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# Walter Lippmann's Search for a Sustainable Liberalism

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WALTER LIPPMANN'S SEARCH FOR A SUSTAINABLE LIBERALISM

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
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in

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by

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments .....	ii
Abstract.....	iv
Introduction – A Hero for Sustainable Liberalism .....	1
Chapter One – The Context of Lippmann’s Political Thought: Some Important Features of Liberalism and Progressivism.....	11
Chapter Two - A Preface to Politics: Reason and Nuanced Progressive Idealism .....	29
Chapter Three – Drift, Mastery, and Scientific Organization .....	54
Chapter Four – Public Opinion and the Tyranny of the Masses: A Democratic Critique .....	75
Chapter Five – Solving Society: The Disinterested Humanist.....	111
Chapter Six – Economics, Material Well-Being, and The Good Society.....	128
Chapter Seven – Making Liberalism Sustainable: The Public Philosophy .....	151
Conclusion.....	168
Notes .....	174
Bibliography: .....	175
Vita.....	179

## **Abstract**

*Walter Lippmann's intellectual journey represents the journey of American liberalism in the 20th century: an attempted return from infatuation with the progressive ideals of inevitable historical development and scientific progress to the stability of human rights and freedom. America's path to defining its brand of liberalism finds expression in the philosophical works of Lippmann, who was at the center of this struggle. Lippmann was a defender of the liberal democratic state whose value as a thinker derives from his attempt to understand the problem of political freedom (are people competent to self-rule in a mass democracy?) throughout this critical time period. In this struggle Lippmann remains a nuanced, though fierce exponent of political freedom as he sought to verify the foundations of political legitimacy and authority on which true political freedom depends. He began his quest as a progressive, averring scientific realism against entrenched dogmas and traditions, but, by remaining consistent on this question of political freedom (insofar as he sought to preserve and expand it), was led to conclude his quest arguing for a sustainable liberalism characterized by an attentiveness to the human person.*

## Introduction – A Hero for Sustainable Liberalism

Of all the towering figures in 20<sup>th</sup> century American political life, few were as versatile and insightful as Walter Lippmann. His intellectual and personal history traced, better than any other single man, the character of America in the 20th century: he began his career in all the hope and optimism of an unchallenged progressivism, and ended it amidst the Vietnam conflict, despair, and disillusionment. Neither academician nor politician, Lippmann is best known for his career as a journalist. His column, “Today and Tomorrow”, ran in all major newspapers in the United States for almost 40 years, regularly commanding the attention of millions of the most politically engaged people in America.<sup>12</sup> Yet, despite Lippmann’s fame as a journalist, this is at best only half the story of his career. Beginning with *A Preface to Politics* in 1913, and culminating with *Essays in the Public Philosophy* in 1955, Lippmann also authored many significant works of political philosophy. His proximity to events in the political arena, and his access to the public mind through his columns ascribe an unique character and importance to these works of political philosophy as a valuable resource to understanding the American mind, and with it the tumultuous development of liberalism in 20<sup>th</sup> century America.

Lippmann’s intellectual journey represents the journey of American liberalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: an attempted return from infatuation with the progressive ideals of inevitable historical development and scientific progress to the stability of human rights

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980) xvii

<sup>2</sup> As an additional prefatory note, it must be said that the most outstanding of all works concerning Lippmann is Ronald Steel’s biography, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century*. Steel places Lippmann in the context of 20<sup>th</sup> century politics and culture, writing about Lippmann’s personal life as well as his place in the public sphere. It is an exceptional biography, and an indispensable reference for any scholar interested in Lippmann. I have used it extensively to understand the biographical curiosities of Lippmann’s life and times. All quotations hereafter in the format of, Steel, pg. x.

and freedom. America's path to defining its brand of liberalism finds expression in the philosophical works of Lippmann, who was at the center of this struggle. Lippmann was a defender of the liberal democratic state whose value as a thinker derives from his attempt to understand the problem of political freedom (are people competent to self-rule in a mass democracy?) throughout this critical time period. In this struggle Lippmann remains a nuanced, though fierce exponent of political freedom as he sought to verify the foundations of political legitimacy and authority on which true political freedom depends. He began his quest as a progressive, averring scientific realism against entrenched dogmas and traditions, but, by remaining consistent on this question of political freedom (insofar as he sought to preserve and expand it), was led to conclude his quest arguing for a sustainable liberalism characterized by an attentiveness to the human person. The key, then, to understanding Lippmann and the great depth of his contribution to American liberalism is to understand his philosophical journey through careful exegesis of his major works of explicit political philosophy.

Lippmann's popularity, as well as his unique versatility and perceptiveness has prompted a large amount of secondary literature about his life, politics, philosophy, and influence. What is unique to my goal of a philosophical analysis of Lippmann's major works of political philosophy is my attempt connect a common theme through Lippmann's works to show consistency amidst his widely varied philosophies,<sup>3</sup> and then to situate that

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<sup>3</sup> In addressing the majority of those who have sought to apprehend some vision of Lippmann's mind, the central misunderstanding of his thought in his major works of political theory follows in reaction the 'turn towards conservatism' in his late works, *The Good Society*, and *Essays in the Public Philosophy*. Hari N. Dam, Heinz Eulau, Charles Forcey, Christopher Lasch, David Elliot Weingast, Morton White, and, most prominently Benjamin Wright, have all written on this theme, portraying Lippmann, in varying degrees of harshness, as a betrayer of his progressive, liberal, or democratic roots.

journey in regard to American liberalism's engagement with progressive idealism. No work accomplishes both of these goals, and only two book length studies<sup>4</sup> argue for any serious continuity in Lippmann's political philosophy. My analysis is distinctive because it evaluates Lippmann's thought explicitly for lessons on a sustainable liberalism with a new interpretation of Lippmann's works that stresses a limited, but present continuity on the grounds of Lippmann's intellectual consistency. This emphasis on continuity offers greater sensitivity to the corrections Lippmann makes to his own work, and greater insight into the consequences of these corrections for liberal democracy.

