The Crisis of Civic Consciousness: Nihilism and Political Science as Resistance

Where there is no vision, the people perish:
but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.
Proverbs 29:18

Teaching political science always has seemed to me to be a noble calling and at times even fun. We political scientists were kept, in some significant degree, from the plunge into the abyss of scientism, positivism, and Marxism that opened under the feet of many of our sociologist colleagues by the fact that we had to teach the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. We had a block of granite for our cornerstone that gave some stability to our profession that much of the rest of academe lacked. Whether we did it well or poorly all were in some degree disciplined and chastened by professional and, thus, economic necessity, compelled to come to terms with our heritage and with the larger tradition of which American government is part. The nobility and fun mainly came through vicarious participation in the high moral fervor of a founding that resisted tyranny in the name of justice and enshrined liberty in a final burst of patriotism by tacking the Bill of Rights on to a Constitution that became the envy of much of mankind. Such stalwarts of our profession as the estimable Charles S. Hyneman admitted to celebrating July Fourth every day of the year.

In heady moments it even seemed plausible to suppose that the profession was, in an odd peripatetic way, carrying out Washington's vision of a national university that would secure the coherence of the American community and instill the principles of free government
in rising generations. As Washington believed, "The more homoge-
neous our citizens can be made in these particulars, the greater will
be our prospect of permanent union; and a primary object...should
be, the education of our youth in the science of government." Thirty
years later when the two old Argonauts of the founding were
'designing the University of Virginia to become that national univer-
sity Congress never would approve, Jefferson wrote to Madison: "In
the selection of Law Professor we must be rigorously attentive to his
political principles." The principles in mind were those of the
"Whig liberty" concisely distilled in the Declaration as expressive of
the consensus of the People and the Spirit of Seventy-six.

Political science as a school for citizenship is a conception as old
as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* and has had a great
run in the United States. But the academy today, and political
science within it, is beset by challenges that denigrate every senti-
ment prized by Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and Madison as
constitutive of that cornerstone block of granite and the civilizational
tradition it epitomizes: The question is whether the contemporary
resurgence of a sound prudential science of human affairs is ade-
quate to resist the challenges that erode civic consciousness and
cripple the intellectual life of the nation. What is the challenge and
how might it be overcome? These are questions especially for
political scientists to consider. Just a decade ago, in his Jefferson
Lecture, the philosopher Leszek Kolakowski resolutely signaled the
path to follow when he said: "However distasteful our civilization
might be in some of its vulgar aspects, however enfeebled by its
hedonistic indifference, greed, and the decline of civic virtues,
however torn by struggles and teeming with social ills, the most
powerful reason for its unconditional defense (and I am ready to
emphasize this adjective) is provided by its alternative." The alter-
native in view at the time was the triumph of totalitarian Marxism-
Leninism through Sovietization. The alternative now most evidently
in view is more diffuse but of the same order and clearly akin to the
horror Kolakowski rejected: namely the triumph of deculturation,
social amnesia, and nihilism. Since the root issues are those of mind
and spirit and their institutionalization, how is the crisis to be
understood and civilization to be defended? Are our philosophers and political scientists up to the task? Perhaps we can at least sketch a few of the issues involved.

**Civic Consciousness**

The term *civic consciousness* as used herein means the kind of agreement on fundamentals of association and government that has been evidenced over time in America as a society organized for action in history.

If we take our bearings from the founding, some of the main attributes of America’s public mind may be summarized as: an effectively cohesive community that prizes human dignity; the creaturely-Creator relationship (announced in the Declaration) and devotion to liberty under law in the Anglo-American tradition, as dimensions of personal character and moral and political identity; a people responsible for the conduct of public affairs through representative state and national institutions with limited powers under civil and higher law. This consensus becomes the foundation of citizenship and civic responsibility in a political order conceived to be natural and resting on consent as befits free men. The general principles governing the founding were articulated by Dr. David Ramsay in 1789 on the last page of his famous *History*: “Remember that there can be no political happiness without liberty; that there can be no liberty without morality; and that there can be no morality without religion.”

