

The Americanization of the Mind

THE CLOSING OF THE American mind is in itself an aspect of the Americanization of the mind. The new world of America was long considered to be the opening of the minds of men. It was here that Roger Williams successfully fought for religious freedom. In contrast to the European principle *cuius regio eius religio*, there came about in the absence of a state church a separation between state and church, followed by assertions and recognitions of other human rights, whether in works like Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* or in documents like the Declaration of Independence or the Bill of Rights. The emancipation of the individual from governmental restrictions was complemented by one toward self-government. Whereas England, considered by Montesquieu a republic in practice, retained monarchical trimmings after the Glorious Revolution, Americans, having asserted the power of locally elected legislatures against royal governors and having repudiated George III, left no doubt that theirs were republican governments also in form. This may well have prompted Bolívar in his Lima meeting with San Martín flatly to reject as un-American the latter's suggestion to invite Spanish princes to be monarchs in the newly independent Spanish-American nations.

In the United States, then, popular government was considered the best means for the freedom of the individual from the rulers so that American society might be open. I always have considered it a telling symbol that the very year Adam Smith published *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Americans took action by declaring their independence from Britain and the mercantilist laws that were closing their activities. Between the publication of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and his essay on the Enlightenment, the Peace of

Paris secured American independence: A Prussian's reflections on the opening of the human mind was matched by an American practical step insuring the sovereignty of the United States for the sake of an open society. American emancipations took place not only from monarchical but also from democratic governments. Short experiences of the latter under the Articles of Confederation made Americans aware of the pitfalls of popular rule. The Constitution and its Bill of Rights were designed to restrain the ruling majority in favor of the rights of individuals and minorities. This was conducive to all kinds of pursuits, including the pursuit of happiness.

The United States is the only major nation born at the height of the Enlightenment. This points to an American manifest destiny in relation to the opening of the human mind. Kant wrote that we live in an age of enlightenment, but not yet in an enlightened age, enlightenment being an ongoing and continuing process. Dr. Benjamin Rush, the father of American medicine, expressed similar ideas on the American Revolution when he emphasized the need not to identify that revolution with the War of Independence. The American Revolution was not over, continuing permanently to open the minds of men.

This mission was indicated by Europeans and Americans alike. An English clergyman and moralist, Dr. Richard Price, praised "the revolution in favor of universal liberty which has taken place in America;—a revolution which opens a new prospect in human affairs . . . occasioning the establishment in America of forms of government more equitable and more liberal than any the world has yet known." American independence provided "a place of refuge for oppressed men in every region of the world." It was "the

foundation . . . of an empire which may be the seat of liberty, science and virtue, and from whence there is reason to hope these sacred blessings will spread, till they become universal." The "American revolution may prove the most important step in the progressive course of human improvement. It is an event which may produce a general diffusion of the principles of humanity, and become the means of setting free mankind from the shackles of superstition and tyranny, by leading them to see and know that nothing is *fundamental* but impartial enquiry, an honest mind, and virtuous practice" (*Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution*, 1784, pp. 3-7 passim).

Two years later, in his essay on the influence of the American Revolution on Europe, Condorcet praised the Declaration of Independence as a simple and sublime exposition of rights long sacred and long forgotten. He noted that in no nation have they been so well known and so well preserved in such perfect integrity, adding that in America's republican sages and leaders one finds neither maxims of Machiavellianism established in political principles nor the opinion that it is impossible to make the social order perfect and to reconcile public prosperity and justice. Condorcet felt that in a few generations America, by producing nearly as many men who can add to knowledge as all of Europe, will at least double progress. Goethe's poem dedicated to the United States is a tribute to American openmindedness. So is Hegel's statement, in the introduction to his *Philosophy of History*, that all those who feel closed in and bored by the historical burdens of old Europe long for America.