### Chapter One – The Context of Lippmann's Political Thought: Some Important Features of Liberalism and Progressivism

To achieve the ends of my thesis, it must be shown that there is a conflict between liberalism and progressivism that is at the heart of American political life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and that Lippmann's career engages these political trends and thereby offers insight into the disambiguation of liberalism and progressivism. The central difficulty in this dissertation will be to associate elements of progressive or liberal philosophy, linked traditions with slippery and contentious definitions, to Lippmann's somewhat discursive works of political philosophy. Because it is my desire to offer a new reading of Lippmann that offers insight into the way Lippmann's engages with these traditions, I direct my argument through a set of main themes that encompass the crux of the division between liberalism and progressivism, and then connect these themes through each of Lippmann's

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<sup>4</sup> Larry L. Adams, *Walter Lippmann* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977) and Charles Wellborn, *Twentieth Century Pilgrimage: Walter Lippmann and the Public Philosophy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969)



works. One of the central problems with this approach is that, as any observer of American political history will attest, our definitions of liberalism, and progressivism are easily confounded, and no simple analytic will fully distribute the traditions in a way that is satisfactory to all. It is therefore my aim that the interpretative categories I establish should express essential (though not always comprehensive) features of liberalism and progressivism that are *also* predominate in Lippmann's work.

The methodological framework is primarily defined in my first chapter, which describes liberalism and progressivism in the context of American political thought, primarily in contradistinction to the liberalism of the American founders. The purpose of this account is to establish an intellectual framework for discussing constitutionalism, natural rights, and human nature, political categories which I believe are the most essential to productively differentiating progressivism and liberalism, and which attach readily to Lippmann's arguments. I structure my examination of Lippmann's works around these themes in order to draw nuanced conclusions about his philosophical development, and, because the categories are well established in the origins of American political thought, the design allows for direct reflection upon how Lippmann's philosophical development was responsive to intellectual trends of American political thought.

## Chapter Two - A Preface to Politics: Reason and Nuanced Progressive Idealism

This chapter opens the discussion of Lippmann's philosophical career, and begins with a brief biographical sketch with a focus on Lippmann's intellectual influences leading up to *A Preface to Politics*. Though it is my intention to limit my exegesis to the content of his philosophical works, and avoid an intellectual biography, in order to understand

Lippmann as he understood himself, it is necessary to pay attention to his immediate influences and antagonists. The most lengthy manifestation of this in this study comes in discussing his early years at Harvard and shortly thereafter, before the publication of his first work of political philosophy. In *Preface*, we find, as I will argue is present in all of Lippmann's works, recourse to both Nature and History, to the founders and the progressives, to strands of both progressivism and liberalism across the categories of constitutionalism, natural rights, and human nature. Lippmann consolidates these varied and disparate elements into a defense of a particular vision of human freedom. Every chapter in this study finds that Lippmann's works all manifest some element of this quixotic desire to diagnose the means by which men enjoy the most political freedom. It is through engagement with this problem that my framework defining liberalism and progressivism gains cogency.

### Chapter Three: Drift, Mastery and Scientific Realism

Lippmann's 'sequel'<sup>5</sup> to *A Preface to Politics*, called, *Drift and Mastery*(1914), retained the iconoclastic spirit of its predecessor, but also contained many revisions and new ideas such that it is difficult to draw too strong a connection to *Preface*, a book written just one year prior. He continues the themes of rejecting the past with hope for the future, he increases his emphasis on the development of the future through scientific realism and what he calls "industrial statesmanship." The book moves Lippmann closer to one of his idols, Teddy Roosevelt, and his political platform, and includes striking condemnations, not

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<sup>5</sup> His friends and admirers, notably Graham Wallas, expected this book to be a sequel to *Preface to Politics*. Indeed, most commentators did view it as a continuance of Lippmann's youthful iconoclasm, though my argument contends that there is a notable divide between *Preface* and *Drift*.

of private property in its full scope, but rather private property as a stultifying, sacrosanct tradition. Lippmann both claims that the productivity of the economy should not be hampered by government action, and that the time has come for government takeover of basic industries, mining operations, railroads, and the like.<sup>67</sup> The seeming paradox is resolved in Lippmann's mind because of his stark optimism in scientific/bureaucratic management, but offers a curious contrast from the later Lippmann who values property rights. I will attempt to dissolve part of this tension by suggesting that Lippmann's youthful self has downplayed the role of scarcity in his theoretical political musings, and that his conclusions are more ideologically neutral as a result.

Lippmann later said glibly of his early books that he attempted to "solve all the world's problems," but if the subject of my study is the development of Lippmann's thought as context for American political theory, it is imperative that the texts be read closely and purposefully. A close reading and attempt to make sense of Lippmann's motivations is key to this enterprise, and sets up interesting conflagrations with the more well-known works by Lippmann.

#### Chapter Four – Public Opinion and the Tyranny of the Masses: A Democratic Critique

In this chapter I combine my analysis of, *Public Opinion* (1922), Lippmann's most famous book, and *The Phantom Public* (1925), two works that formed the basis of Lippmann's democratic critique and signaled his growing disillusionment with progressive idealism, particularly in the wake of WWI. This chapter is critical to describing the

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<sup>6</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1914) Ch. 6

<sup>7</sup> For details on the citation index, see the section of this paper labeled, "Notes."

development of Lippmann's thought, which is particularly compelling concerning his views of 'social science.' Early Lippmann is confident in the role of social science/science in facilitating the work of great men who rule, who have both the need and talent to transgress institutional limitations. In this middle period of Lippmann's thought, knowledge and the authority of science are largely assumed, and represented in masterful men who manifest an idealized form of statesmanship. Though he remains animated by a need to provide new, progressive solutions the new problems of mass democracy, this very spirit is what leads him closer to the founders and the principle of Nature as a foundation for the 'traditions of civility.'

#### Chapter Five – Solving Society: The Disinterested Humanist

*A Preface to Morals* (1929)<sup>8</sup> seems like a natural corollary to *Phantom's* pessimism insofar as Lippmann appears to retreat from the intractability of political affairs to humanistic moral philosophy. But it also feels strangely apolitical for someone who accused Plato of defining an ideal society, only to leave the world to Machiavelli.<sup>9</sup> My argument is that this retreat by Lippmann reflects both his progressive and liberal inclinations. On one hand he argues that political thinking is "Notably inferior in realism and in pertinence to the economic thinking which now plays so important a part in the direction of industry."<sup>10</sup> This reflects a subtle confidence in the progress of economic industry, where one is granted the luxury of eschewing political affairs. This also grounds itself in Nature through appeals he makes to the role of government, which is dramatically reduced, and ameliorates the

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Lippmann. *A Preface to Morals* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers 1982)

<sup>9</sup> Walter Lippmann. *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co. 1960) Ch. 28

<sup>10</sup> *Morals*, Ch. 13

abstractions necessary to circumvent institutional governance. Despite a harsh tone of realism, Lippmann's political commentary in *Morals* primarily serves to disinvest the seemingly abstract government of its power in favor of refocusing our attention on the state of the souls which inhabit the polity. Lippmann follows this theme, the management of political affairs through the education of human affairs, into his last work, *Essays in the Public Philosophy* (1955) where he adds to the disinterested humanism of *Morals* the support of what he calls the 'traditions of civility.'

