

THE VISIONARY MEN:  
ELIHU HUBBARD SMITH AND THE UTOPIAN FEDERALISTS

By

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To my grandparents

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	4
ABSTRACT.....	7
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION: ELIHU HUBBARD SMITH AND THE FEDERALISTS.....	9
Elihu Hubbard Smith, Federalist.....	14
The Contradictions of Federalism.....	16
Federalist Worlds.....	23
2 UTOPIANISM FROM PLATO TO ELIHU HUBBARD SMITH.....	27
Eighteenth-Century Anti-Utopian Rhetoric.....	31
Who Were the Utopians?.....	38
Elitism, Collectivism, and Virtue in Smith’s Utopia.....	45
3 NEW ENGLAND AS UTOPIA REALIZED.....	53
City upon a Hill.....	56
Ezra Stiles’s “ <i>American Israel</i> ”.....	63
Timothy Dwight’s Millennial Utopia.....	67
4 THE EDUCATION OF ELIHU HUBBARD SMITH.....	76
Noah Webster and Benjamin Rush as Modern Pansophists.....	82
Smith and the Diffusion of Knowledge.....	86
5 THE UTOPIANISM OF THE CONNECTICUT WITS.....	93
The Connecticut Wits Enter the Debate on the Constitution.....	98
Joel Barlow’s Vision.....	103
6 PERFECTING MANKIND.....	111
Perfectibility in the Late Eighteenth Century.....	117
William Godwin and Timothy Dwight.....	121
Two Progressivist Federalists: Charles Chauncey, Jr. and Charles Brockden Brown.....	132
7 CONCLUSION: THE VISIONARY FEDERALISTS.....	139
APPENDIX: REALISTS OR IDEALISTS?: A NOTE ON THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF FEDERALISM.....	152

LIST OF REFERENCES ..... 158  
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH ..... 175

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In New York in the late 1790s, Elihu Hubbard Smith, an idealistic Connecticut-born physician and man of letters, began writing a “Utopia.” Upon first glance, Smith’s imaginary agrarian republic seems to be a Jeffersonian fantasy. But Smith was actually a staunch Federalist. Most historians portray the Federalists as the realists of the Early Republic, sometimes as hardheaded empiricists, and other times (not so charitably) as self-interested, would-be aristocrats. What attracted a utopian like Smith to Federalism? A close examination of Smith’s intellectual world not only answers this question, but also reveals insights about the true nature of Federalism. Smith was by no means the only idealistic Federalist. Federalism was actually a multifaceted, ambiguous movement. Many Federalists were realists, but many others were philanthropic idealists who were drawn to Federalism because of its emphasis on virtuous leadership, and its establishment of an energetic central government. This structure, which the realistic Framers had originally devised as a means of restraining the passions of a licentious citizenry and the ambitions of the powerful, also gave elitist idealists a vehicle for promoting their social reforms. A Calvinist like Timothy Dwight could see it as a means of inculcating virtue among the people, thus paving the way for the millennium, while his colleagues, the Federalist poets known as the Connecticut Wits, could similarly consider it a means of realizing

their “visions” of national grandeur. Dwight and the Wits were strong influences on Smith, who saw himself as a member of a vanguard elite that had the responsibility of tutoring mankind, and setting it on the path of indefinite perfectibility. Many Federalists believed that the people had sufficient virtue (or the desire to promote the common good over their own selfish interests) to willingly defer to these wise and virtuous elites, who would use their power to enact salutary measures. But when the people turned against the Federalists and elected their hated foes the Jeffersonian Republicans instead, the Federalists grew disillusioned and bitter. Many, including Fisher Ames and Rufus King, realized that their overoptimistic expectations of the people had made *them* (and not, as they had thought, the Jeffersonians) the Republic’s true “visionary men.”

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION: ELIHU HUBBARD SMITH AND THE FEDERALISTS

On August 22, 1796, Elihu Hubbard Smith, a physician living and practicing in New York, jotted in his diary, “Began to trace out the rude & irregular outline of my Utopia.” In September, Smith continued “to lay the aerial foundations of the visionary republic of Utopia.” In the eighteenth century, to call something “visionary” was to dismiss it as impracticable, and utopias were definitely vulnerable to that accusation. A year earlier, on September 4, 1795—Smith’s twenty-fourth birthday, in fact—Smith himself had resolved that he would “no longer lament the dissolution of the fairy fabrics of visionary & passionate delusion; but shall keep my eye, & my heart, fixed on the majestic, simple, sublime, & venerable temple of Truth.” But Smith’s self-deprecating comment was only tongue-in-cheek. In truth, he had “many hopes” for his “Utopia,” which would “embody & substantialize my numerous speculations.”<sup>1</sup>

Smith’s “speculations” concerned nothing less than the most perfect form of government. This topic was one of great interest in the early years of the American Republic; one evening in November of 1795, while on a trip to his hometown of Litchfield, Connecticut, Smith and his fellow passengers discussed, among other things, “the best government.” Smith was an enlightened reformer who had long sought ways to extirpate society’s ills and ameliorate the human condition. His “Utopia” was “a subject, so long & so maturely weighed.” He composed it “for the purpose of shewing [*sic*] what improvements are compatible with the present condition of man, in our country.” He gained inspiration from radical European philosophers like the Marquis de Condorcet and William Godwin, who believed that man was vile and base not because that was his true nature—not because it was man’s ineluctable and woeful fate to be

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<sup>1</sup> Aug. 22, 1796, Preface to Sept. 1796, Sept. 4, 1795, Oct. 29, 1796, in *The Diary of Elihu Hubbard Smith (1771-1798)*, ed. James E. Cronin (Philadelphia, Pa., 1973), 207, 212, 43, 239.

foolish, greedy, and violent. Rather, flawed institutions—tyrannical governments, obscurantist religions—had corrupted human nature. It was then the role of the reformer to demolish the old institutions, and replace them with rationally-devised ones, which would allow humanity to resume its natural course of indefinite perfectibility. Smith believed that the institutions that he outlined were the most perfect ones that could exist in the present stage of development; they were the ones most likely to create that stable and just order that would allow man to progress indefinitely, as he was destined to do.<sup>2</sup>

So Smith imagined a “State of Utopia, lately admitted into the Union,” which he situated in the Northwest Territory. Utopia’s flawless peace and harmony “renders it an interesting subject of inquiry.” Smith wrote that he “has endeavored, by a careful history of the Institutions of the Republic of Utopia, to expose to every inquirer the causes of it’s<sup>3</sup> rare felicity.” Utopia’s 360,000 inhabitants enjoyed a moderate wealth—spread among all—that was founded not on manufactures or commerce, but on agriculture. The land was not superior to “that of the neighboring States,” but it was fertile enough for the “wise & industrious” farmers, who produced “abundant” crops. Their enlightened leaders ensured the “prompt & satisfactory distribution of justice,” and “the universality of political, moral, & economical information, among people of every condition.” Utopia’s rare and placid felicity was the true ideal—not “that empty luster which surrounds empires distinguished for their military & naval power, their wealth, their commerce, their luxury & their arts.” “They... who prefer peace to victory, virtue to power, & tranquil simplicity to the splendid enchantments of magnificence and fame, will thank me for my labors, & will obtain improvement from the picture now presented for their

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<sup>2</sup> Nov. 4, 1796, Preface to Nov. 1796, “Introduction,” Aug. 1, 1796, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 85, 241, 196.

<sup>3</sup> “It’s” was commonly used in this context in the eighteenth century. Whenever this word appears in the ensuing chapters, the reader should assume that it is not an error. The same applies for British spellings of words, the use of the article “an” for words beginning with the letters “h” and “u,” and the failure to capitalize words like “Federalism” and “Christian.”

contemplation.” Smith ardently hoped that by reading his “Utopia,” “statesmen should learn...that the perfection of the whole depends on that of it’s integral parts; that manufactures, & commerce, & fleets, & armies, & a full treasury, do not, of themselves, solely, constitute the greatness of an empire; & that a nation is not happy & respectable in proportion to the number of individuals it contains, but in proportion to their knowledge & their virtue.”<sup>4</sup>

Catherine Kaplan has shown that Smith’s “Utopia” was the anti-New York. The New York of the 1790s was plagued with bitter partisan controversies and frequent yellow fever epidemics. The filth and pools of stagnant water that defaced the city’s unpaved streets disgusted Smith, and he dreamed of a bucolic, salubrious Eden, free of the miasmatic summers during which sometimes hundreds of New Yorkers, Philadelphians, and other fellow citizens would perish. So Utopia had no marshes or lowlands, but it was blessed with an abundance of “rapid & fertilizing streams,” and a “pure & healthful air.” Smith also wished that Americans would control their passions, and choose to live lives of contemplation, devoting their leisure hours to discovering truths that would improve the human condition. As Kaplan has noted, his “Utopia” was a “fantasy” of the Enlightenment in which life was organized according to the dictates of reason, “a paradise of knowledge creation and circulation” where information cured all ills, including disease, immorality, and partisanship.<sup>5</sup>

This, then, was Smith’s model for a perfect order. Or rather, it was the outline of a model, since Smith never completed it. The paragraphs of the “Utopia” that he wrote in his diary were “only hints, or fragments of a whole hereafter to be reunited on paper, as now in imagination.” After the first spurt of activity in the fall of 1796, Smith interrupted his work on the “Utopia”

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<sup>4</sup> Elihu Hubbard Smith, “The Utopia,” *Early American Literature*, 35 (2000), 309, 320, 310, 309.

<sup>5</sup> Catherine Kaplan, “Document: Elihu Hubbard Smith’s ‘The Institutions of the Republic of Utopia,’” *Early American Literature*, 35 (2000), 302; Smith, “Utopia,” 310; Kaplan, “Document,” 301; Catherine O’Donnell Kaplan, *Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forums of Citizenship* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2008), ch. 3.

until the following September. He then interrupted his work a second, and last, time; in September of 1798, at the age of twenty-seven, Smith succumbed to yellow fever, the disease that he had spent much of his time and energy as a physician and scholar trying to cure.<sup>6</sup>

Despite its tragic brevity, Smith's was a productive and fascinating life. He was admitted to Yale at the age of eleven, and graduated four years later (1782-1786), after which he attended Timothy Dwight's Academy at Greenfield Hill in Fairfield, Connecticut (1787). He then studied medicine in Philadelphia, under Benjamin Rush, the country's most famous doctor (1790-1791). While practicing medicine, Smith found enough time to edit the first anthology of exclusively American verse, *American Poems* (1793), and to write his own poetry, and medical and literary essays, as well as the libretto to an opera, *Edwin and Angelina* (1797). He also edited the American edition of Erasmus Darwin's *Botanic Garden* (1798), some plays by his friend William Dunlap, who was one of the young republic's most important playwrights and theater managers, and *Alcuin* (1798), the first published work by his friend Charles Brockden Brown, who was the first full-time professional writer in the United States. Dunlap, Brown, and Smith were also members of a circle of intellectuals known as the New York Friendly Club, which included the famous jurist James Kent and the physicians Edward Miller and Samuel Latham Mitchill, who would go on to become a Republican congressman. With the latter two, Smith edited the nation's first medical journal, the *Medical Repository* (1797-1824). Along the way, Smith served as a secretary of the New York Manumission Society and as a trustee of the African Free School; he collaborated with Noah Webster (whom he knew for most of his life); he corresponded with Senator Uriah Tracy, Congressman John Allen, Jedidiah Morse, and the English doctor, writer, and editor John Aikin; and he met George Washington, Alexander

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<sup>6</sup> Smith, "Utopia," 321; Sept. 5, 1797, Sept. 6, 1797, Sept. 7, 1797, Sept. 9, 1797, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 356, 357.

Hamilton, and John Adams (whose son Charles was Smith's friend, and a member of the Friendly Club).<sup>7</sup>

Smith not only met Washington, Hamilton, and John Adams, but he also revered and respected them. He was, in fact, a loyal and thoroughgoing Federalist. And herein lies a problem. The Federalists saw themselves as realists, and they persistently denounced their Jeffersonian foes as impractical "visionaries"; to this day, the majority of historians classify the Federalists as realists, and the Republicans as idealists. Why, then, would a utopian like Smith be drawn to Federalism?

Upon first glance, his "Utopia" does not seem compatible with Federalism. Indeed, according to Kaplan, it is un-Federalist; its agrarian idealism seems more Jeffersonian than Hamiltonian. Even though the Federalist preoccupation with commerce is often exaggerated, and the many agrarian Federalists ignored, Kaplan's conclusion is certainly plausible.<sup>8</sup>

And yet, a closer examination of Smith's intellectual world can explain why he, as a Godwin-admiring utopian, felt so strongly attracted to Federalism. Smith's mind matured in an environment in which supposedly conservative Calvinist clergymen regaled their flocks with rapturous millennial prophecies, and Federalist poets composed ecstatic "visions" of America's future glory. In other words, Smith was by no means the only visionary Federalist; he was merely one of those who most explicitly embodied Federalism's utopian side. A thorough analysis of his thought reveals that Federalism was multifaceted, and capable of accommodating distinct worldviews, both realistic and idealistic. Moreover, idealism did not exist only on

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<sup>7</sup> For a brief biography, see James E. Cronin, "Introduction," in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 1-16. For more information on Smith and his circle, see James E. Cronin, "Elihu Hubbard Smith and the New York Friendly Club, 1795-1798," *PMLA*, 64 (1949), 471-479; and Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York, N.Y. 1976), 233-234. For Smith's encounters with Washington, Hamilton, and Adams, see Elihu Hubbard Smith, "Notes from Recollections of My Life from My Birth Till the Age of Eleven," Oct. 3, 1795, Nov. 30, 1796, May 2, 1797, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 28, 65, 268, 315.

<sup>8</sup> Kaplan, "Document," 299, 307n16. Though I have since revised it, I shared Kaplan's opinion upon first reading the "Utopia." For agrarian Federalists see Manning J. Dauer, *The Adams Federalists* (Baltimore, Md., 1953).

Federalism's fringe; it was, rather, a significant facet of the movement. In fact, in the nineteenth century, once they had been defeated and discredited, prominent Federalists like Fisher Ames and Rufus King came to realize that their overoptimistic expectations had made *them* (and not, as they had thought, their Jeffersonian opponents) the Republic's true "visionary men."

### **Elihu Hubbard Smith, Federalist**

Like all good Federalists, Smith considered himself "a fond admirer of order & peace," and he considered the Federalists to be "the friends of good government & of law." In letters to his fellow Connecticut Federalists Allen and Tracy—who were despised by Republicans at the time, and denounced as "noxious" extremists by some historians since—Smith transmitted intelligence about the New York political scene, denounced the Republicans as "violently democratic," and urged swift action on enacting Federalist policies such as the Jay Treaty, even to the point of telling Allen (who was, according to Manning Dauer, "the most virulent Federalist in the House, at times becoming incoherent in debate, so exasperated did he become at the Republicans") that, "as no argument will do good with your adversaries, I wish you to put forth your strength, & rely more upon it than upon your reason."<sup>9</sup>

Despite Kaplan's argument that Smith was anti-political and sought to transcend partisanship for the good of the country, the truth is that Smith identified the Republicans as the partisans; the Federalists represented the true spirit of the United States, and the end of partisanship amounted to nothing other than the establishment of a Federalist consensus. As he wrote to his friend Samuel Miles Hopkins (a future Federalist congressman), "In our own State, an increasing spirit of unanimity, promises to render Mr. Jay's administration fortunate for

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<sup>9</sup> EHS to Uriah Tracy, May 3, 1796, to Samuel Smith, July 31, 1796, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 162; David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York, N.Y., 1965), 22-23; EHS to Tracy, Dec. 24, 1795, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 112; Dauer, *Adams Federalists*, 142; EHS to Tracy, Apr. 10, 1796, May 3, 1796, to Allen, June 25, 1797, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 155, 162, 328.

himself, & beneficial for the people.” Smith frequently praised and defended the virtuous John Jay (even composing an ode in his honor) and “the illustrious Washington,” as well as Hamilton, Timothy Pickering, and Fisher Ames. In the rancorous, feverish summer of 1798—the summer of the Alien and Sedition Acts—he even giddily attended a parade in President Adams’s honor.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, Smith denounced the radicals in his midst as fomenters of anarchy. One Mr. Meigs was “a strenuous democrat & Frenchman in his politics—which I am not.” Thomas Paine “disgusted” him. Thomas Jefferson was “jacobinical almost to lunacy,” and the Swiss-born Speaker of the House Albert Gallatin was “an Exotic, more distinguished for application than original genius.” (As this remark shows, Smith, like most Federalists, was not above nativism, and he once disparaged the quality of recent immigrants, adding, “It is much to be desired, not for America only, but for the prosperity of the general cause of Liberty & Humanity, that we be left to the natural means of increase.”) Virtually his only criticism of Washington was for appointing James Monroe, whom he considered incompetent and pro-French, as ambassador to France. He had no patience for “our french partizans,” or for the revolution that they so fervidly admired. Smith had supported the French Revolution at first; in this, he was no different than most other Federalists. But “the horrible blood-hounds of Robespierre,” with their “*Noyades, fusillades, &c.*,” destroyed the Revolution’s promise, so that the French “Despotism—mis-named Republic” “threatened the destruction of morality.” As the United States and France approached all-out war, Smith placed the blame entirely on France. In a series of letters, he urged Tracy to convince the Federalists to stand up to the French. He approved of

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<sup>10</sup> Kaplan, *Men of Letters*, chs. 1-3, passim. Kaplan argued that the New York Friendly Club preferred to discuss philosophy and literature instead of politics, but, as Cronin wrote, though the Friendly Club perhaps preferred to discuss those other, more elevated and pleasant topics, “[b]y actual count, politics was the topic of conversation four times as often as anything else”; Cronin, “Elihu Hubbard Smith and the New York Friendly Club,” 478. EHS to Samuel Miles Hopkins (hereafter SMH), Feb. 15, 1797, Oct. 6, 1795, “Notes from Recollections of My Life,” Dec. 11, 1796, Jan. 31, 1797, Sept. 23, 1797, to SMH, Feb. 15, 1797, July 27, 1798, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 292, 68, 28, 271, 286, 366, 292, 458.

Adams's leadership, but thought the Congressional Federalists had done nothing but talk, when the situation demanded action. Smith wished to avoid war if possible; but it was up to France to send an envoy to the United States, and to make a full apology. In the meantime, the United States should impose an embargo on French trade, and prepare its defenses in case that war did come.<sup>11</sup>

Such vituperation contrasts starkly with the calm, reasoned, benevolent tone of Smith's "Utopia." Indeed, Smith was alternately romantic and cranky, idealistic and realistic. Could one say the same of the Federalists as a whole?

### **The Contradictions of Federalism**

Decades' worth of scholarship notwithstanding, there is still no consensus about the true nature of Federalism. According to James Banner, we should still see Federalism "as a problem—as a subject of historical inquiry about which comparatively little agreement has been reached and comparatively little still is known." Much of the controversy revolves around the question: were the Federalists self-interested realists, or were they idealists who elevated the common good above all else? One scholar even edited a slim anthology of primary and secondary sources arguing both of these positions. Both realism and idealism can be defined in two ways. Realism involves the ruthless pursuit of one's own material interests, and/or of goals

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<sup>11</sup> Nov. 19, 1795, Apr. 15, 1797, EHS to SMH, Nov. 7, 1797, Dec. 23, 1796, Feb. 19, 1798, EHS to SMH, Nov. 7, 1797, Aug. 6, 1796, EHS to SMH, Mar. 16, 1798, to Charles Brockden Brown, Mar. 27, 1796, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 90, 309, 390, 274, 426, 390, 197-198, 432, 146. For more on Federalists—including very prominent and conservative ones like Hamilton, Pickering, Jay, Gouverneur Morris, Noah Webster, and the Congregationalist clergy—who supported the French Revolution in its early stages, but turned against it with the Reign of Terror (or even later than that), see Gary B. Nash, "The American Clergy and the French Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, 22 (1965), 392-412; James M. Banner, Jr., *To the Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815* (New York, N.Y., 1970), 17-20; May, *Enlightenment in America*, 194-195, 261, 268; John Zvesper, *Political Philosophy and Rhetoric: A Study of the Origins of American Party Politics* (Cambridge, Eng., 1977), 62, 136; Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (New York, N.Y., 1993), 310-311, 360, 510, 544, 561, 625, 676, 814n47; Andrew Siegel, "'Steady Habits' under Siege: The Defense of Federalism in Jeffersonian Connecticut," in Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, eds., *Federalists Reconsidered* (Charlottesville, Va., 1998), 202. EHS to Uriah Tracy, Mar. 31, 1797, Apr. 16, 1797, June 25, 1797, Nov. 29, 1797 in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 303-304, 310-311, 329, 395.

that are obviously realizable (such as those that have been attained in the past). Idealism entails the pursuit of the public interest rather than private interests, and/or of a sociopolitical perfection that is perhaps unrealizable, either in whole or in part. (For more on the wide range of opinion in Federalist historiography, see the Appendix).<sup>12</sup>

However modern-day scholars interpret them, most Federalists saw themselves as unquestionably realistic. Most (not all) adhered to a conservative epistemology, according to which human capacities were “constrained,” so that it was impossible to fully discern and comprehend the truth in any abstract sense—that is, by using one’s unaided reason. In Hamilton’s words, “Men are rather reasoning than reasonable animals, for the most part governed by the impulse of passion.” In the *Federalist Papers*, Hamilton and Madison asserted that “the imperfection of human faculties” precluded the possibility of creating a perfect political system. They also repeatedly emphasized that men were selfish, foolish, wicked, and depraved. Fisher Ames scoffed at the “nonsense” “that man is a perfectible animal, and all governments are obstacles to his apotheosis.” He wrote, “The truth is, and let it humble our pride, the most ferocious of all animals, when his passions are roused to fury and are uncontrolled, is man; and of all governments, the worst is that which never fails to excite, but was never found to restrain those passions, that is, democracy. It is an illuminated hell, that in the midst of remorse, horror, and torture, rings with festivity; for experience shows, that one joy remains to this most malignant description of the damned, the power to make others wretched.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> James M. Banner, Jr., “Afterword: The Federalists—Still in Need of Reconsideration,” in Ben-Atar and Oberg, eds., *Federalists Reconsidered*, 253; George Athan Billias, ed., *The Federalists: Realists or Ideologues?* (Lexington, Mass., 1970), vii-ix.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the “constrained vision,” and its counterpart the “unconstrained vision” (to which radicals like Condorcet and Godwin subscribed), see Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (New York, N.Y., 2002; orig. pub. 1987). Alexander Hamilton to James A. Bayard, Apr. 1802, in *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, 12 vols., ed. Henry Cabot Lodge (New York, N.Y., 1904), 10:433; *Federalist* Nos. 1, 37, 78, in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York, N.Y., 2003), 27-28, 225, 227, 470; Fisher Ames to Timothy Pickering, Nov. 5, 1799, “The Dangers of American Liberty,” in *Works of Fisher Ames with a Selection*

If allowed to rage unchecked, the passions would push the country into a state of anarchy, which was always followed by the imposition of tyranny. Man’s passions, Washington said in his Farewell Address, were the cause of faction, disorder, and tyranny. Hence, as Madison wrote, “[t]he passions ought to be controlled and regulated by the government.” And, since the rulers would inevitably try to abuse power, most Federalists insisted on a system of separation of powers, and checks and balances: “It may be a reflection on human nature that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.” It was not enough to rely on public opinion to keep the powerful in check. Men would revere and obey the laws just by force of “enlightened reason” only if they were “a nation of philosophers.... But a nation of philosophers is as little to be expected as the philosophical race of kings wished for by Plato.”<sup>14</sup>

In this world in which men were neither angels nor philosopher-kings, it was not reason, but religion (as Washington emphasized in his Farewell Address), habit, and experience, whether personal or historical, that would maintain peace and stability—a trial and error approach that ensured that perfection was unattainable. The Federalists routinely denounced philosophy that was unmoored from experience, religious faith, and plain common sense—“Philosophism,” “the love of *Sophisms*,” as Timothy Dwight and Ames called it. Ames referred to theorists as “our

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from *His Speeches and Correspondence*, 2 vols., ed. Seth Ames (Boston, Mass., 1854), 1:263, 2:394. For examples of Hamilton and Madison denying that any government—including the Constitution—could be perfect, see *Federalist* Nos. 16, 37, 85, in *Federalist Papers*, ed. Rossiter, 113, 222, 226, 522, 523, 526.

<sup>14</sup> George Washington, *The President’s Address to the People of the United States, Announcing His Design of Retiring from Public Life, at the Expiration of the Present Constitutional Term of the Presidency* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1796), 9; *Federalist*, Nos. 49, 51, 49, in *Federalist Papers*, ed. Rossiter, 314, 319, 312. See also Ames, “Dangers of American Liberty,” in *Works of Fisher Ames*, ed. Ames, 2:354; and James Kent, *An Introductory Lecture to a Course of Law Lectures, Delivered November 17, 1794* (New York, N.Y., 1794), 11.

sensible fools,” and he associated such folly with the “experimental” French Revolution and Thomas Jefferson; these fools wished “to reduce to practice the schemes, which Plato and Harrington had only sketched upon paper.” John Adams found Plato’s philosophy “absurd,” and Condorcet and Thomas Paine were just as bad as Plato. Reading all of Plato’s works taught him little more than “that sneezing is a cure for the hiccough.” He told Jefferson, in exasperation, that all philosophers were “a little cracked”—they “appear to me as mad as Hindoos [*sic*], Mahometans, and Christians. No doubt they would all think me mad, and for any thing [*sic*] I know, this globe may be the Bedlam, *le Bicêtre* of the universe.” Philosophy should be left “in the clouds.... Or, if permitted to be read, it should be with romances and novels.”<sup>15</sup>

The tried was superior to the untried. Ames argued against the full liberalization of trade on the grounds that, even though it was theoretically superior to protectionism, it was “perfectly Utopian and wild”—that is, impractical—given that America’s competitors protected their own trade: “We follow experience too little, and the visions of theorists a great deal too much.... That rage for theory and system, which would entangle even practical truth in the web of the brain, is the poison of public discussion. One fact is better than two systems.” Washington, too, preferred to put “speculative opinions” to “the test of experience.” In his Farewell Address, he repeatedly invoked the lessons of experience, which showed that the Union must be preserved, and innovations to the system guarded against; he warned that “history and experience prove that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of Republican Government.” History, of course, was a form of experience—that of the species as a whole—so the Federalists often

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<sup>15</sup> Washington, *President’s Address*, 10-11; Timothy Dwight, *The Duty of Americans, at the Present Crisis...* (New Haven, Conn., 1798), 10n; Fisher Ames to Theodore Dwight, Mar. 19, 1801, to Timothy Pickering, Nov. 5, 1799, “The Observer,” “Falkland No. II,” “Camillus No. II,” in *Works of Fisher Ames*, ed. Ames, 1:293, 263, 2:145, 134, 102; John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, June 28, 1812, Adams to Jefferson, July 16, 1804, in *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States...*, 10 vols., ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston, Mass., 1856), 10:18-19, 103-105.

invoked it as well. In 1802, Ames wrote a newspaper essay with the ancient adage “history is philosophy teaching by example” as its title; he lamented that “ancient history has a great deal to say to America; but America will not hear it.”<sup>16</sup>

The Federalists’ distrust of theory and their ostensible reliance on experience make them seem rather realistic. And yet, Federalism was more ambiguous; it contained much that could appeal to individuals of a disposition more idealistic than that of Hamilton, Adams, or Ames. The source of this ambiguity was the importance that the Federalists placed on virtue, which Robert Treat Paine, Jr. called “the BARK of our political tree, which conveys the sap to its branches—the channel, which supplies its vegetation with aliment.” The Federalists were, after all, republicans. According to republican theory, for a republic to survive, both the people and their leaders had to be virtuous—meaning that they had to sacrifice their own selfish interests for the common good. James Madison gave a plausible but paradoxical explanation of this belief:

As there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form. Were the pictures which have been drawn by the political jealousy of some among us faithful likenesses of the human character, the inference would be that there is not sufficient virtue among men for self-government; and that nothing less than the chains of despotism can restrain them from destroying and devouring one another.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Fisher Ames, “Speech in the Convention of Massachusetts, on Biennial Elections,” in *Works of Fisher Ames*, ed. Ames, 2:12; George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, Aug. 23, 1792, in *George Washington: A Collection*, ed. William B. Allen (Indianapolis, Ind., 1988), 578; Washington, *President’s Address*, 7-9, 13; Fisher Ames, ““History is Philosophy Teaching by Example,”” in *Works of Fisher Ames*, ed. Ames, 2:230. For more on the Federalists’ view of the nature and uses of history, see Linda K. Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1970), 118-123. For more on “history is philosophy teaching by example,” see Donald R. Kelley, ed., *Versions of History from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (New Haven, Conn., 1991), 54, 439; and Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York, N.Y., 2004), ch. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Paine [Robert Treat Paine, Jr.], *An Oration, Written at the Request of the Young Men of Boston, and Delivered, July 17th, 1799, in Commemoration of the Dissolution of the Treaties, and Consular Convention, between France and the United States of America*, 2d ed. (Boston, Mass., 1799), 28-29; *Federalist* No. 56, *Federalist Papers*, ed. Rossiter, 343. For republicanism, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992; orig. pub. 1967); Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1969); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political*

These thoughts could take someone in both classical republican and liberal directions, and Madison would go toward the latter. But most Federalists shared these beliefs; they held that the people were sovereign. It was the people who delegated the powers enumerated in the Constitution (“We the people...”), and all branches of government represented the people. Even Ames wrote that “in America no plan of government, without a large and preponderating commixture of democracy, can for a moment possess our confidence and attachment.... This is certain, the body of the federalists were always, and yet are, essentially democratic in their political notions.” Nevertheless, in the same essay, provocatively titled “The Dangers of American Liberty,” Ames wrote that neither of the parties “seemed willing to exclude the people from their *temperate and well-regulated* share of concern in the government.”<sup>18</sup>

In other words, the wise and virtuous elites had to regulate the people’s behavior—even their degree of political participation. The people needed to be sufficiently virtuous to choose their leaders wisely; as Madison wrote, “The aim of every political constitution is, or ought to be, first to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of the society, and in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous whilst they continue to hold their public trust.” But the people were also sufficiently passionate and ignorant, that they needed to be restrained and guided by their betters. Hamilton wrote “that the people commonly *intend* the PUBLIC GOOD,” but they do not “always *reason right* about the *means* of promoting it.... When occasions present themselves in which the interests of the people are at variance with their inclinations, it is the duty of the

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*Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, N.J., 1975). Richard Buel denied that the Federalists were republicans in *Securing the Revolution: Ideology in American Politics, 1789-1815* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1972); but James Banner showed that the Federalists were true to the Revolution’s republican ideals in *To the Hartford Convention*; and Joyce Appleby argued that the Federalists, not the liberal Jeffersonians, were the true heirs of classical republicanism in *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York, N.Y., 1984), 21, 59, 79-80n1.

<sup>18</sup> For popular sovereignty, see Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, pt. 5. Ames, “Dangers of American Liberty,” in *Works of Fisher Ames*, ed. Ames, 2:348 (my emphasis).

persons whom they have appointed to be the guardians of those interests to withstand the temporary delusion in order to give them time and opportunity for more cool and sedate reflection.” The people would thank these “guardians” for “serv[ing] them” with “courage and magnanimity.”<sup>19</sup>

The entire Federalist system was based on the assumption that the people were virtuous enough to elect virtuous leaders, and then to defer—voluntarily—to those leaders because of their superior judgment and virtue. One of the most potent articulations of the “ideal” of deference was the Massachusetts Federalist Jonathan Jackson’s *Thoughts upon the Political Situation of the United States of America*. Jackson believed that “most of the people in any community know too little,” so, when it came to creating “the best political institutions,” “only few are capable with judgment to decide.” Luckily, “[t]he bulk of mankind in every community, should never expect to govern, and take the lead in publick [*sic*] affairs—they should never wish it—and when left to themselves, in general, I believe they do not;—for it is no slander to say, they are totally incapable of it.” Though America was to be spared a hereditary aristocracy, there existed an “*aristocracy* of experience, and of the best understandings to guide their measures.”<sup>20</sup>

Jackson had a collectivistic, organic, hierarchical conception of society. Every citizen had to put the common good above his self-interest by conforming to the role that custom had ascribed to him. Were the people to usurp the elites’ roles, then the sociopolitical order would collapse, and the resultant “anarchy” would end only when some tyrant re-imposed order. Americans could preserve their liberty only if the people could “be properly organized” into “a perfect whole, in which the general harmony may be preserved, each one learning his proper

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<sup>19</sup> *Federalist* Nos. 57, 71, in *Federalist Papers*, ed. Rossiter, 348, 431.

<sup>20</sup> For deference as an “ideal,” see J. G. A. Pocock, “The Classical Theory of Deference,” *American Historical Review* 81 (1976), 516; [Jonathan Jackson], *Thoughts upon the Political Situation of the United States of America...* (Worcester, Mass., 1788), 130, 54, 57; see also David Hackett Fischer, “The Myth of the Essex Junto,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, 21 (1964), 200.

place, and keeping in it.” Reason and experience showed that “to be free, . . . each one is not to do as he pleases, but must conform to rules—to the best general will—to the good of the whole—or no political happiness can ever be obtained.”<sup>21</sup>

This was the language of Plato, and of Rousseau—the very philosophers that those like Ames and Adams excoriated for their impracticality. And yet Jackson was a staunch Federalist. What remains so striking about Federalism is that it is far from obvious that the assumptions on which it was based led to the conclusions that the Federalists drew. After all, if the people were so depraved and ignorant, why would anyone *expect* them to be sufficiently virtuous to sustain republican institutions, much less found an entire political system on this perhaps overoptimistic hope? This blind spot in Federalism would have tremendous consequences for the Federalists in the early nineteenth century.

### **Federalist Worlds**

If Federalism really was that ambiguous, then perhaps it appealed to people for different reasons. Some (like John Adams) might have gravitated toward Federalism because it emphasized tradition, morality, order, balance, and restraints on both the licentiousness of the people and the ambition of the powerful. These conservative principles were based on the assumptions of the depravity of man and the unattainability of perfection (“[a]ims at perfection will always fall short,” Adams wrote). But Federalism also could have appealed to those who believed that perfection was “asymptotic,” meaning that, while one could never totally reach it, one could progress toward it, and come close to reaching it—which is not quite what someone

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<sup>21</sup> [Jackson], *Thoughts upon the Political Situation*, 98, 49, 53; see also Fischer, “Myth of the Essex Junto,” 201-202. For more on the hierarchical conception of society that prevailed in the colonies, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, N.Y., 1993; orig. pub. 1991), pt. 1. Jackson was by no means unique among the Federalists in holding these beliefs; for another example of a Federalist with a pronounced organic conception of society that emphasized deference and the promotion of “*the general good*” see Nathanael Emmons, *A Discourse, Delivered May 9, 1798. Being a Day of Fasting and Prayer throughout the United States* (Newburyport, Mass., [1798]), 5-6, 12-14.

like Hamilton had in mind when denying the possibility of perfection. The elitism inherent in Federalism was compatible with two conceptions of perfectibility: first, with the Platonic notion that philosophers could discover the Forms (the ideals of justice, politics, etc.), and, as lawgivers, create relatively accurate simulacra here on earth; and second, with the belief that some people's minds had reached such an advanced stage of development, that they had the duty to serve as a vanguard of sociopolitical progress, putting the people under their tutelage and leading them toward enlightenment, until they no longer needed the elite.<sup>22</sup>

The first of these conceptions was classical; it held that society was organic and hierarchical, and that once the philosopher-king had duplicated the ideal, no more improvements could possibly be made—in other words, this was a static idealism. This view survived into the eighteenth century (and beyond), when its adherents included reactionaries like Jonathan Jackson, who saw the political order established with the ratification of the Constitution as that static ideal that one should never tinker with; these reactionaries nonetheless downplayed its important feature of checks and balances, because they believed that it would unduly restrict the ability of the virtuous elites to enact wise policies.<sup>23</sup>

The second conception was similarly idealistic, but it differed in that it saw society as “dynamic” rather than “static.” Progress was inevitable—it was the law of history—and there was no Platonic ideal toward which it was advancing; humanity would progress indefinitely, until the end of time. Additionally, whereas the Platonic conception held “that human nature was immutable,” and that only a very few would ever possess minds sufficiently elevated to become philosophers, the progressivists believed that the human mind itself would improve over

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<sup>22</sup> Zoltán Haraszti, [ed.], *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), 220. For perfection as “asymptotic,” see Sowell, *Conflict of Visions*, 19.

<sup>23</sup> For some Federalists downplaying checks and balances, see Fischer, “Myth of the Essex Junto,” 209, 214.

time, so that anyone could live purely rationally, without relying on custom, superstition, or authority.<sup>24</sup>

Even though these two conceptions differed in important particulars, they were both denigrated as “utopian” in the eighteenth century, as we shall see. The fact that these two forms of idealism coexisted in the Federalist Party with the two aforementioned forms of realism (pursuit of material self-interest, and belief in man’s ineradicable limitations) renders Federalism a multifaceted movement, worthy of deeper analysis. If Federalism was in fact multifaceted, then that would help explain its historians’ wildly divergent appraisals.

