

AMERICA'S SPIRITUAL CAPITAL

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America is a market-oriented, center-right polity and the modern exemplar of the Judeo-Christian heritage of spiritual capital. Let me present two theses in this regard and demonstrate what they mean for governing and markets, the theme of your Forum.

The first thesis concerns the logic of modernity. What distinguishes modernity is the Technological Project, the transformation of nature for human betterment as opposed to fatalistic conformity. The technological project requires inner-directed individuals and free market economies that maximize competition and innovation. Free market economies operate best with limited government (Montesquieu's commercial republic and Madison's Federalist #10). Limited government can only be maintained under the Rule of Law. The rule of law can only be sustained if there is a larger cultural context that celebrates responsible individual autonomy. Finally, responsible individual autonomy presupposes a larger ontological claim about human freedom or free will that requires a theology. Moreover, personal autonomy avoids self-destruction and adds a spiritual content to the technological project itself when the responsible use of freedom leads to helping to fulfill God's plan by eliminating suffering and promoting freedom in and for others.

Recognizing, pursuing, and sustaining autonomy are the spiritual quests of modernity and the technological project, which is best, evidenced, in the American experiment. To discover that our greatest sense of fulfillment comes from freely imposing order on ourselves in order to impose a creative order on the world is perhaps the closest way of coming to know God.

Three considerations lead me to maintain that responsible personal autonomy requires theological support. First, personal autonomy presupposes free will. This amounts to saying that there is no naturalistic (and scientific) explanation of the ultimate truths about who we are. Second, we understand ourselves as historical beings, but history does not form a self-explanatory system. Our interpretation of the whole human drama depends on an intimately personal decision concerning the part we mean to play in it. In the end, this is a religious decision, not a scientific or scholarly one. Finally, sustaining our autonomy under trying circumstances requires spiritual stamina. Since naturalism and scientism fail, theology in some important sense emerges as the only discipline that can provide ultimate comprehension.

The second thesis is the documented history of how settlers and immigrants to the United States (my family and your families) brought this larger view to America, nourished it, and sustained it.

The most important historical development in the last four hundred years has been the rise of the technological project. This project, not the market, is the starting point for our narrative, because, although there have always been markets, it is only since the 17th century that markets have come to play such a dominant role in our lives. It is the presence of the Technological Project that explains the centrality of markets.

The following claims with regard to the Technological Project can be made:

- It is an irreversible historical fact. Abandonment of the project would have catastrophic consequences for humanity and threaten its very existence.
- To the extent that the Project creates environmental and other kinds of problems we are now irrevocably committed to using future developments to address and hopefully solve those problems.
- Those cultures which have most fully embraced the technological project ,(including military technology) have come to dominate the world and to spread the Technological Project. The spread has not been a matter of the powerful imposing on the weak; the weak have largely come to embrace the project on their own. The thorny issues of globalization would not have developed outside of the context of the technological project.

Starting with Copernicus, western thinkers became aware of how much of what we understand reflects the human perspective (and so did the artists of the Renaissance). Copernicus, for example, maintained that despite appearances the sun does not raise and set, rather the earth turns on its axis. Starting with Copernicus and reinforced by the work of Galileo, Descartes, and Newton, Western thinkers came to recognize how much of science depended not on naïve observation of surface phenomena but on the construction of hypothetical mathematical models about hidden structure. Newton and Leibniz would both go on to invent the calculus. Meaning and structure (and in a word truth) were not to be found externally but in the internal models of the human mind. Wisdom and success were transformed from conformity to an external structure to bending or conforming the external physical world to human reason and imagination. The belief that human beings could understand and control the hidden structure of nature, and that the hidden structure was conducive to human benefit, was inspired by Christianity.