#### Chapter Six – Economics, Material Well-Being, and The Good Society

Lippmann's *Method of Freedom* (1934) is an astounding reentry into political life. The essential point of *Method* and its sequel, *The New Imperative* (1935), is that the government should be responsible for the maintenance of the standard of living of its people. At first glance, this is diametrically opposed to the Lippmann in *Morals*, and even of *Opinion* and *Phantom*, however, Lippmann retains certain characteristics of humility amidst his new optimism. Fundamentally, he claims that human liberty should extend as far as possible, and that "the state is the servant and not the master of the people."<sup>11</sup> He explains a method of 'free collectivism' that is distinct from the collectivism of communist and fascist societies primarily in its ability to continually reorient itself around private enterprise, and to adopt *temporary* emergency measures in response to events such as the Great Depression. This emphasis on emergency methods for emergency situations helps explain his support and later break from FDR and the New Deal programs. The works again split Lippmann ideologically, on one hand he appeals to a natural right to work (a new

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<sup>11</sup> Walter Lippmann. *Method of Freedom* (New York: Macmillan, 1934), Part III

world without a frontier means that there are occasions where there are no opportunities to get jobs unassisted), and on another, he again appeals to executive authority, shunning legislative institutions which he sees corrupted by special interest groups. Not only does Lippmann continue to tacitly balance progressivism with liberalism, but he explicitly calls for a balancing of their proxies, liberty and authority.<sup>12</sup>

*The Good Society (1937)*<sup>13</sup> overlaps strongly, and is in some ways a prequel to *Essays in the Public Philosophy (1955)*, but it is chronologically more compatible with *Imperative and Method*, and because it is often mistakenly viewed as a complete repudiation of those works, they must be examined together.<sup>14</sup> I will stress two themes of continuity with his previous works: one, that the model of free collectivism is refined rather than completely abandoned, and two, that what progressives and some liberals see as a retreat to free market moralism, comes only with heavy qualifications from Lippmann, and familiar repudiations of past models of laissez-faire dogmas. To the former, his explicit rejection of New Deal style programs is tempered by a call, repeated from *Method* and *Imperative*, for money spent (not on direct public assistance) on public works, education and health as both “relief and remedy.”<sup>15</sup> To the latter, Lippmann emphasizes what he sees as a false dichotomy between individual rights/laissez faire, and progressive stateism/collectivism.<sup>16</sup> He envisions property rights as managed extensively through a court system that depends on common law jurisprudence.

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<sup>12</sup> Walter Lippmann. *The New Imperative* (New York: Macmillan, 1935) , Part II

<sup>13</sup> Walter Lippmann. *The Good Society* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers 2005)

<sup>14</sup> See Wright, Ch.4 and 5.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Lippmann. *The Good Society* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers 2005) Ch. 11

<sup>16</sup> *Good*, Ch. 12

## Chapter Seven – Making Liberalism Sustainable: The Public Philosophy

Whatever vicissitudes Lippmann's thought underwent, he always remained preeminently concerned with the problem of freedom in the modern world. *Essays in the Public Philosophy* (1955) was no different. While Lippmann retains some hallmarks of the progressive mind in that he saw in the modern world a new, and unmet challenge to the old order of natural law: "The school of natural law has not been able to cope with the pluralism of the later modern age—with the pluralism which has resulted from the industrial revolution and from the enfranchisement and the emancipation of the masses of the people."<sup>17</sup> The mature Lippmann, however, instead of rebelling against the tradition, cites that very rebellion as the cause for our inability to cope with modernity's new challenges. *Essays* is a culmination of Lippmann's search to support liberal democracy, and his conclusion that the revival of American political life and discourse depends on the rearticulating of a political philosophy expressed as natural law is an outgrowth of his new understanding, and fervent desire to protect men and keep them free in the modern age.

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<sup>17</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Essays in the Public Philosophy* (Transaction Publishers, 1989), Ch. 8

## Chapter One – The Context of Lippmann’s Political Thought: Some Important Features of Liberalism and Progressivism

### Liberal Origins

To understand Lippmann’s search for a profitable, sustainable liberal democracy, the origins of and dangers to liberalism need to be sketched.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps better than any other democratic thinker, Alexis de Tocqueville understood the great consequence and tenor of the liberal tide. In one of the most passionate lines of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville states that, “the entire book you are going to read was written under the pressure of a sort of religious terror in the author’s soul, produced by the sight of this irresistible revolution that for so many centuries has marched over all obstacles, and that one sees still advancing today amid the ruins it has made.”<sup>19</sup> For Tocqueville, democracy’s ascendance is providential, and he is severely aware of the diverse challenges that will face those who wish to restrain and govern it.

The path and development of liberalism began in Europe and was driven by theologico-political problem, and by the slow withdrawal of aristocratic, classical mores and virtues in the face of their liberal democratic heirs. Liberal thinkers who wish to sustain democracy tend to recognize the acute limitations of liberal democratic progress. Walter Lippmann’s thought was characterized by constant doubt and worry about the

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<sup>18</sup> Pierre Manet’s works, particularly, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, Trans. Rebecca Balinski (University of Princeton Press, 1996) were particularly influential in my understanding of, and framing of the liberal project in this context.

<sup>19</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 6



capacity of liberal democratic politics, and to understand that concern is to touch a nerve deep within the original birth and logical path of the liberal revolution.

The insistence at the great heart of liberalism that, as Hobbes says, “every man acknowledge another for his equal by nature,”<sup>20</sup> conflicts with the aristocratic, classical impulse for excellence. How is one to be excellent and thus distinguished while being inherently the same? Hobbes condemns those who succumb to the passion of excellence, “The breach of this precept is pride.”<sup>21</sup> Liberalism in some ways sets itself against the passions, against human nature. But does liberalism seek to conquer the passions definitely, or to balance them? The former option inclines toward apotheosis and utopia, and the latter to modest politics, and perhaps a greater freedom. How to sustain particular liberal democratic regimes is coevally a question of human nature, and one side to a problem generated by the theologico-political problem.

