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On the eve of the industrial revolution, and anticipating the political revolutions that were to sweep across Europe in 1848, John Stuart Mill wrote "The Spirit of the Age," an essay that sought to distinguish calm periods of continuity from the turbulent age of historic transition into which his world was then entering.

"Mankind are divided into those who are still what they were," he wrote, "and those who have changed: into men [and women] of the present age, and the men of the past. To the former, the spirit of the age is a subject of exultation; to the latter, of terror..." His era, he said, "...will be known to posterity as the era of one of the greatest revolutions of which history has preserved the remembrance, in the human mind, and in the whole constitution of human society." We are, he wrote, "henceforth to be held together by new ties, and separated by new barriers; for the ancient bonds will no longer unite, nor the ancient boundaries confine."

Like Mill, and Arthur Schlesinger after him, we can divide human history into those predominant periods of stability, continuity, consensus, tradition, authority, and conservatism, and those transition ages characterized by revolution, disruption, chaos, novelty, experimentation, creativity, innovation, and structural reform. The fundamental premise of my argument is that we are now very much in a transition age but have not yet found political leaders or devised political institutions to respond to that historic reality.

Having produced more history than it could ever possibly consume, our century is both exhausted and consumed by conventional thinking. It now prepares to give way to a new century and an, as yet, undefined age. And the search must now begin for new ways to make democracy work in this age of transition.

By seeking only to preserve New Deal and Great Society social programs, liberalism has become reactionary. By seeking only to end those programs and return to the *laissez-faire* of a simpler time, conservatism has become simply nostalgic. Advocates of the so-called "third way" seek to mediate between liberalism and conservatism, searching for a pragmatic center.

Some credit is due "third way" pragmatists for their efforts to make social programs work better and thus preserve some sense of the role of government in

national life--indeed to preserve a sense of national life itself--against a form of new right anarchism.

But moderate centrism is bound to fail in its mediating role for the same reason traditional liberals and tradition conservatives are bound to fail. For, they are all seeking solutions in programs and policies rooted in a past that is rapidly disappearing.

Government programs derive from policies, and policies derive from political belief systems called ideologies. Therefore, programs and policies now debated at the end of this tired century are the products of traditional conservatism, liberalism, or some faint reflection of democratic socialism--all belief systems derived either from the age of Enlightenment or from political reactions to it.

Unfortunately, our age of transition does not recognize any of these ideologies as relevant to emerging realities. Further, following a century featuring the clash of ideologies, a century in which ideological theory became but the handmaiden of power, the very notion of ideology has become suspect. Therefore, like Vaclav Havel, let's not discuss ideology; let's discuss a new politics of ideas.

Politics in democracies works only to the extent that there is congruence between the policies it produces and the realities experienced by individual citizens. Most of the social programs of the rapidly disappearing 20th century--and the *laissez-faire* alternatives to them--are not conceptually designed to address the new realities of the emerging 21st century.

What are the realities that require radical new political thinking? Why is our age different from those of the recent past?

First, we now acknowledge **information technologies**, not traditional manufacturing, as the engine driving economic growth. The last such transformation was the mid-19th century industrial revolution. But these information technologies are *dis-integrating* old networks, such as the entire manufacturing chain linking raw materials to finished products, financial networks, educational processes, and even traditional communications networks. They are *integrating* new networks, such as new systems of communication, international financial networks, and cross-border transactions. And they are creating a new class of trans-national elites.

Second, **international markets** are driven by systems of capital supply and demand that know no national laws or national interests. Capital recognizes no political (or even moral) imperative. It recognizes no citizenship or special national obligation. It seeks only to maximize its own return. Despite the threatened collapse of major national and regional economies, national sovereignty--perhaps itself an increasingly obsolete notion--has so far prevented

the evolution of international financial regulatory institutions, or structures to manage global environmental, population, and terrorism threats.

Third, even as capital and finance are becoming international, **politics** is becoming more **local.** As individual citizens despair of participating in decisions affecting international finance or national policies dominated by powerful interests, they revert to demanding greater control of their neighborhood lives. Thus, the authority of nation-states and confidence in traditional national political institutions declines.

Fourth, human conflict in the form of traditional wars between nation-states is diminishing even as **low-intensity, urban conflict** between and among tribes, clans, and gangs increases in the post-Cold War non-polar world. We all know the litany of Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, and even East Los Angeles. Most students of the history of tribalism, nationalism, fundamentalism, and the "clash of civilizations" expect this trend to go nowhere but up.

Fifth, among thoughtful social and cultural critics there is a rising sense of the spiritual limits of the scientific method and the beginning of the **end of the Age of Enlightenment**. The 20th century age of mass slaughter--featuring the dedication of sophisticated instruments of science to purposes of wholesale destruction--did more than anything to erode the notion of the evolution of human reason.