Among the first to proclaim the Technological Project as a self-conscious undertaking were Francis Bacon¹ when he proclaimed that “knowledge is power” and Rene Descartes, French philosopher, mathematician, and physicist, who advocated that human beings make themselves “the masters and possessors of nature.” It is worth noting that Descartes specifically singled out the importance of advances in medical science for an age in which the normal human life span was 36 years! It was also Descartes who in his Discourse on Method advocated the development of inner-directed individuals cooperating to produce innovative ideas for understanding and controlling natural processes. Finally, Descartes also recognized how commercial republics like Holland in the 17th century were peculiarly hospitable to these new developments.

The Technological Project is fostered by an environment in which human beings are given as much free reign as possible to use their imagination (a) to think scientifically in the mathematical-modeling sense and (b) to develop new ways and products for humanity to control the physical environment, to protect and heal the human body, and to make life more comfortable and enjoyable. The economic institution most conducive to the was the free market economy: a system for the exchange of goods and services wherein there is no central allocation of such goods and services.

The market economy was not itself entirely new. In fact, it could be maintained that private property had always existed in historical memory. The Church, moreover, had officially

defended the importance of private property. What was new was the recognition of how crucial private property and a free market economy were to the Technological Project. Why is that? Innovation cannot, by definition, be planned. To the extent that property is privately owned and not centrally controlled, and to the extent that a free market economy is competitive, there is a greater possibility for innovation. In his canonical work, which marked the beginning of modern economic theory, Adam Smith argued in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) that a free market economy encouraged innovation. It was innovative because the division of labor led to specialization and specialization led to innovation as well as greater productivity. Smith's example of the manufacturing of pins explains how an assembly line of narrowly focused specialists is far more productive. Once we focus on one part of a process we are apt to invent labor saving devices. Because it is the best vehicle for innovation, the free market economy is the best form of economic system for engaging in the Technological Project. Finally; the historical-empirical argument for the advantages of a free market economy is the 1989 implosion of the Soviet Union. I was there! Almost everywhere it is now admitted that a free market economy is the most efficient method for engaging in the technological project.

While private property had always existed, governments from time immemorial had regulated and controlled them in varying degrees to advance their own purposes and not for the Technological Project. To get the maximum advantage out of a market economy it needs to be as free as possible to foster maximum innovation. Government or the State can play a useful but limited function by providing a legal system for protecting the rights of individuals, especially private property, for enforcing contracts, and for dispute resolution. In order for a free market economy to function it requires a limited government known as a commercial republic. A republic is a government of laws and not of men. A Republic is not a democracy, for a democracy involves majority rule and not constitutional rule. From Plato and Aristotle right through the 18th-century Founding, democracy was rejected as mob rule. Democracy technically means majority-rule, and in practice becomes a system of political economy in which the bottom 51 percent progressively loot the wealth and productivity of the top 49 percent.

Democracy was understood by the American Founders as part of a system of checks and balances that prevents one interest from imposing its will upon others. Democracy, as Madison made clear in Federalist # 10, is a negative device for blocking one powerful interest group or faction from imposing its will on others. Democracy was never intended as a positive device for articulating a suspect common good. It was during the nineteenth-century in Europe that democracy as majority rule was posited as the will of the people. That is when Tocqueville and Mill came to view democracy as a threat, as the tyranny of the majority. It evolves into the formal notion that what is right is what the majority decides or that the common good is what the majority decides it is on a given occasion.

In the post-Renaissance and Reformation period, Protestants especially in America saw an important connection between politics and economics. The desire for political equality was not the desire to exercise power for power's sake or to remake society. On the contrary, Protestants were largely focused on protecting the private sphere and the spiritual dimension from political corruption. The connection between politics and economics derived from the fact that government controlled large parts of the economy (granting of privileges such as monopolies, sinecures, land grants, etc.). Political equality implied economic equality in the

sense that all possessed the liberty to pursue God's work in this world, not an equal distribution of the spoils.

Part of the meaning of political equality was equality before the law, and equality before the law meant appeal to the rule of law and not the whim of political leaders. Crucial to the development of the rule of law in England was the theologian Richard Hooker who adapted Thomistic notions of natural law to the Church of England and influenced John Locke who quotes him extensively in the Second Treatise.