The theologico-political problem is the conflict of locating political power in the temporal or the spiritual, in reason or in revelation, in Athens, or in Jerusalem. It is the essential question about the locus of political authority, though the division extends naturally to particular human activity. The nub of this immensely complex issue is that Church’s elemental good, salvation, is not of this world, but the Church is nonetheless tasked with leading men to that salvation. The corollary duty to oversee human action then manifests in the politically problematic pressure to oversee the actions of rulers, particularly those who in the church’s view endangered the salvation of their subjects. It is not difficult to see how the imposition of theocracy therefore tends to follow into temporal

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, Chapter XV

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

orders. The political problem for the Christian West was then how to allow political unions the latitude needed to govern themselves while respecting the universal authority of the Church.

The principle of the liberal revolution seeks to reunite this divided man by reconsidering the terms of political association. The result is a radical political freedom expressed as natural rights, foremost among them liberty, property, and life (security/freedom from oppression/pursuit of happiness). Natural rights doctrines at the heart of liberalism's revolution are therefore expressed as freedom of movement, particularly as unconstrained movement, which is a response to the ancien regime's impossible demand of lawful obedience to divided authorities. Political freedom then, the destruction of obstacles, is the aim of liberalism.

This revolution therefore operates between actors who can be delineated in accordance with their response to this movement: the reactionary seeks to return to an older era, predating liberalism's natural rights rhetoric; liberals support the project of liberalism (more conservative liberals wish to slow its momentum, while more liberal supporters want to nudge it along); and progressives wish to accelerate liberalism's progress indefinitely. These movements and antagonisms occur within the liberal regime along the axis of the state and civil society. In a liberal regime, the state's authority and legitimacy are conferred through consent of the governed. The regime's constitutional order or institutional arrangements are agreed upon for the purpose of expressing natural rights claims through the demolition of obstacles to those freedoms. The civil society exists

naturally insofar as it is an expression of the social nature of man, but in a liberal regime it exists in contradistinction to the state.

The state and the civil society are codependents in a tensional relationship. The state's justice rests primarily upon the politicized virtues attendant to its claim to rule impartially—it is no coincidence that Hobbes, Locke, and other liberal philosophers imagine an Archimedean point, the 'state of nature' wherefrom the justice of social order can be theorized and computed. The civil society, usually manifested as some form of commercial society in liberal regimes, is left 'free' through the construction of laws which ensure unrestraint. Where the ancien regimes commanded from on high, the liberal regime was content to leave men to be free, socially and economically. Civil society needs the state to enforce laws, and fundamental natural rights, and the state needs commercial society to produce wealth (a product of free association in commercial society) and consent (tacit, or otherwise in accordance with a particular constitutional order) to furnish its effective power.

For all the great benefits men have reaped from the rise of liberalism, there is an implicit crisis concerning the direction of liberalism's momentum. The problem emerges from liberalism's internal logic which pressures the incessant dismantling of all obstacles to human freedom: once the obstacles are removed, where should one go? Against what force should liberal society direct itself? There is a lack of positive affirmation for particular conduct in private life in liberalism, unlike every other political regime before it, all directed by visions of virtue, excellence, holiness, conquest, etc. Liberal regimes are typically slow to acknowledge that liberty is a condition for human action, but not an end in

itself. What is the right to the pursuit of happiness if people do not possess knowledge of that which they pursue? The conflict is embodied in the desire to forge a strong (intentional and essential) communion of the great freedom in liberal society and a vision of truth which merits perpetuation. To say this another way, can men secure in liberalism the natural objects of their desire? That a society has a purpose is a condition for its sustainability, else its perpetuation is conditioned upon radical contingency.

Liberty and equality work harmoniously when there are clear barriers to abolish, but when the barriers are obscured, when people disagree about which barriers need to go, when they begin interrogating small obstacles in the same manner as they once interrogated the great edifices which initially oppressed the promises of liberty and equality, there is more strife and little consensus. Disconcert is the price of liberalism's triumph, and liberalism frays in the face of this search for common purpose, and struggles to account for expanding definitions within what Rawls defined (broadly, he hoped) as the liberal principle of legitimacy: "Our exercise of political power is fully proper only when it is exercised in accordance with a constitution the essentials of which all citizens as free and equal may reasonably be expected to endorse in the light of principles and ideals acceptable to their common human reason."<sup>22</sup> Liberals expect reason to immaculately generate consensus, and uncritical liberals often fail to acknowledge that this consensus is innately threatened by limitless liberty. Consider Locke in Chapter XXI, Section 55, of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, "Were all the concerns of man terminated in this life, why one followed study and knowledge, and another hawking and hunting: why one

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<sup>22</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

chose luxury and debauchery, and another sobriety and riches, would not be because every one of these did NOT aim at his own happiness; but because their happiness was placed in different things.” Locke’s observation can be read as a warning, particularly of the taste for material well-being if left unchecked by some moral satisfaction: there no limit to the diversity of pursuits in the name of happiness. A sustainable liberalism inherently depends on the character and agreement of these ‘happineses.’ In America, Tocqueville saw the civil society’s preponderance of religiosity as an essential bulwark against the materialistic temperament engendered by the equalizing of conditions brought on by the rise of democracy. The freedom to pursue a diversity of individual, material happineses was constructively hemmed by a coeval desire for moral satisfaction, in this case manifest through American religious character. Whether waning religiosity is a symptom or cause of the liberal democratic revolution, it is liberalism’s friendly critics, like Lippmann, who are interesting because they sense this lacuna of purpose, and judiciously warn and hope to guide, farsighted, against these tendencies and, often, their remedies.