Federalism is best understood not as a uniform ideology or movement, but as a collection of groups whose interests—economic, political, intellectual—were best advanced by Federalism. Some scholars have approached the subject in similar ways, whether focusing on economic interest groups and classes (as Manning Dauer did in his study of the Federalists—or Saul Cornell in his study of the Anti-Federalists), or on ideology (as Gordon Wood did when he pointed out that John Adams supported the Constitution for reasons far different than those that motivated the Framers themselves).<sup>25</sup>

I hope to shed new light on the nature of Federalism by using Elihu Hubbard Smith as a means of penetrating one of the Federalist worlds. Federalism attracted Smith because it provided an apparatus—an energetic, paternalistic government—that an intellectual vanguard could use to educate and enlighten mankind, thus setting it on the proper path of indefinite perfectibility. Equally importantly, his Connecticut, Congregationalist background exerted a

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<sup>24</sup> Elisabeth Hansot, *Perfection and Progress: Two Modes of Utopian Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), 10.

<sup>25</sup> Dauer, *Adams Federalists*; Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1999); Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, ch. 14. For a similar opinion on Adams, see Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 17-19. Jeffrey Pasley has also noted that the Republicans’ “ideology varied by locality and faction,” in “*The Tyranny of Printers*”: *Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville, Va., 2001), 365.

powerful influence on his intellectual and moral development. By detailing these influences on Smith's worldview, I will show that, far from being the result of misperception or of eccentricity, Smith's Federalist sympathies were logical, given the milieu in which he lived.

I must emphasize some points. First, not all Federalists were utopian. Second, there was no simple dichotomy of realistic Federalists and idealistic Republicans, or vice versa. Anti-Federalism and Jeffersonian Republicanism contained significant realistic elements. But there were also utopian liberals and radicals. Third, it is not that the social spheres in which someone circulates *determine* one's worldview (for example, Smith's friend and colleague Samuel Latham Mitchill was a staunch Republican), but that one's family, friends, teachers, etc., can *influence* one's worldview. Lastly, I neither endorse nor repudiate Federalism, nor do I use terms like "idealistic," "realistic," or "utopian" as either compliments or criticisms. These terms are descriptive, as we shall see in the following chapter.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For Jefferson as a realist, see Cecelia Kenyon, "Alexander Hamilton: Rousseau of the Right," *Political Science Quarterly*, 73 (1958), 167; for Jefferson as anti-Plato, see May, *Enlightenment in America*, 293; for Jefferson as non-utopian, see Ari Helo and Peter Onuf, "Jefferson, Morality, and the Problem of Slavery," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, 60 (2003), 584; for Madison as critical of Robert Owens's utopian socialism, see Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1980), 259n61; for the plebeian Jeffersonian William Manning's belief that government was necessary because of man's innate sinfulness, see Manning, *The Key of Liberty*, in Michael Merrill and Sean Wilentz, eds., *The Key of Liberty: The Life and Democratic Writings of William Manning, "A Laborer," 1747-1814* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 128-130, and for commentary, Michael Merrill and Sean Wilentz, "Introduction," in Merrill and Wilentz, eds., *Key of Liberty*, 20, 42, 47, 52. But, in contrast, for portrayals of Jefferson as "utopian," see McCoy, *Elusive Republic*, 229; Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order*, 78; Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 20, 196-197, 199; Darren Staloff, *Hamilton, Adams, Jefferson: The Politics of Enlightenment and the American Founding* (New York, N.Y., 2005), 360-361. Bernard Bailyn portrayed Jefferson as both idealistic and realistic in *To Begin the World Anew: The Genius and Ambiguities of the American Founders* (New York, N.Y., 2003), lecture 2. And for American "radical Enlightened utopianism," see Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (Cambridge, Eng., 1985), ch. 8.

## CHAPTER 2 UTOPIANISM FROM PLATO TO ELIHU HUBBARD SMITH

Like all other products of the human intellect, Elihu Hubbard Smith's "Utopia" was a palimpsest of ideas. Reading it, one can clearly discern Smith's contemporary influences—the bold strokes of Enlightenment philosophy, and New England exceptionalism. But the underwriting reveals the unmistakable outlines of a two-thousand-year-old philosophical tradition. Smith's "Utopia," like all other Western utopias, reflects a pattern of thought that extends all the way back to Plato. What does that pattern entail?

Scholarly interpretations of "utopianism" seem to have fallen within two categories. Some broadly defined "utopianism" as the hope for a better world, while others have seen a utopia as a model of a better society that contains certain characteristics (which differ from scholar to scholar). Those in the former group, like Karl Mannheim and Vernon Parrington, Jr., emphasized dissatisfaction with the status quo as a prerequisite of utopianism, and they claimed that any attempt to improve society was utopian. Frank Manuel's approach to utopianism was "latitudinarian and ecumenical," the only requirement being that a work "evoke a vision of the life of man in an earthly paradise that would be radically different from the existing order and would presume to render its inhabitants happier." Frank and Fritzie Manuel refused to impose "a rigid definition" on utopian thought, claiming that it was actually a "propensity in man" that took diverse forms in different times and places. Thus, they counted as utopians ancient philosophers and playwrights, classical utopians like Thomas More, Enlightened progressivists like Turgot and Condorcet, utopian socialists (including the supposedly non-utopian Karl Marx), and even the Marquis de Sade.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York, N.Y., 1936); Vernon Louis Parrington, Jr., *American Dreams: A Study of American Utopias* (New York, N.Y., 1964), vii, 4; Frank E. Manuel, "Toward a Psychological History of Utopias," in Frank E. Manuel, ed., *Utopias and Utopian*

Judith Shklar criticized Mannheim's argument as "a perfectly deliberate falsification of history," and she contended that the classical "utopia was a model, an ideal pattern that invited contemplation and judgment but did not entail any other activity." A tale that described "a future society" in the hopes of inspiring people to make it a reality was not a utopia because it was "not 'nowhere' historically." Elisabeth Hansot also saw the classical utopia as "[a] thought experiment," intended "to increase man's knowledge and to persuade," but she was more inclusive than Shklar in that she also recognized the existence of "modern utopias... written with the hope or expectation that they would come into existence in the near future"; classical utopians sought "to judge," and modern ones "to change." Meanwhile, Franco Venturi differentiated between "utopia"—the most perfect form of society that can ever be created (which he seemed to associate with communism)—and "reform"—the piecemeal correction of social problems, or "practical change" (which was not utopian because it did not strive for full perfection). And Dorothy Donnelly specified that "the expression of the desire for a better way of being in the classical utopia centered, first and foremost, on redefining order"—a criterion not met by progressivist visions.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting attempt to specifically define "utopianism" was J. C. Davis's. Though he respected the Manuels' "monumental work," he criticized them for vagueness. Davis complained "that the adjective 'utopian' is being used as a catch-all label for all forms of ideal society," when utopia is actually "a mode or type of ideal society." Davis classified five "forms of ideal society" according to how they solved "the 'collective problem,'" or that of economic

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*Thought* (Boston, Mass., 1966), 69, 70; Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Judith Shklar, "The Political Theory of Utopia: From Melancholy to Nostalgia," in Manuel, ed., *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, 102, 105, 109; Elisabeth Hansot, *Perfection and Progress: Two Modes of Utopian Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), 38, 74-78, 9-10, 96; Franco Venturi, *Utopia and Reform in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Eng., 1971), 96-98, 99; Dorothy F. Donnelly, *Patterns of Order and Utopia* (New York, N.Y., 1998).

scarcity (limited resources, with unlimited wants), which was “one fundamental cause of conflict and social tension.” In the peasants’ dreamland of cockayne, there is no conflict because food magically exists in such abundance that everyone can gratify his urges without having to work. Conversely, arcadia is a land of plenty because people have moderate desires, and are thus able to live in harmony with nature, without the need for utopian restraining institutions. In a perfect moral commonwealth, there is no change in the political status quo; instead, human beings achieve “order, stability, justice and happiness” by following the examples set by Jesus, the saints, or virtuous Christian kings. The millennium, another religiously-themed ideal society, solves the collective problem with “a *deus ex machina*.”<sup>3</sup>

The utopia is a “realistic” solution to the collective problem. Man is immutably flawed, and if unrestrained, his passions will cause all of those ills associated with the competition for scarce resources. “The utopian seeks to ‘solve’ the collective problem collectively, that is by the reorganisation of society and its institutions, by education, by laws and by sanctions. His prime aim is not happiness, that private mystery, but order, that social necessity.” Furthermore (and chillingly), to create a perfect order “without denying the nature of man or society, there must be discipline of a totalitarian kind.” Once the ideal order has been created, “politics stops, and so does change. Perfection is not relative.” Therefore, the ideology of progress is not utopian.<sup>4</sup>

Davis’s argument is elegant but flawed, as he himself admitted. He referred to his “modes” as “no more than heuristic devices, useful, I hope, for explanatory and analytical purposes. In practice...the modes may interlock or overlap in the thought of individuals.” Davis’s work is indeed useful as a way to understand the characteristics of utopianism. His most

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<sup>3</sup> J. C. Davis, “The History of Utopia: The Chronology of Nowhere,” in Peter Alexander and Roger Gill, eds., *Utopias* (LaSalle, Ill., 1984), 1, 5; J. C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing, 1516-1700* (Cambridge, Eng., 1981), 17, 4, 19, 21-32, 27, 36.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-39; Davis, “History of Utopia,” 10.

important insight is that utopianism need not presuppose the potential perfection of man or the permanence of a perfect order. If man remains a fallen creature, then the possibility of the degeneration of order never disappears. Hence the rulers of a utopian society must exploit all advantages, all means at their disposal, to maintain their perfect order. They have to regulate every aspect of life, down to the minutest detail, to make sure that there are no lapses, no opportunities for the onset of corruption. Some authors—Thomas More and Francis Bacon, for example—even made their ideal societies islands, so that they could isolate themselves from Europe’s corrupting influences, and thereby preserve their peaceful, harmonious orders.<sup>5</sup>

Even though Davis tried to devise an objective definition for “utopia,” previous generations did not use the term so specifically. What did “utopia” mean in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? Firstly, people used the term interchangeably with other names for ideal societies. For example, Cotton Mather compared New England to “More’s fam’d *Utopia*,” and claimed that it would be “the Seat” of the “New Jerusalem,” when a “*golden age*” would begin. He referred to God’s “*New-English Israel*,” and speculated that the “Golden Age” of the Millennium was not even a hundred years off. A century later, John Aikin explained the appeal of pastoral poetry as the satisfaction of “an universal longing after a certain imagined state of society,” a nonexistent “golden age,” or “a kind of Utopia, in which the wounded and wearied spirit of man has ever delighted to take refuge.” But: “Alas! we know too well that no Arcadia exists upon modern ground, and that vice and wretchedness prevail in the hamlet as well as in the city. But why might we not for a time be indulged with forgetting it?”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> [Cotton Mather], *A Poem Dedicated to the Memory of the Reverend and Excellent Mr. Urian Oakes...* (Boston, Mass., 1682), 7; Cotton Mather, *The Wonders of the Invisible World. Observations as Well Historical as Theological, upon the Nature, the Number, and the Operations of the Devils...* (Boston, Mass., 1693), 36; John Aikin, *Letters from a Father to His Son, on Various Topics, Relative to Literature and the Conduct of Life* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1794), 82, 84.

## Eighteenth-Century Anti-Utopian Rhetoric

The golden age, arcadia, utopia: people who lived in the eighteenth century often pointed out that such things had never existed, and never would. The eighteenth century was a rational age (or at least it aspired to be such), and those who promoted schemes that were deemed impractical would frequently face the charge of utopianism. Actually, even if a scheme was not impractical, its defenders would still have to rebut their opponents' charges of utopianism. "Utopian," and other buzzwords like "visionary," were more rhetorical devices than anything else. Even if "utopia" does have an objective definition, in practice, in the eighteenth century, on both sides of the Atlantic, it was usually little more than an insult.

So far as "utopianism" had any objective meaning, it referred to the sorts of radical schemes described in works like Plato's *Republic* and Thomas More's *Utopia*. For example: "The Utopian schemes of levelling, and a community of goods, are as visionary and impracticable, as those which vest all property in the Crown, are arbitrary, despotick [*sic*], and in our government unconstitutional." Many, including John Witherspoon, Bernard Romans, and Tunis Wortman, declared that things like common property and agrarian laws were "Utopian": "as for an equal distribution of property it is like Harrington's *Oceana* or Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*." In the 1790s, both radicals and conservatives associated utopianism with the ideals and goals of the French Revolution. To radicals, France, where all men were said to be equal, was an "Arcadia of DEMOCRACY"; in contrast, conservatives ridiculed that chimera, "Utopian happiness in a state of universal Liberty and Equality."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "A Letter to Dennis DeBerdt, Esq; Agent for the House of Representatives," Jan. 12, 1768, in [Massachusetts. General Court. House of Representatives], *Journal of the Honourable House of Representatives, of His Majesty's Province of the Massachusetts-Bay...the Twenty-Seventh Day of May... 1767* (Boston, Mass., 1767), 26; John Witherspoon, *The Works of the Rev. John Witherspoon...*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia, Pa., 1800), 3:324; Bernard Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida...*, vol. 1 (New York, N.Y., 1775), 107; Tunis Wortman, *A Treatise, Concerning Political Enquiry, and the Liberty of the Press* (New York, N.Y., 1800), 198; James Philip Puglia, *A Short Extract (Concerning the Rights of Man and Titles,) from the Work Entitled Man Undeceived...*

Most of the time, people used the term “utopian” to describe things that they believed could not exist in the real world. In 1752, New Yorker William Smith criticized those who, preferring “the Dreams of Visionaries, and the imaginary Virtues of Utopian Characters” to the ineradicable evils of the real world, “refuse to act in Society, because *Plato’s Republic* [*sic*] and *More’s Utopia* have no real Existence.” His more famous contemporary, Adam Smith, despaired that prejudice and private interests rendered the possibility of establishing free trade in Great Britain “as absurd as to expect that an Oceana or Utopia should ever be established in it.”<sup>8</sup>

Some of those who often used anti-utopian rhetoric to contemptuously dismiss new ideas, whether or not those ideas could actually work, were the Loyalists. One Loyalist officer warned the rebels that history showed that the hasty dissolutions of governments that had passed the test of time resulted not in liberty, but in anarchy and then tyranny. The rebels had too often read “*Harrington’s Oceana*, a Work of extraordinary Genius, but an impracticable System,” based on a false appraisal of human nature; their “[a]pplication” of Locke’s “noble, benevolent, and in general true” principles was “wild and Utopian.” Loyalist pamphleteers blasted “the American Republicans” for their “Utopian schemes of government,” or for their “*utopian dreams of happiness*,” which would lead to nothing but destruction. To James Chalmers, Thomas Paine was a “*Political Quack*” out to destroy the British constitution—the most perfect system that human beings could ever establish—all because his Rousseauan confidence in human nature led him foolishly to believe that something better could be achieved. Similarly, Charles Inglis denounced the “visionary political fabrics,” founded on a false conception of human nature,

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(Philadelphia, Pa., 1793), 13; John Robison, *Proofs of a Conspiracy against All the Religions and Governments of Europe, Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies. Collected from Good Authorities...* (New York, N.Y., 1798), 185.

<sup>8</sup> [William Smith (1727-1803)], *Some Thoughts on Education: With Reasons for Erecting a College in This Province, and Fixing the Same at the City of New-York...* (New York, N.Y., 1752), 5; Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York, N.Y., 2003), 591; see also *ibid.*, 1190.

produced by writers like Paine, who “amuse themselves with *Utopian* systems” that, if put into practice, risked “misery and ruin upon millions”; Paine was a poor man’s Harrington, who, “[t]o make way for this crude, wretched system,... would destroy the best, the most beautiful political fabric which the sun ever beheld!”<sup>9</sup>

After the Revolution, many Americans (soon to be known as Federalists) believed that the country would not survive its infancy, thanks to the selfish state legislatures, which were dominated by men “of strong wild projection, whose brains are always teeming with utopian, chimerical plans and political whims, very destructive to society.” During the Constitutional ratification debate, such rhetoric became quite common. If the Anti-Federalists believed that the disunited states could remain at peace, they were “visionary...men,” “far gone in Utopian speculations” that defied “the accumulated experience of ages.” “Is it not time to awake from the deceitful dream of a golden age and to adopt as a practical maxim for the direction of our political conduct that we, as well as the other inhabitants of the globe, are yet remote from the happy empire of perfect wisdom and perfect virtue?” Very similarly to the Loyalists, the Federalists argued that their opponents’ “visionary,” “romantic” conception of man and society would cause anarchy, which would end when a tyrant re-imposed order. Over and over again,

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<sup>9</sup> [Robert Prescott?], *A Letter from a Veteran, to the Officers of the Army Encamped at Boston* (New York, N.Y., 1774), 7, 9; “A Westchester Farmer” [Samuel Seabury], *The Congress Canvassed: or, An Examination into the Conduct of the Delegates, at Their Grand Convention, Held in Philadelphia, Sept. 1, 1774...* ([New York, N.Y.], 1774), 26; [Henry Barry?], *Remarks upon a Discourse Preached December 15th 1774...By William Gordon...* ([New York, N.Y.?], 1775), 8; “Candidus” [James Chalmers], *Plain Truth; Addressed to the Inhabitants of America, Containing, Remarks on a Late Pamphlet, Entitled Common Sense. Wherein Are Shewn, That the Scheme of Independence Is Ruinous, Delusive, and Impracticable...* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1776), 2-3; [Charles Inglis], *The True Interest of America Impartially Stated, in Certain Strictures on a Pamphlet Intitled [sic] Common Sense* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1776), 9, 10, 54. See also “Grotius,” *Pills for the Delegates: or The Chairman Chastised, in a Series of Letters, Addressed to Peyton Randolph, Esq; on His Conduct, as President of the General Congress...* (New York, N.Y., 1775), 32; [Charles Inglis], *The Letters of Papinian: In Which the Conduct, Present State and Prospects, of the American Congress, Are Examined* (New York, N.Y., 1779), 33.

they accused the Anti-Federalists of trying to create “a fantastical Utopia,” or “an Utopian constitution.”<sup>10</sup>

Such rhetoric became even more common in the 1790s, thanks to the polarizing effect of the French Revolution. The Federalists saw the Jeffersonians as a pro-French faction that did not appreciate that the United States was “Emmanuel’s land, in which he has planted his Church, and maintained his cause, by a series of signal interpositions,” and so were recklessly “bartering [the Constitution] away for the Utopian scheme of Liberty and Equality.” Many Federalists hysterically accused the Republicans of pursuing nothing less than “the the abolition of all society and Government, and the utter extinction of every species of religion,” under the influence of “the Stygian philosophy” of Diderot, Rousseau, Condorcet, Godwin, and the other radicals whom they blamed for the Reign of Terror. Even New Jersey’s Legislative Council, in an address to President Adams, denounced “the fine-spun philosophy of some visionary men.”<sup>11</sup>

The greatest of these supposed philosophic fools was the Federalists’ *bête noire*, Thomas Jefferson. Congressman William Loughton Smith ridiculed Jefferson as “the Generalissimo,” a

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<sup>10</sup> [Pelatiah Webster], *A Dissertation on the Political Union and Constitution of the Thirteen United States, of North-America...* (Hartford, Conn., 1783), 14; *Federalist* Nos. 6, 16, in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York, N.Y., 2003), 50, 48, 53, 110-111; Alexander Hamilton, “Speech on the Senate of the United States,” June 24, 1788, in *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, 12 vols., ed. Henry Cabot Lodge (New York, N.Y., 1904), 2:57; William [Loughton] Smith, *An Oration, Delivered...on the Fourth of July, 1796...*, 2d ed. ([Charleston, S.C., 1796]), 11. See also [Alexander Contee Hanson], *Political Schemes and Calculations, Addressed to the Citizens of Maryland, by a Native Citizen and Servant of the State* (Annapolis, Md., 1784), 11; Silas Deane, *An Address to the United States of North-America...* (New London, Conn., 1784), 18; *Federalist* Nos. 30, 35, 46, 60, in *Federalist Papers*, ed. Rossiter, 188, 210, 295, 365.

<sup>11</sup> Nathanael Emmons, *A Discourse, Delivered May 9, 1798. Being a Day of Fasting and Prayer throughout the United States* (Newburyport, Mass., [1798]), 24; Amos Stoddard, *An Oration, Delivered...on the Fourth Day of July, 1799...* (Portland, Me., 1799), 12; [Benjamin Davies], *Tit for Tat; or, A Purge for a Pill: Being an Answer to a Scurrilous Pamphlet, Lately Published, Entitled “A Pill for Porcupine”...* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1796), 10; [New Jersey. Legislature. Legislative Council], *Journal of the Proceedings of the Legislative-Council of the State of New-Jersey, Convened in General Assembly, at Trenton, on Tuesday the Twenty-Third Day of October, Seventeen Hundred Ninety-Eight. Being the First and Second Sitzings of the Twenty-Third Session* (Trenton, N.J., 1799), 53. See also Josiah Dunham, *An Oration, for the Fourth of July, 1798...* (Hanover, N.H., [1798]), 3-4; Noah Webster, *An Oration Pronounced before the Citizens of New-Haven on the Anniversary of the Independence of the United States, July 4th 1798...* (New Haven, Conn., 1798), 13; Thomas Paine [Robert Treat Paine, Jr.], *An Oration, Written at the Request of the Young Men of Boston, and Delivered, July 17th, 1799, in Commemoration of the Dissolution of the Treaties, and Consular Convention, between France and the United States of America*, 2d ed. (Boston, Mass., 1799), 11.

man who, like Locke, Condorcet, and all other “philosophical politicians,” made a poor statesman, because his mind resided not in the real world, but in a “Utopia” of “theoretical principles.” Other Federalists bristled at the “infidel and visionary schemes,” or the “visionary experiments,” of this “disciple of *Turgot*,” this “pupil of *Condorcet*.” “[T]he Atmosphere of Virginia,” wrote George Cabot, “doubtless makes every one [*sic*] who breathes it visionary.”<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps because they posed an immediate threat to the British and American political orders, conservatives reviled the progressivist philosophers like Condorcet and Godwin far more than they did the classical utopians like Plato and More. The latter were invoked for rhetorical effect; their relation to the radicals of the late eighteenth century was metaphorical. On the other hand, the former were seen as the immediate inspirers of groups like the Republicans or their British counterparts. As such, the conservative British critic Thomas James Mathias pilloried Godwin as someone who would replace the good and wise British institutions with a sanguinary tyranny. He compared Godwin (and his intellectual brethren Thomas Paine, Rousseau, David Hume, and Condorcet) unfavorably with Plato, Harrington, and More. Though Mathias was “sensible of their errors,” he greatly admired Plato and More for their respect of religion and the laws, in contrast to Godwin, who sought only to destroy them. The classical utopians “knew the nature and the state of man; and they saw what it would admit, and what it would not bear.

When they proposed some amendment, or some institution which did not then exist, it was in the way of suggestion, and not of dogmatical imposition,” which was the method of “the modern

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<sup>12</sup> [William Loughton Smith], *The Politicks [sic] and Views of a Certain Party, Displayed* ([Philadelphia, Pa.?, 1792), 28, 29; [William Loughton Smith], *The Pretensions of Thomas Jefferson to the Presidency Examined; and the Charges against John Adams Refuted* ([Philadelphia, Pa.], 1796), 14; Timothy Pickering to Rufus King, Mar. 4, 1804, King to Pickering, Dec. 1, 1808, in *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King...*, 6 vols., ed. Charles R. King (New York, N.Y., 1894-1900), 4:365, 5:110; Alexander Hamilton, *Examination of Jefferson's Message to Congress of December 7, 1801*, in *Works of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Lodge, 8:293; George Cabot to Rufus King, Apr. 26, 1799, in *Life and Correspondence of Rufus King*, ed. King, 3:9. For a defense of Jefferson against Smith's *Pretensions*, see [James Thomson Callender], *The American Annual Register, or, Historical Memoirs of the United States, for the Year 1796* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1797), 206.

*Directors* of human affairs,” these “gods of this nether world” who “sit with the thunderbolt in their hands, and the storms under their feet.”<sup>13</sup>

Because “searching for an *Utopia*, a nation perfect in every respect, has driven millions to their graves,” in the 1790s, the authorities felt compelled to prosecute agitators for seditious libel, first in Britain, and then in the United States. In 1793, the Scottish radical Thomas Muir was prosecuted for distributing radical texts, including Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man*, and for making seditious speeches. In his defense, Muir argued that Paine’s writings “are merely of a speculative nature,” and as such they posed no threat to the British constitution. Indeed, he maintained that Paine’s speculations did not go as far as those of Hume or More, neither of whom had faced prosecution—nor did Plato or Harrington. These utopians went off “in pursuit of chimeras,” whereas, Muir claimed, he merely wished to reform the British constitution, not replace it.<sup>14</sup>

Radicals often had to defend themselves in this manner. In fact, Paine himself had had to defend himself when a Member of Parliament called for his prosecution, on the grounds that, unlike the works of Harrington, More, and Hume, his *Rights of Man* “reviled what was most sacred in the Constitution, destroyed every principle of subordination, and *established nothing in their room.*” Paine deflected this attack by pointing out that he *had* argued in favor of a system that not “in theory only, but already in full and established practise,” proved better than the

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<sup>13</sup> [Thomas James Mathias], *Pursuits of Literature...* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1800), 180-185np, 234na, 236, 314-315nr; [Thomas James Mathias], *The Shade of Alexander Pope on the Banks of the Thames*, in [Thomas James Mathias], *The Imperial Epistle, and The Shade of Alexander Pope* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1800), 38-44nq, 41nq.

<sup>14</sup> Archibald Hamilton Rowan, *Report of the Trial of Archibald Hamilton Rowan, Esq...for the Distribution of a Libel...* (New York, N.Y., 1794), 125; *An Account of the Trial of Thomas Muir...before the High Court of Justiciary at Edinburgh, on the 30th and 31st Days of August, 1793, for Sedition* (New York, N.Y., 1794), 8-9, 96, 97, 100-101, 102.

British one: “the representative system.” In other words, by pointing out that his preferred system was not only practicable, but being practiced, too, Paine denied that he was a utopian.<sup>15</sup>

Denying that one was utopian was a common rhetorical device in the late eighteenth century. Critics of reformers accused them of utopianism with such frequency, that many reformers preemptively denied that they were utopian. For example, Benjamin Rush bluntly stated, “The abolition of domestic Slavery is not an Utopian Scheme.” When arguing against corporal punishment in schools, Rush claimed that innovations—including the magnetic compass, the steam engine, and Columbus’s explorations—had long been erroneously “branded as Utopian projects.” And when, at the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin argued, unsuccessfully, against executive salaries, he vehemently denied “that this is an Utopian Idea.” Furthermore, like Paine, staunch republicans regularly denied that republicanism “is in reality utopian, imaginary, and impracticable!” “In this country you see a strange phænomenon in politics,” proclaimed Samuel Latham Mitchill, “a PEOPLE RULING THEMSELVES! What had been viewed by many as a speculative vision, or an Utopian dream, is here reduced to actual practice.”<sup>16</sup>

But Republicans like Mitchill did more than mount defenses against charges of utopianism: they, themselves, used anti-utopian rhetoric, sometimes to attack *their* opponents. Thomas Paine wrote that the British funding system was built on a “visionary basis.” According

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Paine to Mr. Secretary Dundas, June 6, 1792, in *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, 2 vols., ed. Philip S. Foner (New York, N.Y., 1945), 2:447, 456.

<sup>16</sup> [Benjamin Rush?], *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements, on the Slavery of the Negroes in America. To Which Is Added, a Vindication of the Address, in Answer to a Pamphlet Entitled, “Slavery Not Forbidden in Scripture; or, A Defence of the West Indian Planters”*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia, Pa., 1773), 5; Benjamin Rush, *Thoughts upon the Amusements and Punishments Which Are Proper for Schools* ([Philadelphia, Pa., 1790]), 7; “Opposition to Executive Salaries (June 2),” in *The Anti-Federalist Papers and the Constitutional Convention Debates*, ed. Ralph A. Ketcham (New York, N.Y., 2003), 45; “Demophilus,” “The Propriety of *Independency*,” in *Large Additions to Common Sense; Addressed to the Inhabitants of America, on Several Important Subjects...*, 12<sup>th</sup> ed. (Salem, Mass., 1776), 5; Samuel Latham Mitchill, *An Oration, Pronounced before the Society of Black Friars... in the City of New-York, on Monday, the 11th of November, 1793* (New York, N.Y., 1793), 16.

to James Callender, the entire British constitution was visionary: “This constitution can only be valuable,” he wrote, “in the same degree that it is practicable, for, if *it cannot be reduced to practice*, it is of no more use than the republic of Plato, or the Utopia of Sir Thomas More. When we examine it, by the test of experience, we are immediately overwhelmed in an ocean of follies, and of crimes.” Joseph Priestley, whom the Federalist polemicist William Cobbett (writing under the appropriate *nom de plume* Peter Porcupine) once savaged as a “delirious” utopian, actually acknowledged that “no work of man can be expected to be perfect,” and he advocated presidential term limits because an ambitious president, allowed “to keep this high situation for life,” would have “an interest in enlarging the power attached to” the office, at the country’s expense—“pure patriotism, I fear, exists only in Utopia.” Even Thomas Jefferson himself did not fit the Federalists’ caricature of an absurd visionary. Although he consulted More’s *Utopia* “for some good hints” for a proposed “Bill for Proportioning Crimes and Punishments” (1779), elsewhere he described an Indian prophet (probably Tenskwatawa) as “a visionary... vainly endeavoring to lead back his brethren to the fancied beatitudes of their golden age,” and he criticized medicine that was based on “visionary theories” rather than on painstaking observation and “sober facts.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Who Were the Utopians?**

In short, both Federalists and Republicans liked to see themselves as realists, while portraying their enemies as visionaries so enamored of their hopes and their theories that they failed to see the world as it actually was—in other words, the use of anti-utopian rhetoric did not

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Paine, “The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance,” Apr. 8, 1796, in *Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Paine, 666; [James Thomson Callender], *The Political Progress of Britain...*, 3d ed. (Philadelphia, Pa., 1795), 89; [William Cobbett], *Observations on the Emigration of Dr. Joseph Priestley...*, 3d ed. (Philadelphia, Pa., 1795), 81; Joseph Priestley, *Letters to the Inhabitants of Northumberland and Its Neighbourhood... Part II...* (Northumberland, Pa., 1799), 9; Thomas Jefferson, “A Bill for Proportioning Crimes and Punishments,” Jefferson to John Adams, Apr. 20, 1812, Jefferson to Doctor Caspar Wistar, June 21, 1807, in *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, 12 vols., ed. Paul Leicester Ford (New York, N.Y., 1904-5), 2:399-400n, 9:238, 10:428.

signify that one was indeed anti-utopian. But who was right? Who were the realists, and who were the utopians? Granted, there were realists and utopians on both sides. But which movement—Federalism or Republicanism—was more compatible with utopianism? To answer this question, we must first examine those works that were considered utopian in the eighteenth century. We can divide them into two groups: classical utopianism (Plato, More, Harrington, Hume, and Rousseau), and progressivism (Turgot, Condorcet, and Godwin). The former devised perfect governments that were static—governments that were to be preserved in their final forms for as long as possible—while those in the second group believed that human beings and all their works progressed indefinitely toward perfection, and so preservation of a government as it existed at any given time would only hinder improvement. The Federalists resembled the former far more than they did the latter, although some Federalists did believe in the progress of the human mind, and developed hybrid worldviews that borrowed from both of these utopian groups (see Chapter 6).

Alfred North Whitehead famously said, “[T]he safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.” Many of the thinkers who have contemplated the most perfect form of government have done so within the Platonic paradigm. Plato’s *Republic* was an attempt to discover the true nature of justice by describing it in the macrocosm of the state, and then applying those principles to the individual. To Plato, the just state was an organism in which the three classes—guardians, soldiers, and producers, representing the traits of wisdom, courage, and appetite—performed the duties that fit their respective natures—and only those duties. The classes, guided by the guardians (the mind—or wisdom—of the body politic), had to work in harmony to promote the happiness of all. So that they would advance no interests other than the common good, the guardians had no

private property, and they even shared their women and children in common. Convinced of the evils of licentious democracy, Plato created an aristocracy (“government by the best”) in which wisdom was united with power in the persons of the philosopher-kings, who came from the class of guardians. The wise few controlled the passionate many by rigging breeding lotteries so that only the fit had children (an early version of eugenics), and then taking the children from their parents to instill in them—through a system of wholesome lies and judicious censorship—the virtues of temperance and obedience to their betters.<sup>18</sup>

Plato tried to picture the ideal state as it existed in the world of Being, but he understood that it could not exist in the world of Becoming. Even in ancient Athens, such utopianism was a target of ridicule, as in Aristophanes’s witty plays *Clouds* and *Ecclesiazusae*. In *The Republic*, Plato (speaking through Socrates) acknowledged that the “pattern” of perfection existed only “in heaven.” But, “[i]t matters nothing whether it exists anywhere or shall exist; for he would practice the principles of this city only, no other.” In other words, the Republic was a model that human beings were to duplicate as closely as possible in the real world. Perhaps out of frustration that his Republic could never exist as he envisioned it, Plato planned to revisit the theme in a trilogy—*Timaeus*, *Critias*, and *Hermocrates*—in which he would describe a real Republic “engaging in transactions with other states, waging war successfully and showing in the process all the qualities one would expect from its system of education and training, both in action and negotiation with its rivals.” He therefore depicted an antediluvian Athens in which the guardians maintained the world’s greatest constitution—an Athens virtuous and strong

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<sup>18</sup> Whitehead qtd. in Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964; orig. pub. 1936), 24; Plato, *The Republic*, in Philip G. Rouse and Eric H. Warmington, eds., *Great Dialogues of Plato*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse (New York, N.Y., 1956), bks. 4, 5, and pp. 361-369, 257-258, 341, 174-178, 186-189, 230, 257. For more on Plato’s influence on future utopianism, see Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, 111-112.

enough to defeat the great but decadent island empire of Atlantis in battle. Alas, this was pure fiction, and Plato abandoned the trilogy midway through the *Critias*.<sup>19</sup>

Later utopian authors reprised many of Plato's themes. Foremost among them was Thomas More. More never expected a society like his Utopia to come into being; one can see this by examining his language. In the story, a man named Raphael Hythloday ("peddler of nonsense") described to More (a character in his own story) a land named "Utopia" ("no place"), whose capital Amaurote ("dim city") was located on the island's major river Anyder ("waterless"). More's purpose was not to create a real Utopia, but to use Utopia as a model to reform society. Indeed, More the character even expressed disagreement with Utopian institutions like the abolition of private property, and he had to "grant that many things be in the Utopian weal-public which in our cities I may rather wish for than hope after." But he nevertheless urged Hythloday to put to use his knowledge of Utopia's perfect institutions by advising Europe's kings, so that philosophy would tutor power, as Plato had prescribed.<sup>20</sup>

Utopia was the anti-England. The England of More's time (1516) suffered from rampant poverty and crime, and myriad executions. The same ruling class that had deprived the people of their livelihoods through enclosure had the temerity to slaughter these poor souls when they engaged in the only activity that would keep them alive—theft. In contrast, in Utopia, private property, the supposed source of all social conflict, was abolished. With no great accumulations of wealth, there was no poverty or hunger, and no one had any private interests at odds with the commonweal. There were also no motives for theft, since all were provided for from common storehouses. Those who happened to commit crimes were sentenced to hard labor; only traitors

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<sup>19</sup> Plato, *Republic*, in Rouse and Warmington, eds., *Great Dialogues of Plato*, 393; Aristophanes, *Clouds*, *Ecclesiazusae*, in *The Complete Plays of Aristophanes*, ed. Moses Hadas (New York, N.Y., 1962), 101-141, 417-462; Plato, *Timaeus*, in Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, ed. Desmond Lee (London, Eng., 1977), 31.