The demand for equality before the law was an expression of the notion of Christian liberty. In rejecting a hierarchical conception of the world, Protestants could accept that the political realm was no longer subordinate to the religious realm. But, at the same time, the political realm had to respect the traditional spiritual realm of Christianity. That realm as understood in Protestant terms meant the opportunity to do God's work by transforming the world economically. Equality before the law came to mean that there should be no legal barriers to economic activity that did not apply equally to everyone. Placing legal barriers in the economic realm was tantamount to thwarting God's plan.

The rule of law has evolved jurisprudentially into meaning a legal system that constrains government. Typically in practice the powers of government are divided among separate branches, with an independent judiciary. Due process and the equal protection of the law protects the rights of individuals by constitutional means. It is a system of rules designed to allow individuals to pursue their self-defined interests without interfering with that same pursuit on the part of others. The rule of law provides the rules of the game without determining the outcome of the game.

There is an important connection between spiritual capital and responsibility. Purpose refers to a person's belief that life has meaning. Autonomy refers to a person's belief that it is in his power to fulfill that meaning through his own acts creativity ultimately comes down to small, solitary acts in which an individual conceives of something new and gives it a try, without knowing for sure how it will turn out. Streams of accomplishment are more common and more extensive in cultures where doing new things and acting autonomously are encouraged than in cultures that disapprove.

In order for a government to remain limited and not become either authoritarian or totalitarian or subject to mob-rule, it is necessary that the citizens of that government be special kinds of people. They must be autonomous responsible people. Such people: are those who rule themselves (i.e., they impose order on their lives through self-discipline in order to achieve goals that they have set for themselves).

The so-called Protestant work ethic promoted the notions of the inner-directed individual; an emphasis on achievement through work; equality before the law; and, differentiation based on the merits of achievement.

It is the combination of the Technological Project, and the Free Market Economy, that account for the appearance of a new persona, the entrepreneur. In the 16th-century we find the first use of the term entrepreneur, from the French verb *entreprendre* – to undertake something. The entrepreneur discovers or imagines new ways of combining resources to create new products

or new methods of production. The entrepreneur engages in what Joseph Schumpeter was to call creative-destruction.

Autonomous people, practicing virtue, are inner-directed and therefore capable of participating in the Technological Project in a creative and constructive way. In fact, the ultimate purpose of the Project is not simply to create wealth but to allow autonomous people to express their freedom and how such freedom reflects God's will. Wealth is a means to achievement and freedom, not an end in itself. It is in this sense that the Technological Project is to be understood as the spiritual quest of modernity. This is America's quest. The ultimate rationale for the technological project is not consumer satisfaction but the production of the means of accomplishment. Our greatest fulfillment comes from freely imposing order on ourselves in order to impose a creative order on the world. We have now come full circle. We started with the Technological Project and now we have explained that even the Technological Project itself is an expression of spiritual capital.

The Judeo-Christian roots of autonomy are evident: it is the culmination of the Christian doctrine of free will and responsibility transposed to the civil sphere. Social scientists will offer some resistance at this point. Those committed to scientism (or extreme versions of positivism) may concede that religious belief has in fact played a significant role in affecting market behavior and social institutions in the past and present, but they may also think that it "ought" not to have this influence in the future. My argument, on the contrary, is that the spiritual dimension is a 'necessary' condition for the continued vitality of free societies; any form of scientism is intellectually deficient; and, scientism cannot generate an adequate account of ethical principles.

Autonomous people want to run their own lives, and they do not want the government or any other institution to control them. They are jealous of their liberties and want the government to be restricted to its proper spheres. They are focused on taking care of themselves and not looking for others to take care of them. The abuse of democratic procedure requires the political and legal machinery of checks and balances. Political machinery ultimately depends on the larger cultural context. We are, therefore, brought back to the need for a culture that preserves something like the importance of individuality and human flourishing.