To suppose in response that the indeterminable freedom of liberal society should be somehow guided is not as heartening as it is obvious. The great danger resides in how exactly liberal peoples should do this. To secure the natural objects of men’s desire the state could assign quotas and direct behavior more combatively, but this would threaten the success of the commercial civil society and roundly weaken its underlying assumptions, and guarantees of rights, liberty and equality. On the other hand, it is not clear that a rudderless liberal society, prone to authoritarianism when confronted by hardships, particularly economic crisis, can alone approach an end outside of indeterminate liberty. It is no coincidence that Lippmann and other friendly liberal democratic critics felt so sharply

the sting of the first and second world wars. Liberalism's substitute purpose, for the moment, is a faith that it is moving toward a human order that is in some measure satisfying. Caught between despotism/dogmatic truth and indeterminate faith, it is not surprising that modern liberals should wonder: what exactly were the medieval shackles from which liberalism was supposed to free them?

This intractable situation is the basis of the balancing act that is at the heart of modern liberalism. At stake is the capacity of the liberal democratic regime's ability to self-sustain. It is exactly this question of a sustainable liberal regime which was taken up by the American founding fathers. Few were either reactionaries or progressives, seeking a return to pre-enlightenment (pre-liberal) political orders, or pro forma Jacobin radicals devoted to impalpable progress. In the sense of the preceding discussion, they were all liberals whose prescriptions were grounded in the claim of nature, of philosophy, which dampened their radicalism, but allowed them varying degrees of conservatism and liberalism as it relates to arresting or cautiously encouraging movement of the liberal regime to its unspecified end. The founders' later antagonists, the progressives, would be less bothered by the indeterminable structure of the liberal regime, less bothered by the question of sustainability, and fundamentally buoyed by their radical faith in History to deliver the regime to a welcome future. Understanding liberalism's origins and its crisis, the balance of the state and the civil society, the great promise of its guarantee of rights and the great danger of its momentum, sets the stage for a more particular discussion of its movement in America.

## Liberalism and Progressivism: Definitions for Evaluating Lippmann's Thought

To evaluate the continuity and message of Lippmann's political thought requires both foundations and criteria well suited for the exegesis of Lippmann's works of political philosophy. In this case the pursuit of these definitions runs headlong into a vast literature of academic and political debate, not to mention the canon of western political thought. The sheer volume which burdens those who would explain and articulate the antagonisms between liberalism and progressivism suggests that any pretense of comprehensiveness would be too ambitious. This diversity plagues the goal of comprehensiveness also invites the indictment of 'cherry-picking.' The goal here is identifying a set of working definitions, no more, no less.

Disentangling liberalism and progressivism in American political life and culture is largely a Sisyphean task. Academicians, politicians, pundits, and especially the casual political observer all find it difficult to separate the two political philosophies due to a perceived overlap both historically and politically. The very terms 'progressive' and 'liberal' have come in and out of vogue in the world of political capital, often used and shunned by various institutions with remarkably diverse sets of political beliefs. Yet through the fog of war, persistent distinctions have existed through American political history, and continue to persist though substantive philosophical inclinations within the (mostly) competing doctrines. What follows is a presentation of an useful set of philosophical distinctions which separate the core substance of liberalism from progressivism, traced through the history of political thought into the American context. This distinction will then be used to characterize Lippmann's thought, and pursue an understanding of his development as a thinker. This opening chapter will be successful if it produces a working understanding that separates the hallmarks of liberal and progressive thought while also placing the debate in

the larger context of American political philosophy, and western political philosophy. This understanding will then be used as a means by which Lippmann's works will be interpreted, and his development as thinker studied.

One promising approach is to set Lippmann's thought within the framework of political foundations. The structure of this framework is as follows: liberalism takes Nature<sup>23</sup> as its political foundation, progressivism, History.<sup>24</sup> A recent work by political scientist James Ceaser, *Designing a Polity*, attempts a definition: "a foundation is a first principle that explains or justifies a general political orientation; it is offered as an authoritative standard or fundamental idea of right."<sup>25</sup> Though the very term "foundationalism" really only exists in contradistinction to non-foundationalism, particular 'foundations' can be understood "merely as a formal property of any polity."<sup>26</sup> This useful typology divides American foundational concepts into two categories: History and Nature, which are readily available in American Political Thought, and in Lippmann's books of

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<sup>23</sup> When speaking of nature as a foundational concept, I will capitalize it for the sake of clarity. However, I will also capitalize History, and this creates a certain ambiguity. History is, in this context as well as others, perceived by progressives as a process (ex. "Progress"), to speak in quasi-Hegelian terms, of dialectical changes unfolding in the flow of time toward a vision of an 'ethical state.' I in no way wish to, by association, offer a deleterious definition of 'Nature as process to a fixed end' through its capitalization. This should be evident through my exegesis, but bears mentioning at the outset.

<sup>24</sup>Political scientist James Ceaser defines a foundation, "merely as the formal property of any polity." This sort of conceptual organization offers immediate connection between one ideological persuasion in the American tradition, and its animating form. The central advantage of this approach arises by offering categories which are philosophical in nature. James A. Ceaser, *Designing a Polity* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011), pg. 7

<sup>25</sup> James A. Ceaser, *Designing a Polity* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011) pg. 7

<sup>26</sup> Ibid



political theory.<sup>27</sup> These categories are broad, but can be identified roughly with currents in liberalism and progressivism.<sup>28</sup>

Within the inquiry through foundations the founders, as liberals, and the progressives naturally seem to adopt Nature, and History, respectively. This makes exploring their antagonisms worthwhile, because to American progressives, their political philosophy embodies some combination of a correction or a repudiation of the philosophy of the American founders. For reasons often as much rhetorical as philosophical, this sometimes manifests as an re-articulation of the aims of the founders<sup>29</sup> that maintains their spirit, or, more combatively, sometimes as arguments directly against the liberalism espoused by men such as Washington, Madison, Hamilton and Jefferson. For whatever purposes the progressives make reference to the founders, there is in that tendency a point of departure: it is necessary to understand the liberalism of the founders to understand the motivations of the progressives. The division between the two camps offers a useful proxy between the foundational concepts of Nature and History. This distinction is present in Lippmann's thought as he often turns to the founders either for the purpose of criticism or inspiration, often both. This is one of many points of contact with his thought, offering deep

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<sup>27</sup> Ceaser also includes the category of Faith, which is an important explanatory feature of American political thought and practice. Foundations in faith operate primarily in culture, providential teachings can be found at the heart of the progressive's "social gospel" movement, and deductions from religious teachings are merge with and buttress claims on behalf of "the laws of nature and nature's God." However, it is almost completely absent in the works of Lippmann, present only as a difficult sort of Neoplatonism. The absence of faith is, of course, important, but is better treated as the philosophical portrait of Lippmann emerges in the exegesis of his work.

