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A NEWSLETTER FOR THE CAUX ROUND TABLE FOR MORAL CAPITALISM
NETWORK LOOKING AT BUSINESS ABOVE THE CLUTTER AND CONFETTI



Pegasus

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Introduction

As we mark our 250th birthday in the United States, it is a time for celebration and reflection. In June *Pegasus*, we have several essays that offer thoughts on this important national milestone.

First, Steve Young kicks it off with an essay titled, “The American Declaration of Independence and the Caux Round Table’s Ethical Principles for Decision-Making.” He notes that the Caux Round Table has drawn from the thinking that permeated discussions during the founding of the country. “The Caux Round Table Principles for Government begin with this premise: public power is held in trust for the community. Once the premise of government as powers held in trust for the people is accepted, then guidance on how to promote “happiness” is needed.”

He adds that this notion that a trustee serves the people has deep roots. “The requirement that government serve as a trustee for the good of the people was the moral (and rational) premise for John Locke when he wrote his *Second Treatise on Government* in 1689.” But as Steve notes, its origins stretch back to the Old Testament and can also be found in the depths of other cultures.

Next, we hear from several fellows who have offered reflections on the 250th.

In “Education is the Foundation of Self-Government,” John C. Knapp, Ph.D., a former college president and a scholar of theology and religion, writes about the importance of education. “Washington said of education, ‘Without this foundation, every other means, in my opinion, must fail.’ Thomas Jefferson wrote, ‘Educate and inform the whole mass of the people... They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.’”

Jefferson, he writes, “throughout his life, saw an educated populace as a guard against unscrupulous or overly ambitious leaders at the state or federal levels... There are some encouraging efforts today to reclaim civics education in primary and secondary education, but it is uncertain whether they will see much success.” And as John argues, civics education is core to a strong citizenry, a key aspect of a republic.

In “The Socratic Republic: Dialectic, Sophistry and the Quest for Universal Truth,” Abdullah al-Ahsan, a former professor of political science and foreign relations in Turkey, argues that “The founding and evolution of the American Republic can be understood as a grand, historical, Socratic quest – one that has consistently sought to manifest a singular, universal truth of human dignity through a messy, confrontational dialectic.”

He makes the case that “the Scottish Enlightenment, particularly Adam Smith, balanced the framers’ understanding of human nature. While Smith is often remembered for economic theory, his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* argued that society is held together by “sympathy” – an innate capacity for moral benevolence and mutual regard.”

In “Policing and the Promise of July 4th,” Matthew Bostrom, former sheriff of Ramsey County, Minnesota, makes the case for the importance of policing in the pursuit of happiness. “Not to enforce compliance. Not to project power. To secure rights. That distinction is not semantic. It is foundational... The Declaration’s promise – life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness – requires policing.”

Kasit Piromya, former foreign minister of Thailand, writes in “Spiritual America Serves the Global Community” that “Public officeholders must be equipped or imbued with moral conscience and authority.” Moreover, “Public officeholders must constantly be reminded of the noble undertaking.”

In “Understanding the Spirit of Freedom: The Importance of Remembering the Foundations of American Self-Government,” Stephen Jordan, founder and CEO of the Institute for Sustainable Development, cites Benjamin Franklin’s famous quote about the U.S.: “A republic, if you can keep it.” He warns that “250 years after the country’s founding – the average life expectancy of great powers – there are concerns that the republican spirit is fraying, not just from one potential point of failure, but many.”

The solution is, in part, embodying Alexis de Tocqueville’s key insight that “American liberty depended not primarily on constitutional architecture, but on *moeurs* – the habits of the heart, formed in families, congregations, voluntary associations and local self-government that disposed citizens to take their obligations seriously.”

Michael W. Wright, CEO of Intercepting Horizons, hits on a hot topic in “What Now: AI at America’s 250th.” “Now we reach an historic anniversary, holding not just a new kind of power, but a civilization-transforming one. The honest question is: what will we do with it?” He frames it as one more chapter, however intense in the age-old mission of the U.S. “Even with the advent of AI, that remains our work, still being argued, still being hard earned, two hundred and fifty years on.”

Lastly, Michael Hartoonian offers “A Birthday Wish for America and the World.” “My birthday wish for Americans and for citizens of the world is to engage in renewal... to understand who we are and who we will become, with all the privileges and responsibilities bestowed upon citizens of a democratic republic.”

He adds: “We the People” never are, but are always to be. We will always have questions in search of testable answers in order to form a more perfect union.

Happy birthday America!

Dave Kansas
Editor-at-Large
Pegasus



The American Declaration of Independence and the Caux Round Table's Ethical Principles for Decision-Making

Stephen B. Young

The U.S. Declaration of Independence, dated July 4, 1776, proposed that government is a public trust established for the benefit of citizens:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

Thus, as a universal principle for all of humanity, government legitimacy and therefore its right to call upon the loyalty and deference of those under the authority of its laws, regulations and instructions is earned and sustained by service of the people – by providing for them liberty and the opportunity for them to pursue “happiness” – as they define happiness.

(My ancestor, Lewis Morris, signed the Declaration, so its teachings have been something of a family inheritance for me.)

The Caux Round Table Principles for Government begin with this premise: public power is held in trust for the community.

Power brings responsibility. Power is a necessary moral circumstance in that it binds the actions of one to the welfare of others. Therefore, the power given by public office is held in trust for the benefit of the community and its citizens. Officials are custodians only of the powers they hold. They have no personal entitlement to office or the prerogatives thereof.

Holders of public office are accountable for their conduct while in office. They are subject to removal for malfeasance, misfeasance or abuse of office. The burden of proof that no malfeasance, misfeasance or abuse of office has occurred lies with the officeholder.

The state is the servant and agent of higher ends. It is subordinate to society. Public power is to be exercised within a framework of moral responsibility for the welfare of others. Governments that abuse their trust shall lose their authority and may be removed from office.

Once the premise of government as powers held in trust for the people is accepted, then guidance on how to promote “happiness” is needed.

The principles then provide specific standards for the work of public governance that will lead to citizens having the liberty to pursue their happiness, each in his or her own way with respect for the similar liberty in others and with due respect for vigorous citizenship responsibility in support of the common good.

For example, the principles advocate that discourse ethics should guide application of public power.