Americans also hoped for an opening of the minds under free government protecting the rights of individuals. In his First Inaugural Address, George Washington praised the "new and free Government" under the "Great Constitutional Charter" for cherishing "the eternal rules of order and rights, which Heaven itself had ordained." In his Farewell Address he anticipated "the sweet enjoyment of partaking

. . . the benign influence of good Laws under a free Government," so that "the happiness of the people of these States, under the auspices of liberty, may be made complete, by so careful a preservation and so prudent a use of this blessing as will acquire to them the glory of recommending it to the applause, the affection, and adoption of every nation which is yet a stranger to it." The idea of the open society is evident in the Federalist Papers. We need only think of the tenth essay in which Madison states that the causes of faction ought not to be eliminated since this elimination would amount to destroying liberty or else giving to everyone the same opinions, passions, and interests.

In his First Inaugural Address, Thomas Jefferson called republican government under the Constitution "the world's best hope." Although he favored majority rule, he stipulated that it should be reasonable. His ideal government basically leaves citizens "free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement." He also stated that "every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all republicans—we are federalists. If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it."

On March 6, 1801, Jefferson wrote to John Dickinson: "A just and solid republican government mentioned here, will be a standing monument and example for the aim and imitation of the people of other countries; and I join with you in the hope and belief that they will see . . . that . . . our revolution and its consequences, will ameliorate the condition of man over a great portion of the globe." In a letter dated October 28, 1813, he emphasized to John Adams the importance of education and elaborated the concept of the natural aristocracy. On July 12, 1816, he wrote to Samuel Kercheval: "I am certainly not an advocate for frequent and untried changes

in laws and constitutions. . . . But I know also, that laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths disclosed, and manners and opinions change with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also, and keep pace with the times." Two weeks later, on August 1, he wrote to John Adams: "We are destined to be a barrier against the return of ignorance and barbarism. Old Europe will have to lean on our shoulders, and to hobble along by our side, under the monkish trammels of priests and kings, as she can," adding that, hopefully, the American colossus would radiate "the reason and freedom of the globe." Clearly, the author of the Declaration of Independence, founder of the University of Virginia, and promoter of freedom of religion, whom Benjamin F. Hallett named "the apostle of Freedom" and Gilbert Chinard spoke of as "The Apostle of Americanism," and whom James Truslow Adams also called the greatest and most influential American exponent both of liberalism and Americanism, made plain the need for the opening of the American mind for the good of humanity.

How can one, then, dare to assert that the closing of the American mind, which to my delight Allan Bloom has described to a large audience, is an aspect of the Americanization of the mind? In a large measure, the key lies with Jefferson, who more than anyone else hovers over developments in the United States. It lies in the best-known words he wrote in the best-known American document, words that became the best known of American thought: *the pursuit of happiness*. It lies in the lifestyle of the man and his own pursuit of happiness.

Jefferson may well have spoken of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" in order not to make it too obvious that he was copying from Locke's Second Treatise, in which the sequence "life, liberty and prosperity" occurs frequently. There is reason to believe that he had in mind

property when he wrote "happiness." On May 8, 1825, he wrote to Richard Henry Lee rejecting the thought that he wanted to express anything new when drafting the Declaration. Thus, just a year before his death, he forwent an opportunity of making himself appear as an innovator, something that Lincoln, in his address of January 27, 1838, considered a prerequisite for immortality.

Be this as it may, the concept of "pursuit of happiness," conceived in the new nation of the New World, was brought forth at a time when the new ideas of liberalism were emphasized by men like Smith and Kant, when these ideas, long ascendant, were receiving greater recognition, and when the age of liberalism was about to succeed that of Enlightenment. Under the auspices of liberalism proper, that concept spawned various liberties and all kinds of liberal variations. This was bound to happen in the land of the free in which the liberalism considered proper by most of the Founding Fathers increasingly approached pure liberalism, one that was free from ethical, moral, and other connotations, including the liberty of closing the American mind.