<sup>28</sup> "Progressive" will be capitalized only when referring to the Progressive party. The lower-case progressive, will be a reference to the generalized ideology.

<sup>29</sup> See Wilson on the Founding. Newtonian Science. In I. Bernard Cohen, *Science and the Founding Fathers* (Norton, 1997)

insight though an extended brief on the foundationalism of the founders and the progressives.

### Liberalism of the Founders: Grounded in Nature

In *Federalist 1*, Alexander Hamilton introduces the great question of governing a liberal constitutional republic, of judging “whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.” Hamilton sensed the magnitude of the moment, the great experiment of a government of “reflection and choice”, and rightly judged that failure in this project would “deserve to be considered as the general misfortune of mankind.”<sup>30</sup> *The Federalist* is preeminently concerned with the political consequences of this new project, which would determine whether men *could* live in liberty and freedom, or would instead be forever fated to live slavishly under essentially despotic, contingent political orders.

Fundamental to the founders’ political science was constitutionalism, natural rights doctrine, and a realist view of human nature. Consider Jefferson: “We had no occasion to search into musty records, to hunt up royal parchments, or to investigate the laws and institutions of a semi-barbarous ancestry. We appealed to those of nature, and found them engraved in our hearts.”<sup>31</sup> A foundation in Nature is a foundation in rational philosophical/scientific inquiry. Though for some of the founders this meant a Christian rationalism, and others a political psychology, the amalgam of their views amounted to an

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<sup>30</sup> *Federalist 1*

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in *Designing a Polity*, 8

articulation of natural rights doctrine. “Not myth, mystery, or History, but philosophy or science—the terms were then synonyms—could serve, perhaps in a simplified version, as a public foundational concept. *There could be ‘public philosophy’*.”<sup>32</sup> The foundation in Nature formed the grounds upon which the Founders rested their political prescriptions for institutional governance. This political science of natural rights stands in opposition to the philosophy of History, and a rigorous, almost strictly empirical natural scientism, both of which would beget the later forms of progressive opposition to the philosophy of the founders.<sup>33</sup>

### Progressives: A Lost Foundation and Modern Crisis

The progressive movement, though nebulous and difficult to study as a continuous body of thought, often manifests as a rejection of the founders and their political science. Progressive leaders and intellectuals view the world as complex and unmanageable without a large, active central government. The view, engendered in large part by rapid industrialization<sup>34</sup> in the eras following the founding, is animated by the idea of progress within history<sup>35</sup> which rejects natural rights theory and pronounces a belief in the

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<sup>32</sup> *Designing a Polity*, 10 Emphasis mine.

<sup>33</sup> *Designing a Polity*, pg. 68 Ceasar speaks extensively about both the Philosophy of History and natural history as opponents to the natural rights theory of the founders. He finds the latter to be the forerunner of biology, anthropology, etc. And as such it constitutes the branch of progressive opposition to the founders expounded in highly scientific theories of social order which are to be administered by the central government. Both the Philosophy of History and natural history (as just briefly outlined) will be treated in the section of this paper that deals with the progressives, but more emphasis will be placed on the former as a definitive element of the Progressive mind-frame.

<sup>34</sup> Though many progressive accounts of this phenomenon exist, see, for example, the work of American progressive leader and economist, Richard T. Ely in "Industrial Liberty" *Publications of the American Economic Association* 3rd Series, 3 no. 1 (1902)

<sup>35</sup> Much of my analysis for this section, as well as my understanding of the categories of foundationalism and non-foundationalism rely on the work of James A. Ceasar, *Nature and History in American Political Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), as well as *Designing a Polity* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011)

unassailable progress of humanity. The words of Woodrow Wilson stand as ready as any encapsulation of the promise of History:

Progress! Did you ever reflect that that word is almost a new one? No word comes more often or more naturally to the lips of modern man, as if the thing it stands for were almost synonymous with life itself, and yet men through many thousand years never talked or thought of progress. They thought in the other direction. Their stories of heroisms and glory were tales of the past. The ancestor wore the heavier armor and carried the larger spear. "There were giants in those days." Now all that has altered. We think of the future, not the past, as the more glorious time in comparison with which the present is nothing. Progress, development,—those are modern words. The modern idea is to leave the past and press onward to something new.<sup>36</sup>

Though the concept of History well defines the foundation of all progressive thought, in considering the progressive allegiance to the general idea of progress, it is helpful to consider the writing of enlightenment forerunner to the progressives, Marquis de Condorcet in his *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind*:

This picture, therefore, is historical; since subjected as it will be to perpetual variations, it is formed by the successive observation of human societies at the different eras through which they have passed. It will accordingly exhibit the order in which the changes have taken place, explain the influence of every past period upon that which follows it, and thus show, by the modifications which the human species has experienced, in its incessant renovation through the immensity of ages, the course which it has pursued, and the steps which it has advanced towards knowledge and happiness. From these observations on what man has heretofore been, and what he is at present, we shall be led to the means of securing and of

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<sup>36</sup> Woodrow Wilson, from *The New Freedom*, 1913. *American Progressivism: A Reader*. editors Ronald J. Pestritto and William J. Atto, (Lexington Books, 2008) pg 49

accelerating the still further progress, of which, from his nature, we may indulge the hope.<sup>37</sup>

Because of this enlightenment era introduction of the idea of progress, Progressivism is perhaps best understood by its relation to enlightenment thought: on the one hand it can be seen as a continuance of enlightenment thought in an 'new' era fashioned by the industrial revolution, and, in another version, it can be seen as a philosophy of History and wholesale rejection of the enlightenment tradition's attempt to understand nature.<sup>38</sup> The former accentuates the sciences of political economy and institutional tools of an active central government, and is grounded more in the immediate observable progress within history noted by Condorcet. The idea of progress, at first closely tied to observable progress, initiated by positivists such as Condorcet, was once the central organizing principle of the otherwise nebulous movement.

The science of History furnished an age where men sought to direct the inexorable force of movement in history. "The task of directing progress now fell to the pragmatic philosophers and social scientists."<sup>39</sup> So long as History's movement was guided, and remained true to its perceived course, the progressive movement had no difficulty in connecting their goals with those of the end of History. "We may indulge the hope," said Condorcet. A second conception banishes the virtue of hope within history for a radical

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<sup>37</sup> Marquis de Condorcet, *Outlines of an historical view of the progress of the human mind* (translated from the French) (Philadelphia, 1796). Accessed from <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/1669/789> on 9/23/2015.