As stated elsewhere: "The integrity and virtue of the people must remain the primary force shaping *civic consciousness* as the ‘first order of reliance.’ [It] is highly differentiated in the founding period by reason of long self-government and attendant development of an indigenous common law and traditions of governance; the sense of public spirit fostered by pervasive congregationalist church polity; the sense of equality, dignity, and self-reliance generated by social and economic circumstance, and above all, by religious teachings of a Bible-centered faith premised on the priesthood of all believers; and by decades of scrutiny of public policies and officials that engrossed while politically educating Americans as
the quarrel with Britain intensified after 1760."

The argument here is that American civic consciousness is moving toward crisis and that this crisis, in principle and intention, goes to the roots of individual and societal existence. The task is to understand the crisis and, then, to seek adequate means to check it.

Maladies of Free Government
At the outset I have to acknowledge that all sorts of ills and crises beset contemporary existence. I have to be selective and deal with only the most basic and virulent. The language of Hippocratic medicine supplied Plato with the useful symbol of the disease (nosos) of the soul and polity, and I shall follow this example on the principle that the order and disorders of society reflect the order and disorders of the souls and consciousness of the people who compose it.

Since there are myriad problems of lesser magnitude that it would take a long time just to enumerate, it is by no means to minimize their importance that I pass over most of them here. Americans have taken on a grumpy disposition about themselves and conditions in society. We could trace elements of the crisis of civic consciousness to everything from the chronic divided government of one party dominating Congress the other the presidency, to low election turnout, to the questionable condition of states' rights and the federal system generally, to shrieking demonstrations in the street over the abortion issue. Each suggests at least that all is not well in our republic, and some political candidates for national office are quite prepared to contend that we are engaged in a "culture war" for the soul of America, which is pretty heady language. In fact, there is a new monthly magazine entitled Culture Wars published in South Bend, Indiana, and preaching "counter-revolution."

My suggestion is of a crisis more profound than any or all of these taken together, although one not unrelated to various other manifestations of malaise and alienation. High on the list of the diseases of American civic consciousness, for example, are statism, economism, and a pervasive social amnesia. Each of these is merely to be mentioned but might concern us at length: the increasing tendency
to be married to government and believe it must supply every need; the conservatives' shibboleth that free enterprise economics is the panacea and politics is mostly derivative, secondary, and will take care of itself; and the tendency to dismiss with a contemptuous "that's history" any recollection of the temporal-transcendental dimensions of experience and the formative role that consultation of historical consciousness plays in ordering human existence-this order of "experience" is the sovereign guide to prudential action, the Federalist insisted (No. 85). All these are vital elements of the crisis, but I largely set them aside in the present discussion.

Of course, like the frog placed on the fire in a pot of lukewarm water that, didn't notice the heat increase until he was cooked when it boiled, we can react to our social deformations and diseases by not reacting or by denying there is anything really amiss. After all, our traditions and institutions are wonderfully resilient and may, like youth itself, be immortal and indestructible. Right? Wrong. Free government is fragile and must be nurtured-by us.

The question is this: how many decades and generations of systematic mis-education can we endure? How much abuse of our heritage through neglect, ignorance, and mendacity can we bear without experiencing disintegration and collapse into some kind of despotic authoritarianism? It continues to be true that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. The founders sniffed tyranny in the air when Britain levied a 3-pence tax on tea, as James Madison admiringly recalled in old age; and they fought the Revolution on the slogan of no taxation without representation. Little clues count in matters of this sort, and the clues are there. So worry! But I must be highly selective and consider only the main thrust of major movements undermining the foundations of the American community.

### Context of Civilizational Crisis

Perhaps it might be said that, in a sense, the maladies of American society that endanger free government are nobody-in-particular's "fault." But at the same time, this does not excuse its protagonists of their responsibility or fundamental obligation to live in truth and to resist evil and the lie. The maladies arise, however, from a complex
set of circumstances productive of a climate of opinion—a growth of radical modernity. This is not exclusively American but global in range. What is new is not the lineaments of the disease (which is relatively old and commonplace) but the intensity of its propagation in the United States during the last half-decade or so, especially since the collapse of the Soviet empire. The syndrome is characterized by pervasive deculturation of society, intensifying secularization to the point of radical immanentization, to the end of defacing if not eradicating culture and personality as they have developed over millennia. The drift, which appears to have accelerated since 1990 into a rush, is toward what can be identified as the horror of Nietzschean nihilism. Generally characterized: this amounts to the desire to find truth by destroying all that ever has been true before and to plunge fearlessly into the primordial abyss of the unbounded. Increasingly, we are cut loose in the uncharted metaphysics of nothingness through a defiant gesture not unlike that of the suicide who hurls himself from the top of the building so he can soar like an eagle. From the perspective of common sense we identify this as madness.