Jefferson's lifestyle aided this development. While his writings teem with admonitions, his personal pursuit of happiness shows activities that were on the libertine rather than the moral side. These included affairs with his slaves, prompting T. B. Hamilton in *Man and Manners in America*, published five years after Jefferson's death, to accuse Jefferson even of auctioning off his own children and thus making money from his debaucheries. In 1792 Alexander Hamilton had already mentioned to Edward Carrington Jefferson's passions, which were also emphasized by Adams in *The Living Jefferson*. According to a note John Quincy Adams made in his diary on January 11, 1831, Jefferson engaged in rather egoistic private pursuits that were hedonistically tuned to present allurements and prospects. They were reflected in his public career in which he continually adjusted himself to the good graces of those who

counted, including the voters.

Kant, aware of the risks of the uses and abuses of freedom, let a liberating work like the *Critique of Pure Reason* to be followed in 1788 by his *Critique of Practical Reason*, full of categorical imperatives which the sage of Königsberg tried to follow throughout his life, thus leaving no doubt that the fulfillment of duty came before *Glückseligkeit*. The master of Monticello showed, in sharp contrast, the *savoir-vivre* of a *bon vivant* in a pursuit of happiness tuned to the pleasures of the moment. Easily getting tired of one thing and turning to another, he rearranged his principles and liberally invented new ones.

It is hardly surprising that, in the new world of the country of unlimited opportunities, Jefferson's compatriots and their descendants followed in his footsteps, the more so since immigration made the United States a nation of migrants—of seekers after ever new things, in a large measure subjectively and materialistically oriented. This was reinforced by the innate ambiguity of free government. Did it imply a government that left individuals free or one that was free to oppress them? Most of the founders of the American republic understood it in the former sense, under which the ruling majority was bound to respect the rights of individuals and minorities. With the march of democracy it came to mean that the majority was free to disregard and even to oppress these rights. Complaints about that were heard under the New Freedom, the New Deal, the New Frontier, and other similar programs. All these liberal variations were possible under the aegis of liberalism proper or of pure liberalism that knows no limits in the liberal pursuit of happiness.

It is true, as Bloom points out, that developments in the United States were increasingly influenced by foreign ideas. This was bound to happen in a nation open to immigration. A country open to immigrants is likely to be open to their ideas, which may very well conflict with prevalent ones. Too, in a nation born towards the end of the Enlightenment and

the beginning of the liberal century, there was bound to be a climate not only of receptivity concerning new ideas, but also of one calling for an ever new world of ever new opinions. The appetite of the Enlightenment and of liberalism for new things is insatiable. The human, all too human democratic liberalism, which the Constitution restricting democracy was supposed to put humanely in its place, was quite in vogue in some states, as was demonstrated by the mass of legislation which Madison denounced in Federalist No. 62, as well as by Shays' Rebellion.

In his dissenting opinion, Oliver W. Holmes stated in *Gitlow v. New York* (1925): "If in the long run the beliefs expressed in proletarian dictatorship are destined to be accepted by the dominant forces of the community . . . they should be given their chance and have their way." These words disclose, of course, the influence of Marx, but they are also in line with what Benjamin Hichborn said in Boston eleven years before Kant's second critique, namely, that "civil liberty" did not imply "a government of laws, made agreeable to charters, bills of rights or compacts, but a power existing in the people at large, at any time, for any cause, or for no cause, but their own sovereign pleasure, to alter or annihilate both the mode and essence of any former government, and to adopt a new one in its stead" (H. Niles, ed., *Principles and Acts of the American Revolution*, 1822, pp. 27, 30). Holmes's statement is also in tune with John Marshall's policy expressed in *McCulloch v. Maryland*, that the Constitution must be adjusted to new conditions, followed later by Roger Taney during the age of Jacksonian democracy, in the Charles River case that emphasized the rights of the community *vis-à-vis* individuals. In short, not only the advocates of unlimited democracy, but also the interpreters of the Constitution designed to limit majority rule were in favor of change. This is not surprising, for they all can be called brethren of the same principle, liberalism.