The list could go on at considerable length, but the point is obvious to anyone who has any sense of these revolutionary times.

But if these are not ordinary times, then why do we think we can govern with ordinary--albeit moderate, centrist,--policies? Those seeking the center of a horizontal--that is to say, a static left-right--axis are condemning themselves never to participate on the cutting edge of change.

For, to govern in the 21st century is to begin with the knowledge that life is not lived on a horizontal, left-right plane. It is lived on a vertical, future-past axis. To govern well in a revolutionary age is, by definition, to *be* revolutionary--not to seek the moderate-center between the extremes of outdated ideologies of left and right, but to create revolutionary new political systems on the outpost of change. Reforming political systems to meet new challenges cannot be done by producing policies and programs based upon ancient ideologies that no longer possess sufficient intellectual energy to make themselves relevant or compelling.

Therefore, as a means of establishing the framework for truly innovative governance in this age of transition, let's consider some elements of a 21st century political belief system that seeks to relate deepest traditional values to revolutionary new realities.

Consider four foundational principles that might form the framework of a new political belief system. First, from **classical republican theory**, the ideal of civic virtue--the citizen whose duties and responsibilities require participation in the public issues of the day. Second, from **radical democratic principles**, the ideal of the township republic, the immediate government in which all citizens can participate to achieve social progress and inclusiveness; and, third, the sense of generational accountability. And fourth, from **traditional conservatism**, the notion of inter-generational compact--the moral imperative of leaving to the next generation a better society than one inherits--a social compact that forms the standard for judging all public policies.

The first pillar in a new political credo is restoration of the ideal of **civic virtue**--civic duty and citizen participation--from classic theory established 2500 years ago as the centerpiece of republican government. We are a republic--a democratic republic to be more precise. This means our government is based upon the principle of the many electing the few to represent them. It is not--or at least it should not be--a government controlled by an unrepresentative, unelected monarchy, oligarchy, theology--or, Washington elite. But, from the Greek city-state where it originated, through the Renaissance, to the English and Scottish Enlightenment, through the early American republic until today, classic republican theory assumes certain citizen obligations. It assumes citizen responsibility, civic duty, and civic virtue.

These are not platitudes to be memorized for a middle school civics exam and then forgotten. They are central to the proper functioning of our form of government. Citizen responsibility and civic duty require participation in the life of the republic. "Liberty means responsibility," wrote George Bernard Shaw, "that is why most men dread it." Participation means something more than mere grudging payment of taxes or expectations that your neighbor's son or daughter put on a military uniform if the nation calls. It means, at the very least, voting--participation in the selection of leadership.

Advocates of "centrism" believe that voters are driven away by political extremism, and this is undoubtedly true. But if so, then why, in 1996, when voters were given the most moderate, centrist candidates imaginable, did 51% of those eligible to vote stay home? This is one of the lowest voter participation percentages in modern democracy and a great shame on the American republic. It is also a referendum rejecting mere "centrism."

It is fashionable in late 20th century America to pour scorn on politics and government, to take the position that voting only encourages them, to hope that, if one has nothing to do with it, then our government will simply go away. This fashionable libertarianism may suit the trendy high-tech executive. But it is no way to run a republic. Indeed, it is exactly the way to run a republic into the ground. In **The Republic**, Plato put it more succinctly: "One of the penalties for

refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors."

Civic virtue means caring for and therefore participating in the life of the republic, the society, the nation. It means fulfilling the citizen's responsibility to strengthen, nurture, and improve the political structures and public institutions by which the American people govern themselves. Absent this sense of civic virtue, then the republic perishes.

Opinion-shapers on the right are fond of lecturing the public on the topic of virtue. It has turned into a lucrative business for some. But among all the sermons on personal virtue, where is the sermon on *public* virtue--the debt and the duty of the citizen to the society of the republic. If one claims to believe that government is the enemy, then it become complicated to advocate participation in public affairs. Traditional conservatives have overcome this contradiction and remained true to the republican ideal by opposing large government, not all government. Elements of the new right, however, seem to be against all government and therefore find themselves outside the parameters of classic republican theory.

But we are also a democracy. Therefore, let's look to democratic principles for the second pillar of a new political philosophy. Democracy, when taken literally, is a radical notion in the grand scheme of human affairs. Nothing is more radical than the notion that all men and women are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among which are the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Taken literally, though, nothing upsets established hierarchies and elites--whether political, religious, or cultural--than the notion of true equality, genuine individual liberty, natural rights, and human dignity. In the abstract, virtually everyone confirms these principles. In practice, however, even today these ideals become revolutionary. One of their most radical promoters, Thomas Jefferson, understood this more than most.