Public power, however allocated by constitutions, referendums or laws, shall rest its legitimacy in processes of communication and discourse among autonomous moral agents who constitute the community to be served by the government. Free and open discourse, embracing independent media, shall not be curtailed, except to protect legitimate expectations of personal privacy, sustain the confidentiality needed for the proper separation of powers or for the most dire of reasons relating to national security.

The civic order shall serve all those who accept the responsibilities of citizenship.

Public power constitutes a civic order for the safety and common good of its members. The civic order, as a moral order, protects and promotes the integrity, dignity and self-respect of its members in their capacity as citizens and therefore, avoid all measures, oppressive and other, whose tendency is to transform the citizen into a subject. The state shall protect, give legitimacy to or restore all those principles and institutions which sustain the moral integrity, self-respect and civic identity of the individual citizen and which also serve to inhibit processes of civic estrangement, dissolution of the civic bond and civic disaggregation. This effort by the civic order itself protects the citizen’s capacity to contribute to the well-being of the civic order.

The civic order, through its instrumentalities, shall provide for the security of life, liberty and property for its citizens in order to insure domestic tranquility.

The rule of law shall be honored and sustained, supported by honest and impartial tribunals and legislative checks and balances.

General welfare contemplates improving the well-being of individual citizens.

The state shall nurture and support all those social institutions most conducive to the free self-development and self-regard of the individual citizen. Public authority shall seek to avoid or to ameliorate conditions of life and work which deprive the individual citizen of dignity and self-regard or which permit powerful citizens to exploit the weak.

The state has a custodial responsibility to manage and conserve the material and other resources that sustain the present and future well-being of the community.

The requirement that government serve as a trustee for the good of the people was the moral (and rational) premise for John Locke when he wrote his *Second Treatise on Government* in 1689.

Long before Locke, the requirement that rulers serve those under their authority was set forth in the Old Testament.

In the book 1 Samuel, we read:

When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn son was Joel and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. Yet, his sons did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."

So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking for a king from him. He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your male servants and female servants and the

best of your young men and your donkeys and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks and you shall be his slaves. And in that day, you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day.” (1 Samuel 8)

Cross-culturally, in China before the inauguration of the imperial system of authoritarian rule, Mencius similarly proposed rulership as a public trust always obedient to the principles of humaneness and righteousness (*ren y*). He noted that “Heaven sees as the people see; Heaven hears and the people hear.”

In the Qu’ran we read that all persons are to act always as good stewards of the Lord God (*khalifa*) avoiding corruption (*fasad*) and never replacing God’s guidance with their own selfishly generated desires and prejudicial thinking (*shirk*).

According to the Declaration of Independence, Samuel’s warning about the high-handedness of kings and their disdain for the welfare of the people applied to King George of Great Britain, his ministers and his parliament in oppressing the residents of his colonies in North America. The Declaration said:

The history of the present king of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

Some of the abuses of trust cited in the Declaration were:

He has refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good. ...

He has forbidden his governors to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them. ...

He has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of representation in the legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only. ...

He has made judges dependent on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices and the amount and payment of their salaries. ...

He has erected a multitude of new offices and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people and eat out their substance. ...

He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies without the consent of our legislatures. ...

He has affected to render the military independent of and superior to the civil power. ...

For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world: ...

He has abdicated government here, by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us. ...

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns and destroyed the lives of our people. ...

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages and totally unworthy the head of a civilized nation. ...

In every stage of these oppressions, we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms: our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

And as the people of Isreal experienced kings abusing their powers of governance, the Lord spoke to the prophet Ezekiel.

The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them, even to the shepherds, thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought and with force and harshness, you have ruled them. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd and they became food for all the wild beasts. ...

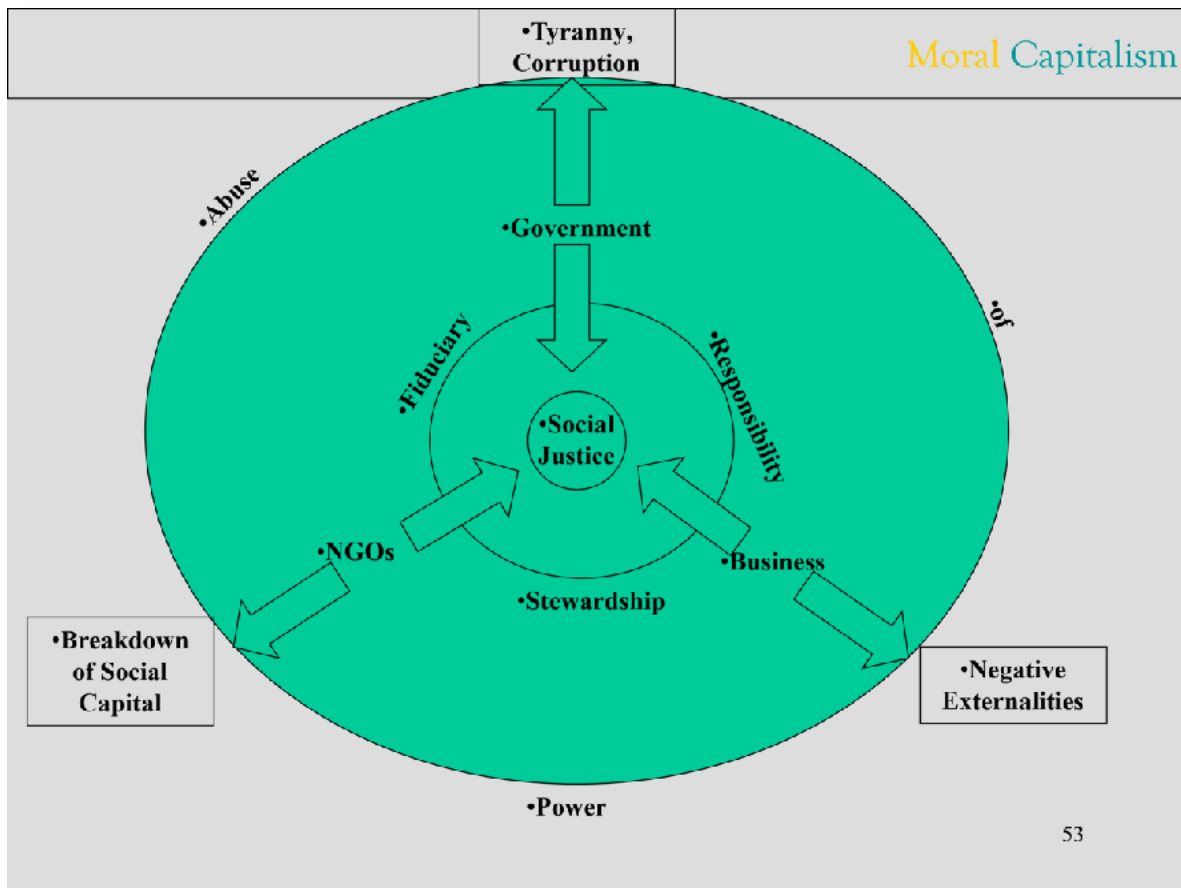
Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against the shepherds and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. (Ezekiel 34)