<sup>20</sup> Susan Bruce, "Introduction," in *Three Early Modern Utopias: Utopia, New Atlantis, The Isle of Pines* (Oxford, Eng., 1999), ed. Susan Bruce, xxi; Thomas More, *Utopia*, *ibid.*, 34, 41-42, 46, 123.

were executed. Like most other ideal societies, Utopia was collectivistic. Everyone wore the same type of clothes (the only differences being those between the sexes). Everyone worked, but since there was no leisure class, only six hours of work per day were necessary to provide for the needs of all. Everyone ate at the common tables. And like Plato's Republic, it was also an organic, hierarchical society, in which wise, paternalistic magistrates regulated the people's behavior down to the minutest detail. The Utopians needed licenses to travel from city to city; the punishment for a second infraction of this law was enslavement. Taverns and bordellos were outlawed—but anyway, the Utopians had “little liberty...to loiter.” Such strict rules were necessary because man was “mutable [i.e., capricious] and frail.” But happily, the Utopians were so enlightened that they loved their magistrates and “willingly” deferred to their superior judgment, so that “the whole island is as it were one family or household.” So ordered, Utopia “shall endure for ever [*sic*].”<sup>21</sup>

James Harrington's Oceana was also an organic society in which all had their proper places, and all put “the public interest” above their selfish ones. Though in spirit it fairly resembled Utopia, it differed in two important details. First, Harrington saw Oceana as realizable—he was not just “writing romance.” The book was an exhortation to Oliver Cromwell (to whom it was dedicated) to establish a republic rather than a dictatorship. *Oceana* (1656) was basically a *roman à clef*: Oceana stood for England; its capital was Emporium (London); and its lawgiver—the man who ordered this perfect commonwealth—was Olphaus Megaletor, Lord Archon (Cromwell). Second, private property was not only legal, it was tremendously important. Rather than ensuring an equitable order by abolishing private property, Harrington established an even distribution of private property with an agrarian law and the abolition of primogeniture. Harrington believed that the division of property defined the type of

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 19, 21-24, 44-45, 119, 63-64, 56, 57-59, 67-68, 114, 93, 69.

polity. In other words, a polity in which one man owned most of the land was a monarchy; one in which a few owned most of the land was a “mixed monarchy”; and one in which the people owned most of the land among them was “a commonwealth,” or republic. Oceana was not, however, a pure democracy. Though the people composed “the main body of a commonwealth,” an aristocracy was necessary, “for that the politics can be mastered without study, or that the people can have leisure to study, is a vain imagination.” Harrington believed in the existence of “a natural aristocracy”; in a group of twenty men, six “will be wiser, or at least less foolish, than all the rest,” and the other fourteen will recognize them as men of wisdom, and voluntarily defer to them. The natural aristocracy would make up the senate, which “is not to be commanders but counsellors of the people.” The senate could only propose and debate laws, and the people had the power to decide; were the same body to exercise the powers of debate and resolution, the commonwealth would lose its equilibrium, and one order would tyrannize the other.<sup>22</sup>

David Hume was a reluctant utopian. His “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth” (1754) was an essentially conservative exercise, in that he understood that one could not simply change a government on the basis of philosophy alone, without taking into account the customs and prejudices of the people. But “it must be advantageous to know what is the most perfect in the kind, that we may be able to bring any real constitution or form of government as near it as possible, by such alterations and gentle innovations as may not give too great disturbance to society.” He rejected Plato’s and More’s exercises because they “suppose[d] great reformations in the manners of mankind”; Oceana was “the only valuable model of a commonwealth that has

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<sup>22</sup> James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, in James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana and A System of Politics*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge, Eng., 1992), 19, 265, 67, 36, 33, 101, 110, 11-12, 136, 23.

yet been offered to the public,” even though its agrarian law was “impracticable,” and its preemptive senatorial veto risked giving the elite a stranglehold over the system.<sup>23</sup>

Hume, ever conscious of human shortcomings, concocted intricate checks and balances in order to prevent the abuse of power. Propertied voters elected county representatives, who in turn elected national senators and magistrates. The senators elected from their own ranks “a protector” and the ministers of state. Each of these groups would be checked by rival groups; the senators would restrain popular passions, and in turn, a “court of competitors” (composed of runners-up in senatorial elections) had the power to monitor and accuse public servants, including senators, of wrongdoing. Popular participation would check and balance elite guidance, and vice versa. Hume believed that his commonwealth was “practicable”—because it was simply an improvement of the United Provinces—and would be long-lived. But he doubted that it could last forever, because human ambition and selfishness were too strong ever to be eradicated; in other words, there would never really be a perfect commonwealth.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s “Platonic” utopia from *The Social Contract* (1762) had none of the rigorous checks and balances of Hume’s commonwealth. Rousseau believed that when faced with the precariousness of life in the state of nature, the people contracted to form a society, thereby agreeing to surrender their selfish interests, and to conform to the “general will.” In order to advance “*the good of all*,” the state could force the citizens to obey the general will, “[a]nd this is in effect nothing more, than that they may be compelled to be free.” A citizen could no longer consider “himself a solitary and independent being”; he was, rather “a part of a greater whole,” and if his conception of the general will clashed with that which the majority of the people proclaimed to be the general will, he “was mistaken,” and “if

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<sup>23</sup> David Hume, “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth,” in David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* (London, Eng., 1963), 499-500, 500-501.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 502, 504, 503, 505, 509, 513-515, 512, 515.

my particular advice had been followed, it would have been contrary to my will, which as a citizen is the same as the general, and in that case I should not have been free.” In practice, this meant that the collectivity had the right to decide how best to use “the possessions of all.” A citizen could not accumulate vast wealth and dispose of it as he pleased, since then he would advance only his own good, not that of his fellows. Only an even distribution of wealth made the law “advantageous to mankind in general,” rather than just to the propertied at the expense of the poor. And to maintain this equality, a polity had to practice agriculture rather than commerce, which bred “luxury” and “indolence,” and depleted the public virtue necessary for the success of a democratic republic.<sup>25</sup>

In summary, the classical utopias shared several topoi. They depicted agrarian polities, located in isolated lands, so that foreigners could not corrupt their perfect institutions. These polities were commonwealths, meaning that the common good took precedence over private interests. To ensure that their inhabitants promoted only the common good, great accumulations of wealth were prevented, either by holding all property in common, or by ensuring that private property was equally distributed. These commonwealths were organic, hierarchical societies; everyone had his place, and the many had to defer to the enlightened few. Furthermore, these utopias—perfect and changeless—were often really models that people could use to reform their own unjust societies.

### **Elitism, Collectivism, and Virtue in Smith’s Utopia**

We have already seen that Elihu Hubbard Smith’s Utopia was another such model for real-world reforms, an agrarian and economically egalitarian society, an anti-New York, just as

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<sup>25</sup> For Rousseau as a utopian in the “Platonic” tradition, see Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, 447; Jean Jacques Rousseau, *A Treatise on the Social Compact*, in Jean Jacques Rousseau, *A Dissertation on Political Economy: To Which Is Added, a Treatise on the Social Compact; or the Principles of Politic Law* (Albany, N.Y., 1797), 22, 48, 40, 42-43, 27, 58-59, 165, 33-34, 77-78, 100-101.

More's Utopia was an anti-England. Smith was far more sanguine than More about the possibility of realizing his vision; but his "Utopia" still assumed many of the characteristics of his predecessors' works, such as elitism, collectivism, and the primacy of virtue—characteristics that coincided with some of Federalism's main attributes. Given the parallels between Federalism and classical utopianism, the idealistic Smith naturally gravitated toward Federalism as the vehicle with which to realize his vision.

Smith was familiar with the classical utopians, whose works were often discussed at the weekly meetings of the New York Friendly Club. At some meetings, members read aloud from Hume's *Essays*, and Smith himself read Hume's "literary & historical writings." He also read multiple works by Rousseau. In one of the most sweeping and stimulating Friendly Club meetings, the members discussed "the political works" of More, Harrington, and Hume, among many others.<sup>26</sup>

In his "Utopia," he duplicated several classical utopian topoi—isolationism, for example. Catherine Kaplan has noted that Smith's Utopia was a romanticized Northwest Territory, "less accessible by water than was in fact the case"—yet another manifestation "of an ancient wish—to escape from and reform society at once." Smith ensured that the corruptive influences of the outside world would never be able to infiltrate his pristine Utopia. Therefore, though Utopia was blessed with navigable rivers, "no stream, navigable for vessels of more than forty tuns [*sic*], is to be found in all this territory." This convenient natural barrier would keep out two things: commerce and immigrants. Without waterways or harbors that could accommodate copious imports, Utopia would be spared the spread of "the luxuries of life," which were poisonous to republican virtue. Because the Utopians were "obliged to cultivate the earth," they were "a

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<sup>26</sup> Nov. 28, 1795, May 7, 1796, Elihu Hubbard Smith to Theodore Dwight, Nov. 22, 1796, Sept. 4, 1795, General Postscript to the Month of April, Jan. 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 1798, Sept. 30, 1797, in *The Diary of Elihu Hubbard Smith (1771-1798)*, ed. James E. Cronin (Philadelphia, Pa., 1973), 92, 163, 261, 44, 160, 414, 416, 418, 371.

hardy, temperate, frugal, laborious, & enterprising race of men.” Smith, like many other Federalists, was leery of immigrants. They most likely came from backward, decadent countries, and had yet to attain the enlightened dispositions required of Utopia’s citizens. Immigrants were permitted in Utopia, but in order to qualify as voters, they had to reside in Utopia for ten years (American citizens who moved to Utopia had to wait for only five, and all had to be at least twenty-one years old to vote). Foreigners were prohibited from holding office, and American immigrants could do so only after living in Utopia for a decade. These waiting periods gave immigrants sufficient time (in Kaplan’s words) “to be reformed by Utopia’s pure institutions.”<sup>27</sup>

Smith’s grand hopes for his mythical northwestern commonwealth were actually not all that different from many Federalists’ plans for the real Northwest Territory. Andrew R. L. Cayton has shown that the Federalists believed that their “vision” of the West as a land of prosperity and order could come to fruition only under the guidance of enlightened, gentlemanly elites. Utopians tend to believe that matters will not improve on their own, so they must use all means at their disposal to steer their fellow man toward perfection; as such, utopians naturally tend toward elitism.<sup>28</sup>

In Smith’s words, “It is my *duty* to exert all my powers to promote the welfare of mankind.” Smith believed that only a “[f]ew persons, fewer than, at the first glance, you would imagine, act from motives of duty.” Most people never even contemplated elevated subjects like duty and morality; they were “the blind & passive machines of imitation or fear.” “It follows, of

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<sup>27</sup> Elihu Hubbard Smith, “The Utopia,” *Early American Literature*, 35 (2000), 330n2; Catherine Kaplan, “Document: Elihu Hubbard Smith’s ‘The Institutions of the Republic of Utopia,’” *Early American Literature*, 35 (2000), 299; Smith, “Utopia,” 310 (see also Kaplan, “Document,” 301); Smith, “Utopia,” 310 (see also J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* [Princeton, N.J., 1975], chs. 13-15; and Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* [Chapel Hill, N.C., 1980]); Smith, “Utopia,” 312, 331n10.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew R. L. Cayton, “Radicals in the ‘Western World’: The Federalist Conquest of Trans-Appalachian North America,” in Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, eds., *Federalists Reconsidered* (Charlottesville, Va., 1998), 82-83; Crane Brinton, “Utopia and Democracy,” in Manuel, ed., *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, 50-51.

necessity,” he wrote, “that, as there are few who are competent to judge, there are few whose judgements ought to influence our conduct.” Those “persons not competent to decide” would no doubt unjustly impugn the motives of virtuous elites like himself. But it was imperative that the enlightened ignore the “ferocious & empoisoned attacks” of the malicious and ignorant “multitude,” and persevere in their pursuit of truth and justice—particularly for the good of the ungrateful masses. “The ignorant are ever the slaves of passion,” “easily swayed” by demagogues exploiting their “hatred, envy & resentment.” Once unleashed, such passions would destroy order and its blessings; fearful of this anarchy, the people would become “the patient victims of a new tyranny.” Only the prudent reforms made by the “well-informed” could preserve society’s beneficial institutions.<sup>29</sup>

So Smith was quite the elitist. When in one of his cranky moods, he often made snide comments about the masses (“[p]ublic opinion is unusually just in Lichfield [*sic*]”). He was particularly scornful about his countrymen’s unsophisticated theatrical tastes: “Show & bustle, for interest & character & plot; & eating a pudding, for wit & humour; pass off better, with an audience, than Othello & Iago, Benedick & Beatrice.” Smith was thus bitterly pessimistic about the chances for success of William Dunlap’s plays, but, at the same time, he defiantly wore their unpopularity as a badge of honor. Of a performance of one of them he wrote, “[I]s it wonderful that it did not produce bursts of applause? Yet there was some, in several parts. But not enough to satisfy the wishes of one, who longs to see a deserving piece well received.” Smith’s own work, *Edwin and Angelina*, was “as favorably recd. as I had any reason to expect,” because “it had not sufficient attractions for our laughter-loving citizens.” But the reception of one “contemptible play” was a relief: “Thank Heaven! our audience was not stupid enough to relish

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<sup>29</sup> Feb. 27, 1797, EHS to Mrs. Tracy, Dec. 15, 1795, to John Allen, Mar. 30, 1796, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 297, 104-105, 150.

it—stupid as it generally is.” Smith blamed one thing above all for Americans’ neglect of learning and the arts: the pursuit of wealth. “The cares of Avarice” prevented people from devoting time to “read[ing] any thing [*sic*] lengthy,” whether philosophy, scientific research, or epic poetry; “the mass of readers,” with their short attention spans, could handle only “Scraps, Anecdotes, paragraphs, & Stanzas.” It was “the demon of speculation” that led New Yorkers to “neglect...the elegant & useful sciences,...the arts of genius, taste, & society.”<sup>30</sup>

The pursuit of wealth was entirely selfish, and therefore, un-republican. Smith believed that “w[e] are not made for ourselves alone, but for each other; for all. For the benefit of all, therefore, should our lives, our thoughts, our energies, be employed; and each act must be pronounced good or bad; only in proportion as it promotes or impairs the welfare of all.” Therefore, “it is not sufficient that the Government of a Nation should not place any obstacles in the way of each citizen to happiness, but it is the duty of every Government to do all in it’s power to augment that happiness. For the design of all Political Institution [*sic*] should be to *assist*, as well as *protect*; a design never accomplished where encouragement does not go hand in hand, with restraint.” Smith considered this to be the essence of republican government. And in a true republic, “the general will is supposed to direct the application of the common property to the benefit of all; while other governments lose sight of general, in the furtherance of partial interests.” When Smith said “common property,” he meant *all* property; he believed that “the whole property in a state, is the State’s property; & ought to be apportioned to the necessities, & capacities of doing good, of each citizen.” Since all property belonged to the state, the state had the power—indeed, the duty—to engineer a material equality, since republicanism was based on,

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<sup>30</sup> Nov. 8, 1795, Jan. 1, 1797, Jan. 9, 1797, EHS to Samuel Miles Hopkins, Feb. 15, 1797, *ibid.*, 87, 280, 281, 293; E. H. Smith, *Edwin and Angelina; or The Banditti. An Opera, in Three Acts* (New York, N. Y., 1797); Mar. 16, 1796, July 25, 1796, EHS to John Allen, Jan. 24, 1796, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 139, 189, 126.

and needed for its survival, equality, “& the more perfect that equality, the more assured is the continuance of the reign of order, freedom, virtue, happiness.”<sup>31</sup>

These were the principles that Smith illustrated in his “Utopia.” It was the Utopian government’s duty to reform its citizens’ very natures. Since the old institutions had relegated mankind to a hell of greed and selfishness, it was imperative that Utopia’s vanguard elite instill virtue in the citizens’ hearts. Consequently, these enlightened rulers monitored and regulated their every behavior. At the society meetings for choosing representatives (the society was one of Utopia’s jurisdictional divisions), the voters’ attendance was mandatory, and enforced by “severe laws” (stipulating fines or incarceration as penalties)—although, happily, “the virtuous habits of the people have long since rendered them unnecessary.” Meanwhile, the town meetings were not like the “tumultuous” ones of New England. Instead, five deputies from each society met and elected town officers, who then set policy on the basis of detailed reports, which “furnish all the means of judging, & preclude the necessity of long debates & inquiries.” As Catherine Kaplan wrote of this authoritarian, technocratic ritual, “Smith is concerned less with political expression or rights than with an orderly, rationally run government which will permit a virtuous citizenry and society to flourish in peace and prosperity.”<sup>32</sup>

Each town regulated its local economy: “It has the power to erect or pull down a market-place, to lay out & pave a street, to supply itself with water, to convert certain of its grounds to purposes of pleasure, or improvement, to build mills, to restrain any citizen from the wasteful disposition of his property, to regulate the mode of building, &c. &c &c.” As a Federalist, Smith was not too idiosyncratic in his opinions regarding property rights. Although most Federalists believed firmly in the sanctity of property rights, several of them, including

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<sup>31</sup> EHS to Idea Strong, Mar. 29, 1796, to John Allen, Mar. 30, 1796, *ibid.*, 147-148, 149-150.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, “Utopia,” 313-314, 324, 333n29.

Theophilus Parsons and Theodore Sedgwick, denied that property rights were inalienable, or contracts sacred, because property rights and contracts were merely institutions that “served social purposes,” rather than ends in themselves; they had to promote the common good, rather than private interests, and if they did not do so, the state could have them superseded.<sup>33</sup>

In Smith’s Utopia, the people were just stewards of property, all of which belonged to the state, and it could dispose of that property in the manner most beneficial for the collectivity. Therefore, the state had broad taxing powers. Utopians were taxed in seemingly all jurisdictional levels. Each district held meetings “to assess taxes for repairs of the School, for penalties or transgressions of their regulations, for the support of teachers, to appoint a Collector, & enforce [sic] the collection.” Meanwhile, each society collected taxes for poor relief and maintenance “of the common lands, timber, &c.” Even the College of Physicians possessed “the power of taxation.” All of “[t]hese taxes are grounded...on the actual ability of the individual, as shewn [sic] in the Lists of the several towns.”<sup>34</sup>

The Utopian elites’ authoritarian management of the people’s lives was made possible by the census. Every May, each citizen had to register his household, providing the authorities with “his name, the names & sex & age of each member of his family,” as well as their occupations, and any other salient information. “Thus no person can live in Utopia,” wrote Smith, “whose condition is not thoroughly known to some magistrate.” In Catherine Kaplan’s spot-on formulation, “Utopia...was both paradise and panopticon”; Smith’s “goal...was that inhabitants be shaped by surveillance and education so that they internalized the rules of their governors.” In other words, Smith’s Utopia could function only through the efficient dissemination of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 323; David Hackett Fischer, “The Myth of the Essex Junto,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, 21 (1964), 202-204, 204n33; James M. Banner, Jr., *To the Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815* (New York, N.Y., 1970), 63.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, “Utopia,” 320, 322, 329, 326-327.

information. To regulate each citizen's behavior, to manage the economy, to levy taxes, the Utopian elites needed to come as near as they could to achieving omniscience. Once these elites had properly adjusted Utopian institutions, the people could shed their old, degenerate habits, and join the elites so that together they could travel the path of selflessness, of virtue, of indefinite perfectibility. Then the people would be able to make their own life-improving discoveries, inventions, and innovations; information would be used to create yet more information, and all would progress in unison.<sup>35</sup>

In its bestowal of tremendous power to the enlightened few for the purpose of improving society, Smith's Utopia resembled Plato's Republic and the other ideal commonwealths that—in their assumptions, structures, and aspirations—borrowed much from Plato. Yet other forces shaped Smith's mind and prompted the speculations that inspired his "Utopia." Such speculations—such visions—were not unique to Smith. Those teachers and mentors who most powerfully influenced him had similar hopes. In fact, these visions were rife in Smith's native New England.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 318-319; Catherine O'Donnell Kaplan, *Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forums of Citizenship* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2008), 102; see also Kaplan, "Document," 302.

### CHAPTER 3 NEW ENGLAND AS UTOPIA REALIZED

As Catherine Kaplan has noted, even though Elihu Hubbard Smith's Utopia was a state in the Northwest Territory, the land that he described actually resembled his native Connecticut more than anything else. He even based Utopia's institutions—governmental, educational, and religious—on those of Connecticut. In Smith's time, Connecticut was undergoing substantial sociopolitical changes—modernization, the rise of liberalism and capitalism. Yet many still saw it as “the land of steady habits,” an elite-directed commonwealth that had preserved its fundamental hierarchical order since the seventeenth century, “a speaking *Aristocracy* in the face of a silent *Democracy*.”<sup>1</sup>

Connecticut was “divided, successively, into counties, towns, parishes, and school districts,” which, according to the Congregationalist minister and president of Yale, Timothy Dwight, “superintend[ed] with peculiar felicity every interest, public and private, of every individual.” Similarly, Smith's Utopia had nine counties, each of which included nine towns, which in turn had five societies, which were divided into four districts. The societies were, like Connecticut's parishes, responsible for “the steady maintenance of religious & moral instruction”; indeed, in the “Utopia,” Smith used the terms “society” and “parish” interchangeably. Furthermore, Utopia, like Connecticut, had a bicameral legislature, and a

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Kaplan, “Document: Elihu Hubbard Smith's ‘The Institutions of the Republic of Utopia,’” *Early American Literature*, 35 (2000), 298; Elihu Hubbard Smith, “The Utopia,” *Early American Literature*, 35 (2000), 330n2; Andrew Siegel, “‘Steady Habits’ under Siege: The Defense of Federalism in Jeffersonian Connecticut,” in Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, eds., *Federalists Reconsidered* (Charlottesville, Va., 1998), 199-224; Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1999), 19-20, 1.

popularly elected governor and lieutenant governor. There was a state senate of twelve (also popularly elected), and each town elected a representative every two years.<sup>2</sup>

The districts served “the special purpose of general instruction.” “I revere my native State, above all things,” Smith wrote, “for its provision for public instruction. It is the best, because the only practical method, in the present state of things. It is the great national bulwark of liberty, & order, & morality.” His Utopia’s public education system was so effective, that “few men in Utopia are ill-educated.” In fact, a great many Utopians—and virtually all who belonged to a profession—“passed thro’” Utopia’s public university: “It is common for men to continue there till they are twentyseven [*sic*], eight, nine, or thirty.”<sup>3</sup>

And in Utopia, as in Connecticut, the state nurtured not only the minds of its citizens, but their souls as well. The societies, “or parochial divisions,” had the authority to collect taxes for “the support of the Ministry.” They employed clergymen “of what denomination they please.” Most clergy were Calvinists, but there were some Episcopalians, Baptists, Universalists, and Socinians. “No Quakers, no Methodists, no Catholics are in Utopia. The law, therefore, is not oppressive, but springs out of the condition of Society. Had the people consisted of Quakers, there had been no such law as that which obliges each parish to maintain public worship.”<sup>4</sup>

The appearance of established religion in Smith’s Utopia seems incongruous. Smith was actually a deist who deprecated organized religion. He did believe in God, “the Source of Animation, the imperishable spring & exhaustless fountain of knowledge, virtue, & happiness.” But he also believed that religion was irrational. The “priests” of all religions kept the people

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy Dwight, *A Discourse Occasioned by the Death of His Excellency Jonathan Trumbull, Esq., Governor of the State of Connecticut...* (New Haven, Conn., 1809), 17; Smith, “Utopia,” 311, 313, 331n5, 311-315, 330n6, 331n11.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 311; Elihu Hubbard Smith, “Notes from Recollections of My Life from My Birth Till the Age of Eleven,” in *The Diary of Elihu Hubbard Smith (1771-1798)*, ed. James E. Cronin (Philadelphia, Pa., 1973), 26; Smith, “Utopia,” 317.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 321-323.

wallowing in superstition, the better to dominate them. Smith felt very strongly about this subject, and he was not afraid to express his opinions even to important, anti-French Federalists, as he did once when he dined with Oliver Wolcott, Jr., Chauncey Goodrich, and Oliver Ellsworth. Indeed, he believed that the extirpation of religious “error” was a positive consequence (even if the only one) of the French Revolution. Smith saw Christianity as beneficial insofar as it instilled morality; but, his passion for truth led him to conclude that its theology was not rational, although the system of morality that it promoted, and to which he adhered, was. Nor did he begrudge the solace that Christianity provided to the troubled and confused; but, while this “may be necessary, or rather unavoidable,” it did not confirm the truth of Christianity, which took the guise of an “intellectual opium or incitant.”<sup>5</sup>

And yet, it is difficult to purge the Calvinism from the man. James Cronin noted that Smith “despised Puritanism and formal religion and yet he is a nice example of the young eighteenth-century intellectual evolving from a primarily Puritan background.” Of Smith and his fellow enlightened intellectuals, he wrote, “in a way almost impossible to explain, and which, perhaps can be understood only by those who have lived long in New England, the Congregational church, denied and often scorned, still guided the actions of its wandering children.” Indeed, Smith, whether motivated by reason or the latent impulse of habit, could be as moralistic, censorious, and austere as the most stereotypical Puritan: “The gaiety & frolic which society often inspires,” he wrote, “gives a looseness to conversation, neither moral, nor becoming. It is my duty to put an end to this, in myself; & to attempt to check it, in others. I will put an end to it.” Given these powerful and persistent influences on Smith’s thought, the establishment of religion in his Utopia was logical. Kaplan has pointed out that Utopia “bears

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<sup>5</sup> EHS to Idea Strong, Mar. 29, 1796, Oct. 3, 1795, Jan. 10, 1796, Jan. 1, 1798, EHS to Charles Brockden Brown, Mar. 27, 1796, to Theodore Dwight, Nov. 19, 1796, June 6, 1798, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 148, 65, 119, 412, 146, 248-249, 448.

echoes of the seventeenth-century founding of Connecticut's [former co-]capital. New Haven had been intended as a New Jerusalem, a place in which moral authority would emerge from a seamlessly unified church and state.... Self-consciously seeking to create a new society, Smith partook of an old New England dream and, despite himself, dreamed of old New England."<sup>6</sup>

Smith's Utopia was, to a great extent, a romanticized, purer version of his native New England. He was by no means the first or only New Englander to idealize his native land; indeed, he might even have learned the habit from teachers and mentors such as Ezra Stiles and Timothy Dwight, whose own works were part of a long tradition of seeing New England as a real-world utopia—a tradition that extended all the way back to New England's very founding.

### **City upon a Hill**

Since the inception of the Age of Exploration, the New World, with its beautiful, seemingly pristine landscapes and its abundance of natural resources, was "the object of utopian hopes," "a blank slate" upon which reformers could project their desires. In 1511, the Italian humanist Pietro Martire D'Anghiera depicted the natives of the New World as what today we would call "noble savages," living harmoniously "without laws, without books, and without judges," holding all land in common and being so unselfish that all were abundantly provided for; "they seem to live in the golden world, without toil, living in open gardens, not entrenched with dikes, divided with hedges, or defended with walls." Such romanticizations became quite common in the ensuing decades, as Europeans transformed the New World into an ideal against which they unfavorably judged their own degenerate societies. To Michel de Montaigne, the newly discovered lands were "pure, and Virgins yet, in Comparison of ours." The supposedly barbaric native societies, where dishonesty, greed, and disease were rare, "surpass[ed] all the

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<sup>6</sup> James E. Cronin, "Elihu Hubbard Smith and the New York Friendly Club, 1795-1798," *PMLA*, 64 (1949), 479; James E. Cronin, "Introduction," in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 11; Apr. 3, 1796, *ibid.*, 152; Kaplan, "Document," 299.

Images with which the Poets have adorn'd the Golden Age," and Plato's Republic, too. True, many of them practiced cannibalism, but their vices paled in comparison to those of Europe, where, rather than eating men only after they were dead, the ostensibly civilized tortured them and burned them alive. The Europeans were the real barbarians; it was they who invaded "an infant world" and "precipitated it's Declension and Ruin by our Contagion."<sup>7</sup>

Over the next two centuries, European literature was replete with tales of nearly-inaccessible oases, which were prosperous, peaceful, just, and felicitous—in short, the exact opposites of Europe. For example, Francois Rabelais's gilded, bejeweled, resplendent Abbey of Thélème was an anti-monastery; monks and nuns lived together, they could marry and dress luxuriously, and there was only one rule: "Do what you will." In some of these stories (as in More's *Utopia*), a traveler would reach the ideal society, where, astounded by its superiority, he would come to comprehend the injustices and absurdities of his own, like Gulliver among the Houyhnhnms. Often, these voyagers would find themselves in isolated paradises in the Americas—Voltaire's *Candide* in El Dorado, or Ignacy Krasicki's Nicholas in Nipu, for instance—where people lived simply and equally, free of the political and religious persecution, avarice, and litigiousness so pervasive in Europe.<sup>8</sup>

In short, the tendency to see America as the anti-Europe had long existed by the time that Europeans began in earnest to settle North America. Histories, travelogues, and promotional tracts, from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth, presented North America as a world that

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<sup>7</sup> Howard P. Segal, "Eighteenth-Century American Utopianism: From the Potential to the Probable," *Utopian Studies*, 11 (2000), 5-6; Pietro Martire D'Anghiera, "The Golden World," in James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin, eds., *The Portable Renaissance Reader* (New York, N.Y., 1977; orig. pub. 1953), 151; Michel de Montaigne, "Of Moderation," "Of Cannibals," "Of Coaches," in Michel de Montaigne, *Montaigne's Essays in Three Books. With Notes and Quotations. And an Account of the Author's Life...*, 3 vols., trans. Charles Cotton (London, Eng., 1743), 1:223, 229-230, 2m32, 3:149.

<sup>8</sup> Francois Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London, Eng., 1955), bk. 1, chs. 52-57; Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (New York, N.Y., 1960), pt. 4; Voltaire, *Candide* (New York, N.Y., 1991), chs. 17-18; Ignacy Krasicki, *The Adventures of Mr. Nicholas Wisdom*, trans. Thomas H. Hoisington (Evanston, Ill., 1992), bk. 2.

“enjoyed the singular favor of heaven,” a land so “fruitful” that people could savor its bounties “[w]ithout laboring or tilling the soil”; “no place is more convenient for pleasure, profit, and mans [*sic*] sustenance.” And if the New World was the anti-Europe, the natives, as Montaigne had believed, were the anti-Europeans. Many European chroniclers mythologized the idyllic existences of the noble savages, who shared all they had, and thus never quarreled or callously allowed their fellows to live in destitution. Despotism was unknown among them; they lived according to the dictates of natural law, treating their brethren humanely and charitably. Indeed, “for all our religion and education, we possess more moral deformities and evils than these savages do, or are acquainted withal.”<sup>9</sup>

True, the Europeans had contaminated the New World and destroyed the Indians’ ways of life. But, if America’s remoteness from the putrid Old World had once enabled its peoples to live in freedom and innocence, then European immigrants could reconstitute their Edenic existences. Those seeking relief from Europe’s political and religious oppressions could build new havens in the New World. There, they could secure happiness and independence—“each may sit safe, and at ease, under his own fig-tree, indulging himself in the natural bent of his genius, in patronizing the useful arts of life, and in practicing the virtues of humanity.” Such joys were unattainable in Europe, which, as George Berkeley said, was in a state of “decay,” “[b]arren of every glorious theme.” Civilizations aged like people, and, whereas Europe was virtually a corpse, America was young and vibrant, “the seat of innocence, / Where nature guides

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<sup>9</sup> Nicolas le Challeux, “A True and Perfect Description, of the Last Voyage or Navigation, Attempted by Capitaine John Rybaut...”; John Smith, “A Map of Virginia with a Description of the Country, the Commodities, People, Government, and Religions in *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith (1580-1631)*”; Pierre and Jean-Baptiste Talon, “La Salle, the Mississippi, and the Gulf: Three Primary Documents”; James Adair, “The History of the American Indian”; William Bartram, “Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida”; John Lawson, “A New Voyage to Carolina...,” all in *Voices of the Old South: Eyewitness Accounts, 1528-1861*, ed. Alan Gallay (Athens, Ga., 1994), 16, 23, 33-35, 55-60, 64-65, 40. For promotional tracts as utopian texts, see Vernon Louis Parrington, Jr., *American Dreams: A Study of American Utopias* (New York, N.Y., 1964), 5-6.

and virtue rules.” In America “shall be sung another golden age, / The rise of empire and of arts, / The good and great inspiring epic rage, / The wisest heads and noblest hearts.” But America would be so much more than another great civilization; it would fulfill its destiny of bringing history to its grand culmination: “Westward the course of empire takes its way; / The four first Acts already past, / A fifth shall close the Drama with the day; / Time’s noblest offspring is the last.”<sup>10</sup>

America was, of course, not the first land to be eulogized for its exceptionalism. For example, in antiquity, the Greeks saw themselves as uniquely graced with liberty and superior laws, and Europeans in the centuries since often possessed a “sense of superiority, of having been singled out, first by nature, then by God, to play a special role in the history of creation.” Berkeley’s poem itself was a variation on the cliché of the *translatio imperii*, according to which the torch of civilization passed from empire to empire, east to west. In Berkeley’s time, however, the British still considered themselves to be (in the words of an English clergyman) the “chosen People of God,” leading the onward march of history.<sup>11</sup>

Some have argued that Britain, in fact, bequeathed to her colonies this sense of exceptionalism, which, more often than not, had a millennial inflection. Really, though, the concept of America as a haven from Europe’s—including the mother country’s—troubles was very strong in British North America, and some colonies, such as Pennsylvania and Georgia, were founded from “utopian” motives. The belief in the sickness of Europe was one of the most powerful American tenets; Americans had to take full advantage of their remoteness from

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<sup>10</sup> An Impartial Hand, “‘Information Concerning the Province of North Carolina, Addressed to Emigrants from the Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland, by an Impartial Hand,’” in *Voices of the Old South*, ed. Galloway, 74; George Berkeley, “Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America,” in *The Works of George Berkeley...: Including His Posthumous Works*, 4 vols., ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (Oxford, Eng., 1901), 4:365-366.

<sup>11</sup> Anthony Pagden, “Europe: Conceptualizing a Continent,” in Anthony Pagden, ed., *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* (Washington, D.C. and Cambridge, Eng., 2002), 37, 49; James Bate, qtd. in Eliga H. Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2000), 4.

Europe in order to avoid contagion. American law, said the jurist James Kent, had “to be drawn from our own History and Constitutions,” and not from Europe, with its “artificial distinctions,” “oppressive establishments,” and “wild innovations.” In his Farewell Address, Washington famously urged Americans to take advantage of “[o]ur detached and distant situation” to avoid entangling alliances with European states perpetually at war with each other. Elihu Hubbard Smith, too, asserted the superiority of the United States—a country of “homely & russet simplicity, blest...with morals, knowledge, & liberty”—over Europe, where child labor was condoned. In a letter to Samuel Miles Hopkins, who was then overseas, Smith implored, “For Heaven’s sake, make haste to quit that aceldama called Europe”; upon Hopkins’s return, Smith was relieved that he “has come back, as he went, an American; improved, but not corrupted.”<sup>12</sup>

The United States had to maintain its purity because God had destined it to redeem mankind. Some clergymen, including Jonathan Edwards and Ammi Ruhamah Robbins, even believed that the millennium would begin in America. God had kept it in isolation for so long, for this very purpose. As Noah Webster asked, “Secluded as America has been from a knowledge of the Europeans, till a late period of the world, may we not consider it as reserved by Heaven for the theatre of important events; or as the asylum of persecuted freedom and religion?” “America alone,” he affirmed, “seems to be reserved by Heaven as the sequestered

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<sup>12</sup> Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 14; Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (Cambridge, Eng., 1985), 70. For more on the flow of ideas between Britain and her North American colonies, see Ned C. Landsman, *From Colonials to Provincials: American Thought and Culture, 1680-1760* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1997). For Pennsylvania as “utopian,” see Jeremy Belknap, *American Biography: or, An Historical Account of Those Persons Who Have Been Distinguished in America...*, vol. 2 (Boston, Mass., 1798), 406; Alan Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717* (New Haven, Conn., 2002), 63. For Georgia, see William Douglass, *A Summary, Historical and Political, of the First Planting, Progressive Improvements, and Present State of the British Settlements in North-America...*, 2 vols. (Boston, Mass., 1749), 1:16, 246, 2:6, 20; Galloway, *Voices of the Old South*, 77; Parrington, *American Dreams*, 6. James Kent, *An Introductory Lecture to a Course of Law Lectures, Delivered November 17, 1794* (New York, N.Y., 1794), 8; George Washington, *The President’s Address to the People of the United States, Announcing His Design of Retiring from Public Life, at the Expiration of the Present Constitutional Term of the Presidency* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1796), 13; Sept. 30, 1795, EHS to Samuel Miles Hopkins, Mar. 16, 1798, June 16, 1798, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 64, 432, 449.

region, where religion, virtue and the arts may find a peaceful retirement from the tempests which agitate Europe.” Once these tempests subsided, the United States would be able to retransmit the patrimony to those countries that had once squandered it; it would spread religious and political truth to the rest of the benighted world, including despotic and barbaric Asia and Africa. Even the secular-minded Jefferson saw the United States as “a chosen country,” “advancing rapidly to destinies beyond the reach of mortal eye.”<sup>13</sup>

Nowhere was the belief in America’s special role in Providence’s design stronger than in New England. Edwards and Robbins were part of a long tradition that extended back to the earliest years of settlement. In 1630, John Winthrop reminded his fellow Puritans that according to their special “Covenant” with God, it was their duty to set an example for the rest of the world, by living as righteously as Christians could. Were they to fulfill their duty, God “shall make us a prayse and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, ‘the Lord make it likely that of *New England*.’ For wee must consider that wee shall be as a citty upon a hill. The eies of all people are upon us [*sic*, for all].” For a long time after, it was the conventional wisdom among the likes of Cotton Mather that “The *Moral of More*’s fam’d *Utopia* / Is in *New-England*,” which the Lord had designated “the Seat” of the “New Jerusalem.” The founders of “His *New-English Israel*” “were a *Chosen Generation* of men,” and their descendants had to take care that their “manifold Apostasies” did not risk the ruin of the world’s one “true *Utopia*.” These were manifestations of the nationalistic “myth of New England exclusiveness.” New Englanders thought that their society was as perfect as any that man could devise. Indeed, the

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<sup>13</sup> Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America’s Millennial Role* (Chicago, Ill., 1968); Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 17; Landsman, *From Colonials to Provincials*, 102; Ammi Ruhamah Robbins, *The Empires and Dominions of This World, Made Subservient to the Kingdom of Christ; Who Ruleth over All...* (Hartford, Conn., 1789), 23-24; Noah Webster, *An Oration Pronounced before the Citizens of New-Haven on the Anniversary of the Independence of the United States, July 4th 1798...* (New Haven, Conn., 1798), 6, 10, 7; Thomas Jefferson, First Inaugural Address, in *Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (Washington, D.C., 1989; Bartleby.com, 2001), pars. 1, 3 [updated Jan. 2001; cited 21 Mar. 2009], available from <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres16.html>.

whole of North America was superior to Europe; but it was New England that comprised the core of America; New Englanders “defined themselves as its saving remnant.”<sup>14</sup>

One of the proofs of New England’s superiority was that it had achieved the most perfect equality possible; it embodied the ancient ideal of the golden mean. To a great extent, this was true of the country as a whole. Jonathan Jackson rejoiced that there was a “small inequality of fortune throughout this country”; unlike in Europe, there were no hereditary lords, and few “miserable beggarly folk.” And Fisher Ames explained American liberty as a consequence of the wide diffusion of education, “the dispersion of our people on farms,” and “the almost equal diffusion of property.” But, as their fellow Bay Stater Jedidiah Morse wrote, “In the Eastern states, property is more equally distributed than in any other civilized country.” In New England, where the public supported religion and education, the people were moral, “and a grown person, a native of these states, can scarcely be found, who has not some acquaintance with reading, writing, and arithmetic.” That most of them were middling farmers allowed them to maintain their independence and virtue, since they neither needed to beg for their sustenance, nor did they waste their days in luxurious dissipation. Similarly, a comparison “between New-England and Great-Britain” that appeared in the *Monthly Magazine, and American Review*

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<sup>14</sup> John Winthrop, “A Modell [*sic*] of Christian Charity,” 46-47 [updated Aug. 1996; cited 21 Mar. 2009], available from <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html>; [Cotton Mather], *A Poem Dedicated to the Memory of the Reverend and Excellent Mr. Urian Oakes...* (Boston, Mass., 1682), 7; Cotton Mather, *The Wonders of the Invisible World. Observations as Well Historical as Theological, upon the Nature, the Number, and the Operations of the Devils...* (Boston, Mass., 1693), 36, [x-xi]; James M. Banner, Jr., *To the Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815* (New York, N.Y., 1970), 84; David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997), 251. New England nationalism does not validate modernist theories of nationalism, which see either print culture or industrialization as prerequisites for nationalism; see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, Eng., 2006; orig. pub. 1983); and Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1983). According to Michael Warner, in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England, print actually served introspective purposes; Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), 19-26. Nor does New England nationalism conform to the “primordialist” theory. There is a median approach, which holds that particular, currently-existing nations are not primordial, but that the nationalist impulse itself has existed since antiquity, and can materialize at any moment; see Aviel Roshwald, *The Endurance of Nationalism: Ancient Roots and Modern Dilemmas* (Cambridge, Eng., 2006).