<sup>38</sup> This classification of the different types of progressive thought is given in James Stoner's conference paper, "Progressivism, Social Science, and Catholic Social Teaching in the Building of the American Welfare State," at a conference on "Progressive Challenges to the Constitution," sponsored by the Center for Political and Economic Thought, St. Vincent College, Latrobe, Pennsylvania, April 9, 2011. I have found it very useful for conceptually organizing the different strands of progressive thought in America.

<sup>39</sup> *Designing a Polity*, 10

faith in the limitless perfectibility of man. Exacerbated by the collapse of immediately observable progress in the wake of WWI and the totalitarian cataclysms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the radicalized faith in History moved away from observable hope for progress, and became more antagonistic towards constitutional limits, natural rights, and realism concerning human nature. In many ways the Progressive movement predating WWI was shattered, and rearticulated in a manner hostile to the natural rights foundation on which a sustainable Liberalism depends. This coexistence has been the story of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and the story of Lippmann's public philosophy. To delve more deeply the categories of those divisions must be examined more thoroughly.

The competing doctrines can be shown to coexist in a relatively balanced political climate until the foundation of the progressivism which rested in the observational/empirical progress of history crumbled, and divided the progressive movement in two: *empirical progressivism* disappeared, and non-foundational progressivism, characterized by an explicit rejection of natural rights doctrine, emerged, revealing itself as an always-present element in empirical progressivism and as the future of the movement which would continue to aver against the liberal consensus in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The attack on nature as a foundational concept was launched by the non-foundational progressives, particularly John Dewey, who were unwilling to concede any standard of natural rights, considering it untenable as a metaphysical position. Because the idea of natural rights entailed a fixed human nature that necessarily limits man's possibilities, these progressives instead opted for a more robust notion of progress that is foundationless. By questioning the idea of progress in History some philosophers and progressive leaders began to reevaluate the very idea of foundations. They rejected the

empirically flawed notion of progress in History as an outdated form of “historicism,” and instead embraced a new sort of non-foundationalism that took the idea of eventual progress on nothing more than “an act of faith.” It became the hallmark of a *fatalistic progressivism*. The distinction between the observable and fatalistic progressivism will help clarify what parts of Lippmann’s thought, particularly his early thought, remained consistent and active throughout the course of his career.

### Refining Categories for Lippmann’s Political Thought

Through the density and variety of this brief on the distinctions within and motivations of liberalism, the scope of American political thought offers many potential modes of interpretation. However, there are three categories that form the crux of the division: Constitutionalism, Natural Rights, and Human Nature. Evident in each is the tension between Nature and History, where claims on behalf of Nature and liberalism are distinct from those of History and progressivism because the former tend to imply limits on political order, and the latter tend to reject them.

To broadly identify these tensions:

*Natural right’s* appeal to Nature amounts to assertions of truth and falsehood as a pursuit of the good in an ordered universe. The progressive rejection of nature argues some version of the historicity of moral-political judgments: that they are circumscribed by their particular place and time, or that there is no ground, providential or natural, for the very concept of natural right. A notion of progress within History is instead inserted as guide and master.

*Constitutionalism* appeals to Nature as a doctrine of limits (natural rights, limited power) through which a people enumerate the terms and conditions under which they consent to be governed. Limited government is possible only in democratic societies if the demos is willing to impose limits upon itself through representation (rather than direct democracy) and agreed institutional mechanisms. Constitutionalism tends to appeal to History when it is treated as an evolving organic process, thus moving towards an idealized 'ethical' state. Constitutional limits are often diminished through active political actors who circumvent institutional structures, and through excessively sweeping jurisprudence which seeks a particular result identified through an appeal to History.

The view of *Human Nature* endorsed by the foundation in Nature is rooted in fixed ends of human flourishing engendered by a particular philosophical anthropology. History, conversely, rejects the ideas of fixity and limits engaged by the traditional study of man, and instead advocates a faith in the perfectibility of humanity through state intervention and guidance. Nature aligns with the notion that the government is the product of the exercise of practical wisdom naturally available to those who practice self-government, and History favors man in motion, directed towards his apotheosis by the state as the basis of all morality.

Where does this leave us in the quest for a distinction between liberalism and progressivism? At the very least, there are two foundational concepts, Nature and History. Each formalizes properties constitutive of liberalism and progressivism and divides them in a way that can organize the interpretation of Lippmann's thought. Yet the distinction is incomplete: there is too much overlap, too much rhetoric to disambiguate the ideological



doctrines within a single factor analytic. The real task of disambiguation will come through examination of the particular with reference to the general framework. The benefits of foundational categories extend to the task of clarifying Lippmann's political ideas in the scope of the political ideas which animate the varieties of liberal and progressive thought. Further, by stepping away from the secondary literature's tendency toward indexical analysis of Lippmann as a partisan in one particular tradition on the basis of practical politics and/or biographical circumstance, there can be clarification of his purposes through a re-reading of his engagement with the philosophical trends of the 20th century, and a new philosophical understanding of the ideas which form the basis of political ideologies. That task, however, can only be completed through sustained, careful, and philosophically motivated exegesis of Lippmann's treatises on political philosophy.

## Chapter Two - A Preface to Politics: Reason and Nuanced Progressive Idealism

Lippmann's first book was nothing less than an astonishing success in the estimation of its contemporary cultural and political observers. Teddy Roosevelt went so far as to call Lippmann: "the most brilliant young man of his age in all the United States."<sup>40</sup> The book is an unique and in some ways even a profound tackling of the deepest elements of a dueling progressivism and liberalism that would persist throughout his corpus. Yet for all its complexity in this regard, its incoherencies are difficult to overlook. Many friends and critics attribute this to the boisterous optimism of his youth, but it is in large part due to his split allegiance to History and Nature as guiding principles, and the beginning of his quest to resolve their dispute. To understand this context for his first book begins with the immediate intellectual influences upon its authorship. In discussing his first book, the most relevant influences felt by a young Walter Lippmann occurred during his time at Harvard, which was in turned shaped by his early life.