The term is of more than passing interest, and we shall encounter it again in our consideration of the Nietzschean murder of God when the madman seeks the god who will replace the God men have murdered. A parallel is to be seen in the young Karl Marx’s quotation of Prometheus from Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* (line 975) which he took as the motto of his doctoral dissertation, as follows: “Philosophy makes no secret of it,” Marx wrote. “The confession of Prometheus, ‘In a word, I hate all the gods,’ is its own confession, its own verdict against all gods heavenly and earthly who do not acknowledge human self-consciousness as the supreme deity. There shall be none beside it. But Marx omits the context, for in Aeschylus, Hermes the messenger of the gods rebukes Prometheus for his defiant statement with the reply: “It appears you have been stricken with no small madness [nosos].” The term translated as madness means, as mentioned earlier, “bodily or mental sickness. In the sense of a disease of the spirit [pneumopathology] it can mean hatred of the gods or simply being dominated by one’s passions.”
As any adequate sketch of the ground of the American founding will attest, to the extent that America stands for a coherent idea or vision of reality, it is rooted in the classical and Christian philosophy of being, as filtered through the Enlightenment, which magnifies the individual human person as possessed of certain inalienable rights and properties that are God-given in an indelibly defining creaturely-Creator relationship. The human being is imago Dei. The political and ethical order is, thus, surmounted by a metaphysical process-structure anchored in an order of truth reaching back to Moses and the prophets in Israel and to Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics in Hellas and Rome. Not merely the rationalistic aspects of the American idea as (say) proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence, but also its representative habits and customs or historicity partake of this general understanding of human existence—its origin and destiny generally reflect this same vision of reality and truth. The coherence and resilience of this vision that is representatively American and in significant degree merges with the universal vision of what it is to be a human being living in truth under God has shaped American civic consciousness. It has heretofore made it substantially immune to the most radical aspects of ideological or gnostic politics. Its general acceptance by the public and academy alike has supplied the groundwork of an identifiable consensus in political and social matters productive of a stable community based on a morality of liberty and justice beyond merely utilitarian interests and claims. Even the greatest breach of American history through the War Between the States or Civil War, as one prefers, revolved around contradictory interpretations of this consensus and its meaning.

Avant-garde intellectuals loathe and despise all of this. To trace this hatred would require a separate study. But it seems that such militantly secular intellectuals never have forgiven America that in 1776 they did not conduct our revolution as they did in 1789 the French Revolution. On the contrary, our revolution was instead conducted mainly by the "black regiment" of the clergy, and by lawyers and other political leaders. It was neither anti-religious nor anti-property but the very opposite. At any rate, these intellectuals'
condemnation and repudiation of the Christian and classical truth of reality is broadly characteristic of the trendy "isms" that continue to float on the surface of political discourse and anti-philosophy-above all in the scientific accents of Freudianism, positivism and Marxism, their amalgam and derivatives. These now are streamlined and vulgarized into burgeoning "new" totalitarian movements loudly and boringly familiar to everyone in academe as political correctness, radical feminism, critical legal studies, multiculturalism, and deconstructionism. The nature of the crisis of civic consciousness therewith becomes more clearly apparent. It centers in an attack on America's constitutive historical understanding of itself and the truths fundamental to the American idea or vision of reality as part and parcel of an unlimited rebellion against the order of being itself and most directly against reality's divine Ground in theory and institutions.

Specific Focus of Attack
The "God is Dead" movement is the heart of the matter. Edmund Burke carefully diagnosed the fact in his valedictory Letters on a Regicide Peace (1796), there identifying the comprehensive destructive intentions of the revolution in terms of Regicide, Deicide and Jacobinism. But Burke had himself been anticipated (with a cheer!) by the Marquis de Sade in Francais, encore un effort sivous voulez être républicains! (1792) where the author advocates regicide, deicide, homicide, and suicide. The illustrious founder, litany, and rancid headwaters of radical modernity therewith appear!