(edited by Charles Brockden Brown, Elihu Hubbard Smith's close friend), held that the "virtue and happiness of a people depend chiefly upon two things, the quantity and the equal distribution of knowledge and property." Most New Englanders owned their own land, and "every native of New-England, of mature age, can read and write. This cannot be said of the natives of Britain."<sup>15</sup>

These longstanding patterns of thought were undoubtedly impressed on the mind of Elihu Hubbard Smith. His Utopia—with its agrarianism, its citizens' middling yet equal circumstances, its public provision of education and religious instruction—was no aberration. It was but an idealized version of New England—specifically, Connecticut—much as Harrington's *Oceana* was an idealized England. Indeed, in his implicit paean to Connecticut, Smith, in his own way, followed in the footsteps of his teachers and mentors. Ezra Stiles, a Congregationalist minister and the president of Yale when Smith was a student, once said, "Little would Civilians have thought ages ago, that the world should ever look to *America* for models of government and polity: Little did they think of finding this most perfect polity among the poor outcasts, the contemptible people of New-England, and particularly in the long despised civil polity of *Connecticut*." In fact, it was New England, with its "equable distribution of property," that had "realized the capital ideas of *Harrington's Oceana* [*sic*]."<sup>16</sup>

### **Ezra Stiles's "American Israel"**

Though New England received Stiles's most effusive tributes, he believed that the entire United States had attained a relative perfection: "the laws...of each state, are already excellent,

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<sup>15</sup> [Jonathan Jackson], *Thoughts upon the Political Situation of the United States of America...* (Worcester, Mass., 1788), 56; Fisher Ames, "Eulogy on Washington," in *Works of Fisher Ames with a Selection from His Speeches and Correspondence*, 2 vols., ed. Seth Ames (Boston, Mass., 1854), 2:82; Morse qtd. in Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York, N.Y., 1976), 181; "Parallel between New-England and Great-Britain" qtd. in Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2006), 185.

<sup>16</sup> Ezra Stiles, *The United States Elevated to Glory and Honour...*, 2d ed. (Worcester, Mass., 1785; orig. pub. 1783), 95, 10, 11. For more on Stiles, see Grasso, *Speaking Aristocracy*, ch. 5.

surpassing the institutions of *Lycurgus* or *Plato*.” This was no accident, for the United States had a divine mission. God had reserved a vast continent in its barely-inhabited purity so that His “American *Israel*” would have the glory of instructing the rest of the world in the true principles of public felicity. All nations would adopt its institutions, and so attain liberty, peace, and prosperity, as a prelude to the millennium. As long as Americans preserved their “union,” they would secure “the publick [*sic*] welfare,” and live “in amity, as brothers,” enjoying the many blessings that the Lord had bestowed on them.<sup>17</sup>

Their population would soar to fifty million “within a century,” and to three hundred million “[i]n two or three hundred years”; “before the Millennium, the English settlement in *America*, may become more numerous millions, than that greatest dominion on earth, the Chinese empire.” Fisher Ames once said, “I think it is Utopian to calculate upon the population of the United States a century hence.” But according to Stiles, his prophecies were “[a]s visionary that the twenty thousand souls which first settled *New-England*, should be multiplied to near a million in a century and a half.... As Utopian would it have been to the *loyalists*, at the battle of *Lexington*, that in less than eight years, the independence and sovereignty of the *United States*, should be acknowledged by four European sovereignties, one of which should be *Britain* herself.”<sup>18</sup>

In this mighty nation, commerce and manufacturing would flourish. Its countless libraries and colleges would propel literature and learning to new heights. Armed with the knowledge brought back by their ships, America’s free citizens would make their own advancements in the arts and sciences, and once the United States surpassed Europe, knowledge would “reblaze back

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<sup>17</sup> Stiles, *United States Elevated*, 36, 9, 11-12, 22, 37, 51.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 60, 12; [United States. Congress (1st 1789-1791). House], *The Congressional Register; or, History of the Proceedings and Debates of the First House of Representatives of the United States of America...*, vol. 2 (New York, N.Y., 1790), 377; Stiles, *United States Elevated*, 60-61.

from *America to Europe, Asia and Africa*, and illumine the world with TRUTH and LIBERTY.” In America, the English language, “unmutilated by the foreign dialects of foreign conquests,” would “take its Athenian polish, and receive its attick [*sic*] urbanity; as it will probably become the vernacular tongue of more numerous millions, than ever yet spake one language on earth.” In America, Christianity, too, would be purified, so that there would once again be only “one holy faith, one apostolick [*sic*] religion, to an uncontroversial world.” With all men “speaking one language,” and practicing Christianity, they would live in peace and harmony, and await the millennium together.<sup>19</sup>

Stiles’s denial of the utopianism of his prophecies did not arise from any antipathy toward utopianism, since he, himself, in his *History of Three of the Judges of King Charles I*, “indulged” in envisioning a “utopian polity,” whose “absurdity will never appear by an actual experiment, for such an experiment will never be made. Not that it is impossible....” Reformers could approximate his polity, “[b]ut this perfect idea will never be realized.” And yet, Stiles’s utopia very closely resembled the United States! The people were sovereign, and they elected the lower and upper houses of the “national council,” as well as an executive, called “the Protector.” The “supreme court” was a “pure and uninfluenced tribunal for the ultimate decision on civil and criminal tribunals and adjudications.” The Protector had a limited veto, and he conducted foreign policy; the national council had the sole power to appropriate money, the senate had the power to declare war, and the Protector’s appointments needed the approval of “both houses.” This constitution was perfect because it was balanced; a mixed constitution was more likely than an unmixed democracy to promote “the public and general welfare.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 44-50, 56-57, 85, 89, 87, 97.

<sup>20</sup> Ezra Stiles, *A History of Three of the Judges of King Charles I...* (Hartford, Conn., 1794), 292, 302, 304, 292-294, 300, 297-299, 296-297.

Stiles's utopia was an aristocratic republic: "The whole national assembly is an aristocracy, while in office, not hereditary but elective.... This august body during their elevation are to receive all honor and respect, submission and free obedience from the whole union." The virtuous elites conferred stability to the republic, making it "safe for liberty, laws, and energetic government." Stiles believed that the people never intentionally infringed "the public good"; "the common people will generally judge right, when duly informed. The general liberty is safe in their hands." But "popular societies sometimes err," because they lack sufficient information, or because demagogues mislead them. It was the responsibility of the society's "enlightened characters" to guide the people, in order to preserve good government. Corruption of the constitution was inevitable, but it could be slowed: "Our only safety is in diffusing [*sic*] light and knowledge through the common people and body of citizens at large, to guard them from being bribed or influenced against their own interest, for each citizen has an interest in the public interest." Stiles believed that the clergy were best suited to serve as the people's benevolent guardians, instilling virtue in their hearts and pointing them toward the candidates who would promote the common good, rather than their own interests. While Stiles advocated religious tolerance, he also firmly believed that "a christian state ought expressly to acknowledge and embosom in its civil constitution, the public avowal of the being of a GOD, that Most High and Holy Sovereign, upon whom all depends, and the avowal of christianity."<sup>21</sup>

Stiles believed that such a constitution would attain perfection not immediately, but gradually, as the people amended it. Once it reached a state of perfection, amendments would no longer be necessary—unless, that is, the constitution was corrupted. He wrote, "Human legislation cannot be at first perfect, complete and comprehensive.... [Y]et after a while a system or code of laws will grow up to a magnitude and comprehension of cases sufficient for

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 301, 305, 274, 307; Grasso, *Speaking Aristocracy*, 273-274; Stiles, *History of Three of the Judges*, 308.

the administration of justice in the state, and for the determination of all causes civil and criminal.” Then, legislation would diminish considerably, and government would become a mostly administrative entity.<sup>22</sup>

Elihu Hubbard Smith read Stiles’s *History* in the year before he began working on his “Utopia,” and it may have influenced him. But no one exerted a greater influence on him—and no one provided as sustained and comprehensive an idealization of Connecticut—than did Stiles’s successor as president of Yale, Timothy Dwight.<sup>23</sup>

### **Timothy Dwight’s Millennial Utopia**

If one persists in totally dissociating Federalism and idealism, the eulogiums to Connecticut as a perfect commonwealth might seem a little odd, since Connecticut was a bastion of Federalism. It was, in the words of Fisher Ames, “the lifeguard of liberty and federalism.” Dwight (himself a staunch Federalist), at times expressed a thoroughly pessimistic view of man and the world. He believed in the doctrine of “total depravity”; since the Fall, man had a propensity to disobey God: “It is a humiliating, but just observation, verified by daily experience, that human nature is much more resolute in perpetrating that, which is wrong, than in practicing that, which is right.” Thus, people—particularly the young—constantly had to be shielded from infidelity, for the sake of their immortal souls. As obviously false as infidelity was, the young were nonetheless in danger of falling for its seductive charms. Deists and atheists were “[i]ngenious and able men,” capable of easily fooling the “ignorant” and the impassioned—Dwight himself, in his youth, had “been strongly tempted by means of them to yield myself a prey to this unhappy Philosophy.” Because it sought to restrain the passions, Christianity was often seen as “narrow and severe,” whereas infidelity “holds out...a general license to every

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 302, 299-300.

<sup>23</sup> Oct. 31, 1795, Dec. 14, 1795, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 83, 103.

passion and appetite.” Infidels tried to appeal not only to man’s depravity, but also to his hopes for a better world. They told the idealistic that the eradication of “authority” and “superstition” would engender earthly bliss; but in reality, there was no possibility “of unmingled happiness on this side of the grave. This world has ever been and still is, a vale of tears. Want, pain, sorrow, disease, and death, are constant tenants of this unhappy soil, and frequent inmates of every human dwelling.”<sup>24</sup>

“Perfection, in the absolute sense,” Dwight once said, “is never found in the present world. Every object, both in the natural and moral kingdom, is here stamped with mutability, decay and dissolution.... The world itself...is destined to a speedy termination, and will soon be blotted out of living.” Evil was ineradicable, and since it served the unfathomable purposes of a benevolent God, it was vain to question or protest its existence. It was vain for a statesman to seek perfection. Speculation was useless or counterproductive:

a theoretical man is always a bad Ruler.... Their views are visionary; and their designs, however well intended, totally unsuited to the objects, at which they professedly aim. Men they regard, not as they are, but as their imagination has fashioned them; and the world, not as we actually find it, but as it is viewed by an excursive fancy. Hence their plans, instead of being fitted to promote the real welfare of man, are only a collection of waking dreams; a course of political Quixotism.

A statesman had to be moderate, prudent, and realistic.<sup>25</sup>

And yet, as with many other Federalists, Dwight’s political philosophy was tremendously ambiguous. Though man was “so frail, and so forgetful a being,” human frailty could be

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<sup>24</sup> Fisher Ames to Theodore Dwight, Mar. 19, 1801, in *Works of Fisher Ames*, ed. Ames, 1:295; see also Siegel, “‘Steady Habits’ under Siege,” in Ben-Atar and Oberg, eds., *Federalists Reconsidered*. [Timothy Dwight], *A Sermon, Preached at Northampton, on the Twenty-Eighth of November, 1781: Occasioned by the Capture of the British Army, under the Command of Earl Cornwallis* (Hartford, Conn., [1781]), 8; Timothy Dwight, *The Conquest of Canaan; a Poem, in Eleven Books* (Hartford, Conn., 1785), 108-111; Timothy Dwight, *Virtuous Rulers a National Blessing. A Sermon, Preached at the General Election, May 12th, 1791* (Hartford, Conn., 1791), 36; Dwight, *The Nature, and Danger, of Infidel Philosophy, Exhibited in Two Discourses, Addressed...September 9th, 1797* (New Haven, Conn., 1798), 49, 66, 50, 57, 89; see [Timothy Dwight], *The Triumph of Infidelity, a Poem*, 8vo ed. ([Hartford, Conn.?], 1788).

<sup>25</sup> Dwight, *Discourse Occasioned by the Death of...Jonathan Trumbull*, 3; Dwight, *Conquest of Canaan*, 111; Dwight, *Nature, and Danger, of Infidel Philosophy*, 17-18; Dwight, *Discourse Occasioned by the Death of...Jonathan Trumbull*, 10, 11-15.

mitigated by “virtuous rulers,” who were “summoned, by God, to the office, and to the power, of doing more good, than other men.” These guardians had attained such a high level of virtue that they would seek the common good rather than their own self-interests. It would not suffice merely to administrate competently and honestly; a ruler had to use government’s “beneficent influence” to the fullest, to promote virtue actively, “to make mankind better, and happier, to give confidence to virtue, to trample vice under foot, to extend the kingdom of righteousness, to enlarge the general assembly of the first-born, to increase the glory of the FATHER, the REDEEMER, and the SANCTIFIER, of man.” Virtue was more important than liberty, for virtue was in fact the source of liberty; virtuous men did not have to be governed on the basis of force. Since “[v]irtue is the genuine, the invariable, and the efficient source of public happiness,” it was “the first business of Legislation” to instill “knowledge and virtue in the citizens of a Community,” by publicly supporting Christianity, and by establishing a public education system tightly supervised by government commissioners with the power to inspect “the progress of the pupils in knowledge, manners, and morals.” Furthermore, statesmen had to pursue such an agenda at the national level; the inculcation of virtue “ought to be the first end of all measures national and personal.”<sup>26</sup>

Because it was the rulers who had the responsibility of spreading virtue, it was imperative that the people defer to them. As “the common parent” of “that great family”—society—the ruler was “assured of...a most delightful obedience.” We are “oblige[d]...to love, to fear, to honor him, with a regard wholly singular, and inferior to that only, which is due to the infinite Ruler.” As “the vice-regent of JEHOVAH, appointed to execute the noblest purposes,” the ruler

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<sup>26</sup> Dwight, *Virtuous Rulers*, 7, 40, 16, 7, 33-34; Timothy Dwight, *The True Means of Establishing Public Happiness. A Sermon, Delivered on the 7th of July, 1795, before the Connecticut Society of Cincinnati...* (New Haven, Conn., [1795]), 32, 15, 33, 35-37, 37, 38. For more on Dwight’s political philosophy, see Gregory Clark, “Timothy Dwight’s Moral Rhetoric at Yale College, 1795-1817,” *Rhetorica*, 5 (1987), 149-161; and Grasso, *Speaking Aristocracy*, ch. 7.

“is not only elevated to the first earthly distinction, entrusted with the first means of usefulness, and separated from the rest of men by peculiar ensigns of dignity; but, by the voice of God, he is entitled to an unrivalled homage, and secured from opposition, obloquy, and irreverence.” To ridicule or calumniate a ruler was unacceptable, because it would weaken the government, thus giving full rein to “the depravity of man,” and unleashing “numerous evils” upon society. One can see here the rationale for the Sedition Act.<sup>27</sup>

Dwight believed that God had blessed the United States (and especially Connecticut) with rulers of unparalleled virtue—men like Washington and Jonathan Trumbull, Jr.—who had firmly established public piety, and the most perfect order in the world: “No such exhibition has probably been given to the eye of time, of the reign of righteousness; no such specimen of the weight of wisdom and integrity, uncloathed [*sic*] with the ensigns of splendour; no such proofs of the happy influence of virtuous rule, since authority first erected her throne among the descendants of Adam.”<sup>28</sup>

God had not granted these blessings arbitrarily; rather, in His grand design, it was the United States that was destined to usher in the millennium. America was exceptional; it was, in fact, the anti-Europe. Europe was corrupt, decadent, and wicked, a “foul harlot” plagued by war, oppression, luxury, prostitution, and myriad hypocrisies. But: “In fair Columbia’s realms, how chang’d the plan; / Where all things bloom, but, first of all things, man!” The great hero of Dwight’s poetry was “the independent swain,” who lived “with bliss to Europe’s climes unknown.” In America, the yeoman enjoyed the world’s greatest land and climate: “Our plants and flowers, for health and pleasure, appear to have been scattered by the same benevolent hand,

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<sup>27</sup> Dwight, *Virtuous Rulers*, 34-35; Dwight, *True Means*, 21, 34.

<sup>28</sup> Timothy Dwight, *A Discourse, Delivered at New-Haven, Feb. 22, 1800; on the Character of George Washington, Esq.* (New Haven, Conn., 1800); Dwight, *Discourse Occasioned by the Death of...Jonathan Trumbull*; Dwight, *Virtuous Rulers*, 29-30, 29.

which called forth the luxuriance of Eden.” God had also provided America “with naval and commercial advantages, superior to those of any state on earth”—a lengthy coast, commodious harbors, and magnificent rivers and lakes. America’s isolation kept it safe from “the ravages of enemies,” allowing it to amass “inconceivable wealth and power” through its “unbounded commerce” and “inexhaustible” natural resources. Dwight envisioned a country with a booming population. The diffusion of knowledge “thro’ every class of people” ensured that Americans would remain “the most free, enlightened and virtuous people on earth.” Their freedom would allow them to reach undreamed-of heights in the sciences, philosophy, and the arts (poetry, sculpture, painting, and oratory). Truly, this was “the favorite land of heaven.”<sup>29</sup>

Dwight believed that “the progress of Liberty, of Science and of Empire has been with that of the sun, from east to west, since the beginning of time. It may as justly be observed that the glory of empire has been progressive, the last constantly outshining those which were before it.” Furthermore, “it is evident that the Empire of North America will be the last on earth,” and “the most glorious. Here the progress of temporal things towards perfection will undoubtedly be finished. Here human greatness will find a period.” The United States was “destined to be the last retreat of science, of freedom and of glory,” “[t]he last recesses of oppress’d mankind.” Once it had achieved perfection in all human endeavors, it would tutor the rest of mankind, spreading truth and freedom throughout the world: “For now each fair improvement of the mind, / Each nobler effort lifts the human kind.” Americans were God’s “chosen sons”; He had granted them their independence not for their own glory, but rather because He had destined their

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<sup>29</sup> For an analysis of the millennialism of Dwight’s poetry, see Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation*, 103-112. Timothy Dwight, “Epistle to Col. Humphreys,” in *American Poems: Selected and Original*, [ed. Elihu Hubbard Smith] (Litchfield, Conn., [1793]), 80, 82; Timothy Dwight, “Address of the Genius of Columbia, to the Members of the Continental Convention,” *ibid.*, 58; [Timothy Dwight], *A Valedictory Address to the Young Gentlemen, Who Commenced Bachelors of Arts, at Yale-College, July 25th. 1776* (New Haven, Conn., [1776]), 6-7, 7, 8, 11, 14, 21; [Timothy Dwight], *America: or, A Poem on the Settlement of the British Colonies; Addressed to the Friends of Freedom, and Their Country* (New Haven, Conn., [1780]), 9-11; [Dwight], *Valedictory Address*, 7.

country to be “the principal seat of that new, that peculiar kingdom, which shall be given to the Saints of the MOST HIGH. That also was to be the last, the greatest, the happiest of all dominions.” Dwight was confident that the millennium was not far off; he observed many signs that confirmed predictions that it would begin “near the year 2000.” As a prelude to the millennium, the United States would spread “[h]er genial influence thro’ all nations,” bring them together in a “union,” and thus “[h]ush tumults of war, and give peace to the world.” “Then, then an heavenly kingdom shall descend, / And Light and Glory through the world extend; / Th’ Almighty Saviour his great power display / From rising morning to the setting day; / Love reign triumphant, Fraud and Malice cease, / And every region smile in endless peace.” In that glorious age, “human life shall be lengthened, and...the child shall die an hundred years old[.]”<sup>30</sup>

Was this not utopian? Was this not visionary? In his two major poems, Dwight repeated these prophecies, which he referred to as “visions.” In *The Conquest of Canaan* (1785)—an epic about Joshua’s conquest of the Holy Land, which Dwight dedicated to Washington—an angel visited Joshua and showed him “a vision of futurity,” which included the discovery of “a new Canaan’s promis’d shores,” where “Empire’s last, and brightest throne shall rise,” as well as the spread of freedom and the extirpation of war and famine before the millennium. *Greenfield Hill* (1794), which Dwight dedicated to John Adams, also contained a “vision” of the future, recounted by “The Genius of the Sound.” Once again, Dwight showed America to be superior to Europe. As the latter groaned under the miseries of tyranny, war, and poverty, the former would be the “asylum” of freedom, and of the arts and sciences, a land of virtue and justice, where few

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 13, 14; Dwight, “Address of the Genius of Columbia,” in *American Poems*, [ed. Smith], 56, 58, 57; [Dwight], *Valedictory Address*, 13; [Dwight], *Sermon, Preached at Northampton*, 27; Timothy Dwight, *The Duty of Americans, at the Present Crisis, Illustrated in a Discourse, Preached on the Fourth of July, 1798* (New Haven, Conn., 1798), 20, 30, 31; Dwight, “Epistle to Col. Humphreys,” in *American Poems*, [ed. Smith], 84; [Timothy Dwight], *Columbia: An Ode* ([Philadelphia, Pa.?, 1794?]); [Dwight], *America*, 12; [Dwight], *Valedictory Address*, 18.

were either rich or poor, and all lived amid plenty. America would usher in the millennium:  
“Thus, thro’ all climes, shall Freedom’s bliss extend, / The world renew, and death, and bondage,  
end; / All nations quicken with th’ ecstatic power, / And one redemption reach to every shore.”<sup>31</sup>

*Greenfield Hill* was Dwight’s most sustained and complete treatment of the themes that he had developed throughout his life. He had long been writing panegyrics to Connecticut, his “much lov’d native land,” and he would continue to do so long after *Greenfield Hill* (which he named after the Fairfield parish where he was a minister) was published. He revered New England’s founders, who came to a “wilderness” and changed it “into the garden of God,” “a *land of milk and honey*” where all was orderly and harmonious. “Our Sires established... / The noblest institutions, man has seen, / Since time his reign began...” New England’s peace, equality of property, and paucity of crime “constitute a mass of blessings, rarely, if ever, seen in the present world. How great ought to be our gratitude to that glorious Being, who has so eminently distinguished us from the great body of mankind?” And Connecticut was the jewel of New England; it had “the best government, which has hitherto existed,” which made its people “more free and happy than any other people ever were, since the beginning of time.” If its inhabitants did their “duty” and conserved what their forebears had created, then Connecticut would become “the Athens...of a world enlightened, refined, and christian.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Dwight, *Conquest of Canaan*, bks. 9, 10, pp. 212, 253, 255; Timothy Dwight, *Greenfield Hill: A Poem, in Seven Parts...* (New York, N.Y., 1794), pt. 7, pp. 150, 151-153, 159, 158.

<sup>32</sup> Timothy Dwight, “New-England Described,” in *The Columbian Muse: A Selection of American Poetry, from Various Authors of Established Reputation* (New York, N.Y., 1794), 199; Dwight, *Virtuous Rulers*, 39; Timothy Dwight, *A Discourse on Some Events of the Last Century, Delivered...on Wednesday, January 7, 1801* (New Haven, Conn., 1801), 46; Dwight, “New-England Described,” in *Columbian Muse*, 201; Dwight, *Discourse on Some Events of the Last Century*, 14; Dwight, *Discourse Occasioned by the Death of...Jonathan Trumbull*, 18; Dwight, *Virtuous Rulers*, 39; Dwight, *Discourse on Some Events of the Last Century*, 43; Dwight, *True Means*, 39. Dwight’s rhetoric was not an aberration among Federalists; the New Hampshire Federalist Josiah Dunham referred to the United States as “this *American Canaan, a land, literally, flowing with milk and honey*,” “the favourite clime of heaven, where the GOD of nature has profusely scattered his richest bounties; where the grand manager of the universal theatre, may exhibit, in the closing scene of the great *drama* of time, the perfection of humanity”; Josiah Dunham, *An Oration, for the Fourth of July, 1798...* (Hanover, N.H., [1798]), 11, 12.

But *Greenfield Hill* was Dwight's most utopian work. Even though in the poem he characteristically belittled "politic visions" and "Utopias... / Ancient and new, high fraught with fairy good," and might have protested that the utopias he criticized were "philosophic whims,...cloud-built theories, and lunar dreams," whereas his ideal commonwealth really existed, *Greenfield Hill* was actually his most passionate idealization of Connecticut—perhaps the most passionate one ever written. All of the millennial characteristics that in his earlier works he had ascribed to the United States as a whole now came to define Connecticut specifically. Like Thomas More, he blamed the awful crime in Britain on the unequal distribution of wealth, and he condemned the British for executing the many criminals that their society had created. Also like More, he criticized the use of luxurious dress, and he urged Americans to wear clothing befitting republicans of moderate wealth. For Americans, and especially New Englanders, lacked Europe's huge disparities of wealth, and hence European crime rates (and what little crime they did have was perpetrated by "natives of Europe"). In New England, there were no aristocrats to devour all of the land, or to purloin the modest competence of "the humble swain," leaving him poor and hungry; instead, he was "free, happy, his own lord."<sup>33</sup>

It was Connecticut that best embodied "that pure, golden mean, so oft of yore / By sages wish'd, and prais'd." "Here...one extended class embraces all"; "an equal division of property," the wide diffusion of education, and the public support of religion ensured the people's prosperity, virtue, and happiness. Connecticut's numerous "social libraries" amounted to "one of the best means of diffusing knowledge": "If the proprietors would tax themselves a small sum yearly, they would soon be able to procure a sufficient number of books, to answer every

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<sup>33</sup> Dwight, *Greenfield Hill*, 17, 164. An excerpt from *Greenfield Hill* appears in Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent, eds., *The Utopia Reader* (New York, N.Y., 1999), 175-176. Dwight, *Greenfield Hill*, 18, 170-171n284, 180n378, 181n386, 171n267, 182n583, 171n248, 33-34, 15.

valuable purpose of such an institution.” (In such passages, Dwight’s influence on Elihu Hubbard Smith is evident.) “A thorough and impartial development of the state of society, in Connecticut,” Dwight wrote, “and a complete investigation of the sources of its happiness, would probably throw more light on the true methods of promoting the interests of mankind, than all the volumes of philosophy, which have been written.” He was certain that New England’s “national manners” were “rapidly spreading through the American republic”: “When the enterprize [*sic*], industry, œconomy, morals, and happiness, of New England, especially of Connecticut, are attentively considered, the patriotic mind will perhaps find much more reason to rejoice in this prospect, than to regret it.”<sup>34</sup>

Alas, the rest of the United States did not, in fact, adopt Connecticut’s mores. Indeed, the Connecticut that Dwight knew and cherished would not survive the first quarter of the nineteenth century. But, in the meantime, his idealistic perception of Connecticut as the world’s most perfect polity—populated by well-educated, pious, middling yeomen, and led by men of superior virtue, who far surpassed their fellow citizens in their ability to identify and incarnate the common good—exerted a powerful influence over his equally idealistic pupil, Elihu Hubbard Smith. Smith’s Utopia was but another version of Dwight’s Connecticut, and thus, it was part of a long utopian tradition of New England, which began with its very founding. True, Smith made his own additions, under the influence of other thinkers; but the New England imprint is unmistakable, as is that of Dwight. In fact, Dwight was, by Smith’s own account, the greatest influence on his moral development.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 17, 169n42, 36, 172n297, 172n1, 179n531, 169n223, 169n215, 171-172n296.

CHAPTER 4  
THE EDUCATION OF ELIHU HUBBARD SMITH

The inhabitants of Elihu Hubbard Smith's Utopia were the best-educated men and women in the world. Children ages seven to twelve attended society schools, where they learned the basics of reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and morals. Each town had an academy for children ages ten to seventeen, which taught natural philosophy and natural history, moral philosophy, politics, economics, and history, as well as French and German, and "[g]ardening, preparation of food, sewing, &c. &c." Each county had a college open to students ages sixteen to twenty-two, who studied Latin and Greek, "Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry, surveying, Engraving[,] Navigation,...Natural Philosophy & Astronomy,...meteorology, Ecology, Hydrology, Mineralogy, Botany, & Zoology,...Rhetoric & Logic,...Astronomical Geography & Chronology,...History[,] Elocution, & Composition. New & more extensive progress in Morals & Politics. Economics, & especially Agriculture & Domestic economy." Students ages twenty to thirty could then proceed to the University of Utopia, a "grand Institution" with "collections, libraries, gardens, Halls, &c. &c." that facilitated the absorption of any and all knowledge:

Higher Mathematics,...Philosophy, Astronomy, &c.... Professors in every part of Natural Knowledge—& in Medicine: in the Science of Government, it's History, Positive Institutions of ancient & modern nations, of the Union; & of the State. Professors in Moral-Ecclesiastical History—the literature of the Church—& Divinity. On Commerce, its history & principles. On the Dialectic; & on Philology. In modern, ancient, & eastern, & on our own languages. On the History, Philosophy, & Detail of Agriculture. On Mechanics & their application to the arts.—On the History, principles, & practice of architecture, sculpture, Painting, Engraving, & Design. In music....

Everyone had access to these schools, including to the university. Smith wrote, "All these institutions are at the expence [*sic*] & under the immediate patronage of the State. They are

supported by tax [*sic*] on the citizens at large—a small contribution from native students—a contribution somewhat more, but very moderate, from foreign students.”<sup>1</sup>

Smith dreamed of reforming the educational system of the United States along Utopian lines. He urged John Allen to introduce a bill in the Connecticut legislature that would levy a tax to support the schools, divide the towns into school districts, require the presentation of annual reports to the legislature concerning “the condition of Schools,” and establish an academy in each county. In one Friendly Club meeting, he argued in favor of establishing “a National University.” Smith believed that, to a great extent, the United States already had a superior educational system. “The United States is distinguished, above every other country,” he wrote, “for the uniform & universal education & intelligences of it’s inhabitants.... [F]rom the poorest laborer to the chief magistrates, with few exceptions, all are able to read, & all desire to know.... [T]heir early habits preserve in them a love of learning, & a relish for works of science & of taste, which to their honour, they fondly cherish & assiduously cultivate.” But there was great room for improvement. It was cause for despair that the country had “[n]o Museums, Libraries, Collections—not even learned men,” when decadent Europe, thanks to the existence of “exorbitant wealth, accumulated in a few hands,” had the resources to endow many such institutions. Smith spat, “I sicken at the thought of it.”<sup>2</sup>

In Smith’s mind, education was a necessity, not a luxury. Equality was “the very essence of Republican Governments,” and hence “of order, freedom, virtue, happiness. Now, the only stable basis of equality is knowledge. Without knowledge, we may vainly look for virtue, or for happiness.” Political equality and freedom could exist only where there was a “universal

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<sup>1</sup> Elihu Hubbard Smith, “The Utopia,” *Early American Literature*, 35 (2000), 316, 316-317.

<sup>2</sup> Elihu Hubbard Smith to John Allen, Mar. 30, 1796, Dec. 10, 1796, Oct. 22, 1795, Oct. 16, 1796, EHS to R. J. Thornton, Apr. 28, 1798, Oct. 16, 1796, in *The Diary of Elihu Hubbard Smith (1771-1798)*, ed. James E. Cronin (Philadelphia, Pa., 1973), 151, 271, 78, 230, 441, 230.

diffusion of knowledge,” because the ignorant were vulnerable to the wiles of ambitious demagogues, who, upon taking power, would destroy good government and impose despotism in its place. Therefore, “that Legislator who strives to confine knowledge to those only who can pay the price of it’s acquisition” was a “fool,” or “a *Villain*.” “Can men be blamed,” Smith asked, “when they rise up, with all that vengeance which ignorance thus preserved necessarily fosters, against such monstrous impositions? No sir.” Since “the existence & happiness of every Government depend on the knowledge & virtue of the citizens,” for legislators “to fail in the extension of knowledge to all, is to violate their duty, prevent individual, & destroy general, felicity.”<sup>3</sup>

Such ideas were widespread in eighteenth-century America. John Adams attributed New England’s liberty to its well-informed populace, educated in its public schools. In 1775, the Connecticut Congregationalist minister Moses Mather said, “The strength and spring of every free government is the virtue of the people; virtue grows on knowledge, and knowledge on education.” Indeed, Smith believed that “Connecticut possesses uncommon advantages for the ready distribution of every species of information, by means of it’s division into so many regularly organized & small Communities. This, which is perhaps as much the effect of chance, as of knowlege [*sic*], has been the safeguard & preservative of all it’s freedom, all it’s order, all it’s happiness.” Nor were Smith’s calls for governmental support for higher education unique among Federalists. George Washington tried to establish a national university, as did the onetime Federalist John Quincy Adams when he was president. Rufus King lamented republican “parsimony”: “little is to be expected from such a government in favor of the arts and sciences.” King wished to establish “a Botanical Garden” at Harvard (which—he made sure to tell Dr.

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<sup>3</sup> EHS to John Allen, Mar. 30, 1796, *ibid.*, 150.

Daniel Kilham—“is not so utopian as you may imagine”), as well as “a general infirmary,” but he feared that the government’s frugality would frustrate these projects.<sup>4</sup>

When it came to the benefits to be reaped from the wide diffusion of knowledge, few had hopes as high as did Timothy Dwight. In the dawn of the Revolution, he proclaimed of the United States, “No country ever saw learning so largely diffused thro’ every class of people, or could boast of so sensible, so discerning a Commonalty.” Americans knew and understood their rights, and as a result were “the most free, enlightened and virtuous people on earth.” Of course, the people of Connecticut were the most knowledgeable, and the most virtuous, because each neighborhood had a church and a school. As he exulted in *Greenfield Hill*, “See too, in every hamlet, round me rise / A central school-house, dress’d in modest guise! / Where every child for useful life prepares, / To business moulded, ere he knows its cares; / In worth matures, to independence grows, / And twines the civic garland o’er his brows.” Granted, compared to that of Europe, “[t]he progress of knowledge” in the United States was only “respectable,” since it had no leisure class that could devote itself to scholarly pursuits; nevertheless, “the people at large are furnished with information...beyond those of any other country.”<sup>5</sup>

In a sermon titled *The True Means of Establishing Public Happiness* (1795), Dwight explained in detail why the diffusion of knowledge was of the utmost importance. He asserted that “it is not enough, that the members of a Society aim at that, which will promote the general

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<sup>4</sup> Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York, N.Y., 2005), 94-95; Mather qtd. in Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1969), 120; EHS to John Allen, Mar. 30, 1796, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 150; John Lauritz Larson, *Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2001), 49, 177; Rufus King to Dr. Daniel Kilham, Feb. 18, 1784, in *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King...*, 6 vols., ed. Charles R. King (New York, N.Y., 1894-1900), 2:601-602.