Nor is it surprising that, as the Enlighten-

ment faded away and as democracy developed during the liberal era, the United States changed from an elitist to an egalitarian democracy according to that other catchword of the Declaration of Independence, "all men are created equal." As the United States moved from representative popular government, which was praised in the tenth essay of the *Federalist* for refining public views, to direct democracy, which was denounced for being unreasonable, the American scene more and more became that of an *Umwertung aller Werte*. However, the land of the free was mainly just brave enough to take the liberty of opening minds to the Dionysian Nietzsche, to the *Götzen-Dämmerung* of traditional values, and to the *Morgenröte* of new ones, dubious as they might be.

By and large, Americans ignored the great *Entsager* who admired Schopenhauer's saint and the heroic way of life, which was different from the American way of life in the pursuit of happiness. Given the change in the United States from limited to unlimited majority rule and the decline of judicial review, the one-sided influence of Nietzsche was dangerous mainly because Jefferson's ideas on equality and happiness were the fertile ground on which the Nietzschean seed blossomed. That ground also received the thoughts of Freud, making this country Freud's house, in which the replacement of the principle *lex, rex* by that of *sex, rex* was increasingly taken for granted.

This development was complemented by the mass of social legislation that came about especially with the advent of the New Deal. There emerged a new generation that took the pursuit of happiness to mean governments, parents, and universities pursuing their goals with public assistance so they could happily indulge in all kinds of pleasures without working too hard (even at the risk of AIDS), as well as revolting against the Establishment and shirking military service to their country. All this may well have been supported by Weber's value-free ideas, which facilitated the replacement of long-cherished values by new ones. Yet again it was made easier

by the belief that all men are created equal. From this belief it is but a small step to both the assertion that all values are equal and the faith in a pursuit of happiness that allows, in the sense of pure liberalism, everything according to the permissive principle, "as you like it," including the closing of the human mind. Since in the United States pure liberalism, or liberalism proper, is approached to a much greater degree than in other nations, suggesting the equation "Liberalization = Americanization," it can be asserted that because of increasing emancipations and liberal variations, the closing of the American mind is an aspect of the Americanization of the human mind. To what degree Americanization also closes the humane mind is a further question worth considering, if the answer does not already follow from the aforesaid.

Higher education shares much of the responsibility for this development. We must be grateful to Allan Bloom for having pointed to this important fact, even if he has only told us truths that do not necessarily improve the situation but instead make it worse by hurting the image of universities. Because of that very fear, I contented myself, fifty years after Weber's *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, in which he urged keeping politics out of the classroom in order to preserve universities as strongholds for the free and rational pursuit of the truth that to him was a pursuit of happiness more sublime than the one Jefferson had in mind, with bringing out *Youth, University and Democracy*. I have abstained from publishing *Academic Truths and Frauds* as a sequel, showing what administrators, faculties and students actually have made out of the great idea of the university, so that its image might not be tarnished too much, especially in the eyes of students entering a university with open minds.

Still, as a student of Weber's brother Alfred, the Grand Old Man in the reconstruction of the University of Heidelberg after the war, I should like to make a few constructive remarks that might help students, for in a large measure I agree

with Bloom's comments on them. It has disturbed me, for example, that graduate students are no longer encouraged to expose themselves to as many professors as possible and do not seem to be interested in doing so, but instead choose to "work with" one or two under whom they plan to write their dissertations. In addition the financial spoiling of students is now complemented by the time factor. I often have asked myself why it should take students in the humanities and in the social sciences so much longer to get a doctorate than it takes medical students. With sufficient diligence and devotion a student ought to be able, and be made, to pass the qualifying examination after two years

and to defend his or her dissertation after a year or two. These defenses should not ask just for the opinions of candidates but rigorously test their knowledge. Such a process points towards an elimination of politics from the campus, strongly favored in *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, which emphasized that only scholarly achievement should count. I still remember with pleasure how the late Eric Voegelin stressed that idea to me over a cup of tea in his hospitable home in Munich, where in 1919 Weber delivered that famous lecture. *Semper apertus*.

—Gottfried Dietze