Inconsistent and too ready to compromise on the issue of slavery for the sake of union and independence, and largely absent from the Constitutional deliberations that enshrined political paradox in American polity even to this day, Jefferson nevertheless--as the Bill of Rights testifies--remained consistent in his belief in the radical nature of democracy.

From radical Jeffersonian democratic ideals, then, let's take for our 21st century political credo two notions. The first is the ideal of the "**ward (or township) republic.**" Jefferson believed in the theory of the republic, a government of the many electing the few. He also believed in civic virtue, duty, and citizen participation. He opposed Hamiltonian, centralized, federalist government both because it concentrated power in the hands of the unelected few of position,

property, and influence, and because it was too impervious to the participation of the ordinary farmer, laborer, and mechanic.

As defined by access and influence, our current federalist government is very much the one Jefferson warned against. For Jefferson, the best republic was the local republic, the township republic, the arena in which all could and should participate and in which civic virtue should be exercised. True republicans believed that as many decisions as possible should be made by as many citizens as possible participating in these local, grassroots units of government.

Economics is now migrating upward as capital, labor, materials, fabrication, marketing, advertising, and consumption are all becoming internationalized. But politics in democracies must begin migrating downward. Either people will reclaim the responsibility for self-governance, or democracy and the republics in which it is presumed to be practiced will stagnate and decline.

Thus, the two primary elements of a political belief system for the 21st century fashioned from the oldest of ideals are, first, classic republican civic virtue and citizen responsibility and, second, "ward republics" or newly-empowered local governments based upon radical Jeffersonian democratic theory.

But Jefferson had another radical democratic idea that leads to the third pillar of our new political structure. He believed that every generation should have the responsibility to decide for itself the fundamental laws--indeed even the structure of government--it would adopt. Jefferson believed that one generation could not bind another, that the past should not dictate to the present. "The earth belongs always to the living generation," he wrote to Madison in 1789. "Every constitution and every law naturally expires at the end of 19 years."

As radically conservative as the notion of community republics is today, so the notion of **generational accountability** and liberation from the past is equally liberal and revolutionary.

To require each generation to reconsider its laws and underlying constitutions is to require the ultimate in civic responsibility. The political principle is this: We can choose our own form of government. But the equally valid moral corollary is: We are *responsible* for our own choices. Except in extreme circumstances--such as economic upheaval or world war--most Americans, being basically conservative by nature, will opt for the *status quo*. They may even choose, as they seem to be doing today, to abandon previous experiments in social equity and inclusiveness.

But whatever the outcome, according to this principle of generational accountability, collective citizen involvement in self-governance would be encouraged if not actively required.

If the idea of generational accountability is joined with the notion of the community republic and active local government, then there is little justification for the failure of civic duty in the form of citizen participation. For, the familiar argument about the remoteness and inaccessibility of government is taken away.

But are we not a nation, one people united in a common society with common interests, goals, and a common destiny? What of the notion that we are all in this together? Do the wealthy communities have no responsibility for their less fortunate neighbors? Is there no longer need for a central, national government?

This new ideology retains a crucial role for central government. That role is to establish and enforce acceptable national standards for education, health, environment, public safety, and other social undertakings by local governments. No community should be able to subject its citizens to conditions inferior to those deemed by the national government to define a modern civilized society. How the township republic will achieve these goals is for its citizens to decide.

It is unrealistic to assume, in any case, that the citizens of one community would willfully permit its conditions to decline materially compared to its neighbors or the nation at large. Enlightened self-interest would be the stabilizer. For those communities with inadequate tax bases, it should be the further responsibility of the central government to distribute national revenues according to an equitable formula designed to insure that every local government has sufficient resources to meet at least minimal, nationally-established social obligations. Ideally, a 21st century tax system will shift its base from income to consumption. That will mean sufficient national resources will inevitably shift from those who have to those who need.

So, as contrasted with traditional New Deal-Great Society programs that distributed income directly from national government to individuals, this true republic approach would distribute income from national government to disadvantaged community republics--according to some per capita formula--to enable them to meet their basic social responsibilities.

Montesquieu wrote, "If a republic is small, it is destroyed by a foreign force; if it is large, it is destroyed by internal vice." To which I would add: If it is small within the sanctuary of the large, it can avoid both.

Jefferson's idea of generational accountability leads to the final pillar in a new political structure, an element traceable to an icon of traditional conservative thought, Edmund Burke. According to Burke, there is at all times a **partnership among generations** according to which the duty of the present generation is to preserve the values, structures, and institutions inherited from the past and to convey them unchanged to the future generation. For Burke, this was the ultimate means of conserving tradition in his own age of revolutionary upheaval. It was the social and moral compact linking generations.