<sup>5</sup> [Timothy Dwight], *A Valedictory Address to the Young Gentlemen, Who Commenced Bachelors of Arts, at Yale-College, July 25th. 1776* (New Haven, Conn., [1776]), 14, 21; Timothy Dwight, *The True Means of Establishing Public Happiness. A Sermon, Delivered on the 7th of July, 1795, before the Connecticut Society of Cincinnati...* (New Haven, Conn., [1795]), 29; Timothy Dwight, *Greenfield Hill: A Poem, in Seven Parts...* (New York, N.Y., 1794), 48; Timothy Dwight, *A Discourse on Some Events of the Last Century, Delivered...on Wednesday, January 7, 1801* (New Haven, Conn., 1801), 15, 16.

good; they must also know what it is.” “[R]eal knowledge” was “practical, and...useful”; it was based on experience and revelation, whereas theories (“dignified with the pompous title of Philosophy”) were “mere dreams, which ought to be placed on the same level with the professed fictions of poets, and to be written in verse, and not in sober prose.” Knowledge engendered virtue; it made possible the selfless pursuit of the common good, and, therefore, public happiness. Dwight wrote, “The formation and establishment of knowledge and virtue in the citizens of a Community is the first business of Legislation, and will more easily and more effectually establish order, and secure liberty, than all the checks, balances, and penalties, which have been devised by man.” Thus, “most, if not all” laws should be directed toward this end. He urged his audience not to be discouraged of the prospects of “establishing virtue in the present world,” since “[t]he few experiments, which have been imperfectly made, to diffuse knowledge, and implant and cultivate virtue, in the mass of mankind, have sufficiently proved, that efforts for this end may be successful.” Dwight had tremendous confidence in knowledge’s ability to instill virtue, even going so far as to write (in *Greenfield Hill*) that educating “the rising generation” about the evils of war would result in its extirpation.<sup>6</sup>

Both Dwight and Elihu Hubbard Smith believed that knowledge was the source of virtue, and that, therefore, the diffusion of knowledge should be a governmental priority. Indeed, Smith read Dwight’s *True Means of Establishing Public Happiness*, “in which I find many truths, &, as might be expected”—here he undoubtedly was referring to its religious content—“many errors. The first are as brilliant, as the last are deformed.” In November of 1796, Smith wrote a long letter to Theodore Dwight (Timothy’s younger brother), who was troubled by Smith’s deism. Smith recounted the development of his ideas, and explained his reasons for abandoning Christianity, in the hopes of setting at ease his good friend, and maybe even persuading him of

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<sup>6</sup> Dwight, *True Means*, 23, 33, 31; Dwight, *Greenfield Hill*, 176n553.

the truth of his beliefs. He had first lost his faith while at Yale, when he came under the influence of the older students, among whom infidelity was popular because (said Smith) it provided an excuse for debauchery. After graduating from Yale, he attended Timothy Dwight's Academy at Greenfield Hill. It was there, under the benevolent influence of Dr. Dwight, that Smith regained his faith and his sense of morality. He later began to doubt again—this time agonizingly rather than nonchalantly—and, after much debate, he concluded that, despite its effectiveness in inculcating morality, Christianity was irrational and false. But Dr. Dwight had taught him so well that, even after Smith lost his faith, he remained moral and upright. “It is to him,” Smith told Theodore, “more perhaps than to any other man, that I owe that love of virtue, which I now feel.” Despite their differences of opinion about religion, “while I retain any sense of the excellence of virtue, I shall not, I can not [*sic*], cease to love & admire that man; & to ascribe to him a large share of all the little virtue I may possess.” Smith even ascribed some of his deism to his teacher's influence: “Dr. Dwight taught me, also, to reason; & while he inspired virtuous resolutions & religious faith, he excited a spirit of inquiry, & a disposition to examine the foundations of that faith & the reasonableness of those resolutions. He was, indeed, a second intellectual father to me.”<sup>7</sup>

Though Dwight was his greatest mentor, Smith had others, each of whom taught that the diffusion of knowledge was perhaps the most important source of the liberty and happiness of mankind. Smith was not unique in applying this belief in his own Utopia; in fact, he and his knowledge-disseminating mentors were in essence members of a specific utopian tradition that went back for centuries.

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<sup>7</sup> Sept. 17, 1795, EHS to Theodore Dwight, Nov. 19, 1796, to Theodore Dwight, Nov. 22, 1796, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 58, 248-249, 249, 259. For more on Dwight as Smith's teacher, see James E. Cronin, “Introduction,” *ibid.*, 4-5, 9.

## Noah Webster and Benjamin Rush as Modern Pansophists

When Smith was a boy, he learned psalmody from a young Yale graduate named Noah Webster. The two remained lifelong friends, and their similar scholarly interests made them collaborators; they were both from Connecticut, and both were staunch Federalists. Many of Webster's projects were based on the assumption that the wide diffusion of knowledge was the source of social improvement. He believed that education improved morals, and that good morals yielded good government. He intended his spelling reforms to facilitate the transmission of knowledge. Knowledge would not only preserve republicanism; it would also cure diseases. After the atrocious yellow fever epidemic of 1795, Webster sent a circular to the physicians of America, soliciting accounts of the progress of the disease. He set about organizing "the fragments of knowledge which lie scattered in various places"—information about the disease's origins, symptoms, mortality rates, and possible cures—"and arranging and publishing them for the common benefit of my country." "I am persuaded that a full investigation of the causes of the disease will enable the government of our states and cities, to make such regulations as to guard our commercial towns from a repetition of the calamities they have once suffered." The fruit of this endeavor was an anthology that included an essay by Smith.<sup>8</sup>

Webster believed that knowledge had the power to cure all ills—not just medical but social, too. His greatest ambition was to compile "[a] statistical account of the United States"—a compendium of all information, all "practical knowlege [*sic*]"—to aid social reformers in their tasks, and to publicize and spread the latest life-improving scientific innovations. However, at

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<sup>8</sup> Elihu Hubbard Smith, "Notes from Recollections of My Life from My Birth Till the Age of Eleven," in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 26; [Noah Webster], *A Syllabus of Mr. Webster's Lectures on the English Language and on Education* ([New Haven, Conn., 1786]); Linda K. Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1970), 97-101; Noah Webster, (*Circular.*) *To the Physicians of Philadelphia, New-York, Baltimore, Norfolk and Newhaven...* ([New York, N.Y., 1795]); Noah Webster, ed., *A Collection of Papers on the Subject of Biliious Fevers, Prevalent in the United States for a Few Years Past* (New York, N.Y., 1796).

the time (1798) that was unfeasible; so Webster first tried the experiment in Connecticut, which, given its compactness and the ease with which information spread through the state, was ideal for his purposes. He thus sent a circular to the gentlemen of Connecticut, asking for information and statistics of all sorts—about the towns, lands, waters, climates, diseases, life expectancies, agriculture, commerce, manufactures, fisheries, infrastructure, taverns, police, poverty, churches, schools, the population of each town, and “[a]ny curious or important information not falling under any of the foregoing heads, and other miscellaneous observations”—in short, everything.<sup>9</sup>

But Webster was not the most utopian of Smith’s mentors. In 1790, Smith went to Philadelphia to study medicine under Benjamin Rush. Rush believed that “the moral faculty”—the “power in the human mind of distinguishing and chusing [*sic*] good and evil; or, in other words, virtue and vice”—could be improved by external influences, including education. “There is but one method of preventing crimes, and of rendering a republican form of government durable,” he proclaimed, “and that is by disseminating the seed of virtue and knowledge through every part of the state, by means of proper modes and places of education, and this can be done effectually only, by the interference and aid of the legislature.” Rush had very high expectations of the effects of the diffusion of knowledge. He believed that with advances in “the moral science” akin to those made in medicine, “most of those baneful vices, which deform the human breast and convulse the nations of the earth, might be banished from the world.” If only “the numerous literary societies in Europe and America” would join into “a confederation of learned men, and learned societies,” they could “bring the monarchs and rulers of the world, under their subjection, and thereby...extirpate war—slavery—and capital punishments, from the list of human evils.” “Wars originate in error and vice,” so “instill” in the young “sentiments of

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<sup>9</sup> Noah Webster, *Circular. To the Clergymen or Other Well Informed Gentlemen in the Several Towns in Connecticut* ([New Haven, Conn., 1798]).

universal benevolence to men of all nations and colours,” and “wars will cease.” Though he would not achieve perfection, there would be “such a change in the moral character of man, as shall raise him to a resemblance of angels—nay more, to the likeness of GOD himself.”<sup>10</sup>

The hope that a “universal synthesis” of knowledge, and an international league of scholars would spawn a wondrous utopia was already centuries old by the time of Webster and Rush. Pansophia “was a utopian fantasy that never bore fruit, a lost cause, a seventeenth-century hope of a reconstituted Christian commonwealth in Europe that would be the harbinger of a universal millennium on earth...a millennium based on calm and orderly science as a way to God.” Men like Giordano Bruno, Francis Bacon, Tommaso Campanella, Johannes Valentinus Andreae, John Amos Comenius, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz believed that the diffusion of knowledge would improve society; its communication “to rising generations” would “produce an ideal state in the world.” According to Leibniz, such a state would arise with “the dissemination of a body of organized information about all things arranged in an encyclopedia and the acceptance of a common language, a universal ‘characteristic’ or ‘character’ that facilitated communication.” He yearned that the monarchs of Europe would establish academies for the propagation of all knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

Two Pansophists even wrote utopias modeled on those of Plato and More. Campanella’s *City of the Sun* told of an ideal society ruled by an omniscient philosopher-king named Metaphysic, with the assistance of Power, Wisdom, and Love (who controlled human breeding and the rearing of children). Property and wives were held in common, because “when we have

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<sup>10</sup> For more on Rush as Smith’s professor, see Cronin, “Introduction,” in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 6-8, 9. Benjamin Rush, *An Oration, Delivered before the American Philosophical Society... on the 27th of February, 1786; Containing an Enquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1786), 1, 40, 37, 38-39; Benjamin Rush, *Thoughts upon the Amusements and Punishments Which Are Proper for Schools* ([Philadelphia, Pa., 1790]), 3; Rush, *Oration, Delivered before the American Philosophical Society*, 37.

<sup>11</sup> Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), pt. 3, pp. 208, 207, 213, 395, 400.

taken away self-love, there remains only love for the state.” All dined at common tables. All worked for four hours a day, and then devoted their leisure hours to “exercising the mind and body”; in work details led by “kings,” “men and women march together collectively, and always in obedience to the voice of the king.” A bevy of magistrates regulated the people’s behavior down to the minutest details, in order to foster virtue; thus, the city was purged of all crimes and vices. Women caught wearing makeup were put to death; disobedient soldiers were fed alive to wild animals. But these laws were superfluous, because the enlightened populace never broke them. The city thrived because knowledge was widespread. Its explorers and ambassadors collected information from all the nations of the world—their languages, customs, scientific innovations, forms of government, histories, etc. The elites then transmitted this knowledge to the people. Wisdom painted all information—astronomical, mathematical, biological, geographical, climatologic, medical, mechanical, historical—onto the city walls, so that the young could absorb it effortlessly. The profusion of scientific knowledge resulted in the discovery of cures for all diseases, and so, with the help of healthy diets, most people lived for more than one hundred years, and some “reach two hundred.”<sup>12</sup>

Bacon’s *New Atlantis* was not nearly as totalitarian as Campanella’s vision. Bacon told of Bensalem, an island in the New World that was free of all the vices that polluted Europe: “It is the virgin of the world.” Bensalem’s peace and prosperity was made possible by a society known as Salomon’s House, “the noblest foundation...that ever was upon the earth,” whose purpose was “the enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire, to the effecting of all things possible.” “[E]very twelve years...three of the Fellows or Brethren of Salomon’s House” were sent on a mission to collect information “of the sciences, arts, manufactures, and inventions of all

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<sup>12</sup> Tommaso Campanella, *City of the Sun*, in *Famous Utopias: Being the Complete Text of Rousseau’s Social Contract, More’s Utopia, Bacon’s New Atlantis, Campanella’s City of the Sun*, introd. Charles Andrews (New York, N.Y., 1937), 278, 282, 283, 294, 304, 292, 300, 281, 279-281, 279, 305.

the world; and withal to bring unto us books, instruments, and patterns in every kind.” In addition to storing all of the world’s knowledge, Salomon’s House conducted experiments that resulted in the discoveries of cures for diseases, a “Water of Paradise” that prolonged life, as well as new plants and fruits, and even new species of animals. Its mechanical inventions included flying machines, submarines, and perpetual motion machines. The Brethren could predict natural calamities, and “give counsel thereupon what the people shall do for the prevention and remedy of them.” More life-enhancing discoveries and inventions—new foods and textiles, “[a]rtificial minerals and cements,” and the ability to control the weather—were on the horizon.<sup>13</sup>

### **Smith and the Diffusion of Knowledge**

Elihu Hubbard Smith’s projects for the improvement of human life may not have been as grandiose as Bacon’s, but they were unmistakably utopian nonetheless. In fact, his Utopia was Pansophic, as Catherine Kaplan has pointed out. Utopia’s government collected and circulated information, in hope of discovering solutions to all of society’s problems: “If enough knowledge can be collected and circulated, Smith’s writings suggest, yellow fever, moral turpitude, and politics itself would all be washed away.” This was the rationale behind Utopia’s annual census, which, by providing the magistrates with copious information about the citizens, facilitated their formulation of wise, ameliorative policies. Meanwhile, the districts submitted annual reports “of the State of Instruction,” to the state legislature, which then published them. “All reports are matter [*sic*] of record. No transaction relative to the business of the District can be concealed, or destroyed.—The Register is open to the inspection of every citizen.” Furthermore, the counties were created for the very purpose of circulating information: “It [the county] is convenient for the administration of Justice, the communication of instruction to youth, the collection &

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<sup>13</sup> Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis*, in Susan Bruce, ed., *Three Early Modern Utopias: Utopia, New Atlantis, The Isle of Pines* (Oxford, Eng., 1999), 173, 167, 177, 167-168, 177, 178, 179, 183, 185, 186.

circulation of Moral, Medical, Agricultural, Jural, & Literary information. It facilitates the transmission of every kind of intelligence, & prosecution of every plan of improvement.”<sup>14</sup>

But, according to Kaplan, it is with Smith’s “description of Medical Institutions...that his utopia finally begins to feel utopian”; in Utopia, “medical and scientific investigations were cooperative, ongoing, and fully financed,” and it had “an abundance—given the population of the state, an unlikely superabundance—of medical inquiry, conversation, and publication.” Each county had a “Medical Society,” endowed with “its own Library & Museum.” Society members conducted research, and entered their discoveries into registers, from where some were published in the societies’ journals. The journals also published foreign research, meteorological tables, and “a quarterly Report of Health from every town.” The county colleges published journals of their own, which “consist of the Communications from all quarters, analytically arranged—according to subjects.” Smith wrote, “As it is the duty of the Censors of each Society to make quarterly Reports of Health to the College, so it is the duty of the College to make semi-annual Reports of Health to the Legislature.... These Reports to the Legislature include every circumstance of Meteorology &c. necessary to convey precise ideas on the subject of the Public Health.” The apex of Utopia’s medical establishment was the University of Utopia, which conferred medical licenses only to those who passed its grueling examination. The University had a magnificent library, “composed of the rarest & most expensive works, collected with great care, & at the expence [*sic*] of the State, from every part of the world. It includes no common work, at present, however valuable.” With all of this information converging in Utopia—with all

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<sup>14</sup> Catherine Kaplan, “Document: Elihu Hubbard Smith’s ‘The Institutions of the Republic of Utopia,’” *Early American Literature*, 35 (2000), 303, 300; Catherine O’Donnell Kaplan, *Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forums of Citizenship* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2008), ch. 3; Smith, “Utopia,” 318-319, 320, 325.

of this knowledge at the disposal of the diligent citizen—a cascade of life-improving discoveries, inventions, and innovations would soon result.<sup>15</sup>

Smith did not merely fantasize about disseminating knowledge and improving the human condition; he tried to turn his dreams into reality. Some of his projects did not make it beyond his preliminary brainstorm—for example, his Pansophic (and Websterian) plan to reform spelling and create “a new & more perfect language, a language in which philosophy may speak, intelligibly, to all nations, & which may, in time, bannish [*sic*] all the absurd varieties of tongues, & the detestible [*sic*] prejudices which are their deformed offspring.” But others came to fruition. Like Rush, Smith was a great believer in the ability of literary societies to effect progress; the New York Friendly Club was one such society. He also believed that the members of these societies had the responsibility to communicate their ideas to the broader world—otherwise the truths that they uncovered would be useless. In order to bring together the inhabitants of the Republic of Letters, and to spread their knowledge widely, Smith developed intricate correspondence networks that spanned the whole United States. Like Webster, he frequently wrote to professionals and scholars across the country, soliciting detailed information about a number of issues of interest to the public. He would then compile the information into anthologies or journals, and distribute the finished products through the same correspondence networks that made the endeavor possible in the first place. Smith’s reach even extended to Europe. He established a correspondence with John Aikin, the editor of the literary journal the *Monthly Magazine*, so that he and his circle of friends could provide misinformed British readers

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<sup>15</sup> Kaplan, “Document,” 301; Smith, “Utopia,” 326, 328, 329.

with accurate information about the United States, thereby improving his country's image abroad and (since many Americans read European periodicals) at home.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps Smith's first disseminative project was his anthology *American Poems* (1793), which he compiled with the intention that it would spur advancements in American culture. He lamented that the works of "the most eminent American Authors" were "known only to a few of their particular acquaintance, and unheard of by the generality of their Countrymen." He hoped that this collection of "some of the handsomest specimens of American Poetry" would circulate among "the scientific and refined," "those possessed of talents and leisure," thereby inspiring them to compose poetry of their own.<sup>17</sup>

Two years later, Smith considered founding "a Literary Journal," to be titled *Proteus*. He even drafted an introduction for the journal, in which he made clear that its purpose was the edification of his fellow man: "That knowledge is essential to liberty & virtue, is a truth which few, at the present day, will be bold enough to controvert.... The wisdom of later ages, has demonstrated how intimately the enjoyment of our rights & the fulfillment of our duties, is collected with our knowledge of their nature & extent: & has established the foundations of the happiness of society on justice, comprehended, & practised by all." Smith believed that European journals had augmented the world's stock of knowledge, and that American newspapers could have done the same, were it not for the fact that since the inception of the French Revolution they had covered European news at the expense of all else.<sup>18</sup>

Smith's journal would rectify that situation. It would contain no news and no advertisements, only articles on the arts and sciences—natural history and natural philosophy,

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<sup>16</sup> Smith qtd. in Kaplan, "Document," 297; Sept. 11, 1795, Sept. 29, 1795, Oct. 4, 1794, EHS to John Aikin, Apr. 14, 1798, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 54, 63, 66, 437-438.

<sup>17</sup> [Elihu Hubbard Smith, ed.], *American Poems: Selected and Original* (Litchfield, Conn., [1793]), iii-iv.

<sup>18</sup> Oct. 12, 1795, Oct. 20, 1795, Oct. 22, 1795, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 72, 79, 75, 77.

literary and biographical anecdotes, “the best moral, political, literary, &c. essays,” short stories, poems, and essays on agriculture, commerce, and manufactures. It would record all knowledge about the United States, and preserve the glories of its history and culture, with statistics from “every part of the United States, & of America, generally,” historical comparisons with Europe, “American Biography,” American literary history, abstracts of the pamphlets “tending to illustrate the history of this country; especially of the late revolution, & the characters who conducted it,” reprints of satires like *The Anarchiad*, and “[m]emoirs, facts, &c. relative to the antiquities of our country; & the present state of the interior.” “But the benefits of such a periodical publication,” wrote Smith, “would not be confined, to the collection & preservation of the productions of our own country. Whatever the accumulated industry of ages has collected, interesting to man, in Art or Science, in Polity, Morals, or Physics, would equally claim & obtain a place in it’s pages.” *Proteus* never came to fruition, but Smith continued to nurture the ambition to create “an American Review” until the year of his death (1798).<sup>19</sup>

Smith, however, did successfully launch, together with his fellow physicians and Friendly Club members Edward Miller and Samuel Latham Mitchill, the *Medical Repository*, which, in the words of James Cronin, was “the first, and for many years the best, American medical magazine.” In July, 1796, Smith (emulating Webster) began composing a “Circular Letter: To the Physicians, &c. in the United States.” He lamented that despite America’s “numerous advantages” for scientific observation—a product of “the extent of our country, the variety of climate & disease, & universality of information, & sameness of language, we are possessed of, for giving novelty & importance to Medical Collections”—Americans had failed to make great medical innovations. But Smith was optimistic. Physicians all over the world had wasted their time in “neatly fitting together...ingenious conjectures” instead of observing natural phenomena,

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<sup>19</sup> Oct. 12, 1795, Oct. 22, 1795, Jan. 1, 1798, *ibid.*, 72, 78, 412.

thus leaving “question[s] so interesting to humanity...hitherto unanswered.” Did these delays merely serve “to form the basis of the durable glory of the United States? Was the honor reserved for them, to have turned their attention from conjectures to facts, & to have concurred in the erection of a national edifice sacred to the relief of man?”<sup>20</sup>

The *Medical Repository* was “no other than an endeavor to obtain *an accurate & annual account of those general diseases which reign, in each season, over every part of the United States.*” The diffusion of information about these diseases, such as yellow fever, would facilitate the discoveries of their cures. Smith believed that Americans’ reliance on Europe for “all their opinions & modes of reasoning & acting” had “fatal” consequences. America had unique climates and diseases, so theories developed in Europe, based on observations of their “extremely different” climates, would not apply there. American doctors, treating American diseases, needed accurate information about their own country—information that the *Medical Repository* would provide. It would contain articles on the American climate, and flora and fauna (including their diseases and cures), as well as descriptions of the habits and diseases of humans, any news about diseases old and new, case histories, and descriptions of experiments for cures. Smith also wished to include “American Medical Biography,” and accounts of former and new “Medical Publications in America.” Furthermore, “the volume of every year, will contain the history of the health of our Country for the year preceeding [*sic*].”<sup>21</sup>

The first issue of the *Medical Repository* was published in the summer of 1797, and Smith would contribute to and co-edit four more issues until his untimely death; the journal survived

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<sup>20</sup> James E. Cronin, “Elihu Hubbard Smith and the New York Friendly Club, 1795-1798,” *PMLA*, 64 (1949), 475n8; July 28, 1796, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 190-191. This circular letter would become the prospectus [Samuel Latham Mitchill, Edward Miller, E. H. Smith], *Address &c. After a Continued Struggle of Many Centuries against the Absurd Systems of Ancient Physicians...* (New York, N.Y., 1796); on p. 3, Noah Webster’s anthology on the yellow fever epidemic is mentioned as an “encouraging” example.

<sup>21</sup> Aug. 17, 1796, EHS to Reuben Smith, Aug. 10, 1797, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 205, 206.

him by twenty-six years. Nonetheless, Smith had provided a great deal of the vision that impelled its founding. The *Medical Repository* was his attempt to incarnate the ideals illustrated in his “Utopia”; one could say that it was the real-life analogue of the Utopian reports that promoted public health by diffusing knowledge among the populace.<sup>22</sup>

Knowledge—with its power to liberate men, to make their lives better and longer, and to foster peace among them by elevating their souls—captured Smith’s imagination. It was the solution to all of the world’s ills. Intellectuals had thought so for ages, but this belief—this hope—was rarely as strong as it was in the late eighteenth century. It permeated the Western consciousness on both sides of the Atlantic, and held its spell over the minds of men like Noah Webster, Benjamin Rush, and Timothy Dwight, all of whom helped to instill it in the mind of Smith.

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<sup>22</sup> For more on the *Medical Repository*, and its relation to Smith’s “Utopia,” see Kaplan, *Men of Letters*, ch. 3.

## CHAPTER 5 THE UTOPIANISM OF THE CONNECTICUT WITS

In his quest to dispel European myths about the backwardness of the United States, the very first submission that Elihu Hubbard Smith made to John Aikin was an “account of the Poets of the United States.” With this series of essays (which Aikin published in the *Monthly Magazine*), Smith wished to show that, contrary to the widespread belief that they were culturally deficient, Americans had actually made significant progress in the arts. Smith’s essays focused on the group of poets known as the Connecticut Wits. He began writing them on April 4, 1798, and the following day, he completed those on Timothy Dwight and John Trumbull. On the seventh and ninth, he profiled David Humphreys, and on the twelfth, he began the essay on Joel Barlow, which he completed the next day, along with those on Lemuel Hopkins and *The Anarchiad*.<sup>1</sup>

Smith thought very highly of the Wits, who were heavily represented in *American Poems*; indeed, he himself was a member of the second generation of Wits, along with Hopkins, Richard Alsop, Mason Fitch Cogswell, and Theodore Dwight. Alas, the Wits’ poetry was not too good. They developed really only one major theme: the greatness of the United States. In poem after poem, they monotonously described its destinies and its future glories. The Wits’ poetry was, in fact, utopian. They believed that God had granted the United States a special role in His great historical design. Like Timothy Dwight, they were millennialists, who believed that their country would redeem mankind, as long as the people preserved the Union and thus kept their country strong and prosperous.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elihu Hubbard Smith to John Aikin, Apr. 14, 1798, Apr. 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 13, 1798, in *The Diary of Elihu Hubbard Smith (1771-1798)*, ed. James E. Cronin (Philadelphia, Pa., 1973), 438, 435-437. For more on the Wits, see Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York, N.Y., 1976), 187-193.

<sup>2</sup> James E. Cronin, “Introduction,” in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 10.

Americans had been writing utopian poetry since before the Revolution. In 1772, Hugh Henry Brackenridge and Philip Freneau proclaimed, "'Tis but the morning of the world with us." They foresaw that their innocent arcadia would become history's greatest empire—greater than even Greece and Rome. America would usher in "[t]he final stage" of history, an era free of disease and war, when all mankind would await the Savior's return: "The world at peace, and all her tumults o'er, / The blissful prelude to Emanuel's reign. / ... / A new Jerusalem sent down from heav'n / Shall grace our happy earth, perhaps this land, / Whose virgin bosom shall then receive, tho' late, / Myriads of saints with their almighty king, / To live and reign on earth a thousand years / Thence call'd Millennium. Paradise a new [*sic*] / Shall flourish, by no second Adam lost."<sup>3</sup>

That Freneau continued to write poetry in this vein shows that the Federalists did not have a monopoly on nationalist sentiment in the Early Republic, for, in the 1790s, Freneau became one of their fiercest nemeses. In a work published in 1772, he contrasted the brutality, violence, and misery of European life with that in the calm, arcadian "American village." In the early years of the Revolution, he dreamed that "[t]he time shall come when" America would be free and powerful, when her farmers would make the land bloom from the Atlantic to the Mississippi, and her merchants in her "mighty towns," "free freights from every climate bring." In an essay written near the end of the war, Freneau predicted that in the United States, "[a]griculture... will here, most probably, be advanced to its summit of perfection," and the spread of mutually beneficial commerce would foster brotherhood among men, so that "wars will be forgotten." A new golden age would begin: "The iron generation will verge to decay, and those days of felicity

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<sup>3</sup> [Hugh Henry Brackenridge and Philip Freneau], *A Poem, on the Rising Glory of America...* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1772), 24, 14, 3-4, 26, 25.

advance which have been so often wished for by all good men, and which are so beautifully described by the prophetic sages of ancient times.”<sup>4</sup>

The Connecticut Wits, too, saw a golden age on the horizon. In a pre-Revolutionary poem, Trumbull condemned Britain for its abuses, and declared that its glory had passed to America: “...rapt by Freedom’s deathless flame, / And fost’ring influence of the fav’ring skies, / This Western World, the last recess of fame, / Sees in her wilds a new-born empire rise.” In 1778, Barlow similarly visualized “The closing scenes of Tyrants’ fruitless rage, / The opening prospects of a golden age.” In the American golden age, agriculture and commerce, the sciences and the arts, and philosophy and poetry, would all reach their zeniths. With freedom would come eternal peace. “Afric’s [*sic*] unhappy children” would be liberated, and women would achieve excellence in science and literature. America would be a new “Zion,” the home of “the pure Church,” whose truth would spread throughout the world. The Savior would descend and make America the seat of “his long and glorious reign on earth!” In fact, Barlow believed that all of these things had already begun to happen. Did not America already enjoy nature’s blessings? Had not Benjamin Franklin and David Rittenhouse attained new heights in science? Were not Americans already in the process of winning their freedom? These things and more made plain “the genius of the rising age.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Philip Freneau, *The American Village, a Poem. To Which Are Added, Several Other Original Pieces in Verse* (New York, N.Y., 1772), 2-3; [Philip Freneau], *American Liberty, a Poem* (New York, N.Y., 1775), 12; Philip Freneau, “The Philosopher of the Forest. Numb. X,” in Philip Freneau, *The Miscellaneous Works of Mr. Philip Freneau: Containing His Essays, and Additional Poems* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1788), 364-365. See also Philip Freneau, “On the Migration to America, and Peopling the Western Country,” in *The Columbian Muse: A Selection of American Poetry, from Various Authors of Established Reputation* (New York, N.Y., 1794), 173-175. For more on the common eighteenth-century notion that commerce would lead to international peace, see Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton, N.J., 1997; orig. pub. 1977); and for the role of free trade in the “utopian vision” of the Revolution, see Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1980), 76, 258-259.

<sup>5</sup> John Trumbull, “Elegy on the Times,” in *American Poems: Selected and Original*, [ed. Elihu Hubbard Smith] (Litchfield, Conn., [1793]), 9; for more on Trumbull, see Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1999), ch. 6. Joel Barlow, “The Prospect of Peace,” in *American Poems*, [ed. Smith], 85, 87-90, 91-92, 89, 90. According to Ruth Bloch, “It was

The golden age, the millennium—these images recurred in the poetry of all of the Connecticut Wits. We have already encountered them in the works of Dwight. David Humphreys—aide-de-camp to General Washington, and prominent diplomat during the 1790s—was no different. He declared that America “[s]hall far surpass the fabled age of gold”: “For here exists once more th’ Arcadian scene, / Those simple manners and that golden mean.” But the United States would be far more than a humble agrarian republic; it would be “an EMPIRE, which from its situation, and circumstances, must surpass all that ever have existed, in magnitude, felicity and duration”—an empire where “th’ oppress’d a place of refuge find, / The last asylum for distress [*sic*] mankind.” America lacked Old World tyranny; yeomen were left free to work the world’s most bountiful soil, which made “spontaneous harvests spring.” The United States would abound with magnificent cities with “gilded domes.” It would be a new Athens, leading the world in literature, science, and commerce. It would spread throughout the continent, and “The wilderness shall blossom as the rose, / Unbounded deserts [*sic*] unknown charms assume, / Like Salem flourish, and like Eden bloom.”<sup>6</sup>

The religious allusions were not metaphoric. Humphreys believed that Americans were a “chosen race.” God had left America undiscovered until the current, enlightened age, so that it could “become the theatre for displaying the illustrious designs of Providence, in its dispensations to the human race.” Americans had a divine mission to spread freedom throughout the world: “Our constitutions form’d on freedom’s base, / Which all the blessings of all lands

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[millennialism’s] own basic vision of future felicity that...largely defined the utopian dimension of American revolutionary ideology”; Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (Cambridge, Eng., 1985), 77.

<sup>6</sup> David Humphreys, *A Poem, on the Happiness of America; Addressed to the Citizens of the United States* (Hartford, Conn., 1786), 50; David Humphreys, “A Poem on the Future Glory of the United States of America,” in David Humphreys, *The Miscellaneous Works of David Humphreys* (New York, N.Y., 1804), 64; Humphreys, *Poem, on the Happiness of America*, 23; [David Humphreys], *A Poem, Addressed to the Armies of the United States of America* (New Haven, Conn., 1780), 5; Humphreys, “Poem on the Future Glory,” in Humphreys, *Miscellaneous Works*, 63; Humphreys, *Poem, Addressed to the Armies*, 13, 15; [David Humphreys], *The Glory of America; or, Peace Triumphant over War: A Poem* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1783), 13-16; [Humphreys], *Poem, Addressed to the Armies*, 16.

embrace, / Embrace humanity's extended cause— / A world our empire, for a world our laws.”  
Upon imparting “Heav’ns noblest gifts” to all mankind, “a new æra” of “universal peace” would  
begin—the millennium, when “heav’n descending dwells with man on earth.”<sup>7</sup>

“What but disunion can our bliss destroy?” Humphreys asked. But in the 1780s, many—including Humphreys—considered disunion to be a very real possibility. After the Revolution, the country descended into economic depression. The states and many citizens were burdened with tremendous debts, and the temptations of inflation, tax increases, and debt repudiation were quite strong. Under the Articles of Confederation, the national government (such as it was) lacked the ability to raise taxes; and when the states deigned to cooperate with its requisitions, the people, unable to pay with specie that they did not have, sometimes exploded into open insurrection. The government could not maintain internal order, or provide for the common defense. Many feared that its lack of energy would doom their young republican experiment to an early death by anarchy—which always ended in tyranny—or foreign conquest. In multiple poems, Humphreys emphasized that union was the only antidote to anarchy, and the sole guarantor of national strength, freedom, and independence. Therefore, in 1786 he urged, “Increase the fed’ral ties, support the laws, / Guard public faith, revere religion’s cause. / Thus rise to greatness—by experience find, / Who live the best, are greatest of mankind.” Humphreys and his fellow Connecticut Wits put their poetry at the service of the Federalist movement; an energetic national government would ensure the realization of their millennial utopia.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Humphreys, *Poem, on the Happiness of America*, 5; Humphreys, “Poem on the Future Glory,” in Humphreys, *Miscellaneous Works*, 47; Humphreys, *Poem, on the Happiness of America*, 10-11, 31, 30; Humphreys, “Poem on the Future Glory,” in Humphreys, *Miscellaneous Works*, 51. For more on the millennialism of Humphreys’s poetry, see Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America’s Millennial Role* (Chicago, Ill., 1968), 119-121.

<sup>8</sup> Humphreys, “Poem on the Future Glory,” in Humphreys, *Miscellaneous Works*, 51, 62; [Humphreys], *Glory of America*, 16; David Humphreys, “A Poem on the Love of Country. In Celebration of the Twenty-Third Anniversary of the Independence of the United States of America,” in Humphreys, *Miscellaneous Works*, 124, 133-134; Humphreys, *Poem, on the Happiness of America*, 7.

## The Connecticut Wits Enter the Debate on the Constitution

In an oration delivered before the Connecticut Society of the Cincinnati on July 4, 1789, Humphreys looked upon the ratification of the Constitution with relief and satisfaction, and with fervent optimism. He reviewed the inadequacies of the Articles of Confederation, and the reasons for adopting the Constitution. He was certain that, thanks to its establishment of a strong central government, national prosperity and greatness were imminent; the Constitution would vindicate the concept of self-government, and justify “the hope of establishing the empire of reason, justice, philosophy, and religion, throughout the extensive regions of the new world.” The country was “soon to become fair as the garden of God.” And—though the current generation would not live to see it—“[w]e may rejoice in a belief, that intellectual light will yet illuminate the dark corners of the earth; that freedom of inquiry will produce liberality of conduct; that mankind will reverse the absurd position, that the *many* were made for the *few*; and that they will not continue slaves in one quarter of the globe, when they can become freemen in another.” Years later, this was still the narrative accepted by Federalists. Dwight credited the Constitution with rescuing the country from a weak government “founded on visionary ideas of patriotism,” and securing its peace, prosperity, and happiness. He warned Americans that if they wanted their country to fulfill its divinely-ordained promise, they had to cooperate with their wise and virtuous rulers, shunning faction and disunion at all costs: “‘A house, a kingdom, divided against itself cannot stand.’ . . . The great bond of union to every people is its government. This destroyed, or distrusted, there is no center left of intelligence, counsel, or action; no system of purposes, or measures; no point of rallying, or confidence.” As long as they preserved the Union, God would protect them.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> David Humphreys, “An Oration on the Political Situation of the United States of America in the Year 1789. Pronounced before the State Society of the Cincinnati of Connecticut, at New-Haven, in Celebration of the

Fortunately, as Humphreys told the Cincinnati, “the American people... will always judge right when they shall have the means of information.” Two years before—when the Constitutional Convention was in session—Barlow told them the same thing: “the majority of a great people, on a subject which they understand, will never act wrong.” But did the people understand the gravity of the situation? Barlow argued that it was “the strongest duty” of those men “of abilities or information in any degree above the common rank” (like the Cincinnati) “to enlighten and harmonize the minds of our fellow citizens, and point them to a knowledge of their interests, as an extensive fœderal people and fathers of increasing nations.” The elite had to convince the people of “the propriety of sacrificing private and territorial advantages to the good of the great majority, the salvation of the United States.” Barlow tantalized his audience with a utopian vision of the effects of the establishment of “a permanent fœderal government”—a vision of an “American Empire” covering an “amazing extent of territory,” populated by “an hundred millions”; of “the changes to be wrought by the possible progress of arts, in agriculture, commerce and manufactures, the increasing connection and intercourse of nations, and the effect of one rational political system upon the general happiness of mankind.” By stabilizing God’s chosen country, a strong national government would secure the “peace, happiness and prof[g]ressive improvement” of all humanity, “and meliorate the condition of human nature.”<sup>10</sup>

This is not to say that the Constitution was (or is) utopian. Amid the struggles and debates, the bargains and compromises over matters of principle and interest, the Constitutional Convention delegates had little choice but to construct a framework that addressed political

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Thirteenth Anniversary of Independence,” in Humphreys, *Miscellaneous Works*, 333, 339, 340, 336, 341; Timothy Dwight, *A Discourse on Some Events of the Last Century, Delivered...on Wednesday, January 7, 1801* (New Haven, Conn., 1801), 11-12; Timothy Dwight, *The Duty of Americans, at the Present Crisis, Illustrated in a Discourse, Preached on the Fourth of July, 1798* (New Haven, Conn., 1798), 23, 29-30.