In the American case, the American people – not the Lord God – acted, but they acted in conformity to “the laws of nature and of nature’s God” to rescue themselves from living under the management of a bad shepherd.

But from the perspective of the Caux Round Table, principles for moral government alone provide insufficient guidance for the successful pursuit of happiness.

Responsibility comes with liberty and so in business and finance, civil society, ownership of property, education, journalism moral standards contribute to human flourishing.

This PowerPoint slide illustrates this conviction of the Caux:



Thus, the Caux Round Table has proposed moral principles for the following:

- The good citizen
- Journalists
- Teachers
- Owners of wealth
- Civil society institutions
- Businesses
- Users of social media

In order to help individuals become leaders in what they do in their use of liberty and to further general happiness, the Caux Round Table has designed self-assessments for individuals in leadership and inner-direction so that they can become better stewards in creation.

Stephen B. Young is global executive director of the Caux Round Table.

Education is the Foundation of Self-Government

John C. Knapp, Ph.D.



When the nation's founders declared the colonies' independence from the British crown, they knew the exercise of self-government would require a responsible and well-educated citizenry. It was no coincidence, therefore, that within a few weeks of the surrender of General Charles Cornwallis to George Washington at Yorktown, Virginia, three Presbyterian ministers on the western frontier of Pennsylvania were merging their log-cabin schools to form an institution of higher learning known today as Washington & Jefferson College. The project in 1781 was supported by Benjamin Franklin, whose vision for education had previously been the catalyst establishing the University of Pennsylvania.

Washington said of education, "Without this foundation, every other means, in my opinion, must fail." Thomas Jefferson wrote, "Educate and inform the whole mass of the people... They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty."

Jefferson is known for founding the University of Virginia in 1819, but it was through his 1778 "Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge" that he first attempted to establish a decentralized public school system in Virginia. Throughout his life, he saw an educated populace as a guard against unscrupulous or overly ambitious leaders at the state or federal levels.

After the new nation was established, no one took up the cause of education with greater impact than William Holmes McGuffey, a minister and college professor who was encouraged by Harriett Beecher Stowe to write a series of schoolbooks to teach children nationwide. The *Eclectic Readers*, better known informally as *McGuffey Readers*, had a lasting influence

on generations of Americans, selling more than 120 million copies from 1836 to 1960 and are still in print today. The series of readers progressed through multiple grade levels and were noteworthy for their emphasis on character and citizenship, in addition to reading, grammar and vocabulary.

Civics education continued to be a staple of American public education until the late 20th century when it was widely discontinued to make ever more room for classes on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The unfortunate result is that students are gaining more technical skills at the expense of understanding their form of government and its foundation on the principles of liberty, equity and the rights of all people. They are also reaping fewer benefits of a curriculum rich in the humanities (history, philosophy, religion and literature) and social sciences (political science, economics, psychology and other subjects related to human behavior in society).

There are some encouraging efforts today to reclaim civics education in primary and secondary education, but it is uncertain whether they will see much success. However, there is no doubt that the framers of the Declaration of Independence believed future generations could only sustain a government by the people by learning why it matters, how it works and what is expected of responsible citizens.

John C. Knapp, Ph.D., is the former president of two distinguished American liberal arts colleges, most recently Washington & Jefferson College in Pennsylvania. A scholar of theology and religion, he is a fellow of the Caux Round Table.



The Socratic Republic: Dialectic, Sophistry and the Quest for Universal Truth at 250

Abdullah al-Ahsan

As the United States reaches its semiquincentennial – the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence – the nation finds itself suspended between celebratory reflection and deep systemic anxiety. The pageantry of the milestone cannot mask a profound ideological fracture. To understand this moment, one must look beyond the immediate political theater and view the American experiment through a classical philosophical lens. The founding and evolution of the American Republic can be understood as a grand, historical, Socratic quest – one that has consistently sought to manifest a singular, universal truth of human dignity through a messy, confrontational dialectic, perpetually challenged by the sophistic forces of self-interest and factionalism. Today, that enduring struggle is thrown into sharp relief not only by modern populist disruptions, but also by the deep institutionalization of special interests.

The Philosophical Architecture of Enlightenment and Governance

To appreciate the Socratic nature of the American founding, it is instructive to examine the material intellectual currents that shaped the minds of the framers. Rather than relying on a sudden, flawless blueprint, the Constitutional Convention of 1787 functioned as a grueling Socratic dialectic. The framers – steeped in classical history and the European Enlightenment – did not begin in total agreement. They clashed bitterly over representation, state sovereignty and federal power. Yet, through a process of proposal, critique and synthesis, they sought to uncover an objective political truth: how to construct a framework of liberty stable enough to withstand the frailties of human nature. Three pillars of Enlightenment moral and political thought anchored this political dialectic: John Locke, Immanuel Kant and Adam Smith.

John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* provided the primary moral propositions that the framers sought to codify. Locke argued that human beings possess inherent, natural rights to life, liberty and estate and that legitimate government is formed solely through a social contract designed to protect these rights. The framers took Locke's foundational truths and subjected them to a rigorous Socratic examination: *how do we translate the abstract ideal of a social contract into a functioning, durable government?*

To elevate this contract beyond mere political utility, the founding philosophy aligns with what Immanuel Kant would later define as the deontological imperative – the idea that certain moral truths are universal and categorical. Kant’s philosophy asserts that human beings must never be treated merely as a means to an end, but as ends in themselves. The Socratic quest of the American republic was precisely an attempt to build an institutional framework that recognized this intrinsic, universal human dignity.