While only a little less lurid (and not overtly pornographic), it may be more instructive for present purposes to savor the hatred of being, and rebellion against its truth, as that came to crystal clarity in 19th century German thought or anti-philosophy. This is because, for complex reasons, many members of the American academy have inherited this legacy and actively propagate its message as central to their vocations, especially it seems at our premier institutions. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) diagnosed this state of mind with extraordinary insight. It must also be acknowledged that he pro-
moted and participated in the tragic rebellion himself until, for the final decade of his life, he broke psychologically and became irretrievably insane.

Nietzsche concentrated negation of long-prevailing truth in the name of truth in the symbol nihilism, which he called that "uncanniest [unheimlichste] of all guests," and "a pathological transitional stage" (WP, 7, 14). Only a few central points can be noticed here. What is vital as providing the key with which to understand our present situation is this: the chief object of rejection, repudiation, and annihilation is God and the morality of Christianity. Thus: "To become as God," to be absorbed into God"-for thousands of years these were the most naive and convincing desiderata" OW, 15). The nihilist is the liberated one who has concluded that the world of ordinary experience or of "becoming has no goal and that underneath all becoming there is no grand unity in which the individual could immerse himself completely as in an element of supreme value, [but] an escape remains: to pass sentence on this whole world of becoming as a deception and to invent a world beyond it, a true world.... [T]he last form of nihilism comes into Being: it includes disbelief in any metaphysical world [whatever] and forbids itself any belief in a true world. Having reached this standpoint, one grants the reality of becoming as the only reality, forbids oneself every kind of clandestine access to afterworlds and false divinities." But this stance is ultimately unendurable even if it may reflect truth (WP, 13). Human beings must worship: God or idols, Luther once remarked. In a later passage Nietzsche writes: "War against the Christian ideal, against the doctrine of 'blessedness' and 'salvation' as the goal of life, against the supremacy of the simple, the pure in heart, the suffering and unfortunate. What does God, faith in God, matter to us any longer? 'God' today [is] merely a faded word, not even a concept any longer! But as Voltaire says on his deathbed: 'only don't speak of that man there'! When and where has any man of consequence resembled the Christian ideal?" (WP, 127-128, note incorporated).

The antagonism equally extends to Greek philosophy which must be obliterated: "The appearance of the Greek philosophers from Socrates onwards is a symptom of decadence; the anti-Hellenic
instincts come to the top... \textit{In summa}: the mischief has already reached its climax in Plato:-... \[T]he consequence of the denaturalization of moral values was the creation of a degenerate type of man-'the good man,' 'the happy man,' 'the wise. man.' Socrates represents a moment of the profoundest perversity in the history of values" \textit{(WP, 221, 235).}

In \textit{The Gay Science}, Sec. 125, Nietzsche writes of: "The Madman. Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the marketplace, and cried incessantly, '[seek God! I seek God!' Since many of those who do not believe \textit{in} God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter.... 'Whither is God' he cried. I shall tell you. \textit{We have killed him-you} and I. All of us are his murderers.... God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves? What was holiest and most powerful \textit{of} all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives. Who will \textit{wipe} this blood off us?... There has never been a greater deed; and whoever will be born after us-for the sake of this deed he will be part of a higher history than all history hitherto" \textit{(PN, 95-96).}\)

Sec. 343: \textit{The background of our cheerfulness}. The greatest recent event-that 'God is dead,' that the belief in the Christian God has ceased to be believable-is even \textit{now} beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe.... [Only the very few will understand] what has really happened here, and what must collapse now that this belief has been undermined-all that was built upon it, leaned on it, grew into it: for example, our whole European morality.... [W]e philosophers and 'free spirits' feel as if a new dawn were shining on us when we receive the tidings that 'the old god is dead'; \textit{our} heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, anticipation, expectation" \textit{(PN, 447-48).}