Differently interpreted, in the light of Jefferson's own generational imperative, this notion can become the central organizing principle, the moral imperative of a new 21st century ideology. Simply stated, the imperative is this: It is the duty of each generation to try to leave for the next generation a better society in every respect than that which it found.

This principle should apply to every aspect of public policy and social life, from education standards to public health, from lower poverty rates to lower crime rates, from environmental quality to the strength of national defense, from lower public debts to the security of retirees. All public policies should be judged by the degree to which they achieve a greater common good for the next generation.

In this present age of self-aggrandizement, we judge every issue by its affect on us, right now, in our time. But we also claim to care about our children. Most of us define our care by the private legacy we leave our children. We spend increasing amounts of time and energy on such matters as avoidance of inheritance taxes, life insurance, conservation of wealth, and so forth.

But why do we not also consider the *public* legacy we leave? Why are so many blind to the irony of bequeathing greater private resources in a world of increased poverty, pollution, and political corruption?

Whether we care to acknowledge it or not, we all leave two legacies, a private one and a public one. A genuinely concerned parent and citizen would be at least as concerned for the public legacy as for the private one. That necessarily means participation in the public business of the day, in the decisions that affect the public legacy left for the next generation.

Whether we care to recognize it or not, we have a moral imperative to future generations not merely to preserve the values and institutions of the past but also to pass on a society, a nation, that we have made every effort to *improve* for our children and their children. It is that instinct that energizes the reformer who seeks to improve the world left to his or her children.

The four ideals and principles outlined here are interrelated. Civic virtue and citizen participation are best exercised in a local republic that has as its common purpose the commonwealth of the next generation. Some will say this ideological framework is radically conservative. Others may say it is radically liberal. Both will be right, and both will be wrong.

This political framework draws from classic principles that some have interpreted, to serve their own biases, to be conservative or liberal. They will certainly be right that this credo is radical in the purest sense of the word. This political belief system returns to root ideals and values. That is what radical means. It has always seemed to me strange that we live in an age that considers returning to

root principles to be extreme. For that is what radical has come to mean these days.

For the earliest Greeks, creators of a universe of gods and goddesses and great myths, the ideal of a republic where the many could themselves elect the few to govern them was radical in every sense of the word. For European monarchists and loyalists, Jeffersonian ideals of universal equality, individual liberty, and the natural rights of man were radical. Even among his more conventional revolutionary colleagues, his ideas of ward republics and generational accountability were about as radical as the American Revolution would become. They would not be incorporated into the U.S. Constitution, even though a radical Bill or Rights would be.

And, for a late 20th century nation of consumption and instant gratification--what John Kenneth Galbraith calls the Culture of Contentment--nothing could be more threatening to those values than the thought that our collective public duty to our children takes precedence over our interest in consuming and acquiring material wealth for our own gratification in our own time. Such an inter-generational moral imperative and social contract is indeed radical.

And so I here propose the framework of a human-scale political credo for the 21st century that is radically rooted in classic principle and theory. It is meant to take serious account of the true meaning of both republican and democratic governance. It is neither conservative nor liberal in either traditional or modern meanings of these terms. It is most certainly not meant to find a moderate, centrist position between what have finally become irrelevant, outdated, and stale ideologies. For moderation in an irrelevant political arena is nothing more than irrelevant moderation.

Most of all these proposals are meant to address the central theme of this essay: We are living in a great age of transition. And as Edmund Burke, the father of modern conservatism, himself observed, "A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation."

Ideologies are organized systems of political belief and therefore must have a solid basis in political theory. But to survive and provide the basis for practice--for public policies and the programs they produce--they must be practical. Ideologies are not produced by individuals, and they must not be, as in this century, merely a theoretical facade for power. They are produced by the complex interaction of ideas, prejudices, beliefs, and experiences. And, to possess moral authority, an ideology or political must have a basic humanitarianism at its core.

But the spirit of our age is one of transformation and, therefore, our imperative is to think anew, to disenchant ourselves from corrupt and irrelevant politics, and to enchant ourselves once again with the hope of human progress.

Together with Vaclav Havel, I favor "anti-political politics, that is, politics not as the technology of power and manipulation, of cybernetic rule over humans or as the art of the useful, but politics as one of the ways of seeking and achieving meaningful lives, of protecting them and serving them. I favor politics as practical morality, as service to the truth, as essentially human and humanly measured care for our fellow humans. It is an approach which, in this world, is extremely impractical and difficult to apply in daily life. Still, I know no better alternative."

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