Crucially, the Scottish Enlightenment, particularly Adam Smith, balanced the framers’ understanding of human nature. While Smith is often remembered for economic theory, his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* argued that society is held together by “sympathy” – an innate capacity for moral benevolence and mutual regard. Smith warned that while self-interest drives commerce, society fractures if justice and moral sympathy do not govern political life. The constitutional dialogue, therefore, sought to create a republic that synthesized Locke’s liberty, Kant’s universal human dignity and Smith’s civic morality, balancing the pursuit of individual happiness with the demands of the common good.

The Sophistic Challenge and the Tragedy of Compromise

Socrates famously battled the Sophists, rhetoricians who treated truth as relative and utilized language primarily to acquire power and advance personal or tribal interests. The framers anticipated that the greatest threat to their Socratic republic would be the political equivalent of the Sophists: what James Madison termed “factions.” In *Federalist No. 10*, Madison acknowledged that the “latent causes of faction are thus sown in the nature of man,” driven by self-seeking individuals looking to promote their own economic and social interests at the expense of the common good.

The tragic irony of the American founding is that the framers could not escape these sophistic forces. While the Declaration of Independence boldly asserted the universal, Socratic truth – deeply rooted in Locke’s philosophy – that “all men are created equal,” the historical realities of 1787 erected immense barriers. To secure a political union, the framers conceded to horrific sophistic compromises with Southern slaveholders, embedding chattel slavery into the structural fabric of the nation via the Three-Fifths Clause. In doing so, they violated Kant’s most fundamental moral law by reducing an entire population to a financial and political means to an end.

Yet, because the framers recognized that they had not achieved perfect justice, they did something profoundly Socratic: they left the dialogue open. By incorporating Article V, the amendment process, they acknowledged that the Constitution was an incomplete text. They provided future generations with the dialectical tools necessary to challenge historical barriers, allowing the nation to gradually move out of the cave of institutionalized oppression toward the light of universal human rights. From the abolitionists to the Civil Rights movement, progress has been achieved by holding America accountable to the universal truth of its original Enlightenment ideals.

The Modern Sophistry: Lobbies and the Marginalization of Democracy

At the 250-year mark, however, the primary sophistic challenge to the Republic has evolved far beyond the regional factions Madison originally envisioned. Today, the Socratic dialogue is profoundly marginalized by the systemic rise of corporate and special interest lobbying. If the ancient Sophists sold their rhetorical skills to the highest bidder to distort public debate, modern lobbying firms have institutionalized this practice on an industrial scale.

By pouring billions of dollars into campaign contributions, political action committees, targeted public relations campaigns and powerful interest groups have effectively hijacked the legislative dialectic. Rather than serving as a transparent forum where ideas are weighed for the common good, the political arena increasingly resembles a marketplace where policy is bought, sold and drafted behind closed doors by unelected actors.

This financial saturation creates a profound sophistic distortion of truth. It marginalizes the voice of the ordinary citizen, fracturing the Lockean social contract. It stands as a direct violation of Adam Smith's moral philosophy, which cautioned that an unregulated, predatory pursuit of self-interest without an underlying framework of justice and sympathy would inevitably corrupt the state. When the state prioritizes the narrow profits of powerful lobbies over the natural rights of its population, the democratic process is stripped of its moral legitimacy. The public is left with a deep, justifiable cynicism: the belief that the constitutional dialogue is no longer a search for universal truth, but an elaborate piece of political theater masking corporate oligarchy.

The Trumpian Era: A Resurgence of the Populist Counter-Narrative

This widespread institutional decay and the feeling of democratic marginalization directly paved the way for the political phenomenon of Trumpism, which represents a massive, modern resurgence of the sophistic methodology. Populism, by its very nature, relies heavily on the core tools of the Sophist: powerful rhetoric designed to appeal to emotion rather than reasoned discourse, the polarization of the populace into "us versus them" factions and a transactional view of political institutions where personal or tribal loyalty supersedes adherence to abstract principles of law.

Where the Socratic Method seeks a universal unity of ideas – a common ground rooted in objective truth – the Trumpian challenge thrives on fragmentation. It exposes the lingering historical contradictions of the American project and channels the legitimate grievances of citizens who feel abandoned by both the institutional elite and a money-drenched political system. In doing so, it reframes political life not as a collective journey toward a perfect union, but as a zero-sum conflict where self-seeking interests must be aggressively defended. The institutional safeguards designed by Madison – where "ambition must be made to counteract ambition" – are tested to their absolute limits when the shared consensus regarding the rules of the dialectic itself begins to erode.

Conclusion: The Unfinished Dialogue

The 250th anniversary of the Republic is not a marker of a completed project, but a reminder of an ongoing obligation. The intersecting crises of modern populism and entrenched special interest lobbying have not broken the American framework. Rather, they have acted as a severe stress test, revealing the precise fault lines the framers feared most. They force a fractured nation to confront the reality that democracy is not a self-sustaining machine, but a continuous philosophical argument.

Ultimately, the philosophical climb toward a just society points toward the same Socratic conclusion: truth and justice exist independently of the human hands that falteringly record them. The American story is neither a cynical chronicle of pure self-interest, nor a flawless epic of infallible heroes. It remains a painful, persistent Socratic struggle. As the nation reflects on its two and a half centuries of existence, the vital question is not whether the republic can completely eliminate the sophistic challenges of tribalism, lobbying and self-interest, but whether it still possesses the civic courage to sustain the dialogue.

Abdullah al-Ahsan was a professor of political science and international relations at what was formerly Istanbul Sehir University and a fellow of the Caux Round Table.

Policing and the Promise of July 4th

Matthew Bostrom

When the founders put quill to parchment in Philadelphia in the summer of 1776, they were not merely declaring independence from a king. They were articulating a theory of legitimate authority, one that carries profound implications for policing in America 250 years later.

The Declaration of Independence begins with a statement of purpose: that governments are instituted among men to secure the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Not to enforce compliance. Not to project power. To secure rights. That distinction is not semantic. It is foundational.