<sup>10</sup> Humphreys, “Oration on the Political Situation,” in Humphreys, *Miscellaneous Works*, 336; Joel Barlow, *An Oration, Delivered...at the Meeting of the Connecticut Society of the Cincinnati, July 4th, 1787...* (Hartford, Conn., [1787]), 12, 13, 14, 12, 10, 12.

realities. Even if each one of them had the ambition of being a classical lawgiver, or a Platonic philosopher-king, the exigencies of the usual political back-and-forth precluded the imposition of unadulterated visionary theories. And anyway, most of the delegates were outright realists. But people could support the Constitution—and the strong central government that it created—for different reasons. A Madison could see the Constitution as a means of restraining tyrannical majorities at both the state and national levels, thereby protecting individual rights; while a Connecticut Wit could see it as a means of restraining populist demagogues, and of empowering virtuous elites so that they could mold the people into virtuous citizens and improve their lives. The two interpretations might seem like competing versions of the same fundamental worldview, but they were actually very different—the one an articulation of negative liberty and the “constrained vision,” the other of positive liberty and the “unconstrained vision.”<sup>11</sup>

Federalism appealed to the Connecticut Wits because they believed that a strong general government would bring to life their vision of national greatness. So they enthusiastically put Barlow’s exhortations into practice, and began writing poems for the newspapers, in hopes of persuading their fellow citizens to ratify the Constitution. In one such work, Dwight urged the Convention delegates to sacrifice their narrow partisan and private aims for the common good: “Tis yours to bid those days of Eden shine: / First, then, and last, the federal bands entwine.” He then outlined the entire Federalist agenda in a passage that merits being quoted at length:

O’er state concerns, let every state preside; / Its private tax controul [*sic*]; its justice guide;  
/ Religion aid; the morals to secure; / And bid each private right thro time endure. /  
Columbia’s interests public sway demand, / Her commerce, impost, unlocated land; / Her  
war, her peace, her military power; / Treaties to seal with every distant shore; / To bid

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<sup>11</sup> Robert E. Brown, *Charles Beard and the Constitution: A Critical Analysis of “An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution”* (Princeton, N.J., 1956), 183, 198; Forrest McDonald, *Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution* (Lawrence, Kan., 1985), 291-293; Colleen A. Sheehan, “Madison versus Hamilton: The Battle over Republicanism and the Role of Public Opinion,” in Douglas Ambrose and Robert W. T. Martin, eds., *The Many Faces of Alexander Hamilton: The Life and Legacy of America’s Most Elusive Founding Father* (New York, N.Y., 2006), 165-208; Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (New York, N.Y., 2002; orig. pub. 1987).

contending states their discord cease; / To send thro all the calumet of peace; / Science to wing thro every noble flight; / And lift desponding genius into light. / Thro every state to spread each public law, / Interest must animate, and force must awe. / Persuasive dictates realms will ne'er obey; / Sway, uncoercive, is the shade of sway. / ... / Seize then, oh! seize Columbia's golden hour; / Perfect her federal system, public power; / For this stupendous realm, this chosen race, / With all the improvements of all lands its base, / The glorious structure build; its breadth extend; / Its columns lift, its mighty arches bend! / Or freedom, science, arts, its stories shine, / Unshaken pillars of a frame divine; / Far o'er the Atlantic wild its beams aspire, / The world approves it, and the heavens admire.<sup>12</sup>

In this passage, Dwight captured the essence of the Wits' argument—the belief in America's chosenness, its superiority, its historical role, its promise for the rest of the world. But the most famous of the Wits' poetic Federalist polemics (and perhaps their best work overall) was the dystopian satire *The Anarchiad*, “a Poem on the restoration of Chaos and substantial Night,” which Barlow, Hopkins, Humphreys, and Trumbull composed in installments for the *New-Haven Gazette, and the Connecticut Magazine* (1786-1787). The premise of this mock epic was that a recently-discovered ancient American epic had foretold the fate of the United States. The Wits opened the series with their familiar device of the vision of the future—in this case, an excerpt from the purported “Book of Vision,” which described “the beautifying scenes when those plagues to society, law and justice, shall be done away,” to be replaced by anarchy. The future was a world in which Shaysite mobs assaulted hapless judges, and intimidated state legislatures into repudiating debts and printing gobs of paper money. To the great satisfaction of “the old Anarch” (who had “a demon's form, / But headless, monstrous, shapeless as a storm”), these selfish leveling schemes would generate “the young DEMOCRACY of *hell*,” where “*public credit* sinks, an empty shade; / Wild severance rages, wars intestine spread, / Their boasted

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<sup>12</sup> Timothy Dwight, “Address of the Genius of Columbia, to the Members of the Continental Convention,” in *American Poems*, [ed. Smith], 60-62.

UNION hides her dying head; / The forms of government in ruin hurled, / Reluctant empire quits the western world.”<sup>13</sup>

The Wits cleverly inverted the clichés of their patriotic, utopian poetry, in order to warn Americans about the wages of disunion. No longer was America “an asylum to suffering humanity”; in the Wits’ nightmare world, God had granted it to the Anarch, who made it “The last asylum for my knaves and fools. / Here shall my best and brightest empire rise, / Wild riot reign, and discord greet the skies.” Americans were no longer the “chosen sons” of God, but of the Anarch, who commanded them to “Stab Independence! dance o’er Freedom’s grave! / ... / Till ruin come, with fire, and sword, and blood, / And men shall ask where your republic stood.” The Anarch would “reign” until the “tumultuous mobs shall ask a king; / A king, in wrath, shall heaven, vindictive send, / And my confusion and my empire end.”<sup>14</sup>

But these calamities were not inevitable. Brave Hesper tried with all his might to restore law and justice, and preserve independence. He battled the Anarch, but he could not defeat him by himself, so he made one “last solemn address to his principal counselors and sages, whom he had convened at Philadelphia.” He mourned “union’d empire lost in empty dreams,” and warned the selfish, myopic “democratic States” that “[t]h’ extremes of license” always bred “th’ extremes of power.” To avert the destruction of freedom and imposition of monarchy, the people had to strengthen the bonds of union:

From ancient habits, local powers obey, / Yet feel no reverence for one general sway; / For breach of faith, no keen compulsion feel, / And find no interest in the federal weal. / But know, ye favor’d race, one potent head / Must rule your States, and strike your foes with dread, / The finance regulate, the trade control, / Live through the empire, and accord the whole. / Ere death invades, and night’s deep curtain falls, / Through ruined realms the

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<sup>13</sup> David Humphreys, Joel Barlow, John Trumbull, Lemuel Hopkins, *The Anarchiad: A New England Poem (1786-1787)*, ed. Luther G. Riggs (Gainesville, Fla., 1967), 5, 6, 7, 31, 69.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12, 18, 21-22.

voice of UNION calls; / ... / On you she calls! attend the warning cry: / 'YE LIVE UNITED,  
OR DIVIDED DIE!' <sup>15</sup>

This was the Connecticut Wits' darkest and most intense poetry. But even at the height of the postwar tumult, they remained optimistic that the United States would persevere and even thrive—that it would fulfill its divine mission. The country still had virtuous elites who would guide the people and guard their liberties. And, in the end, the people always chose right; they would come to their senses, defer to the elite, and all would turn out well. Utopia was still on the horizon. Few believed this more fervently than did Joel Barlow.

### **Joel Barlow's Vision**

At Yale's commencement in 1781, Barlow recited a poem about "the affairs of America at large, and the future progress of Society." He proclaimed that America would be a "new empire," "Where rest the future deeds on earth design'd / To raise, to dignity and bless mankind." History unfolded according to a "progressive plan," according to which mankind went from living in a state of nature, to forming tribes, and then nations. For ages, these nations had waged wars against each other; but, with the spread of enlightenment, they would realize that they shared the same interests, so war would gradually disappear. All mankind would come to speak the same language, and form one great, harmonious international empire: "The union'd banner be at last unfurl'd, / And wave triumphant round the accordant world. / Already now commencing glories rise." It would be American leadership that would "heal pale sickness, bid diseases cease, / And sound the tidings of eternal peace."<sup>16</sup>

Barlow's address was an excerpt "from a larger work which the author has by him, unfinished." He worked on it for several more years, and it was finally published in 1787 as *The*

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 22-24, 54, 58, 61, 63.

<sup>16</sup> [Joel Barlow], *A Poem, Spoken at the Public Commencement at Yale College...September 12, 1781* (Hartford, Conn., [1781]), [front matter], 7, 8, 9, 8.

*Vision of Columbus*. It was perhaps the most ambitious of the Wits' poems. Barlow advertised it with a declaration that he would provide "a comprehensive View...of the actual and possible Progress of Government, Commerce, Science, and Religion, from the earliest to the latest Ages, and how these are affected by the Events that are taking Place in America." In fact, America was "the greatest Theatre for the Improvement of human Nature" itself. As befitting a work of such supposed consequence, subscriptions cost the then-hefty sum of three dollars per copy.

Subscribers included Louis XVI (who ordered twenty-five copies), George Washington (twenty copies), and many other luminaries (including Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Paine), and humble citizens (including Litchfield's Reuben Smith, father of Elihu).

Barlow oleagiously dedicated the poem to Louis XVI for having come to the aid of the young republic during the war: "I have the honour to be, / Sire, / YOUR MAJESTY's / Most humble and / Most devoted Servant."<sup>17</sup>

To convey his expectations of America's future grandeur, Barlow used the familiar device of the vision. But, whereas Dwight had devoted only one book of *The Conquest of Canaan* to the angel's vision of the future, Barlow's *entire* poem described such a vision, which an angel revealed to Christopher Columbus in order to ease his anguish over having been ungratefully scorned in his lifetime. Future generations would revere him as "the sage... / Who taught mankind where future empires lay." In fact, his discoveries set in motion a chain of events that would culminate in the creation of history's greatest empire, which would fulfill its divine mission of world redemption.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., [front matter]; *Proposals for Printing by Subscription, The Vision of Columbus, a Poem in Nine Books* ([New York, N.Y.?, 1787?]); see the first, tenth, twelfth, and ninth pages of the list of "Subscribers Names" at the end of the first edition of Joel Barlow, *The Vision of Columbus; a Poem in Nine Books* (Hartford, Conn., 1787).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 25.

As the vision unfolded, Columbus saw a world superior to Europe—one without kings, one where the soil was so fertile that it produced “[u]nbidden harvests” and “[s]pontaneous fruits.” Thanks to these natural blessings, a glorious empire, of unrivalled prosperity, would arise in these lands. It would come to lead the world in learning, science, painting, and literature, and its ships would transmit these advancements, and its values, to the rest of the world: “Explore all climes, enlighten every coast; / Till arts and laws, in one great system bind, / By leagues of peace, the labours of mankind.” Due to Columbus’s discoveries, “The mind shall soar... / And the last stage of civil rule advance.” The vision concluded with a survey of the whole world in this final stage of history, when science, philosophy, and politics would progress to their apogees; when improvements in medicine would augment life expectancy; and when there would arise a “final harmony of all languages,” as well as “a general council of all nations...to establish the political harmony of mankind” (a product of the assimilation of interests that commerce naturally engenders): “Bid the last breath of dire contention cease, / And bind all regions in the leagues of peace, / Bid one great empire, with extensive sway, / Spread with the sun and bound the walks of day, / One centred system, one all-ruling soul, / Live thro’ the parts, and regulate the whole.”<sup>19</sup>

Barlow’s progressive conception of history had religious roots. He wrote, “the unchanging Mind, / Thro’ nature’s range, progressive paths design’d, / ... / Thus beauty, wisdom, power, their parts unroll, / Till full perfection joins the accordant whole.” Progress would continue until “the pure Church should stretch her arms abroad,” and “Till warm benevolence and truth refined, / Pervade the world and harmonize mankind.” Mankind was still “rising out of infancy,” and many trials loomed ahead. “But the general system appears so rational and complete, that it furnishes a new source of satisfaction, in contemplating the apparent dispensations of Heaven.”

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 144-145, 45, 141, 201-203, 203-204, 207, 209-210, 211, 146, 64, 247, 238, 249, 250, 241, 244, 257.

Barlow understood perfection in millennial terms, but his was a sort of secularized millennialism: “It has long been the opinion of the Author, that such a state of peace and happiness as is foretold in scripture and commonly called the millennial period, may be rationally expected to be introduced without a miracle.” Progress was simply the law of history; God had devised these laws just as he did those of nature, and not even He could violate them.<sup>20</sup>

Such progressivism had radical implications. It could divert some toward deism; indeed, that is what happened to Elihu Hubbard Smith, as we shall see. Meanwhile, Barlow maintained his faith in the Gospel. But, upon witnessing firsthand the French Revolution in its early, invigorating years, this onetime staunch Federalist and critic of the mob became a radical. Whereas before he opposed monarchy intellectually but could still genuflect to monarchs like Louis XVI, he came to hate and revile kings, those “prolific monsters,” those “vampires,” who, with the aid of equally tyrannical priests, kept their subjects wallowing in ignorance, “[t]o rob, to scourge, and brutalize mankind.” Barlow, righteously indignant, grew capable of spewing a savage vitriol unlike anything found in the genteel verse of the Connecticut Wits. He promised the kings of Europe that they would meet the same fate as Bernard-René de Launay, the governor of the Bastille; in 1789, a mob brutally killed him, and then sawed off his head and paraded it through the streets on a pike. Barlow still saw the United States as the harbinger of international felicity—the nation anointed by God as the redeemer of mankind; from America, “that rare union, liberty and laws, / Speaks to the reas’ning race; to freedom rise / Like them be equal, and like them be wise.” But now only radical action—the violent demolition of the bonds

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 216, 217, 244n, 242n.

of monarchy and superstition—could midwife the birth of the order of liberty, equality, and fraternity.<sup>21</sup>

Naturally, the radicalized Barlow had to revise *The Vision of Columbus*, with its effusive dedication to Louis XVI. And so, he rewrote his epic as *The Columbiad*, and dedicated it to Robert Fulton. He added invective against vile “[k]ings, priests of God, and ministers of state,” and rescinded his compliments of Louis by giving all credit for France’s intervention in the Revolution to the *philosophes* (“the Gallic sages”), who tricked Louis into helping the Americans by appealing to his interest in weakening Britain, with the supposed aim of establishing freedom in America, so that it would spread to Europe. Barlow also emphasized that the poem was really an argument in favor of republicanism, “the great foundation of public and private happiness, the necessary aliment of future and permanent ameliorations in the condition of human nature.”<sup>22</sup>

It is striking how superficial Barlow’s changes were. Now, it was not an angel, but Hesper, “the guardian Genius of the western continent” (as in *The Anarchiad*), who climbed “the mount of vision” with Columbus, and revealed the future to him in order to ease his anguish. But the vision itself was the same. America was still the anti-Europe, a place where “the joyous swain” tilled the world’s greatest soil, and where “peace and plenty reign.” There, “[f]reedom’s first empire” would arise; “uncontaminated” by Old World tyranny, the people would build a glorious civilization, leading the world in agriculture, commerce, learning, science, painting, and poetry. America was still a “new found Canaan,” a “new world” that would “illuminate the old,” spreading freedom, equality, justice, and truth, and extirpating all evils from the world.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Joel Barlow, “A Letter to Henry Gregoire,” in Joel Barlow and Henri Gregoire, *Correspondence Critical and Literary, on the Subject of The Columbiad, an American Epic Poem of Joel Barlow, Esq.* (Ballston-Spa, N.Y., 1810), 16-24; Joel Barlow, *The Conspiracy of Kings; a Poem: Addressed to the Inhabitants of Europe, from Another Quarter of the World* ([Newburyport, Mass.], 1794), 20, 10, 18, 24, 18-22.

<sup>22</sup> Joel Barlow, *The Columbiad, a Poem* (Philadelphia, Pa. 1807), iii-iv, 275, 245, 247-248, xv.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 20, vi, 46, 43, 150, 304-314, 30, 245.

Barlow still saw this period of felicity as “the great millennial morn.” Tyranny and slavery would disappear. Commerce would “lead to universal peace.” History would progress to this point gradually: “all things in the physical, as well as the moral and intellectual world, are progressive in like manner.” “Man is an infant still,” but he would soon pass through adolescence, and into maturity, when he would “Congratulate himself, and o’er the earth / Firm the full reign of peace predestined at his birth.” Barlow even still praised the “Federal system in America,” and declared it the model for the rest of mankind. In fact, all the nations of the world would join into “a general Congress...assembled to establish the political harmony of mankind.” With all nations joined in “union,” and communicating in “one pure language,” the world would be “one great moral soul.” In this era, man would use “[h]is chymic [*sic*] powers” to cure diseases and prolong life to previously undreamed-of spans; he would even learn to control the forces of nature, including storms and volcanoes; he would “Walk under ocean, ride the buoyant air, / Brew the soft shower, the labor’d land repair, / A fruitful soil o’er sandy deserts spread, / And clothe with culture every mountain’s head.” Once this era of international peace and harmony was established, the millennium would begin.<sup>24</sup>

In short, both as a Federalist and as a radical, Barlow had a progressive conception of history. He confidently predicted “the development of the human mind.” Human nature itself was indefinitely perfectible. Barlow even went so far as to assert that under the tutelage of the Americans, the Indians would acquire arts and “social joys,” and that their complexions would assume “[a] fairer tint and more majestic grace.” All of mankind was still in its youth, but progress was “long and perhaps interminable.” “Who will say that the progress of society will

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 163, 292-299, 137, 250, 339-343, 316, 319, 331, 316, 349, 352, 382, 370, 374, 366, 366-367, 375-377.

stop short in the present stage of its career?” he asked, prophesying that there would be liberty, law, and peace, “in one great universal society.”<sup>25</sup>

Was the theory of progressive, indefinite perfectibility compatible with Federalism after all? Of course, Barlow’s fusion of the two could have been idiosyncratic. In the eighteenth century, politicians, theorists, and polemicists often borrowed from, and cited thinkers whose worldviews differed considerably from their own; antagonists could even cite the exact same source, with each side appropriating a respected philosopher for itself, and denying him to its opponent. The Founding Fathers frequently fused varied—and sometimes even contradictory—ideas, in attempts to reinforce opinions that they had adopted beforehand.<sup>26</sup>

And yet, Barlow’s combination of Federalism and progressivism went much deeper than that. As we have seen, Federalism appealed to different people for different reasons. Some Americans believed that human beings could be improved; they had thus far failed to live up to their promise, but, under the guidance of those who had already reached a higher level of awareness, they could shed their corrupt habits, and progress to a future of unbounded virtue and felicity. These enlightened elites—these virtuous rulers—needed sufficient power to be able to fulfill their duty of tutoring and improving their fellow men. This is what the Federalist’s energetic central government provided them. Of course, a Jeffersonian (as Barlow would become) could also believe that humans were indefinitely perfectible, while favoring less coercive means of spurring progress. But elitists saw energetic government as an ideal means of leading, or dragging, human beings into the new, exalted era. This was, to a great extent, the

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<sup>25</sup> Joel Barlow to the National Institute of France, July 20, 1808, in Barlow and Gregoire, *Correspondence*, 3; Barlow, *Columbiad*, 66, 420n35, 421n35.

<sup>26</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992; orig. pub. 1967), 28; May, *Enlightenment in America*, 8, 159-160; Paul M. Spurlin, *The French Enlightenment in America: Essays on the Times of the Founding Fathers* (Athens, Ga., 1984), 89; Forrest McDonald and Ellen Shapiro McDonald, *Requiem: Variations on Eighteenth-Century Themes* (Lawrence, Kan., 1988), 9; Robert A. Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment, 1750-1820* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), 35-36.

mentality of the Connecticut Wits, as well as that of their admirer and epigone, Elihu Hubbard Smith.

## CHAPTER 6 PERFECTING MANKIND

Elihu Hubbard Smith's Utopia was more ambitious than Thomas More's. Smith wished not simply to improve man's material existence, but to improve human nature itself. Nor was he, like More, ambivalent about the possibility of realizing his ideal order; rather, he was convinced of man's perfectibility; that assumption is evident in the "Utopia." Foreigners had to reside in Utopia for ten years before they could become citizens, because it took that long to purge them of their corrupt habits. Utopia's institutions would purify the citizens' dispositions so thoroughly that, after some time, its laws would be superfluous. The laws mandating attendance at society meetings did not need to be enforced, because all citizens voluntarily attended; "it is probable they [the laws] had some influence, originally, in bringing about that strict attendance which is now common on occasions of this nature." In Catherine Kaplan's words, "Smith's Utopia is...a fantasy...in which choice always leads to consensus,...and an educated and enlightened populace willingly allows itself—because of its very education and enlightenment—to be governed and instructed by an even more educated and enlightened few."<sup>1</sup>

In Smith's circle, "the perfectibility of man" was a frequent topic of conversation. Smith often contemplated its boundaries, and recorded his ideas in his diary and in letters to friends. He believed that in the present stage of history, men were debased; generations of tyranny had left them incurious and avaricious, which presented great obstacles to their future progress. But "[t]he fault is in circumstances," Smith emphasized, "not in man." He denied "the *total depravity* of the human heart." As he explained to the skeptical Theodore Dwight, the doctrine of perfectibility "neither implies that man will ever become perfect—(as God is perfect—) or

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<sup>1</sup> Elihu Hubbard Smith, "The Utopia," *Early American Literature*, 35 (2000), 312, 331n10, 313-314; Catherine Kaplan, "Document: Elihu Hubbard Smith's 'The Institutions of the Republic of Utopia,'" *Early American Literature*, 35 (2000), 302.

that he is not vicious, & weak, & imperfect, *now*.” “Those who admit that man is a perfectible animal,” he wrote, “mean that he is an animal susceptible of all the improvement consistent with human nature.” They did not know what those limits were, but they observed that man had progressed over the ages, and were sure that “he will continue to improve”; so they referred to his potential as “unlimited,” or indefinite. Perfection was “unattainable, in the present state of things, yet is not to man unattainable, and by itself may be nearly approached”; the “sensible” “mind, may be made, all of perfect that the present state of things will admit.”<sup>2</sup>

“Mankind” was still in “it’s infancy,” but, like “an individual,” it was maturing with “the progress of knowledge.” But, in order to reach their full potential, currently incurious and lazy human beings needed the leadership of those who had already attained a higher level of consciousness. They needed to be made aware of their potential, and set on the path of enlightenment. Thus education was the proper means of effecting progress. Smith (following John Locke) “den[ied] the existence of *Innate Ideas*,” or that men were “originally depraved, or pure.” They were actually blank slates on which one could inscribe virtue or vice. This is not to say that everyone was exactly alike; individuals did differ from birth, but “*in degree*,” not “*in kind*”; they possessed “differences of *capacity*”—of their ability to understand and retain information. Assuming all were educated, the intelligent could reach greater heights in knowledge and morality than those “of mean capacity.” But the former could also squander their potential, while the latter could surpass them through education. In short, human nature was malleable. People were not naturally vicious; if they acted viciously it was because society’s institutions had failed them—or worse, corrupted them. Had they received a proper education,

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<sup>2</sup> Sept. 8, 1795, Oct. 14, 1795, Nov. 30, 1795, EHS to Mrs. Tracy, Jan. 18, 1796, June 30, 1796, Nov. 12, 1795, EHS to Theodore Dwight, Nov. 22, 1796, to Theodore Dwight, Nov. 19, 1796, Sept. 9, 1795, in *The Diary of Elihu Hubbard Smith (1771-1798)*, ed. James E. Cronin (Philadelphia, Pa., 1973), 49, 73, 92, 122, 183, 88, 263, 251, 49-50.

they would have instead possessed elevated sentiments. And, indeed, they were not beyond redemption. Reformers were in the process of perfecting society's institutions, for the purpose of perfecting human beings.<sup>3</sup>

Smith, himself, championed a number of causes, including the abolition of slavery. He saw the proslavery apology as “a most disgusting spectacle of ignorance, prejudice, corruption, & villainy.” He was a member of the New-York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves (along with Friendly Club members William Dunlap, William Johnson, Samuel Latham Mitchill, G. M. Woolsey, and W. W. Woolsey), and at one time held the position of secretary, in which capacity he attended the convention of Manumission Societies in Philadelphia in 1796 and 1797. He was also a trustee of the African Free School. When invited to speak before the Society, he decided to discourse “on the best means of civilizing, or making good citizens of, the Negroes.” (He added: “I wish also to write an essay on the best means of civilizing the Indian— & on the true obstacles to their civilization.”) Manumission was not enough; those who had enslaved them had to “ameliorate the mental as well as personal condition of the Blacks.”<sup>4</sup>

In his oration, Smith argued that slavery was a natural outgrowth of the tyranny under which mankind had suffered for most of its history, and that the cure was the same: to spread knowledge “of the enormities which mark the reign of oppression,” as well as of the reasons for the necessity of its extirpation. He then ferociously denounced “the Legislators of America” as “the real upholders of slavery” for recognizing the institution in their laws and Constitution; he accused them of profiting “while thousands of your fellow-beings, children of the same father,

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<sup>3</sup> EHS to Theodore Dwight, Nov. 22, 1796, to Mary S. Mumford, Oct. 4, 1796, to Idea Strong, Oct. 17, 1796, *ibid.*, 257, 263, 226, 232-233.

<sup>4</sup> Feb. 9, 1796, Dec. 26, 1795, Jan. 1-7, 1796, May 2, 1797, *ibid.*, 131, 116, 118-119, 315; [New-York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves, and Protecting Such of Them as Have Been, or May Be Liberated], *The Constitution of the New-York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves, and Protecting Such of Them as Have Been, or May Be Liberated. Revised, October, 1796* (New York, N.Y., 1796), 18; Aug. 4, 1797, Apr. 30, 1798, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 341, 442.

and inheritors of the same destiny, eat the bitter bread of slavery, writhe under the lash of cruelty, and sink into the untimely grave amid the taunts of oppression!—Amen! so be it! and so shall be the retribution.” Smith emphasized that blacks had the same capacities as whites; their “degraded condition” was not the result of any inherent deficiencies, but of their enslavement. “They, like all men else, are the creatures of education, of example, of circumstances, of external impressions.” Educate them, and they shall be virtuous. The existence of black artisans, teachers, and preachers showed the true potential of the race. Under the tutelage of the paternalistic white abolitionists, their minds, manners, and morals would gradually improve; in fact, they had already begun to do so.<sup>5</sup>

Smith’s jeremiad was a restatement of arguments that Timothy Dwight had already made. In *Greenfield Hill*, he had argued that blacks had a greater propensity for vice because slavery—“laurel of the Infernal mind, / Proud Satan’s triumph over lost mankind!”—had destroyed their virtue. He wrote, “The black children are generally sprightly and ingenious, until they become conscious of their slavery.... From that time, they usually sink into stupidity, or give themselves up to vice.” Nevertheless, it was evident that they had natural potential, since many had not allowed inhuman slavery to destroy their “ingenuity or amiableness.” Years later, Dwight stressed that whites, whose ancestors had committed the sin of enslaving their ancestors, had a “duty” to care for and educate blacks. A failure to pay this debt would make blacks “blots and burdens upon society: not because they are weaker, or worse, by nature, than we are; but because they are destitute of the advantages, which, under God, raise us above their miserable level.” But if educated and led to religion, they would become “blessings” to society. Dwight lauded

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<sup>5</sup> E. H. Smith, *A Discourse, Delivered April 11, 1798, at the Request of and before the New-York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves...* (New York, N.Y., 1798), 8-10, 6, 25-26, 28, 28-29.

Connecticut's Female Charitable Societies for establishing a school "for *the benefit of the female children of the blacks.*"<sup>6</sup>

Such sentiments were by no means aberrant among the Federalists. John Jay and Alexander Hamilton were members of New York's Manumission Society, and John Trumbull, Noah Webster, Uriah Tracy, and Timothy and Theodore Dwight were members of the short-lived (and ineffectual and self-congratulatory) Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom. Other prominent Federalists, like Gouverneur Morris, Timothy Pickering, and Rufus King, also opposed slavery. The Federalists, moreover, exerted a strong influence on nineteenth-century abolitionists, many of whom were the sons of Federalists. William Lloyd Garrison was influenced by the abolitionism of Pickering and the rhetoric of Fisher Ames, and was himself a Federalist as a young man.<sup>7</sup>

Smith's philanthropy went much further than that of most of his fellow Federalists. Like Francis Bacon, he believed that science could rid the world of all the terrors that had plagued mankind since its birth. He foresaw a world in which the diffusion of knowledge had so highly elevated men's dispositions that all pursued scientific truth together, in "one vast brotherhood," across the globe. But not even this was Smith's most utopian ambition. His great faith in

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<sup>6</sup> Timothy Dwight, *Greenfield Hill: A Poem, in Seven Parts...* (New York, N.Y., 1794), 37-38, 173n221, 173n237; Timothy Dwight, *The Charitable Blessed. A Sermon, Preached in the First Church in New-Haven, August 8, 1810* ([New Haven, Conn.], 1810), 22, 20.

<sup>7</sup> James E. Cronin, "Introduction," in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 13; Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (Cambridge, Eng., 1985), 138; James D. Essig, "Connecticut Ministers and Slavery, 1790-1795," *Journal of American Studies*, 15 (1981), 27-44; Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (New York, N.Y., 1993), 318, 626, 662, 656; James M. Banner, Jr., *To the Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815* (New York, N.Y., 1970), 104-109; Linda K. Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1970), ch. 2, p. 64; Marc M. Arkin, "The Federalist Trope: Power and Passion in Abolitionist Rhetoric," *Journal of American History*, 88 (2001), 75-98. For an argument that the paternalistic Federalists were at the antislavery forefront, see Paul Finkelman, "The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Federalism," in Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, eds., *Federalists Reconsidered* (Charlottesville, Va., 1998), 135-156. For arguments that present the Federalists as cynical racists and portray the Republicans as the true opponents of slavery, see David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997), 252-253; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, vol. 1: *The Crisis of the New Order, 1787-1815* (New York, N.Y., 2007, orig. pub. 2005), 183, 219.

science led him to speculate that man could conquer disease, and even death itself. When one of his friends apparently put “mind over matter” and cured her cold by ignoring it, Smith asked himself, “If we have power to banish, subdue, or destroy, pain, or disease, in one instance, why not in a second, in a third, & so on forever? Who shall say to the intellectual tide, ‘thus far shalt thou go, & no farther’?”<sup>8</sup>

Could human beings even eradicate death itself? In 1796, Smith joined New York’s Humane Society, which was founded in 1794 (the trustees included Smith’s friend—and fellow Federalist—William Dunlap, and the Republican politician DeWitt Clinton) for the purpose of improving the state of medicine, with the ultimate aim of discovering how to resuscitate the dead. New York was by no means the first city to have such an institution. The New York Republican Tunis Wortman (an acquaintance of Smith’s) praised Dr. William Hawes’s “Humane Society in England” as “the ‘Parent of all the Humane Societies established in Great Britain, and in many other parts of Europe as well as in America.’” Wortman claimed that “it has rescued from a ‘floating grave’ ...between two and three thousand individuals.” Benjamin Rush also believed that “medicine...has penetrated the deep and gloomy abyss of death, and acquired fresh honors in his cold embraces.—Witness the many hundred people, who have lately been brought back to life, by the successful efforts of the humane societies, which are now established in many parts of Europe, and in some parts of America.” Alas, the New York Humane Society, Wortman lamented, “has not received support, or been the object of adequate encouragement.” Smith attended three meetings, all of which were cancelled because not enough members showed up: “Evening wasted, for the last time, I am resolved, at what should have been a meeting of the Humane Society.” But he still maintained the hope that man could conquer death: “If I may

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<sup>8</sup> E. H. Smith, “Epistle to the Author of the Botanic Garden,” in [Erasmus Darwin], *The Botanic Garden. A Poem, in Two Parts...*, [ed. Elihu Hubbard Smith] (New York, N.Y., 1798), [front matter]; Oct. 17, 1795, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 74.

make new inroads into the empire of death; if I may wrest from him his already predestined victims; & hem him in, within his earthly bounds; I may indeed exult.”<sup>9</sup>

### Perfectibility in the Late Eighteenth Century

In the late eighteenth century, such inflated expectations were not uncommon. Many were convinced that man was perfectible, and his progress boundless. As we have seen, Rush believed that education could refine the moral faculty, to the point that men would become as virtuous as angels, or even “GOD himself.” The improvement of the mind would lead to the termination of war, the curing of all diseases, and the prolongation of life. The New York of Smith’s time was rife with such hopes.<sup>10</sup>

On any given Fourth of July, a New Yorker might happen across a fiery secular sermon delivered by Elihu Palmer—a Connecticut-born, would-be-minister-turned-radical, and founder of the Deistical Society of New York. Palmer, blinded by yellow fever, was a progressive Tiresias, prophesying the melioration of the human condition, foreseeing “an indefinite extent of human felicity.” Man was naturally good, he said, but “the royal butchers and ecclesiastical impostors of the world” had debased him. Now, however, that the American and French Revolutions had begun the liberation “of the human mind,” “the progressive improvement of the human species” was assured. Progress was the result of “the free exercise of the mental faculties in the discovery, disclosure, and propagation of important truths”; it could not occur without a free press, which tyrants at home and abroad had threatened. Tyrants had always sought to keep

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<sup>9</sup> Cronin, “Introduction,” *ibid.*, 15; Tunis Wortman, *An Oration on the Influence of Social Institution upon Human Morals and Happiness, Delivered before the Tammany Society, at Their Anniversary, on the Twelfth of May, 1796* (New York, N.Y., 1796), 16n; for Smith’s encounters with Wortman, see Nov. 23, 1796, Dec. 20, 1796, Dec. 30, 1796, Feb 9, 1797, Mar. 5, 1797, EHS to Joseph Dennie Junr., June 18, 1797, Nov. 27, 1797, Jan. 15, 1798, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 266, 273, 286, 289, 298, 327, 394, 419. Benjamin Rush, *An Oration, Delivered before the American Philosophical Society...on the 27th of February, 1786; Containing an Enquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1786), 36; Wortman, *Oration on the Influence*, 16n; Mar. 16, 1796, May 18, 1796, May 23, 1796, June 11, 1796, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 139-140, 168, 169, 176.

<sup>10</sup> Rush, *Oration, Delivered before the American Philosophical Society*, 37.

mankind in ignorance; but this time, men had tasted liberty, and would not allow themselves to be enslaved again. Palmer asserted that their minds would continue to progress, until war would disappear, and all mankind would be free, equal, virtuous, and thus happy.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, Tunis Wortman saw evidence of “the progression of the human mind” in the advancement of “knowledge...to a degree of perfection that has exceeded the hopes of the most sanguine and enthusiastic visionary.... It has diffused its invigorating influence throughout every department of social life, and exalted the human character to a state of splendid greatness and perfectibility, that no former age has ever yet realised or experienced.” He agreed with William Godwin’s argument that the human mind was malleable; corrupt “political establishments” had made men vicious, but republicanism would foster virtue, and bring mankind to “that ultimate state of perfection of which the human character is susceptible.” All human endeavors—philosophy, the arts, the sciences—would progress, and war and oppression would disappear. “[M]an will continue to make accelerated advances in wisdom and in virtue until he hath rendered himself the vanquisher of misery and vice, and until *‘Mind hath become omnipotent over matter.’*” Wortman stressed that “[t]his celebrated remark” of Benjamin Franklin’s was not “visionary,” and “whoever has attended to the influence of the discoveries that have already been made in the various departments of human science, will find the observation to be founded in solid reflection.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Gary B. Nash, “The American Clergy and the French Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, 22 (1965), 401-402; Elihu Palmer, *An Enquiry Relative to the Moral & Political Improvement of the Human Species. An Oration, Delivered in the City of New-York on the Fourth of July, Being the Twenty-First Anniversary of American Independence* (New York, N.Y., 1797), 3, 6, 9, 14, 15; Elihu Palmer, *The Political Happiness of Nations; an Oration. Delivered at the City of New-York, on the Fourth July [sic], Twenty-Fourth Anniversary of American Independence* ([New York, N.Y.?, 1800?]), 9-15, 21-22; Palmer, *Enquiry Relative to the Moral & Political Improvement*, 30-32, 34.