The deification of Man at last is at hand, but even Nietzsche finds the possibility dubious: "If there were gods, how could I endure not to be a god! \textit{Hence} there are no gods. Though I drew this conclusion, now it draws me. God is a conjecture.... God is a thought that makes crooked all that is straight..." \textit{(PN, 198).} The solution approaches
from the future: "Dionysian wisdom. Joy in the destruction of the most noble and at the sight of its progressive ruin: in reality joy in what is coming and lies in the future, which triumphs over existing things, however good. Dionysian: temporary identification with the principle of life (including the voluptuousness of the martyr).... Thereupon I advanced further down the road of disintegration.... We have to be destroyers!... To the paralyzing sense of general disintegration and incompleteness I opposed the eternal recurrence" (WP, No. 417, 224). At the end of The Antichrist (Sec. 62) Nietzsche draws his conclusion: "I condemn Christianity.... The Christian church has left nothing untouched by its corruption; it has turned every value into an un-value, every truth into a lie, every integrity into a vileness of the soul.... I call Christianity the one great curse, the one great innermost corruption, the one great instinct of revenge, for which no means is poisonous, stealthy, subterranean, small enough-I call it the one immortal blemish of mankind" (PN, 655-56). Hatred, derision, contempt and will to power are reflected in Nietzsche's attitude by turns, and he finds the final solution for the faithful in self-apotheosis: "Love yourself through grace, then you are no longer in need of your God, and you can act the whole drama of Fall and Redemption to its end in yourself."

Egophanic Revolt

I do not pretend to supply a detailed analysis of Nietzsche on this occasion. But the tenor of his thought is evident. An understanding of it at its most fundamental level-that is, as it is relied upon by contemporary radical ideologues of every stripe, whatever mystics may find in it-is important if we are to comprehend the inspiration of a climate of opinion well represented in the academy. It is obvious that in Nietzsche we are very far—indeed, eons away—from the temper and frame of mind of the American founders and the consciousness they engendered as authoritative for the American ethos and institutional order. And, it is plain enough also that we are far away from the commonsense understanding of reality of the general citizenry today. That Nietzschean nihilism in the specific senses limned here should form the basis, virtually provide the
script, for assault in George Washington's America on civic consciousness by American intellectuals is astonishing, even breathtaking. The chickens have come home to roost through alienated intellectuals. As one commentator observes, they must now dutifully shoulder (with a sigh) the dreadful burden of "the modern project, as a radical manifestation of the will to power... The great creator must also be a great destroyer; in destroying or accelerating the natural decadence of the past, he also destroys his own historical consciousness and becomes like a child, freed from loyalty to and vengeance against the old world, able to create new values in the innocence of his playful strength."\(^8\) The earnest purpose of such playful malevolent intoxication, however, is the destruction of America and the civilization of which it is an integral part.

In vivid terms, we thereby glimpse what Eric Voegelin identifies as *egophanic revolt*. Its key aspect is hatred of divine, Being as emblemized in the murder of God. From this embrace of Cain there follows the murders of kings and millions of men in the name of humanity for Autonomous Man, or the Great Being Man, or the Superman as actually encountered in various guises in our own century. Egophany inverts and expunges wherever it can the great theophanies of Judaism (Yahweh), Christianity (Christ), and philosophy (Nous) which have structured human existence throughout history and into the present. Egophany's most noteworthy marks are systems, the prohibition against the asking of questions, and complicity in the murder of God as the *sine qua non* act of closure.\(^8\)

To the degree that the reward for America in winning the Cold War is to inherit radical modernity as "education" through the conduit of its leading universities and public discourse more gener ally, we glimpse the rudiments of that odious legacy by means of the diagnosis of this celebrated thinker. The onslaught has been and remains massive. In Lionel Trilling's characterization, such education (including civic education, if that is not an oxymoron), even when undertaken so as to illustrate the grotesque, often actually results seductively and inadvertently in "the socialization of the anti-social, or the acculturation of the anti-cultural, or the legitimization of the subversive."\(^8\)
There is irony in this strange recent passage of events. The hideous exemplars of *Autonomous Man* as formed by Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia lie slain and shattered in the dust of remembered history. Or is social amnesia so pervasive that already that, too, has been forgotten? The ideological anti-politics of the nihilistic second realities has been defeated theoretically, politically, economically, and by. all the facts of human existence. Yet unremitting assault continues on the American and generally Western heritage in the name of enlightenment and social progress by the ghosts of the very politics of atrocity whose true monuments are the Nazi death camps and the Soviet Gulag. Unable to cope with reason and experience, the resort is to brute force tending toward the lethal. Shouting and abusive proponents of the new totalitarianism in the academy will have conveyed to common experience this characteristic feature on almost any occasion where opposition or contrary viewpoints come under consideration. This is the spirit of the S. S. and the onset of the New Holocaust in the name of liberation and progress; the fact should not be mistaken.