James Madison understood the tension at the heart of this project. In *Federalist No. 51*, he wrote that if men were angels, no government would be necessary. And so, we have government. And because government requires enforcement, we have police. The necessity of policing flows directly from the human condition the founders understood with clear eyes.

But the Declaration does something equally important on its other side. It indicts bad policing by name. The grievances against King George read, in significant part, as a catalog of policing failures: the quartering of soldiers among civilians, the protection of officers from accountability for abuses, the administration of justice corrupted by the crown's interests rather than the community's, among others. The founders did not merely tolerate the right kind of policing. They declared that the wrong kind justified revolution.

Two hundred and fifty years later, that same tension defines the American relationship with law enforcement. Communities across this country want to trust their police. Officers across this country want to be trusted. Research conducted at Oxford University and implemented in American cities confirms what the founders intuited: that communities and officers share the same fundamental values. The gap between them is not a gap in values. It is a gap in systems, in whether the institutions of policing are built to reflect and reinforce those shared values or to operate in spite of them.

The Declaration's promise – life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness – requires policing. But it requires the right kind. Policing grounded in the consent of the governed. Policing that treats every person with the dignity the founders declared self-evident. Policing that derives its authority not from the power of the state alone, but from the trust of the community it serves.

Sir Robert Peel, whose principles of modern policing were established just decades after the Declaration, understood this: the police are the public and the public are the police. That is



not a management philosophy. It is the American founding ideal applied to public safety.

On this 250th anniversary, we do not need to choose between safe communities and trusted police. The founders did not offer us that choice. They offered us something more demanding and more hopeful: the obligation to build institutions worthy of the rights they were created to secure.

The work is not finished. It is the work of every generation. And it is exactly the kind of work July 4th was always about.

Matthew Bostrom, Ph.D., is the former sheriff of Ramsey County, Minnesota, the state's second most populous county, and author of Built for Trust: A Blueprint for Building Community Trust in Policing. He is a fellow of the Caux Round Table.

Spiritual America Serves the Global Community

Kasit Piromya

The phrase “the creator” was mentioned in the Decoration of Independence. The inauguration of the president of the United States of America takes the oath with his hand on the Bible. Such signifies the spirituality of the American society and people. There is, therefore, a higher calling more than or above the rules of law and the principle of separation of church and state. Public office holders must be equipped or imbued with moral conscience and authority.

Public office holders must constantly be reminded of the noble undertaking.

Independence from Britain came with blood, sweat and tears. The United States of America of today should no longer act imperialistic, should not impose its will on others and should not harm the independence of others. It has all the resources to share experiences based on individualism, property ownership and fundamental rights in the pursuit of happiness.

I lived in America for six years, first as an undergraduate and much later as a diplomat in Washington D.C. Throughout my life, there is the omni presence of the United States of America that induces optimism, freedom and human dignity. Mistakes do occur, but American greatness is the ability to make a self-examination and to produce a “new deal.”

The Honorable Kasit Piromya is the former foreign minister of Thailand. He is a fellow of the Caux Round Table.





Understanding the Spirit of Freedom: The Importance of Remembering the Foundations of American Self-Government

Stephen Jordan

On September 18, 1787, outside of the constitutional convention hall in Philadelphia, a concerned citizen came up to Benjamin Franklin and asked what kind of government the delegates created. His iconic reply: “A republic, if you can keep it.” We have kept it well to date and cherish it deeply. The U.S. has become the world’s oldest continuing democratic government. But now, 250 years after the country’s founding – the average life expectancy of great powers – there are concerns that the republican spirit is fraying, not just from one potential point of failure, but many. For the United States to continue to protect the “life, liberty and pursuit of happiness” of its citizens, a national project to revitalize the safeguards that have preserved the republic are needed.

The framers of the Constitution brilliantly set up a number of technical safeguards. Checks and balances, separation of powers, representation of the states in one chamber and representation of the people in the other. The Supreme Court codified judicial review to create another safeguard for protecting against laws that went against the spirit of the Constitution. The Federalist Papers also recognized that the system would naturally produce factions and highlighted their importance for keeping one party or ideology from running amok.

Other safeguards accreted over time. The media developed as “the fourth branch of government,” seeing itself as the watchdog holding up transparency and truth. The education system required the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. Other safeguards emerged through the transmission of tradition and the shaping of culture. George Washington’s decision to step down after two terms in office as president was enormously influential in setting a precedent for the relinquishing of power.

The civic pride in America’s institutions was palpable and widespread. According to the Harris polls, up until the mid-1960s, the vast majority of Americans had faith and confidence in our government, our military, the media and other pillars of society. But then the bottom fell out during the height of the Vietnam War and has never fully recovered. Regardless of party or ideology, vast majorities of Americans (with a few exceptional periods) have felt like the country, in the 21st century, has been on the wrong track. It’s not just the institutions and the technical mechanisms that have frayed. It’s also because of morals, culture and leadership.

It begins with the attitudes of those who hold power toward the people they govern. The fiduciary sense among elites has eroded. The inward conviction that public office, or any position of stewardship over the lives of others, is a trust held on behalf of those served, owing duties of honesty, restraint and the long view seem to be observed more in the breach than in practice. The interior sense of being accountable is not obvious in our culture – and this applies to business leaders as much as government officials, journalists, as well as activists. While many decry the rise of populism and backlash against “the establishment,” “the deep state” or the “globalists,” the lack of introspection among elites who benefit from the status quo is stunning.

Some of this is structural: any organization of sufficient scale generates its own incentives toward self-perpetuation and insulation. Some is cultural: a political class that increasingly experiences itself as deserving rather than entrusted. Technologists that trumpet mass layoffs, businesses that offshore their manufacturing and politicians that lie to their constituents all erode trust and loyalty, not just to themselves, but to the sectors they represent. It may not be fair, but people tend to equate the personal failings of leaders with something rotten in the institutions that they run. Just ask the Catholic Church how much damage was done by the abuse of some of its priests.

But it’s not just an elite problem. It’s an electorate problem too. The moral participation of citizens has weakened in a parallel and mirroring way. Alexis de Tocqueville saw early that American liberty depended not primarily on constitutional architecture, but on *moeurs* – the habits of the heart, formed in families, congregations, voluntary associations and local self-government that disposed citizens to take their obligations seriously. When those formative institutions thin, what remains is a politics of grievance, consumption and exercise of power: citizens who relate to the state as customers rather than as members of a covenant. People fight for rights and benefits, but decry the duties and obligations that enable them.