<sup>12</sup> Wortman, *Oration on the Influence*, 3, 8, 4, 24, 25, 26-27, 27n. In a letter to Joseph Priestley, Franklin wrote, “It is impossible to imagine the heights to which may be carried, in a thousand years, the power of mind over matter.... [A]ll diseases may by sure means be prevented or cured, not excepting that of old age, and our lives lengthened at pleasure even beyond the antediluvian standard. O that mortal science were in a fair way of improvement, that men

As these remarks make clear, the ideology of progress was not simply the belief that humans would augment their knowledge, and effect improvements in material society—even John Adams believed “in the probable improvability and improvement, the ameliorability and amelioration in human affairs.” The progressivists went much, much further. They believed that human nature itself would improve, that men would abandon superstition in favor of reason, and selfishness in favor of virtue. Human dispositions would improve; people would do good deeds solely because they were right, not because they had something to gain. Not everyone thought this possible; Adams said that he “never could understand the doctrine of the perfectibility of the human mind,” and he compared it to the belief “that a Brahmin, by certain studies for a certain time pursued, and by certain ceremonies a certain number of times repeated, becomes omniscient and almighty.”<sup>13</sup>

One can discern the progressivists’ radical expectations from the title of a famous work by the Marquis de Condorcet: *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795). The realists of the eighteenth century denounced Condorcet as a utopian (“this visionary,” Adams called him) for his faith “that the perfectibility of man is truly indefinite,” and “has no other limit than the duration of the globe upon which nature has cast us.” Progress was inevitable; it was, in fact, the law of history. Condorcet believed that men were good by nature, but that institutions had corrupted them. Kings and priests had kept them living in ignorance because only then could they dominate them. But knowledge was spreading (thanks largely to the rise of printing), and virtue, liberty, and equality would spread with it, never again to

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would cease to be wolves to one another, and that human beings would at length learn what they now improperly call humanity”; qtd. in Vernon Louis Parrington, Jr., *American Dreams: A Study of American Utopias* (New York, N.Y., 1964), 217.

<sup>13</sup> John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, July 16, 1814, in *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States...*, 10 vols., ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston, Mass., 1856), 10:101; Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (New York, N.Y., 2002; orig. pub. 1987), 15-17; for more on Adams’s views on progressivism, see Zoltán Haraszti, [ed.], *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952).

disappear. Reason would supplant “habit, ancient customs, and convention” as the source of human actions, which would stem from pure and benevolent, rather than self-interested, motives. Mankind was approaching what Condorcet called “the tenth stage” of history, when international liberation and the development of “a universal language” would lead to a rapid expansion of knowledge, resulting in the invention of labor-saving technology, increasing agricultural productivity and a concomitantly increasing population, and vast improvements in public health. All of this, plus the provision of pensions for widows, orphans, and the aged, and the establishment of the equality of the sexes, would considerably augment living standards. Across the world, people would identify “the interests of each with the interests of all,” and the nations would form “permanent confederations” and trade peacefully with each other. The end of disease, crime, and war would increase life expectancy; though he considered immortality impossible, Condorcet asked, “Would it be absurd...to suppose...that the day will come when death will be due only to extraordinary accidents or to the decay of the vital forces, and that ultimately the average span between birth and decay will have no assignable value?”<sup>14</sup>

Elihu Hubbard Smith read (and translated, as a personal exercise) Condorcet’s *Sketch* over several months in 1795 and 1796, and when he finished, he wrote that he had done so “with great pleasure.” Smith read and esteemed the major progressivist thinkers of the late eighteenth century, including Mary Wollstonecraft (whom he considered an “admirable woman”) and her spouse William Godwin.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 243; Antoine-Nicolas de Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, trans. June Barraclough (Westport, Conn., 1979), 3-4, 9, 193, 17-18, 34, 10, 24, 100 102, 169, 97, 52-53, 192, 176-178, 197, 199, 184-188 181, 192, 188, 192, 194, 199-200. For more on Condorcet as a utopian, see Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 487-518.

<sup>15</sup> Sept. 4, 7, 19, 29, 30, 1795, Oct. 2, 3, 5-10, 12, 13, 15-17, 20, 1795, Feb. 9, 1796, Nov. 6, 1795, EHS to Mrs. Tracy, Aug. 31, 1796, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 43, 48, 59, 63-75, 131, 86, 210.

## William Godwin and Timothy Dwight

That Godwin was perhaps Smith's favorite philosopher is an interesting paradox, for Godwin was the founding father of anarchism, but Smith, as a staunch Federalist, should have reviled anarchy—and indeed he did. And yet, before Smith had even read Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793, 1795, 1798), his friends had told him that his “opinions...resemble, in many respects, those therein contained.” Upon reading snippets, Smith wrote that though Godwin's system was imperfect, “it approaches nearer to truth, than any preceeding [*sic*] system, with which I am acquainted.” “[N]o author, as far as I know,” he told Theodore Dwight, “has more accurately pointed out what are our duties, more satisfactorily explained the reasons why they are so, or more persuasively exhorted those who love virtue to practice it unceasingly. Benevolence, Justice, Truth, are no where [*sic*] more ably vindicated & inforced [*sic*].” Smith disagreed with Godwin's ideas on “Marriage and Longevity,” and, when he finally read the long work in its entirety, he found Godwin's execration of all governmental authority—even an American-style president, bicameral legislature, and constitution—to be “most exceptionable,” since no one—not even Americans—had yet advanced far enough to sustain a decentralized, direct democracy of the sort that Godwin favored.<sup>16</sup>

Godwin opposed government because it was founded on force. Like all other progressivists, he believed that men were fundamentally good; they “never choose evil as apprehended to be evil.” Governments had corrupted human nature by fostering ignorance; individuals had grown accustomed to bending to its will, and they had thus lost the habit of thinking for themselves. But it was only through the use of one's own reason that one could

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<sup>16</sup> Sept. 4, 1795, EHS to Mrs. Tracy, Jan. 18, 1796, to Theodore Dwight, Nov. 19, 1796, Nov. 2, 1796, *ibid.*, 46, 124, 249-250, 242; William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice: And Its Influence on Modern Morals and Happiness*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth, Eng., 1976), bk. 5, chs. 9, 21, bk. 6, ch. 7; pp. 691, 486, 488-489, 610; June 12, 20, 1797, EHS to Idea Strong, Oct. 21, 1797, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 325, 327, 382.

acquire knowledge, which was the source of virtue, which was in turn the source of happiness. Thus, for the sake of society's progressive improvement, men had to create "sphere[s] of discretion," free of all obstructions to the individual's exercise of his own reason. These obstructions included anything that influenced his judgment or made his mind dependent on others: political and religious authority (even government education), cohabitation and marriage, and an unequal distribution of wealth. Godwin dreamed of a time when the disappearance of ignorance would effect the "euthanasia of government."<sup>17</sup>

Much of this was incompatible with Smith's philosophy, since he believed in the necessity of law and government. Nevertheless, he considered Godwin's *Political Justice* to be an "excellent work," and he thought highly enough of it to make it fit his own worldview so that he could enjoy it in good conscience, by wishfully claiming that the end result of Godwin's system was not anarchy, but "a duely [*sic*] organized Government." But Godwin's and Smith's ideas really did coincide in four important areas: virtue, property, education, and elitism.<sup>18</sup>

Godwin wished to remove all hindrances to the individual's development of his reason, but he was not an individualist as we understand the concept. Individuals were to be left free precisely so that they could discern and promote the common good. Once someone discovered truth, he had to share his knowledge with his neighbors. If they erred, he had a duty to remonstrate with them sincerely, for the sake of their improvement. The individual also had to be benevolent; he had to help his needy neighbors. Godwin argued that "[w]e have in reality nothing that is strictly speaking our own"; people held property merely "as a trust," and they had a "duty" to share it with their needy fellows. He emphasized that the equalization of property had to be voluntary rather than coercive. And he had faith that with the elimination of corruptive

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<sup>17</sup> Godwin, *Political Justice*, ed. Kramnick, pp. 155, 247-248, 239; bk. 4, ch. 5, bk. 1, bk. 5, chs. 2-13, bk. 6, chs. 2, 8; pp. 198, 761, 248.

<sup>18</sup> Oct. 28, 1797, June 20, 1797, May 4, 1798, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 384, 327, 443.

sociopolitical institutions, men would become so virtuous that they, of their own accord, would share their possessions with their neighbors.<sup>19</sup>

Godwin did not see this as naïve, because he firmly believed that “[m]an is a rational being.” Although man had yet to free himself from the fetters of authority and custom, education would rekindle his reason. Godwin saw children as “a sort of raw material put into our hands, a ductile and yielding substance,” which could be deformed by vice or straightened by virtue. It was imperative that society’s “liberally educated and reflecting members” serve as the people’s “guides and instructors,” teaching them how to think for themselves, so that they could sustain a stateless society. Godwin was an elitist who dreamed of an era in which men no longer needed elites. His elitism led him to abjure revolution in favor of gradual reform. Independent and rational inquiry was impossible under mob rule. “Revolutions are the produce of passion, not of sober and tranquil reason.” They fomented chaos and always ended in tyranny, and served only to undermine the progress of man. Society could not progress beyond the current “state of the public mind”; if public opinion did not accept a form of government—no matter how perfect it was in theory—it was unsustainable; the system would collapse into a premature anarchy, violent and short-lived. In these beliefs—the malleability of the young, the need for virtuous elites to guide the people, the desirability of orderly progress rather than bloody revolution, and opinion rather than force as the proper basis of government—Godwin and Smith were virtually identical.<sup>20</sup>

Yet some interesting questions remain. If Smith’s philosophy resembled Godwin’s before he had even read *Political Justice*, where did his ideas come from? Before he was familiar with

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<sup>19</sup> Godwin, *Political Justice*, ed. Kramnick, pp. 194-195; bk. 4, ch. 6; pp. 194, 174-175, 217; bk. 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141, 112, 152-153, 253, 288-289, 252; bk. 4, ch. 2; p. 250. See also Mar. 5, 1797, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 299; and Catherine O’Donnell Kaplan, *Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forums of Citizenship* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2008), 30-31.

Godwin, Timothy Dwight had had the greatest influence on him, and Smith continued to revere Dwight after he had read Godwin. On the surface, this is very paradoxical. After all, Dwight was a conservative Calvinist who believed that men were depraved, and that they should defer to their wise rulers and clergymen, whereas Godwin was a radical atheist who believed that men were naturally good, and that there should be no restraints—political, religious, or social—on the operation of each individual’s reason. How did Smith reconcile the two?

In defending Godwin to Theodore Dwight, Smith boldly asserted that Godwin’s “metaphysics are those of Mr. Locke & President Edwards. If they are visionary, Godwin must be confest [*sic*] to be so.” Indeed, in *Political Justice*, Godwin cited Jonathan Edwards, who was the grandfather of Timothy and Theodore Dwight. But Smith went even further. He paraphrased from *The True Means of Establishing Public Happiness*: “‘Dr. Dwight says that man may easily become an angel, as continue a brute’—There is no difference between him & Godwin, but that one calls in the aid of religion, & the other rests on morality. In every other point of view, they agree. Both admit that man *may* become perfect as man—they only differ as to the means. With the general doctrine, therefore, you can not [*sic*] find fault.” In a second draft of this letter, he quoted Dwight in full: “Man may as easily be a Saint, as a Savage; and Nations as easily enlightened with Millennial glory, as overcast with the midnight of Gothicism. All that is necessary, on the part of man, is to bring the subject home to his heart, to feel its inestimable importance, to realize its practicability, and to make it the chief aim of his fixed endeavours.” Smith then reiterated: “Mr. Godwin himself could not have been more explicit, or wish for other terms of expression. The general doctrine of these two excellent and virtuous men is the same.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> EHS to Theodore Dwight, Nov. 19, 1796, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 250; Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America’s Millennial Role* (Chicago, Ill., 1968), 107; EHS to Theodore Dwight, Nov. 19, 1796,

This was an exaggeration, but it was not wishful thinking. Smith's insight that Dwight's and Godwin's philosophies were similar has much merit, and pursuing its implications can help us understand the nature of the doctrine of perfectibility. We have already seen how Dwight believed that elites had a duty to promote virtue among the people; in this regard, he superficially resembled Godwin. But other similarities were far more profound. Dwight's belief that men could be either saints or savages was founded on the assumption that education could successfully inculcate virtue; it was "a kind of second creation," which, by properly shaping the mind, could mitigate man's depravity. In 1772, Dwight, adumbrating Godwin, said, "The infant mind is pliant and ductile, like wax, you may mould it to any form; you may stamp a fair or deformed impression upon it; error or knowledge, indolence or industry, virtue or vice." Children's bad habits were the result not of innate and ineluctable viciousness, but of bad parenting. Education, he later wrote, could render any child "amiable and worthy."<sup>22</sup>

In the 1770s, Dwight even went so far as to proclaim that men had long been blinded by prejudice, but that with the ascendance of "REASON, the supreme law of our nature,...[v]ice will appear as it is; a violation of our nature, and a fall from its true dignity: virtue its highest ornament and perfection." He criticized "that immoveable biass [*sic*], a fondness for the customs of our fathers." Men had to shed "the shackles of custom, and the chains of authority, and claim the privilege of thinking for themselves." If that seemed very unlike Dwight, a decade later, he still "ardently hoped...that so much independence of mind will be assumed by us, as to induce us to shake off these rusty shackles, examine things on the plane of nature and evidence, and laugh at the grey-bearded decisions of doting authority." He identified prejudice and suppressive

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in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 251; Timothy Dwight, *The True Means of Establishing Public Happiness. A Sermon, Delivered on the 7th of July, 1795, before the Connecticut Society of Cincinnati...* (New Haven, Conn., [1795]), 38; EHS to Theodore Dwight, Nov. 22, 1796, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 263.

<sup>22</sup> [Timothy Dwight?], *An Essay on Education; Delivered at the Public Commencement, at Yale-College, in New-Haven, September 9th, 1772* (New Haven, Conn., 1772), 3, 5-6; Dwight, *Greenfield Hill*, 179n451.

custom with Europe, which was the home “[o]f grey-beard systems” and priestly superstition. Dwight hated “Monkish barbarism” as an anti-Catholic Protestant, whereas Godwin did so as an atheistic *philosophe*. But Godwin could have agreed with Dwight’s argument that “established custom” was to blame for the pervasiveness of capital punishment in Britain, and for the widespread illusion that “Arms and Wealth,” rather than virtue, were the “primary means of continuing national happiness.”<sup>23</sup>

Dwight despised the use of force to control the people just as much as Godwin did. He believed that tyrants had abused education, using it as a tool of oppression rather than as a means “of improving the mass of men.” “The Object was not to prepare subjects by information, happiness, and virtue, to understand, to love, and to preserve their state; but to make them quiet in that state, whether disposed, or indisposed.” Like Godwin, Dwight held that government should be based on opinion, or “persuasion,” rather than “force.” He did not advocate a stateless society, but he believed that if the citizens agreed to the state’s wise measures, “[t]hey may safely be governed by a milder policy, and cannot but be better judges of the desirableness of such policy.... Hence, such citizens may probably be governed by justice, and Common-sense; and will not necessitate the adoption of force and oppression, or the employment of circumvention and statecraft.” Dwight claimed that a virtuous citizenry would preclude the necessity of legislation (“the mere expression of the public will would execute itself”), and of law enforcement. Virtuous citizens would not commit crimes; nor would they wage war. Constitutions and their checks and balances would not be needed because virtuous magistrates

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<sup>23</sup> [Dwight?], *Essay on Education*, 7; [Timothy Dwight], *A Valedictory Address to the Young Gentlemen, Who Commenced Bachelors of Arts, at Yale-College, July 25th. 1776* (New Haven, Conn., [1776]), 19, 12; “rusty shackles” quote is in Kaplan, *Men of Letters*, 65; Dwight, *Greenfield Hill*, 18; [Timothy Dwight], *A Sermon, Preached at Northampton, on the Twenty-Eighth of November, 1781: Occasioned by the Capture of the British Army, under the Command of Earl Cornwallis* (Hartford, Conn., [1781]), 6; Dwight, *Greenfield Hill*, 180n378; Dwight, *True Means*, 6.

would never abuse the people. In Connecticut, “the real power of law itself lies in the fact, that it is actually, and not in pretence only, the public will.” Since its government was based on choice, it was the happiest society that ever existed. But the United States as a whole was the first “empire founded on the only just basis, the free and general choice of its inhabitants. All others were founded in conquest and blood.”<sup>24</sup>

The Revolution had made “freedom of enquiry” possible; “the mind, in a stage of society most friendly to genius, and with all human advantages at the commencement of its progress, is invited, is charmed, to venture far in every path of science and refinement.” The mind, freed from the bonds of despotism and superstition, would beget not only “a new æra in the progress of science,” but also “new, improving, and enrapturing ideas of the human nature and duty, the Divine providence and perfections.” Men would once and for all abandon vice for virtue, and selfishness for benevolence. Dwight condemned the theory that the pursuit of self-interest would promote the common good, and he vehemently denied that benevolence was “a fairy-land chimera.” Only if each person loved his neighbor as himself would society find happiness. Experience proved that men *were* capable of becoming virtuous. For instance, Dwight eulogized the late governor of Connecticut, Jonathan Trumbull, as a “*perfect man*,” who, “in scriptural language, is the same person with *the upright*.” Although absolute perfection was unattainable, “although no child of *Adam* is perfect on this side of the grave, there are many who are in some degree possessed of those characteristics, which, when unmixed and unalloyed, constitute perfection.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 9, 27, 12, 13; Dwight, *Greenfield Hill*, 176n553; Dwight, *True Means*, 16, 33; Timothy Dwight, *A Discourse Occasioned by the Death of His Excellency Jonathan Trumbull, Esq., Governor of the State of Connecticut...* (New Haven, Conn., 1809), 17, 18; Dwight, *Greenfield Hill*, 161, 181n413-416.

<sup>25</sup> [Dwight], *Sermon, Preached at Northampton*, 33-34, 14, 17; Timothy Dwight, *Virtuous Rulers a National Blessing. A Sermon, Preached at the General Election, May 12th, 1791* (Hartford, Conn., 1791), 15; Dwight, *True Means*, 15, 31-32; Dwight, *Discourse Occasioned by the Death of... Jonathan Trumbull*, 3, 4.

According to Dwight, not only individuals, but also the entire world, could advance toward perfection. In 1776, he exulted that the American “empire is commencing, at a period, when every species of knowledge, natural and moral, is arrived to a state of perfection, which the world never before saw.” Since the beginning of civilization, “the glory of empire has been progressive, the last constantly outshining those which were before it.” And it was in the United States that “the progress of temporal things towards perfection will undoubtedly be finished. Here human greatness will find a period.” Five years later, he repeated that the “progress of earthly things towards perfection...will one day finish the preparation for the commencement of the Millennium glory and happiness.” Progress was the process of the fulfillment of the Lord’s “great design”; it “prepar[ed] the way for the commencement of that moral perfection, which is the immediate offspring of the Spirit of God.” Dwight found evidence for this belief “in the progress of knowledge. The present century,” he proclaimed, “is the most enlightened the world ever saw. As the views of the mind enlarge[,] its prejudices of many kinds deminish [sic].” In short, Dwight had a millennial conception of perfectibility.<sup>26</sup>

Both Dwight and Godwin saw history as progressive. They differed in that the former saw mankind progressing to the millennium, while the latter prophesied the deliquescence of the state; moreover, in Dwight’s vision, unlike in Godwin’s, earthly progress was definite. But one would err in saying that they also differed because Dwight’s vision was religious, while Godwin’s was not. It is true that Godwin was an atheist when he wrote *Political Justice*; but that did not make his vision any less religious. In fact, Godwin came from a family of dissenting ministers, and was himself a minister—until he read the *philosophes* in the 1780s. Though he

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<sup>26</sup> [Dwight], *Valedictory Address*, 12, 13; [Dwight], *Sermon, Preached at Northampton*, 7, 31.

returned to religion as an old man, for decades he was an atheist. But he never really lost his faith; he merely sublimated his faith in God into a powerful faith in reason.<sup>27</sup>

Godwin's rationalism was so totalistic as to seem cold and soulless. He urged his readers to "reflect upon the moral concerns of mankind...as we are accustomed to do upon the truths of geometry." He defined "justice" as "that impartial treatment of every man in matters that relate to his happiness." No one—not even one's parents or spouse—could receive special treatment; if one had to choose between rescuing from a fire one's father or an important philosopher, the only rational choice would be to save the latter, since his survival was more important to the happiness of mankind. "Reason," Godwin proclaimed, "is omnipotent." Citing Jonathan Edwards, Godwin argued that man did not have free will. How could he? If he did, he would be able to reject the truth (the secular version of God's grace) once it was presented to him. But reason was so powerful, that this was impossible—he had no choice but to accept the truth. From these assumptions, it followed that criminals acted out of ignorance. If anyone had reasoned with them, they would not have become criminals. The criminal was "upon a par with the child who beats the table." To punish him was therefore cruel and unjust; remonstrance was the only just remedy. Godwin had such great faith in remonstrance that he believed that one could—or rather, would—reason an assailant into desisting in the very midst of an attack.<sup>28</sup>

In fact, with the establishment of the "empire of reason"—Godwin's secular millennium—there would even be little need to remonstrate, because there would be no crime. Government was the cause of vice, so without government, there would be no vice. With the disappearance of government, man's "blind confidence" in the opinions of others would give way to "an unforced concurrence of all in promoting the general welfare." All people would choose to

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<sup>27</sup> Isaac Kramnick, "Introduction," in Godwin, *Political Justice*, ed. Kramnick, 9, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Godwin, *Political Justice*, ed. Kramnick, pp. 359, 169, 169-170, 644, 171n, 348; bk. 4, ch. 7; pp. 356-357, 635, 356-357, 554, 642-643.

work, and with the disappearance of the leisure class, each person would have to work only “half an hour *per diem*” in order to provide for the needs of all, leaving the rest of the day free for intellectual pursuits. The progressive development of the mind would eventually allow humans to realize Franklin’s dream of placing mind over matter. Bacon and Condorcet had speculated that humans would substantially prolong life expectancy, but they “rest[ed] their hopes rather upon the growing perfection of art than...upon the immediate and unavoidable operation of an improved intellect.” Godwin believed that the mind would become so powerful that humans would be able to cure disease by thought alone. They would be able to control currently involuntary motions (like the circulation of blood), and maintain permanently cheerful dispositions, thus postponing aging. The eradication of disease and war would progressively increase life expectancy to the point that the world would be filled to capacity, and humans would “cease to propagate. The whole will be a people of men, and not of children. Generation will not succeed generation, nor truth have, in a certain degree, to recommence her career every thirty years.”<sup>29</sup>

“Need I remind you,” Dwight once asked, “that it is a peculiar mark of the millennial period, that human life shall be lengthened, and that the child shall die an hundred years old?” Godwin, of course, went much further than Dwight did. But the roots of progressivism were still religious. Several scholars have noticed parallels between millennialism and the ideology of progress, and others—most notably Ernest Lee Tuveson—have argued that the ideology of progress arose in the eighteenth century, when millennialism underwent “temporalization,” or

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 554, 248, 753, 770, 771n, 771-773, 774-777, 776.

secularization, a process that shattered ideas—the Chain of Being and the cyclical conception of history—that had dominated the Western mind for thousands of years.<sup>30</sup>

Ministers-turned-progressivist deists and atheists—Elihu Palmer and William Godwin, for instance—embodied the process of temporalization. Their secular conceptions of the world nonetheless retained vestiges of their splintered faiths. As Benjamin Rush—a devout Christian and progressivist—once said, “The boasted morality of the Deists, is I believe, in most cases, the offspring of habits, produced originally by the principles and precepts of christianity.” Elihu Hubbard Smith also underwent temporalization in microcosm. As he explained to Theodore Dwight, upon attending Timothy Dwight’s Greenfield Hill Academy, he became a millennialist. Man’s gradual advancement over the preceding few centuries led him to believe

that, the Millennium must be expected, from natural causes, to take place in the year 2000. By natural causes? How was this reconcileable [*sic*] with Christianity? You will see that I had overrun belief in striving to support it. If natural causes were sufficient—if man could improve his condition, by his own efforts, so as to live free from moral & physical suffering—where was the necessity for superhuman assistance? See here—the origin of my belief in the *perfectibility of man*.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> [Dwight], *Valedictory Address*, 18. The following drew parallels between millennialism and progressivism: Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York, N.Y., 1976), 154; Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 92-93; J. F. C. Harrison, “Millennium and Utopia,” in Peter Alexander and Roger Gill, eds., *Utopias* (LaSalle, Ill., 1984), 64-66; Ned C. Landsman, *From Colonials to Provincials: American Thought and Culture, 1680-1760* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1997), 60. The following argued that progressivism had religious origins: Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress* (Berkeley, Calif., 1949); Mircea Eliade, “Paradise and Utopia: Mythical Geography and Eschatology,” in Frank E. Manuel, ed., *Utopias and Utopian Thought* (Boston, Mass., 1966), 262, 268; Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation*, 34, 39, 58. For “temporalization,” see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964; orig. pub. 1936), ch. 9; Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York, N.Y., 2004), 11, 17. For progress replacing the cyclical conception of history, see Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, ch. 18; Koselleck, *Futures Past*, pt. 1. For critiques of the idea of progress as the law of history, see Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York, N.Y., 1969), 253-264; Jean-Francois Lyotard, “Universal History and Cultural Differences,” and “The Sign of History,” in Andrew Benjamin, ed., *The Lyotard Reader* (Oxford, Eng., 1989), 314-323, 393-411; Donald R. Kelley, *Faces of History: From Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven, Conn., 1998), 160.

<sup>31</sup> Rush, *Oration, Delivered before the American Philosophical Society*, 28-29; EHS to Theodore Dwight, Nov. 19, 1796, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 249.

## **Two Progressivist Federalists: Charles Chauncey, Jr. and Charles Brockden Brown**

Smith and Timothy Dwight were by no means the only Federalists who believed in the progressive nature of history. To show that Federalism could accommodate those with progressivist views—to show that Smith and Dwight were not aberrations—it is useful to examine the ideas of two other progressivist Federalists: the Connecticut-born lawyer Charles Chauncey, Jr., and the Philadelphian author Charles Brockden Brown.

On November 8, 1797 Smith read Chauncey's oration "in defense of the doctrine of progressive improvement of mankind." His verdict: "It is handsome." Chauncey was a politically active Federalist—"an officer in the Washington Society, a regular member of Federalist committees, and a secretary of mass meetings." He was only twenty years old when he delivered his oration, in which, while acknowledging that many had exaggerated the extent of modern advancements and the backwardness of previous eras, he confidently asserted the superiority of the moderns over the ancients. Though he refused to speculate if progress "will ultimately terminate in complete perfection," he argued that the previous century's sweeping improvements in science, morals, and politics validated "the prevailing and pleasing supposition of the progression of man." For millennia, ignorance and superstition had retarded progress. But with the rise of reason, men abandoned alchemy and made tremendous advancements in electricity, chemistry, mathematics, and astronomy. With the rise of Christianity, moral philosophy acquired a basis in reason, and its greatest improvements had come since the Reformation. Political progress was slow, and only painstaking experimentation over many generations could establish perfection; but men had come to understand that good government was founded not on "the ignorance of the people," but on their "*knowledge* and...*virtue*." As

knowledge improved, nations would grow more civilized; they would launch fewer wars, and reform their criminal codes, eliminating unjust and cruel punishments.<sup>32</sup>

Chauncey credited education and scientific societies as the sources of this great progress. He argued that “only, from the assiduous care and spirited exertions of the government itself, can [educational] establishments become the nurseries of Science and of Virtue.” Just as “[i]gnorance and slavery are inseparable concomitants,” the promotion of “the rights and happiness of man” was impossible without the open diffusion of knowledge, and vice versa. “[I]t is only in a state of *mental* and of *personal freedom*,” he said, “that the human mind receives an important expansion, and its faculties an extensive improvement.” The progress of the mind was not inevitable. By neglecting the pursuit of truth in favor of advancing their own selfish interests, the “bigotted [*sic*] political partizan,” or “the enthusiastick [*sic*] demagogue of faction,” and the avaricious, acquisitive individual, could derail progress. Also, some calamity could restore the “dominion” of “barbarism and ignorance.” “But,” Chauncey clarified, “the advancement of the human race is too general and extensive to suffer a material declension.”<sup>33</sup>

In his advocacy of government patronage of education and science, and his denunciation of (Republican) partisanship, as well as of acquisitiveness, Chauncey was in total agreement with Smith. Smith thought highly enough of Chauncey’s oration that two months after he read it, he wrote him a letter saying that, despite some minor flaws “of style, &...of opinion,” “sir, it does you credit, in every respect.... Your future progress is plain, & full of delight, if you have constancy, courage, fortitude.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Nov. 8, 1797, *ibid.*, 388; David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York, N.Y., 1965), 348; Charles Chauncey, Jr., *An Oration, Delivered before the Society of the Phi Beta Kappa...* ([New Haven, Conn., 1797]), 3, 4-11, 13-15, 18, 18-24.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-29, 27, 29, 29-30, 30-31, 32, 33-34.

<sup>34</sup> EHS to Chas. Chauncey, Jr., Jan. 9, 1798, in *Diary of EHS*, ed. Cronin, 418.

Smith also greatly admired another work that he read in 1797: Charles Brockden Brown's *Alcuin*. "I have read it repeatedly, with pleasure," he told the author, who was his good friend, and a member of the Friendly Club. After reading (and rereading) and circulating the manuscript, Smith even took it upon himself to prepare it for publication. The first two parts of *Alcuin* were published in the spring of 1798, but parts three and four were not published until after Brown's death (he died in 1810). The entire work reflects Godwinian (and Wollstonecraftian), and utopian influences.<sup>35</sup>

*Alcuin* was Brown's meditation on women's rights. He structured it as a tortuous, often contradictory dialogue between Alcuin, a schoolteacher, and Mrs. Carter, a *salonnière*, the two of whom represented the opposing sides in a number of debates about the nature and condition of women. Alcuin opened the conversation by asking, "Pray, Madam, are you a federalist?" To Mrs. Carter, that was a ridiculous question, considering that, as a woman, she was supposed to have nothing to do with politics. Indeed, in the United States, she had no political rights. So, bristling with righteous indignation at this "injustice," she eventually replied, "No, I am no federalist.... I cannot celebrate the equity of that scheme of government which classes me with dogs and swine."<sup>36</sup>

Brown had both characters articulate Godwinian sentiments. According to Alcuin, "human beings are moulded by the circumstances in which they are placed"; therefore, women were "superficial and ignorant" not because that was their true nature, but because they had long been relegated to menial vocations, and prevented from enlarging their minds: "Habit has given permanence to errors, which ignorance had previously rendered universal." Similarly, Mrs.

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<sup>35</sup> EHS to Charles B. Brown, Aug. 25, 1797, *ibid.*, 349; see the "Advertisement," signed "E.H. Smith. / New-York, March, 1798," in [Charles Brockden Brown], *Alcuin; a Dialogue*, [ed. Elihu Hubbard Smith] (New York, N.Y., 1798). For more on *Alcuin*, see Anita M. Vickers, "'Pray, Madam, are you a federalist?': Women's Rights and the Republican Utopia of *Alcuin*," *American Studies*, 39 (1998), 89-104; Kaplan, *Men of Letters*, 80-86.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Brockden Brown, *Alcuin: A Dialogue*, ed. Lee R. Edwards (New York, N.Y., 1971), 9, 14, 30, 33.

Carter believed that the sexes had equal capacities, but that “the caprice of civil institutions” had produced differences between them. Alcuin understood that oppression squandered the talents not just of women, but of all people: “The evil lies in so much of human capacity thus fettered and perverted.” “Human beings, it is to be hoped, are destined to a better condition on this stage, or some other, than is now allotted them.” Inequality consigned many to a toilsome, intellectually barren existence; Alcuin thus advocated the equal sharing of labor, and of the produce of that labor. Mrs. Carter pointed out that the argument in favor of equal treatment of the sexes was based on the truth that men and women were both “rational beings”; with progress, or “rational improvement,” human beings would realize that they had “to abolish all distinctions” and “limit the reign of brute force.”<sup>37</sup>

Godwin had argued that progress rested on the eradication of all impositions on human reason. Mrs. Carter likewise took exception to the fact that men had made her dependent on them, and denied her the chance to exercise her own judgment and run her own life; forcing her to live by the “precept, ‘listen and obey’” was “tyranny.” She said, in explicitly Godwinian language, that each human being should “maintain the sphere of our own discretion, as large and as inviolate as possible.” Also like Godwin, despite their fervent advocacy of individual autonomy, Alcuin and Mrs. Carter were elitists who believed that the best and brightest had to tutor their fellows, to prepare them for autonomy. “The chief purpose of the wise,” said Alcuin, “is to make men their own governors, to persuade them to practise the rules of equity without legal restraint: they will try to lessen the quantity of government, without changing or multiplying the depositories of it; to diminish the number of those cases in which authority is required to interfere.” He envisioned a world in which lawyers and judges were superfluous,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 13-14, 38, 28, 14-15, 26, 25. For more on Godwin’s influence on *Alcuin*, see Vickers, “‘Pray, Madam,’” 89, 90, 97, 100.

because people would settle disputes before “a tribunal of our neighbours.” Mrs. Carter then tempered her call for “spheres of discretion,” claiming that “we must, as long as we associate with mankind, forego, in some particulars, our self-government, and submit to the direction of another; but nothing interests me more nearly than a wise choice of a master. The wisest member of society should, if possible, be selected for the guidance of the rest.”<sup>38</sup>

Alcuin was a progressivist, but he was also a very complex character. He knew that women were denied rights to which they were entitled. And yet, after Mrs. Carter’s outburst, he (presumably a Federalist) defended the United States by saying that women were still freer, and more dignified and prosperous there than anywhere else on earth. Alcuin frequently contradicted himself, or changed his opinions upon hearing Mrs. Carter’s reasoning. For example, he stated, unqualifiedly, that women could perform any male-dominated occupation, because they were equal, but not superior, to men. But when Mrs. Carter decried that women (and minors, the poor, immigrants, and blacks) could not vote, Alcuin replied that he could imagine women engaging in literary and scientific pursuits, but not voting or holding office; and yet, he was so mesmerized by Mrs. Carter, intellectually and physically, that (at the conclusion of Part II), he proclaimed, “of the two sexes, yours is, on the whole, superior.”<sup>39</sup>

That was the beginning of Alcuin’s conversion. In Parts I and II, he had argued in favor of a degree of equality of opportunity for women, while simultaneously defending the status quo. But, convinced by Mrs. Carter’s passionate arguments, he grew radical—more radical than Mrs. Carter herself. Alcuin began their second conversation by claiming that he had visited a “paradise of women,” an island in which existed an “absolute and general” equality between the sexes. Alcuin’s vision embellished classical utopian topoi with Godwinian themes. Men and

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<sup>38</sup> Brown, *Alcuin*, ed. Edwards, 29-30, 35, 34, 35.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 33, 16-19, 15, 30-33, 37-40, 42.

women wore the same type of clothing (in this, Brown's utopia went a little further than More's), and women had access to the same occupations and intellectual activities as men did. And why not? As Alcuin's "benevolent" guide explained, all people were "beings of the same nature, inhabiting the same spot, and accessible to the same influences," and in possession of "nearly the same opportunities and materials of judgment." Men and women had the same capacities—all were "progressive," "reasonable beings"—so all received the same education. The work of cultivating the soil was "equally incumbent upon all," so that, with no parasitic leisure class, there was enough food to provide an equal abundance for everyone, with very little labor. In their free time, men and women availed themselves of the "books, instruments, specimens of the productions of art and nature, haunts of meditation, and public halls" (which "it is the genius of our system to create, multiply, and place within the reach of all"), and contemplated how best "to promote...the happiness of others." This "paradise" was distinguished by the abolition of marriage. Alcuin told Mrs. Carter that he had come to understand "the evils of marriage," "the injustice of condemning women to obey the will, and depend upon the bounty of father or husband."<sup>40</sup>

Mrs. Carter, however, balked at accepting this Godwinian view. She merely wished to reform marriage, not destroy it. "The journey that you have lately made," she told Alcuin, "I merely regard as an excursion into [a] visionary world"—even though Alcuin had begun by emphasizing that his story was not "a sick man's dream, or a poet's reverie." Mrs. Carter then censured "that detestable philosophy which scoffs at the matrimonial institution itself," and declared "[t]he idea of common property" to be "absurd and pernicious; but even this is better than poverty and dependence to which the present system subjects the female." She thus proposed some reforms: marriage would be an entirely voluntary institution; divorce would be

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 44, 47, 50, 49-53, 60, 48, 55, 52, 59, 58, 55, 56, 61, 61-62, 60, 63, 64-65, 69.

easy; married women could own property; and married couples would not have to live in “the same dwelling.” These arrangements would leave people “at liberty to conform to the dictates of our judgment.” Alcuin understood that Mrs. Carter (à la Godwin) sought to discern “what species of marriage is most agreeable to justice”; in her view, marriage was “just” only when based on “mutual consent.”<sup>41</sup>

Is it a stretch to see Alcuin as a fictionalized version of Elihu Hubbard Smith? After all, both were Federalists. And Smith believed that women should use their intellects, since the acquisition of knowledge would make them virtuous and happy, just as it would men. “Women,” he told one of his younger sisters, “are formed for something nobler than merely to be wives & mothers.” But, also like Alcuin, Smith could not imagine women as politicians and judges. In his Utopia, females had access to the same education as males, even to “collegiate instruction” (“[u]nder certain regulations”). But they could not vote or hold office: “Females are absolutely excluded from all political privileges.” Alcuin was a Federalist, a Godwinian, and a visionary who constructed his own utopia, just as Brown’s friend Smith was doing in real life. Brown may have been familiar with Smith’s “Utopia,” since they often read each other’s journals. Alcuin was an exaggeration, to be sure—a visionary far more radical than his flesh-and-blood counterpart. Nevertheless, the parallels are too intriguing to ignore. For Smith was still more radical than most other Americans of that era—at the same time that he was an ardent Federalist.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 68, 45-46, 70, 73, 76-78, 83, 86, 87, 75, 87, 88.