In his most poetic work, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche wrote (Sec, 4): "Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman-a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping" (PN, 126).

This image, however, perverts both philosophy and faith and falsifies the fundamental experiences of reality. The vertical tension experienced by man toward transcendent divine reality in the faith-grace relationship—or in the erotic mania and noetic tension symbolized in the philosopher's ascent to Good and Beauty—is no bridge from brute to the superman whose imaginary parousia approaches mankind by a horizontal transcendence from the future. Moreover, man is an end and not a mere means or transition. Man experiences as the core of his humanity the immanent and the divine polarities of existence in the tensional In-Between (Plato's *metaxy*) of preeminently human existence, As self-reflective participants aware of their communion with God, human beings also are conscious of their inherent ineradicable worth and dignity. By contrast,
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the imaginative pretense to the superman experientially means a fall into the abyss of narcissistic self-salvation. If psychic deformation through such pneumopathy remains isolated in individuals, the result may be various psychoses or outright insanity. If the disease of the soul becomes socially prevalent through ideology; the manipulation of mass communication, and other means, then it demonstrably can form as the hell on earth familiar to us as totalitarianism. To succumb to libido dominandi is, in effect, to reverse the periagoge (Republic 515c-d) of Plato or the Christian's conversion (metanoia [Luke 15:7]). The movement can be described as the soul's turning away from openness to the divine through contraction into the closed self. This is rebellion against the uncertain truth of faith so as to embrace the certain untruth of gnostic ideology.

Conclusion: The Ethic of Resistance

The reasonable response by the unafflicted to perverse education is resistance, now as in antiquity when the philosophers resisted the sophists, themselves a glib and fashionable lot. We are obliged to become our own physicians through the therapy of common sense and a steady appeal to the givens of common reality as experienced in the concrete consciousness of everyman and accumulated in the evidentiary treasury of history. History constantly recollected exhibits the collaborative way of God with his sometimes responsive, sometimes rebellious, creature man. Since experience shows that the vanguard of perversion and pneumopathy is the debauchery of language so fashionably now in the forefront of the political correctness ("PC") onslaught, it is important to recall the insight conveyed by George Orwell in a memorable sentence: "The purpose of Newspeak," he wrote, "was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible." Those who control your language will control your thoughts. The result is to make the asking of inconvenient questions impossible, socially irrelevant, or ludicrous—and thus de facto prohibited within the new orthodoxy of closure and deformed souls.

To live in truth requires at all times resolute resistance to
untruth and tyranny as the first courageous step. Behind the novel and unheard-of truths of the insistent ideologue hides the artful lover of power who as incipient übermensch seeks to engender Leviathan, As a friend of the 18th-century Americans we admire as Founding Fathers may have said: "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing."

Unless the game already is up and-as I recently heard proposed—we are meekly to surrender the educational and other basic ordering institutions of this country to the minions of vacuity and second reality; or to be content simply to drift and hope it all turns out well; or in surrendering to withdraw (as a last desperate resort) into enclaves, or oases protective of truth as a besieged remnant—then the order of the day can only be to resist! These exhaust the available choices, unless we, too, decide to join the nihilists in disdaining truth. Resistance, of course, is far from novel in a nation we used to salute as the land of the free, the home of the brave. While it may mean, nothing to apocalyptic dreamers and purveyors of second realities, it means a lot to common sense to remember that the evidence of experience is on the side of those resolute enough to resist!

Epilogue: The Politics of Hope

Lastly, the character of effective resistance itself demands brief explanation in a time of terrorism and street demonstrations teetering on the edge of violence. Polarization of American society has proceeded so far through the influences of socialism, Marxism, and the welfare state's collision with traditional attitudes (among other factors) that the World Trade Center and Oklahoma City catastrophes suggest the possibility, however remote, of a slide toward sedition and civil strife on a scale perhaps not seen in America in the century since the end of Reconstruction in the South.