This is the prisoner’s dilemma at a civilizational scale. For any individual elite, a small breach of fiduciary norm yields private gain at modest collective cost. For any individual citizen, a small withdrawal of civic effort frees up time and attention. Each defection is rational in isolation. Multiplied across an entire society, defections compound until trust becomes impossible to assemble and cooperation impossible to sustain. Republics die, slowly and then suddenly, when too many actors conclude that restraint is for others. This isn’t new. The ancient Greeks observed the same cycle more than 2500 years ago.

Beneath the prisoner’s dilemma lies an even deeper problem, which is the loss of shared moral memory. Free societies require what might be called a radical middle – neither the imposed uniformity of confessional states, nor the dissolved identity of pure pluralism, but a sustained civic culture confident enough in its own moral foundations to tolerate genuine difference, but also create a shared common ground. Tolerance is not the absence of conviction. It is conviction generous enough to make room for others. When a society loses confidence that it stands for anything in particular, tolerance collapses into competitive turf

wars of various sub-groups and the resulting vacuum is filled by whomever is most willing to assert. The radical middle requires the same intensity of support that the extremes do, but its acceptance of limits, celebration of toleration and the general complacency of the people who benefit from it work against its preservation.

Mary Beard has argued that the Roman Republic was re-founded several times across its history. What we call “the Republic” was a sequence of renewals, each reckoning with crisis by recovering and reapplying principles previous generations had nearly lost. Renewal is not revolution. It is the work of recognizing that the original moral architecture remains sound while the practices supporting it have decayed and undertaking the slow effort of rebuilding the practices. It is based on vitality and commitment to the *idea* that the political system is worth defending. When it is present, a people can accomplish great things, no matter the cost. When it is gone, it doesn’t matter how much wealth or past glory the system might have. It is ripe for destruction.

The classical illustration is Rome in 216 BC at the battle of Cannae. Hannibal annihilated Rome’s army – perhaps fifty thousand citizens killed in a single afternoon, in a city of well under a million. The Roman response was simply to raise another army, then another and to keep fighting. Six centuries later, with a population many times larger and resources beyond anything the Republic could have imagined, the Western Empire could not raise comparable forces against far weaker adversaries. The difference was not material. It was civic. The early Republic possessed antibodies – habits of sacrifice, identification with the common project, the conviction that the city was worth what citizenship demanded – that the late Empire had lost. The forces of rot and dissolution are always present, rooted in human nature. What changes across the life of a civilization is the strength of the antibodies and the memory of why they matter.

What the antibodies actually are is moral formation, distributed across institutions the state cannot create and should not absorb. Families. Religious communities. Schools that teach citizens not merely to be productive, but to be free. These intermediary bodies are where citizens learn the practices of self-government – debate, compromise, sustained attention, the discipline of being outvoted – before they are asked to exercise them at scale.

Self-governance is not the norm historically. People have to want liberty and they have to want to protect their agency. They also have to like each other. This is why Montesquieu titled his magnum opus *The Spirit of the Laws*. It doesn’t matter what the form of government is if the underlying spirit isn’t there to sustain it. Otherwise, the forms of liberty without the substance of it become, in time, ceremonial. Procedures reduce to ritual and the civic liturgy makes less and less sense to the people performing it. This is the condition that ends most republics: not external defeat, but internal forgetting.

There is no silver bullet for civilizational maintenance. What is required is a stack of mutually reinforcing efforts. These include a serious civic education that recovers the moral and

historical reasoning behind constitutional limits, not merely their procedural shape. It requires leadership formation that takes fiduciary duty as something more than compliance and a deliberate strengthening of the intermediary bodies – local, religious, associational – where citizens are actually formed. None of these alone is sufficient. Together, they constitute the practice of civilizational maintenance.

Perhaps it is inevitable that polities become senescent and either die or re-found themselves. Many in the U.S. have tended to see history as a random walk upward and to the right – despite occasional setbacks, life is getting better all of the time. But we should also consider the idea that regimes follow cycles and that just as rulers enjoying the mandate of heaven can provide many blessings, so those that undermine it can have their legitimacy and authority called into question. To stay in democratic shape requires effort, training and determination. Lose these qualities and it becomes increasingly difficult to even stay in the race.

Henry de Bracton's formula is an important foundation underlying the American experiment: this is a polity designed for people not to be subject to or underneath persons, but to be equal under God and the law. The signers of the Declaration signed under the Supreme Judge of the world. Their inheritors are free to disbelieve in the metaphysics that undergirded the establishment of the American republic, but they are not free to forget the culture and principles on which it is based. No entity can long survive in the same form it was founded if it is cut off from its roots. It is not enough to enjoy the fruits of liberty. A free people have to understand the roots of their freedom. Some memory must persist across generations. Otherwise, legitimacy becomes whatever the strongest faction can presently enforce – which is to say, it ceases to exist.

The 250th anniversary is an occasion to ask whether we still remember what drove the framers of the government to design it as they did. Do we have a civic liturgy made up of dead rituals or do we have a living, breathing republic where people understand and appreciate the blessings of liberty and have the will and understanding to continue to preserve it? A republic does not survive by avoiding decay. It survives by periodically rediscovering, at the precise moment it is most tempted to forget, the principles that justified its existence in the first place. Nothing lasts forever. But a civilization that remembers what it is for and is willing to undertake the work of renewal can last a long time yet.

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What Now: AI at America's 250th

Michael W. Wright



Two hundred and fifty years ago, fifty-six men signed their names beneath a sentence that has been chasing us ever since: all of us are created equal, endowed with the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They said that these truths were self-evident, writing aspirations as though they were facts, describing a country that did not yet exist and might never survive, let alone arrive whole on the world stage. They were trusting that the words they wrestled with in their journey to create something new might just pull us forward, never imagining they had created the most desired destination in history, one that would pull us forward across the generations. For two hundred and fifty years, slowly and unevenly, at the cost of war and protest and patience, those words have. And we are still being pulled.