Autonomous people want recognition of their autonomy. This recognition can only come from other autonomous people who understand what self-discipline requires. Autonomous people seek to promote autonomy in others in order to encourage this recognition. They believe in helping others. But promoting the autonomy of others does not mean redistribution; it means equality of opportunity not equality of result; it means holding everyone accountable, not condescension; it means when necessary teaching others how to fish, not giving them a fish. Autonomy is not zero-sum. The ultimate self-interest of autonomous people is never in conflict with the ultimate self-interest of others.

In the ancient and medieval world there was no poverty problem. Almost everyone was poor and poverty was considered the natural and unavoidable condition of the human race. As a result of the Technological Project, we can now contemplate a world of such abundance that no

one or few will be poor in the absolute sense, a world marked by ever increasing growth and opportunity.

What are the global implications of the foregoing? A national government is obliged to serve the market economy not only at home but abroad. One of the consequences, therefore, of modern commerce is the potential end of war, what Kant referred to as perpetual peace. As Kant went on to argue, commercial republics do not go to war with each other. This hypothesis has enormous empirical support. It has been argued that in the last two hundred years since Kant wrote Perpetual Peace, there have been no major wars where all of the combatants on both sides have been commercial republics.

This leads to the following tension and paradox: domestically the government is to maintain a low profile and fairly passive supporting role for commerce but in the international context the government is to promote actively the entire panoply of TP, FME, LG, and RL. To intervene in foreign affairs to bring about this result is incumbent upon free governments. It is no use pretending that the implications could be otherwise.

The next American president, whoever he is, must abide by and within the established heritage of America's long established spiritual capital. He cannot deny it, reject it, or pretend it away. The democratic ideal of interventionist socialism we have toyed with surely must come to an end, as it is at odds with what I have defined as, America's true spiritual heritage .

Hopefully, I have made the case that America's success and leadership have an integral relation to its accumulated spiritual capital.

Our heritage is under assault from a variety of sources today.

We therefore need to reidentify the unique content of America's Judeo-Christian spiritual capital. In many ways this is what has essentially come to define America. In the process we must also identify the origins and sources of the current attacks on Judeo-Christian spiritual capital. These include most notably:

- Perennial (heretical) utopian (Gnosticism), now in the various forms of Socialism
- Rousseau/Marx derived narratives of complaint about Modernity
- Militant Secularism (domestic + international) and,
- Militant Radical Islam (internationally)

We must rebut these attacks. Indeed, America will not survive without a renewal of its Judeo-Christian spiritual capital.

- Specifically, this means the importance of personal autonomy and responsibility stemming from the dignity of the individual as a human person. And,
- The need to support civil association with a robust content-full morality.

At no place would I advocate a theocracy or anything less than a democratic Republic that is rooted in commerce and ultimately, produces human flourishing. I would however

advocate, the rejuvenation of Judeo-Christian spiritual capital as a cultural phenomenon, the non-apologetic expression of one's faith, the re-education of misguided clerics, educators, the media, and America's leaders, and most of all direct, honest, lawful, and vigorous confrontation of America's critics and its enemies.

My friends, tradition tells of a chime that changed the entire world when it rang on July 8, 1776. It was the sound from the tower of Independence Hall summoning the citizens of my hometown, Philadelphia to hear the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence by Colonel John Nixon.

The Pennsylvania Assembly had ordered the Bell in 1751 to commemorate the 50-year anniversary of William Penn's 1701 Charter of Privileges, Pennsylvania's original Constitution. It spoke of the rights and freedoms valued by people the world over. Particularly insightful were Penn's ideas on religious freedom, his stance on American rights, and his inclusion of citizens in enacting laws. The Liberty Bell gained iconic importance when abolitionists in their efforts to put an end to slavery throughout America adopted it as a symbol. As the Bell was created to commemorate the golden anniversary of Penn's Charter, the quotation: "Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof," taken from Leviticus 25:10, seemed particularly apt.

We need to ring that same Bell again; to defend and rearticulate America's spiritual capital.

* This material was derived from, *America's Spiritual Capital* by Nicholas Capaldi and Theodore Roosevelt Malloch, St. Augustine Press, 2012.