The primary mode of resistance envisaged in the present context—it must therefore be stressed—is intellectual and spiritual resistance to untruth, conducted by reason and persuasion. It is resistance in the name of liberty and truth to revolutionaries who are succeeding in wresting major universities, academic professional
associations, and much of public discourse into radical control. It is important to show the theoretical (as well as prudential) shortcomings of such developments. The connection with the Murder of God movement as the revolutionaries’ common ground must be repeatedly demonstrated as inspiring their onslaughts. The consequences must then be shown for the destruction of American society as it has existed historically and claimed respect as the last best hope of mankind. The ethic of resistance is the ethic of hope.

Mere conservatism and staunch appeal to tradition ultimately are not in themselves enough and aggravate the general problem of dogmatic closure to truth—even if the essential starting point of resistance is to accept the American founding as the ground of a renaissance of our traditions, patriotism, and civic consciousness. And, to be sure, a muting or omission of the glories and triumphs of American history as part of civic education in the name of pedagogical “standards” is patently an attack on the soul of the country as historically constituted—one rightly condemned by Lynne V. Cheney and others as such and justifiably resisted.

More fundamentally, however, resistance requires recovery of the philosophical and spiritual ground itself, in the academy and churches as well as in public discourse in the country at large. And this means finding the profoundest sources of truth in the meditative life of our civilization and recovering these as living presence through the educative processes. Back to the books! Judaism and Christianity are founded on the Bible, and that book lay at the center of American consciousness at the time of the founding. It is not merely one among other books. The philosophical and religious life of the country can only be reinvigorated by recourse to the great works of the great minds of the ages, from Plato to Augustine to Shakespeare.

Education itself is no monolith, however, and person-peripheral scientific and mathematical education does little to restore the understanding of uniquely human reality. Rather, taken alone, it does the very opposite and helps make human beings an endangered species through obfuscation. Both Nazism and Marxism-Leninism evoke natural science as their paradigm, we remember. Natural
science, a great boon to human existence in most respects, is not itself the core problem, of course. The problem is science's perversion into scientism and positivism and, thereby, into methodological and other assumptions about knowledge and reality that fallaciously presume to supply the sovereign, even sole road to truth. Systematic reductionism, and deformation of reality inevitably result.

The question remains whether contemporary philosophers and political scientists (many of them hardened in the orthodoxies of Marxism, positivism, and behavioralism and in varying degrees part of the problem) are up to the challenge. The situation is not entirely hopeful, and the answer at best doubtful. As one astute commentator discerned thirty-years ago: "The 'givenness' of American life can no longer be taken for granted, and neither can it be rescued by an intellectually empty citizenship training, nor by the attempted reduction of liberalism to scientism.... [I]t is no longer plausible to view the American civilization either as a closed or happily isolated society...or as the society; where a fixed system of natural rights had first been established and could then be generalized universally."

What seems requisite, seems also to be uncertain if not improbable. For if we are to preserve and revitalize free government in America and the world, we are obliged to look to the deepest sources that from Abraham and Aristotle to Thomas Jefferson and John Adams persuasively grounded the self-evident truths that this country is founded on and strives to live by. These sources are to be found in reason and experience concretely disclosed through the historical events of revelation and philosophy in Israel and Hellas and the life of mind uniquely cultivated since antiquity on that foundation in the Christian West. By recovering the vital past, its implications, illuminations, and vision of reality, we lay groundwork that can help assure the essentially unknowable future. The unconditional defense of civilization is, therefore, the essential posture that makes possible the life of mind and spirit whose thriving crowns historical existence. The alternative is to choose a descent into barbarism.

A final caveat and an implication may be mentioned. No institutional order is immortal, however well-contrived or prudentially nurtured, and this includes the American republic no less than
Western civilization. And:

Experience remains our best guide.

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8. The classic statement of the consensus at the time of the framing of the Constitution is Federalist No. 2. A standard presentation of the constitutional aspects of the Civil War and Reconstruction is given in Alfred H. Kelley and Winfred A. Harbison, The American Constitution: Its Origins and Development, 5th Ed. (New


Debate (Lexington, Ky., 1996); and Noel B. Reynolds and Cole Durham, eds. Religious Liberty in Western Thought (Atlanta, Ga., 1996).