Now we reach an historic anniversary, holding not just a new kind of power, but a civilization-transforming one. The honest question is: what will we do with it? Artificial intelligence has quietly become our cognitive infrastructure, the lens through which more than three hundred million of us increasingly read the world and read one another. That lens was made for a single purpose above all others: to hold our attention. Attention, we have learned the hard way, runs hottest on outrage and so the most connective technology ever built has spent its first decade pulling us apart; a myriad of nodes with no unifying aspirational network.

Consider the parallels. The printing press spread scripture and sedition simultaneously. The radio carried Roosevelt's fireside chats and Berlin's midnight rallies down the same antenna. Every transformative tool arrives earlier than most of us see it in the form of a raw possibility and what it becomes is settled generations later. The incentives steering the hands that hold it today appear to be missing the embedded character of the aspirations of the fifty-six men that got us here.

So: What Now?

Picture these same ever more powerful systems turned toward the founders' assignment. An AI that translates across our dialects of grievance, that hands a worker in rural Minnesota the counsel once reserved for the corner office or a timely lifesaving diagnosis or a how-to that saves the day and more importantly, that lays the evidence on the kitchen table before the shouting begins. That future is buildable and it is urgently asking something of us first that we govern this power the way the framers tried to govern every power, every jealously, to do it in the open and bend it toward the many. They expected their own aspirations to do

something modest: to help free people govern themselves a little better than the generation before them. Even with the advent of AI, that remains our work, still being argued, still being hard earned, two hundred and fifty years on.

So, as the fireworks fade this July, here is a question worth asking: What will we build with our new power, before others with less character and commitment than the men that got us here, decide for us?

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A Birthday Wish for America and the World



Michael Hartoonian

*“Oh, my country, how I mourn
Over thy follies and vices,
Thine ignorance and imbecility,
Thy contempt of wisdom and virtue,
Overweening admiration of fools and knaves.”
-John Adams, 1806 letter to Benjamin Rush*

The United States has struggled through a number of renewal periods in its short history, from the 1820s through the Civil War in the 1860s; from the 1890s to the 1920s and from the 1930s to the 1950s. These have all been difficult times of struggle and sacrifice for citizens. Today, we are experiencing the birth pangs of a new renewal epoch and this one is global in nature.

My birthday wish for Americans and for citizens of the world is to engage in renewal...to understand who we are and who we will become, with all the privileges and responsibilities bestowed upon citizens of a democratic republic.

Introduction

During the 19th century, when two merchant ships met at sea, they would ask each other three questions:

- Who are you?
- What is your destination?
- Who is your captain?

I used these questions in a commencement address I gave at the NATO high school in Brussels in the Church of Saint Nicholas some twenty years ago and every once in a while, the questions surface in my conscience. The comments I made that day still echo in the remarks of parents who expressed gratitude regarding their need for ongoing renewal in their lives. However, it provided an interesting intellectual link, one which I had not thought of until recently. In conceptualizing this essay, I also linked the 250th anniversary of the birth of the American Republic with renewal. I read the U.S. Declaration of Independence again and concluded that our need for renewal has never seemed more urgent. So, I will dilate on these questions, which existentially can inform a revolution of thought and also provide the seedbed for cultural renewal. A republic, if you can keep (renewing) it!

Who Are You?

My mother used to tell me to never bring disgrace on my name because it was hers, as well. In the end, all we truly have is our name, our reputation and our identity. Reputation is among the most precious things a person or a culture possesses. It cannot be bought, stolen or invented. It is fragile, easily damaged and slowly built. Awareness of your reputation guides you to act in ways that honor what you love, places and ideas stretching back from the distant past into the future. In a sense, both the past and future cast their light on you and your reputation, as manifested through your behavior, is visible to ancestors, children and those around you now. The question, “who are you?”, is asked and answered every day.

Identity and reputation take shape through daily practice. Our actions are judged as good or bad and over time, they reveal and form our character. That character is guided by an inner moral framework, but it is measured by how we behave. In this way, reputations are either strengthened or damaged. A reputation is earned.

How you and others answer the question, “who are you?”, shapes your understanding of excellence, your well-being and your happiness. Happiness depends on respect – from family, friends and oneself. Your reputation is a storehouse of respect that reaches from today well into the future. What will future generations think, say and write about you? That is our immortality: our identity, for better or worse.

This analysis can be applied to an institution or a republic too. In fact, it is altogether proper to consider reputations on birthdays. America’s reputation is not a mystery. It is out there for all to see. This is based not on what some people say, but on America’s policies, practices and above all, it is based on the congruence between practices and principles. America? Who are you? The answer, of course, lies in culture. Culture does not move in a straight line. It shifts through the changing minds of individuals and societies. Thomas Kuhn described similar transformations in science in his 1962 book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

Scientific revolutions are often easier to see, as with Newton and Einstein, who broke existing paradigms and offered more abstract, mathematical ways to understand nature and reality. Their ideas changed not only science, but society itself. Measurement and experimentation began to replace disclosure, wisdom and mythic thought as efficient ways of explaining the physical world. If one wished to go to heaven, you might simply want to consult religion. But more seriously, if one wished to go to the moon, you needed the paradigms of Newton and Einstein, absent any unmeasurable mumbo jumbo. Now we have people who truly believe that if you can’t measure it, it doesn’t exist. This shift transformed how we understood reality and in turn, how we understood ourselves and society. Some citizens, unable to measure data or find God, simply dismissed any effort to pursue truth and made up their own reality, which seems innocent enough, but quietly destructive of any democratic society.

Yes, there are revolutionary and symbiotic breaks in the timelines of science and culture, moved by changes in values, caused by different conceptions related to personal agency, liberty, the common good and new existential struggles that the present society can't address using its old questions and ultra specialized data bases. These struggles, however, will never be addressed if people don't take them seriously or keep pretending that these are community problems and simply belong to someone else, like perhaps the government. This is another obsolete way of thinking. At this time, in 2026, of cultural paradigm shift, we can renew or we will lose the meaning of "republic."

In today's post-truth age, shaped by self-interested leaders and citizens who no longer value earned reputation, we must restore the tension between the comfort of what is or was familiar and the pursuit of a deeper truth. That tension can open a cultural conversation about renewal –one that makes room for something better and gives our better angels a place to live. Can we pursue excellence? Can we become the future we seek?