<sup>42</sup> EHS to Fanny Smith, Apr. 4, 1797, in *Diary of EHS*, 307; Kaplan, “Document,” 300-301; Smith, “Utopia,” 316, 312, 319; Kaplan, “Document,” 306n11.

## CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION: THE VISIONARY FEDERALISTS

The liberal Federalism of James Madison was not the conservative Federalism of John Adams. The secular Federalism of Alexander Hamilton was not the millennial Federalism of Timothy Dwight. The Federalism that many people think they know—realistic, oriented toward commercial interests, militaristic—was not the Federalism that Elihu Hubbard Smith wholeheartedly embraced. These individuals could consider each other allies at various stages; but their alliances did not signify a uniformity of assumptions or motives. Federalism was a multifaceted movement. This is probably true of many, maybe even most, political movements and parties; certainly the Jeffersonian Republicans were not uniform either, as the existence of the *Tertium Quids* shows. Ideologies (or sets of assumptions about the nature of man and society) and parties (groups of individuals with common goals) are not synonymous. People can join the same party for different reasons, as long as that party can advance their interests, whether personal or ideological.<sup>1</sup>

This premise immediately raises the question: was there any common denominator that attracted different groups to Federalism, albeit for different reasons? It seems that most people who became Federalists at one time or another shared two characteristics: they supported energetic government, and they were elitists who believed that the people should defer to wise and virtuous rulers. They need not have reached these conclusions from the same premises. For example, energetic government was a means, not an end; different Federalists often differed as to their ultimate goals. Some saw energetic government as a necessary evil, and others as a positive good. The Framers' advocacy of a strong central government was born of a realistic, "constrained" view of human nature. Men were depraved and passionate, and it was the

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<sup>1</sup> For the differences between Madison and Adams during the ratification debate, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1969), 582.

government's role to control those passions, in order to ward off anarchy and its byproduct, tyranny. The Framers established the general government as a check upon the licentious, democratic states. And yet, Federalism was ambiguous, and it could appeal to others with radically different worldviews—even to believers in the perfectibility of man, like Smith. For a government energetic enough to restrain the passions was perhaps energetic enough to reform society and human nature itself.

That, at least, was what Smith believed. The Framers had different intentions in creating that strong central government for which he had such high hopes. Madison may have supported the Constitution as a means of restraining abusive majorities, while Hamilton did so because it provided the means of fulfilling his ambition of making the United States a great power. Meanwhile, in Dwight's eyes, a strong Union stabilized and preserved the nation that God had anointed as the redeemer of mankind, not least because it provided virtuous rulers the means of spreading knowledge across the land, and thus of instilling virtue in the citizens' hearts. Smith's vision was very similar to Dwight's; enlightened elites—in public service and in the Republic of Letters—were to serve as the guides of mankind, making them virtuous, and setting them on the path of perfectibility.

The source of Federalism's ambiguity was the importance that the Federalists, as good classical republicans, placed on virtue, or the sacrifice of one's selfish interests in pursuit of the common good. Both the elites and the people were supposed to exhibit virtue, but in different ways. The people had the responsibility of choosing those who were best fit to govern, and the elites had the responsibility of enacting wise measures that would redound to the whole country's benefit. The people were not supposed to intervene in the political process once they had made their choice; they were to defer to and cooperate with the elites, for the good of the country. In

the words of Nathanael Emmons, “The People have nothing to do, in the affairs of government, but merely to choose the Presidents, the Senators, and the Representatives, in a regular and constitutional manner. When these Rulers are chosen, it is their proper business to check and control each other, so as to support the government, which they are authorized to administer.” Each group had its own special role, its own set of responsibilities to the country. This was an organic, hierarchical, and collectivistic conception of politics and society.<sup>2</sup>

It was also an archaic conception, more compatible with Platonic philosophy than with the political realities of the late eighteenth century. Many Federalists—especially Madison—were moving beyond the classical view, and taking republicanism in a (what we would today call classical) liberal direction; but many others stubbornly adhered to the old ways, and still pursued the ideal of organic cooperation. Even some Federalists who were for the most part realistic had difficulty shedding these ancient hopes; for example, in 1788, Hamilton said that by granting the states “an unlimited power,” the anti-Federalists would create not “a wise government,” but “a fantastical Utopia.” “As far as my observation has extended,” he continued, “factions in Congress have arisen from attachment to state prejudices. We are attempting by this constitution to abolish factions, and to unite all parties for the general welfare.”<sup>3</sup>

This was not the language of Madison’s *Federalist* No. 10, in which he argued that the abolition of faction was impossible because its source was human nature itself: “the *causes* of

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<sup>2</sup> Nathanael Emmons, *A Discourse, Delivered May 9, 1798. Being a Day of Fasting and Prayer throughout the United States* (Newburyport, Mass., [1798]), 13. I cannot agree with Gordon Wood’s assertion that “the Federalists hoped to create...a republic which did not require a virtuous people for its sustenance”; Wood, *Creation*, 475. This certainly did not apply to all Federalists, especially not the ones profiled in this essay. Wood himself seems to have given a more nuanced opinion in *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, N.Y., 1993; orig. pub. 1991), 253-254: “Most of the revolutionary leaders...continued to hold out the possibility of virtuous politics”; however, he referred to the expectation of virtue among elites, but not the people.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Hamilton, “Speech on the Senate of the United States,” June 24, 1788, in *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, 12 vols., ed. Henry Cabot Lodge (New York, N.Y., 1904), 2:57; for more on this aspect of Hamilton’s thought, see Cecelia M. Kenyon, “Alexander Hamilton: Rousseau of the Right,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 73 (1958), 161-178; and for an opinion contrary to Kenyon’s, see David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York, N.Y., 1965), 2n3.

faction cannot be removed and...relief is only to be sought in the means of controlling its effects.” Forty-six years later, Madison was still disparaging a society “exhibiting a perfect homogeneousness of interests, opinions & feelings” as “a Utopia...nowhere yet found in civilized communities.” In other words, Hamilton stubbornly retained (in Gordon Wood’s words) a “classical vision of aristocratic leadership,” whereas Madison had already accepted the realities that special interests were ineradicable, and that only systemic restraints on governmental power could be trusted to mitigate their consequences, because “[e]nlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm.” Hamilton wanted to harness the interests to the state and make them work toward one general goal, whereas Madison sought to navigate between these interests, to ensure that none of them came to dominate the rest.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1790s, when Madison, now a Jeffersonian Republican, was devising realistic responses to the challenges of a new age, many Federalists obstinately persisted in their classical republican values. Times were changing—very rapidly—and “the classical conception of politics” was obsolescent. Classical republicanism was, as Gordon Wood has said, “utopian,” because of the expectation that the people would “sacrifice their private interests for the sake of the public good.” The realization that this would never really happen invalidated the organic, hierarchical, virtue-based republicanism to which many had subscribed at the Revolution’s outset. According to Wood, “[a]s early as 1782 Jefferson told Monroe that it was ridiculous to suppose that a man should surrender himself to the state.... The aim of instilling a spartan creed in America thus began to seem more and more nonsensical.” As John Adams put it, “None but an idiot or a madman ever built a government upon a disinterested principle. Such pretensions

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<sup>4</sup> *Federalist* No. 10, in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York, 2003), 72-73, 75; James Madison to ———, [Majority Governments], [1833], in *The Writings of James Madison...*, 9 vols., ed. Gaillard Hunt (New York, N.Y., 1900-1910), 9:526; Wood, *Radicalism*, 265; *Federalist* No. 10, in *Federalist Papers*, ed. Rossiter, 75.

are false and hollow, all hypocrisy.” Nevertheless, even in the 1780s, many Americans did not lose faith in public virtue; some were Anti-Federalists, but many others were Federalists.<sup>5</sup>

From the very beginning of their movement, some of the Federalists’ opponents perceived a degree of unreality in their views and aspirations. Some Anti-Federalists disputed their belief that there existed virtuous elites capable of placing themselves above special interests, and promoting the common good. The elites had their interests, and passions, too, just like any other mortals. Some Anti-Federalists believed that the Constitution did not contain sufficient checks against the abuse of power by these elites. For example, the “Federal Farmer” (perhaps Melancton Smith) considered the Federalists to be either a “consolidating aristocracy,” or “young visionary men,” foisting on the American people a leviathan, which, against their own hopes and expectations, would degenerate into a despotism. The accusation that the Federalists were unrealistic persisted into the nineteenth century. In his First Inaugural Address, Thomas Jefferson, alluding to the Federalists, rebutted those who “fear...that this Government is not strong enough”; “would the honest patriot,” he asked, “abandon a government which has so far kept us free and firm on the theoretic and visionary fear that this Government, the world’s best hope, may by possibility want energy to preserve itself? I trust not. I believe this, on the contrary, the strongest Government on earth.”<sup>6</sup>

To their foes, then, the Federalists were “visionary men”—utopians who had erroneous, unrealistic conceptions of human nature, society, and politics. No doubt, these criticisms were

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<sup>5</sup> Wood, *Creation*, ch. 15, sect. 5, p. 607; Wood, *Radicalism*, 189, 218, 229, 252-253; Wood, *Creation*, 610; Zoltán Haraszti, [ed.], *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), 220.

<sup>6</sup> Wood, *Radicalism*, 255-256, 258-259; Cecelia M. Kenyon, “Men of Little Faith: The Anti-Federalists on the Nature of Representative Government,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, 12 (1955), 13-14; “Letters from the Federal Farmer,” No. 1, Oct. 8, 1787, in *The Anti-Federalist Papers and the Constitutional Convention Debates*, ed. Ralph A. Ketcham (New York, N.Y., 2003), 262; Thomas Jefferson, First Inaugural Address, in *Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (Washington, D.C., 1989; Bartleby.com, 2001), par. 2 [updated Jan. 2001; cited 17 Apr. 2009], available from <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres16.html>.

manifestations of the common polemical device of discrediting an opponent's ideas as impractical, whether or not they actually were. Indeed, not all Federalists were "visionary," and many more of them used this very same anti-utopian rhetoric, as we have seen. But what is remarkable is that even some Federalists—including very prominent ones—came to admit that they were indeed "visionary men."

Perhaps the earliest Federalist to admit to being an idealist was Jonathan Jackson. As we have seen, Jackson had a very pronounced collectivistic, organic, hierarchical conception of society. In the 1780s, he thought that many Americans had pursued their own selfish interests "at the expense of the... best interests of the union." The American people needed "to be properly organized" into "a perfect whole, in which the general harmony may be preserved, each one learning his proper place, and keeping in it." He fully expected the many to defer to the wise and virtuous few who "are capable with judgment to decide." Jackson, citing David Hume's "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth," argued that a republic could indeed thrive in a large territory, and he envisioned a vast but regimented and efficient government in which "each department" reported to and took orders from "the civil commander in chief." "I am aware," he added, "that by advancing opinions like the preceding, I may be subjecting myself to be listed among the projectors of an Utopian scheme; not that it is not possible, but mankind perhaps can never be brought to adopt it, or have patience enough by its full operation to give it a trial."<sup>7</sup>

And yet, Jackson did have faith in the people's virtue. He went on to write that his ideas could serve as a model that would inspire "the younger men"—members of a generation that would be devoid of "bigotry and prejudice of every kind, as much as possible"—to devise a "practicable" system along those lines. He had enough faith in the people's virtue to believe that

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<sup>7</sup> [Jonathan Jackson], *Thoughts upon the Political Situation of the United States of America...* (Worcester, Mass., 1788), 48, 49, 54, 130, 88-92, 93-94.

American matrons could set an example for the rest of the country by eschewing the luxuries of decadent Europe, and dressing modestly instead. He even urged them to “appoint a female congress, to settle the terms and objects of reform, and thereby to establish an uniformity” of mores, including of dress, which should “be confined, singly to a summer and a winter dress.” This sumptuary code resembled that of Thomas More’s *Utopia*; Jackson even admitted, “I am quite aware that for these suggestions, I may risk again being listed among the projectors of Utopian schemes.” In fact, that was not even Jackson’s most utopian speculation; he went so far as to envision an international federal system, ruled by virtuous men who reached the summit after being filtered through local, state, and national departments. He asked, “Would it be too enthusiastick [*sic*] to suppose, that the inhabitants of the whole globe might thus be comprehended in one large family,” with ““peace and goodwill among all men?””<sup>8</sup>

But the Federalists’ disastrous defeat in the 1800 election shattered such optimism. In the *Federalist Papers*, Hamilton had confidently asserted that under the Constitution, the people would not need to be coerced, because they would obey the government as long as it was honestly and competently administered. And yet, in 1800, the people ejected the (self-styled) virtuous Federalists from office and installed in their place the Republicans, whom the Federalists had long condemned as “jacobins”—ambitious, dishonest, traitorous “demagogues.” As Fisher Ames wrote, “While federalists rely on the sense of the people, the jacobins appeal to their nonsense with infinite advantage,” for the sole purpose of tricking them into entrusting them with vast amounts of power, which they would abuse, to the people’s detriment. After their

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 94, 123-126; Thomas More, *Utopia*, in *Three Early Modern Utopias: Utopia, New Atlantis, The Isle of Pines* (Oxford, Eng., 1999), ed. Susan Bruce, 57; [Jackson], *Thoughts upon the Political Situation*, 126, 170, 171. See also David Hackett Fischer, “The Myth of the Essex Junto,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, 21 (1964), 206, 212-213. Sumptuary laws were occasionally advocated by republicans during the Revolution, and sometimes even criticized as “ideal” and unrealistic; see Wood, *Creation*, 64, 96-97; Forrest McDonald, *Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution* (Lawrence, Kan., 1985), 15-16, 88-90.

defeat, many Federalists swiftly concluded that they had been terribly mistaken in relying on the people's virtue. Less than a month after Jefferson's inauguration, John Adams wrote bitterly, "No party, that ever existed, knew itself so little, or so vainly overrated its own influence and popularity, as ours. None ever understood so ill the causes of its own power, or so wantonly destroyed them." The civilized, virtuous Federalists had been "totally routed and defeated" by "foreign liars" and "a few ambitious native gentlemen." "The reason is," he concluded, "we have no Americans in America. The federalists have been no more Americans than the anties."<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, Hamilton's late-1780s exuberance had given way to dejection. In April of 1802 he wrote that men were passionate, not rational, "animals." The Federalists had not fully understood this truth, but "our adversaries" did, and they acted on that insight, claiming to appeal to the citizens' reason, while they were actually inflaming their passions. The Federalists had "erred in relying so much on the rectitude and utility of their measures as to have neglected the cultivation of popular favor, by fair and justifiable expedients"; unfortunately, by appealing to the people, they would probably sacrifice some of their principles, committing the same sins against public virtue that the Republicans had perpetrated. Hamilton despaired of ever reacquiring power, and he lost patience with those Federalists who genuinely believed that the people would soon return to their senses. "Among Federalists old errors are not cured," he told Rufus King. "They also continue to dream, though not quite so preposterously as their opponents. All will be very well (say they) when the power once gets back into federal hands.

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<sup>9</sup> *Federalist* No. 27, in *Federalist Papers*, ed. Rossiter, 170; Fisher Ames, "The Dangers of American Liberty," and "No Revolutionist," in *Works of Fisher Ames with a Selection from His Speeches and Correspondence*, 2 vols., ed. Seth Ames (Boston, Mass., 1854), 2:381, 372-373, 204-205; John Adams to Benjamin Stoddert, Mar. 31, 1801, in *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States...*, 10 vols., ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston, Mass., 1856), 9:582.

The people, convinced by experience of their error, will repose a permanent confidence in good men. *Risum teneatis[?]*”<sup>10</sup>

Fisher Ames responded to the Federalists’ annihilation not with Hamilton’s ironic laughter, but with fierce jeremiads. Two weeks after Jefferson’s inauguration, he criticized the Federalists for their “blind” “confidence...in the *sinless* perfection of a democracy.” “We have been mistaken,” he wrote a few months later. “We have thought that virtue, with so many bright rewards, had some solid power; and that, with ten thousand charms, she could always command a hundred thousand votes. Alas! these illusions are as thin as the gloss on other bubbles. Politicians have supposed that man really is what he should be.” The truth was that it was the passions, not the reason, which drove politics. The Federalists had “nothing to offer” that would satisfy the passions—“nothing that will convince a *sans-culotte* that his ignorance, or vice, and laziness, ordain that he should be poor, while a demagogue tells him it is the funding system that makes him poor, and revolution shall make him rich. Few can reason, all can feel; and such an argument is gained, as soon as it is proposed.” Years later, Ames still firmly believed that selfless virtue should be the foundation of government; but “[o]ur mistake is in supposing men better than they are. They are bad, and will act their bad character out.... I like the pretty business of hoping, but I see very little foundation for it.”<sup>11</sup>

Ames developed these pessimistic themes at length in his 1805 essay “The Dangers of American Liberty.” “[T]he federalists can never again become the dominant party,” he wrote. The people would once again “call wisdom to power” only if faction would disappear, and virtue

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<sup>10</sup> Alexander Hamilton to James A. Bayard, Apr., 1802, to Rufus King, June 3, 1802, in *Works of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Lodge, 10:433, 440-441.

<sup>11</sup> Fischer, “Myth of the Essex Junto,” 209; Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 6; James M. Banner, Jr., *To the Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815* (New York, N.Y., 1970), 32; Fisher Ames to Theodore Dwight, Mar. 19, 1801, “No Revolutionist,” Ames to Richard Peters, Dec. 14, 1806, in *Works of Fisher Ames*, ed. Ames, 1:293, 2:205, 1:377-378.

return to public life. “Are not these the visions that delight a poet’s fancy, but will never revisit the statesman’s eyes?” “Federalism,” he wrote, “was...manifestly founded on a mistake, on the supposed existence of sufficient political virtue, and on the permanency and authority of the public morals. The party now in power committed no such mistake. They acted on the knowledge of what men actually are, not what they ought to be.... The federal power, propped by nothing but opinion, fell, not because it deserved its fall, but because its principles of action were more exalted and pure than the people could support.” Virtue, or “love of country,” would *not* return. “Are not our people wholly engrossed by the pursuit of wealth and pleasure?” he asked. Ames believed that the country was “descending from a supposed orderly and stable republican government into a licentious democracy,” and he predicted that, like all democracies, this one would degenerate further “into a military despotism,” or an absolute monarchy.<sup>12</sup>

Ames made these prophecies out of sadness, not schadenfreude. He still venerated the Revolution’s republican ideals, and could not bear the fact that things had changed. The Federalists had expected the people to have enough virtue to defer to wise and virtuous elites. But they had misjudged them; the people would not defer. The Federalists had seen men (in Ames’s phrase) as “they ought to be,” and when the people behaved differently, they became disillusioned, and lashed out at the people; the Federalists exhibited the wrath not of the malicious, but of the betrayed and broken. In their naïveté, they had indeed been utopian. As Jacques Barzun has noted, what made the utopias unrealistic was not their establishment of orders meant to suppress the evils caused by “the blind struggle...for a bare livelihood,” but rather, “the assumption of ready compliance with rational demands”—the assumption that the

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<sup>12</sup> Ames, “Dangers of American Liberty,” *ibid.*, 2:374, 375, 379, 376, 392, 382, 391.

people would behave just as their philosopher-kings wanted them to, without ever protesting against their authoritarianism. The Federalists made the same false assumption.<sup>13</sup>

Rufus King—whom Shaw Livermore has called “perhaps the most influential Federalist in the country” after the War of 1812—also came to understand this. King bemoaned that the American people had allegedly developed a prejudice against “learning, morals, [and] wisdom”; instead, “[w]ealth & power, or, in other words, money and office, have become the ruling passion of our People.” In 1816 (the year of his unsuccessful presidential candidacy), he thought that American liberty was on the brink of destruction, since demagogues had made “the People jealous of its wisest and most sincere Defenders.” Putting a slightly different interpretation on the Federalists’ typical lamentation that they had been unrealistic, he exclaimed, “We have been the visionary men, who have believed, as many have, that mere Paper Constitutions, without those moral and political habits and opinions, which alone give solidity and support to any Government, would be sufficient to protect and preserve the equal Rights of the weak against the strong, of the honest agt. the dishonest, of the wise and faithful friends of free Govt. against the wicked and ambitious men, who disregard every thing [*sic*] that stands in the way of their criminal desires: but enough!”<sup>14</sup>

The Federalists had had enough indeed. It is interesting to speculate about how Elihu Hubbard Smith would have coped with the Federalists’ crushing defeat, had he lived to see it. Having died in 1798, he was spared the spectacle of the hated Jefferson receiving the acclaim of the people—the people for whom he had had such high hopes. According to his philosophy, in the future, once the enlightened elites had made them virtuous, the people would no longer need

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<sup>13</sup> Wood, *Radicalism*, 230; Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life: 1500 to the Present* (New York, N.Y., 2000), 121.

<sup>14</sup> Shaw Livermore, *The Twilight of Federalism: The Disintegration of the Federalist Party, 1815-1830* (Princeton, N.J., 1962), 25; Rufus King to Noah Webster, June 30, 1807, to Christopher Gore, May 8, 1816, in *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King...*, 6 vols., ed. Charles R. King (New York, N.Y., 1894-1900), 5:35, 534.

to defer. But their future progress depended on their present deference to the wise and virtuous; rebuffing the elites' overtures would amount to rejecting their own perfectibility, which would mean that they were actually ungrateful and incorrigible, and thus unworthy of the efforts and esteem of their benefactors. Perhaps Smith would have concluded that he was wrong and the people right, and joined the other side, as many Federalists did. Or perhaps, conjuring up the same snobbery that had led him to heap scorn upon the people's theatrical tastes, he would have lashed out at the people, as many other Federalists did. Certainly those closest to him, such as Timothy Dwight, did not surrender their Federalist beliefs; Noah Webster and James Kent remained staunch critics of mobbish democracy into the 1830s.<sup>15</sup>

The old Federalists—those who remembered the glory days of the 1790s—also remained proud of their achievements, long after American political realities had passed them by. They saw their years in power as America's "golden age," when the country was at the height of its power and prosperity. As the former Federalist governor of Connecticut John Cotton Smith wrote in 1844, "I am prouder than ever of the name of *Federalist*; a name lovely and of good report, associated with the halcyon days of Washington and Hamilton, commemorative of their patriotic and invaluable labours, and which in all future time will distinguish the first twelve years of our national government as the *Golden Age* of the American Republic [*sic*]." They could not reconstitute such glory in an era in which public virtue had lost the competition against private interests. As James Banner wrote, "the Federalists' Utopia was not before them but in the past."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy, vol. 1: The Crisis of the New Order, 1787-1815* (New York, N.Y., 2007, orig. pub. 2005), 1-2; Wood, *Radicalism*, 268-270.

<sup>16</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1970), 5; John Cotton Smith qtd. in Livermore, *Twilight of Federalism*, 261; Banner, *To the Hartford Convention*, 70.

Perhaps the best epitaph of Federalism was an unintentional one. It was Timothy Dwight's disparagement of the "theoretical man," who "is always a bad Ruler":

Their views are visionary; and their designs, however well intended, totally unsuited to the objects, at which they professedly aim. Men they regard, not as they are, but as their imagination has fashioned them; and the world, not as we actually find it, but as it is viewed by an excursive fancy. Hence their plans, instead of being fitted to promote the real welfare of man, are only a collection of waking dreams; a course of political Quixotism.

Federalism was often thus quixotic, as many Federalists, such as Ames, Hamilton, and King came to realize, and as the foregoing map of the intellectual world of Elihu Hubbard Smith has demonstrated.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Timothy Dwight, *A Discourse Occasioned by the Death of His Excellency Jonathan Trumbull, Esq., Governor of the State of Connecticut...* (New Haven, Conn., 1809), 10.

## APPENDIX: REALISTS OR IDEALISTS?: A NOTE ON THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF FEDERALISM

The traditional interpretation of the Federalists is that they were realists. Charles Beard was highly influential in portraying the Federalist Party as a commercial elite that tried to restrain the democratic aspirations of the agrarian majority in order to advance its material interests. Over the years, scholars such as Manning Dauer and Woody Holton have adapted and refined Beard's views. In contrast to the negative depictions of the Federalists that predominated in the 1950s, Russell Kirk argued that they were principled realists, who based their opinions on experience and custom, rather than on philosophical abstractions. Other scholars in the traditional school similarly focused on ideology rather than on economic interest; but these often differed tremendously, with some portraying the Federalists as the anti-republican villains of the Early Republic (Richard Buel), and others as pessimists whose "realistic republicanism" stood little chance against the Jeffersonians' alluring "idealistic republicanism" (John Zvesper).<sup>1</sup>

Not all scholars considered the Federalists to be realists. In the 1950s, Marshall Smelser, perhaps with McCarthyism on his mind, denounced the Federalists as malicious, antidemocratic paranoiacs who were motivated by their passions rather than by rational calculation. The real birth of the revisionist interpretation that the Federalists were idealists came in two essays by Cecelia Kenyon, in the first of which she argued that it was the Anti-Federalists, not the Federalists, who distrusted human nature, and in the second of which she claimed that Hamilton was a right-wing Rousseau. Kenyon was part of a larger trend in which scholars like Robert E.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles A. Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1998; orig. pub. 1913); Charles A. Beard, *Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York, N.Y., 1915); Manning J. Dauer, *The Adams Federalists* (Baltimore, Md., 1953); Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* (New York, N.Y., 2007); Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Washington, D.C., 1986; orig. pub. 1953); Richard Buel, *Securing the Revolution: Ideology in American Politics, 1789-1815* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1972); John Zvesper, *Political Philosophy and Rhetoric: A Study of the Origins of American Party Politics* (Cambridge, Eng., 1977). For a rebuttal to Zvesper, see Cecelia M. Kenyon, "[Review of] *Political Philosophy and Rhetoric: A Study in the Origins of American Party Politics*," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, 36 (1979), 120-123.

Brown and Forrest McDonald rejected Beard's arguments. Others, like Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, and Judith Shklar, followed Kenyon in rejecting Beard, and instead seeing the Federalists as youthful, energetic, optimistic progressives who rejected the outmoded systems of the past, and imagined (in Shklar's words) a "new political science." Meanwhile, Felix Gilbert saw a mixture of realism and idealism in early American foreign policy.<sup>2</sup>

Starting in the 1960s, some scholars portrayed the Federalists as idealists of a different sort. We tend to think of idealists as optimists and progressives, but these revisionists emphasized that it is possible to be a conservative, or even reactionary, idealist—that is, one who idealizes a classical, archaic, obsolescent form of politics. Lewis Simpson's Federalists feared the vulgarization of the Republic of Letters, and wished to preserve its refinement and high-mindedness. To David H. Fischer, the Federalists were not "selfish reactionaries whose only purpose was to preserve their wealth and privileges," but rather "reactionary idealists"—old-fashioned republicans who believed in an organic society and "the 'general will.'" Similarly, James Banner saw them as republicans defending old ideals from the innovations of liberal capitalism; "the Federalists' Utopia was not before them but in the past." And Linda Kerber

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<sup>2</sup> Marshall Smelser, "The Jacobin Phrenzy: Federalism and the Menace of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," *The Review of Politics*, 13 (1951), 457-482; Marshall Smelser, "The Federalist Period as an Age of Passion," *American Quarterly*, 10 (1958), 391-419; Marshall Smelser, "The Jacobin Phrenzy: The Menace of Monarchy, Plutocracy, and Anglophilia, 1789-1798," *The Review of Politics*, 21 (1959), 239-258; Cecelia M. Kenyon, "Men of Little Faith: The Anti-Federalists on the Nature of Representative Government," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, 12 (1955), 3-43; Cecelia M. Kenyon, "Alexander Hamilton: Rousseau of the Right," *Political Science Quarterly*, 73 (1958), 161-178; Robert E. Brown, *Charles Beard and the Constitution: A Critical Analysis of "An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution"* (Princeton, N.J., 1956); Forrest McDonald, *We the People: The Economic Origins of the Constitution* (Chicago, Ill., 1958). Brown and McDonald actually saw the Federalists as realists; I mention them here only to show that Kenyon and Elkins and McKittrick were part of a larger trend. Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, "The Founding Fathers: Young Men of the Revolution," *Political Science Quarterly*, 76 (1961), 181-216; see also Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (New York, N.Y., 1993); Judith N. Shklar, "Publius and the Science of the Past," *Yale Law Journal*, 86 (1977), 1290; Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton, N.J., 1970; orig. pub. 1961). Gilbert's view was endorsed in Bernard Bailyn, *To Begin the World Anew: The Genius and Ambiguities of the American Founders* (New York, N.Y., 2003), lecture 3. For the realist view of the Farewell Address, see Alexander DeConde, "Washington's Farewell, the French Alliance, and the Election of 1796," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 43 (1957), 641-658.

showed that the Federalists believed that civilization had already discovered the rules of perfection in politics, literature, art, education, and science, and that the radicals' innovations in all these fields would assuredly cause degeneration rather than improvement.<sup>3</sup>

After a long dormant period, scholars resumed the realist vs. idealist debate. A new generation of left-wing scholars (including David Waldstreicher, Rogers M. Smith, Keith Arbour, Jeffrey L. Pasley, Seth Cotlar, and Sean Wilentz) once again portrayed the Federalists as enemies of the people, and thus as decidedly un-idealistic. According to this interpretation, the Federalists opposed the salutary spread of democracy, and suppressed the aspirations of plebeians, immigrants, and blacks. John Lamberton Harper gave a "realist" interpretation of Federalist foreign policy, although his work differed from that of scholars like Waldstreicher and Wilentz in that he wrote from a pro-Hamilton position.<sup>4</sup>

The revisionist interpretation also resurfaced, but in two different forms. Scholars in the first group argued that the Federalists were conservative idealists who tried to contain the potentially destructive effects of the new force of liberal capitalism, or patricians whose acceptance of social distinctions within an organic society allowed them, out of "a sense of

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<sup>3</sup> David Hackett Fischer, "The Myth of the Essex Junto," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, 21 (1964), 234-235, 202; see also David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York, N.Y., 1965). James M. Banner, Jr., *To the Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815* (New York, N.Y., 1970), 70; Linda K. Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1970); the realism vs. idealism trope also figures prominently in Bernard W. Sheehan, "[Review of] *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America*," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, 28 (1971), 134-136.

<sup>4</sup> David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997); David Waldstreicher, "Federalism, the Styles of Politics, and the Politics of Style," in Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, eds., *Federalists Reconsidered* (Charlottesville, Va., 1998), 99-117; Rogers M. Smith, "Constructing American National Identity," *ibid.*, 19-40; Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven, Conn., 1999), ch. 6; Keith Arbour, "Benjamin Franklin as Weird Sister: William Cobbett and Federalist Philadelphia's Fears of Democracy," in Ben-Atar and Oberg, eds., *Federalists Reconsidered*, 179-198; Jeffrey L. Pasley, "*The Tyranny of Printers*": *Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville, Va., 2001); Seth Cotlar, "The Federalists' Transatlantic Cultural Offensive of 1798 and the Moderation of American Democratic Discourse," in Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher, eds., *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004), 274-299; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, vol. 1: *The Crisis of the New Order, 1787-1815* (New York, N.Y., 2007, orig. pub. 2005); John Lamberton Harper, *American Machiavelli: Alexander Hamilton and the Origins of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Eng., 2004).

noblesse oblige” (as Paul Finkelman put it), to advocate abolishing the slave trade and sometimes slavery itself, or, as Rosemarie Zagari showed, “to explore the possibility of an informal role for women—especially elite white women—in politics.”<sup>5</sup>

An interesting development in recent Federalist scholarship was the embracing of Federalism by some left-wing historians who considerably diminished—or even denied outright—its conservatism, as Kenyon and Elkins and McKittrick had done in an earlier generation (although not as extremely). Though Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara Oberg acknowledged that Federalism’s desire that government should be “responsive to, yet independent of, the popular will,” meant that it was not equivalent with leftism, the questions raised by the similarities between the two (“the Federalists’ positions on race and gender, their distrust of the free market, and their cultural elitism are reminiscent of contemporary liberalism”) were powerful enough to help spur them to compile their anthology *Federalists Reconsidered*. Andrew R. L. Cayton argued that the Federalists “were the most thoroughgoing radicals in the ‘western world’ in the late eighteenth century,” because of their Western territorial policies, and their positions on slavery and women’s participation in politics. In John Lauritz Larson’s sometimes-eccentric interpretation, the Federalists envisioned a government that would regulate the economy for the common good, building internal improvements that would divert resources to salutary outlets; the Populists and Progressives were the heirs not of Jeffersonianism, but of Federalism.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Steven Watts, “Ministers, Misanthropes, and Mandarins: The Federalists and the Culture of Capitalism, 1790-1820,” in Ben-Atar and Oberg, eds., *Federalists Reconsidered*, 157-175; Andrew Siegel, “‘Steady Habits’ under Siege: The Defense of Federalism in Jeffersonian Connecticut,” *ibid.*, 199-224; Paul Finkelman, “The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Federalism,” *ibid.*, 155; Rosemarie Zagari, “Gender and the First Party System,” *ibid.*, 118-134; Rosemarie Zagari, “Women and Party Conflict in the Early Republic,” in Pasley, Robertson, and Waldstreicher, eds., *Beyond the Founders*, 107-128. For a similar interpretation of Federalist antislavery, see Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, ch. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, “Introduction: The Paradoxical Legacy of the Federalists,” in Ben-Atar and Oberg, eds., *Federalists Reconsidered*, 8; Andrew R. L. Cayton, “Radicals in the ‘Western World’: The Federalist

Ben-Atar and Oberg summarized the “Federalist legacy” as “nuanced, tension-ridden, and paradoxical,” and they expressed hope that the chapters in their collection “question the wisdom of the traditional dichotomies of elitist, reactionary Federalists and democratic, progressive Jeffersonians; of treasonous New Englanders and unionist Jeffersonians; and of the wealthy and the people. We portray an active Federalist coalition that offered a vibrant intellectual and political alternative throughout the era of the early republic.... And...we propose the unthinkable—that the Federalists are relevant.” Indeed, according to many historians, the Federalists had never stopped being relevant. Shaw Livermore (who directed Fischer’s undergraduate thesis) saw that, although the Federalist Party gradually disappeared, the Federalists themselves made contributions even well into the Jacksonian era. Marc Arkin argued that the Federalist legacy survived as an influence on the abolitionist movement; William Lloyd Garrison—himself a Federalist in his younger years—borrowed rhetoric and arguments from old Federalists like Fisher Ames.<sup>7</sup>

My own view most closely resembles those of Fischer and Kerber. Although I maintain that Federalism was not uniform, and that it made room for conservatives like John Adams, there was, nonetheless, a remarkably potent idealistic element within the Federalist Party. As we have seen, these Federalist idealists could be reactionaries who romanticized an obsolescent form of elitist, virtue-based politics, or progressives who were attracted to Federalism because they believed that its adherence to energetic, paternalistic government provided an apparatus that an intellectual vanguard could use to educate and enlighten mankind, thus setting it on the proper

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Conquest of Trans-Appalachian North America,” *ibid.*, 96; John Lauritz Larson, *Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States* (Chapel Hill, 2001), 7. See also Frank Bourgin, *The Great Challenge: The Myth of Laissez-Faire in the Early Republic* (New York, N.Y., 1989).

<sup>7</sup> Ben-Atar and Oberg, “Introduction,” in Ben-Atar and Oberg, eds., *Federalists Reconsidered*, 15-16; Shaw Livermore, *The Twilight of Federalism: The Disintegration of the Federalist Party, 1815-1830* (Princeton, N.J., 1962); Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, ix; Marc M. Arkin, “The Federalist Trope: Power and Passion in Abolitionist Rhetoric,” *Journal of American History*, 88 (2001), 75-98.

path of indefinite perfectibility. And the ideologies of some Federalists borrowed from both of these views. These Federalists—whether old or young, reactionary or progressive—saw the world as they wanted it to be, rather than as it really was.

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