The pursuit of excellence is finding beauty in the self and in all things. It is the work of people who are serious about the future and the kind of world that we will construct for our children. Nothing harms a republic more than unserious leaders and citizens. When people care more about amusement than the well-being of the community's future, it may be too late to recover purpose and identity. Let's hope not.

This hope rests on the belief that a republic is dynamic, continually renewed by choosing which values to preserve – life, liberty and public happiness or well-being – which values to reject, such as fear of others and of the future and which values to build anew in pursuit of a more perfect union. Cultures need this ongoing self-examination. When they are closed to evaluation, they may appear to function, until they suddenly don't.

What, then, should we build or strengthen? My list includes elements for creating human and social capital, such as:

- Curiosity
- Critical love
- Creativity
- Community
- Character

Meaningful identity is shaped through cultural renewal. That renewal is reflected in the question once posed between merchant ships – and it remains our individual and collective question: "who are you?"



What is Your Destination?

This question reaches beyond space, place, distance or direction. It asks about the course of a life shaped by moral choices. A vessel arrives where it does because of past decisions about wealth and excellence – values that, in commerce, as in life, are inseparable. Why does this ship enter the global marketplace? What knowledge, conduct and commitments have brought it here? More importantly, where is it headed next and how will future destinations strengthen both its purpose and the well-being of markets yet to be discovered?

Metaphorically, we stand with Hercules at the crossroads, forced to choose between easy pleasure and the harder pursuit of happiness. Pleasure promises quick satisfaction. Happiness is earned through meaningful work, purpose and moral effort. That work brings peace of mind, even when no one else sees or praises it.

Like a ship's course, your destination expresses a chosen way of life. It is a mode and code of conduct, made real by living life each day. When your actions are rooted in moral responsibility to other people and to the earth, they can lead you toward true wealth – excellence and beauty.

Who is Your Captain?

Who directs the time and direction of your life? What do you believe and for whom – or what – would you live or die? On what do you depend: self, state, God, family, virtue, knowledge? Such questions call for an honest inner critic, one that keeps conscience, self-reflection and truth in continuing conversation. Without addressing these questions, renewal is simply a slogan.

At one time or another, all of us have served as captains – as athletes, soldiers, parents, employees, committee chairs, CEOs or public officials. Whether we welcome the role or not, we have helped direct others' time, choices and even encounters with life and death challenges. But why ask the name of a ship's captain and what can that question teach us? First, it reminds us that healthy social systems, especially in a republic, should rest on merit and reputation rather than heredity or bullying. The captain presents, as well as represents merit, but also responsibility, humility and the need to weigh risks against benefits. After reading the writings and story of his life, George Washington comes to mind as such a leader, but they are few and far between. Above all, the captain shows that true wealth is created by character, without which the other cannot endure. If the captain and/or owner is to achieve wealth in business, achievement in morality will be a necessity. If a ship's company is not grounded in ethics, it may make money, but it will never earn respect or true wealth. Leaders represent something larger than themselves or their individual roles within an organization. The fool fails to understand this and in that innocence, weakens the family, firm, community and the republic.

In Need of Renewal

The history of republics that have lasted about 250 years offers little comfort for the American republic. History may not repeat itself, but it does leave lessons for those with the vision to study and apply them. The familiar signs of decline are well known: uncontrollable debt, a loss of critical love for one's country, individualism placed above the common good, the erosion of shared values, widespread ignorance and resistance to military, community or national service. These are serious concerns, but the three questions raised in the narrative above are not simply about the common elements of a republic's decline. They pointedly ask how we might move beyond the historic limits that have constrained other republics and renew a society on the brink of collapse. This is not about the "American dream," like owning a house. It's about building a (new) home using the dynamic wisdom of that small group of 18th century leaders living at the edge of a foreign empire along the coast of a continent filled with natural and cultural wealth. These leaders understood that what they were proposing and constructing was and would always be a work in progress. "We the People" never are, but are always to be. We will always have questions in search of testable answers in order to form a more perfect union.

Part of the commencement address I gave those many years ago in Brussels was taken from a letter I wrote to my daughter upon her graduation from high school.

You are now at a point in your life where you must engage in a dialogue with yourself, in a continuing, curious, courageous dialogue between the perceiving self that was and that which is just becoming to be; between the idea of reality, which used to be adequate and that which is, for the first time, only dimly seen as true. As you face the joy and disappointment of adulthood, this dialogue will help you understand that you never are so much as you are to be. And what advice can I share with you now? Perhaps, to simply say that the end of learning is wisdom, alive in your heart, that final mystery where knowledge becomes judgement and you can say: "I know who I am. I know where I am. I know where I am going." I could wish nothing more precious than this.

Conclusion

Today, I would like to think of America's 250th birthday as a commencement – a beginning. Perhaps as Churchill said after the second battle of El Alamein in North Africa, which saw the first Allied victory over the Axis powers in World War II (1942): "Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

In the U.S. and in every republic throughout the world, we are facing the end of the beginning. What was is no longer expectable. If we expect this form of government to be renewed, we must arm it with reason, virtue and the hard work demanded to live with the true meaning of life, liberty and happiness. As the founders in 1776, we must see the republic as a work in progress, attuned to changing realities of culture and technology and to the truth

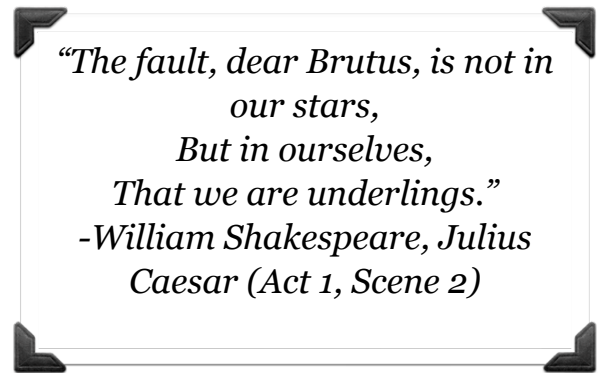
of our internal moral architecture.

If we are serious about “keeping the republic,” we must answer the three questions posed at the beginning of this essay with honesty and humility. Without those virtues, the U.S. risks following Rome and other republics that succumbed to hubris and greed.

I could wish for nothing more precious than to see this generation of citizens truly set America on the way to renewal.

I wish you Godspeed.

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