Though uneventful, Lippmann's childhood was pleasant, and offers a picture of the man he was to become. He was born in New York City on September 23, 1889 to Jacob and Daisy Lippmann. Jacob's family were comfortably upper-middle class garment manufacturers, quickly rising when the Lippmanns inherited a substantial fortune upon the death of Daisy's father. Walter was born and bred as a gentleman, accompanying his parents on regular trips to Europe, exposed to the social and cultural elite, and enjoying a secure existence as their child. He was educated well, and in Jewish preparatory schools

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<sup>40</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., "Walter Lippmann: The Intellectual v. Politics, : in *Walter Lippmann and His Times*, ed. Marquis Childs and James Reston (New York Harcourt, Brace, 1959) pg. 197

where the climate stressed assimilation and submerging that Jewish identity in New York cultural life, and Lippmann often hid through omission his Jewish identity.

One hallmark through all of Lippmann's career has always been his fascination with men of action, leaders possessed of both the reason and moral courage to manifest productive change in accord with democratic sensibilities. His father was not such a man, genial and kind, but cowed by his wife and uninspiring to the young Lippmann. He would turn elsewhere for fatherly advice and tutelage, to such figures as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Graham Wallas, Judge Learned Hand, and art historian Bernard Berenson, among others. Professionally Lippmann was also drawn to political figures with a sort of mastery and commitment to innovation and democracy. Among these figures numbered Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Winston Churchill, and Charles de Gaulle. Though each fell in and out of favor with Lippmann, they each in some way represented an avatar for the contemplative Lippmann. Active leaders who would accomplished much through boundless energies, particularly Teddy Roosevelt, whom Lippmann very much admired early in his career.<sup>41</sup>

All of these men were revered for their ability to disperse the bogeys of 'constructed evils,' a term he uses in his early work, *Drift and Mastery*, to describe the stultifying effects of 'stale tradition.' Biographer Ronald Steel notes that for Lippmann, "Reason became a kind of religion...And he continued to look for men who could see beyond the 'bogeys' and 'constructed evils,' for great leaders who could direct the passions of lonely men in crowds and guide them toward higher paths."<sup>42</sup> Steel notes a story Lippmann tells in *Drift and*

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<sup>41</sup> Steel, pg. 5

<sup>42</sup> Steel, pg. 6

*Mastery* about a telling confrontation in Lippmann's youth, what he called the most heroic moment of his life: a confrontation with a suspected ghost. A family maid planted the idea in the impressionable child's mind, and, in the darkness of his bedroom, Lippmann resolved to confront an image which appeared to him to be that of a ghost. Lippmann lauds himself for stepping out of bed, turning on the light and identifying the ghost as a laced curtain, and returning to sleep. While it is clear Lippmann was indeed gratified and motivated by this guide of reason, it is less clear whether either he or Steel realized that the youth still needed to get out of bed to disperse the bogeys, reason alone being unequal to the task.

Shunning the recommendations of his father and prep school debate coach that he become a lawyer, Lippmann chose a rather more romantic profession for himself, that of an art historian. Deeply influenced by John Ruskin, a Victorian era art and social critic, Lippmann spent his European vacations in museums, ignoring the simple pleasures of rest and relaxation enjoyed by his parents. Ruskin's work had inculcated a social awareness, and reformist sensibility in Lippmann, but, importantly, had also linked it to an aesthetic purity. This is particularly telling concerning Ruskin's view of labor and art:

We want one man to be always thinking, and another to be always working, and we call one a gentleman, and the other an operative; whereas the workman ought often to be thinking, and the thinker often to be working, and both should be gentlemen, in the best sense. As it is, we make both ungentle, the one envying, the other despising, his brother; and the mass of society is made up of morbid thinkers and miserable workers. Now it is only by labour that thought can be made healthy, and only by thought that labour can be made happy, and the two cannot be separated with impunity.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *The Works of John Ruskin*, Edited by Edward Tyas Cook, and Alexander Wedderburn (Cambridge university Press, 2010)

Lippmann was primed with this sense and expectation of the continuity of aesthetic nobility with decent labor, something that informed his early criticism of the excesses of private property support of corporatism, and later restrained his endorsement of the right of private property in a liberal democratic state. Both Lippmann and Ruskin admired pre-classical Greek and Roman, and Gothic architecture, and were disparaging of the vulgarity of self-expression and indulgence of the renaissance artists. Together they condemned the perversions and corrupting influence of the modern world. Lippmann entered Harvard, just days shy of his seventeenth birthday, convinced he would follow this career of art historian, reformer, and social critic.

Harvard was a truly unique experience for a young man with Lippmann's innate intellectual curiosity. Spurned by the socially elite clubs on account of his Jewishness, Lippmann found a home in the intellectualism of the university, rejection fueling his emerging social conscience. An iconoclast at even a young age, one of Lippmann's first published articles was an attack on a professor: Barret Wendell, author of a recent work called *The Privileged Classes*, a condemnation of mass tastes on behalf of a sort of anglophillic cultural absolutism. Lippmann penned an acerbic critical piece for a school magazine, replete with all the expected indignation of a progressive anti-elitist. The work caught the attention of retired Professor William James, who personally sought out and congratulated Lippmann on his insights, and began a friendship with the young man centered around weekly tea times on Thursday mornings.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Steel, 16-7

Ronald Steel notes that while Lippmann was never drawn to the gloomy social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer, he found great accord with the iconoclasm of James, particularly in James' explicit rejection of all dogmas in the favor of experience and rigorous empiricism. James influenced Lippmann's early views with his experimental pluralism and view of truth as efficiency. "'The true', to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as 'the right' is only the expedient in the way of our behaving. Expedient in almost any fashion; and expedient in the long run and on the whole, of course."<sup>45</sup> The meliorism and practicality tempered any dramatic utopian thinking in which Lippmann may have engaged without James' influence, but James also impressed upon the early Lippmann the notion that moral judgments are ineffectual guides to understanding the value and purpose of life, also complicating any recourse Lippmann might have made to the realm of essences in engaging a teleological view of man. James' freethinking openness appealed strongly to Lippmann, but Lippmann was never fully satisfied with the incompleteness of James' experimental pluralism.

James's influence, though prominent, was contradicted by Lippmann's confessed fascination with Santayana, who fostered in Lippmann the idea that reason exists to dominate experience and could assist in the search for reality beyond experiences rooted in neo-platonic 'essences.' What Lippmann did not find in James in regard to aesthetic philosophical judgment, he found in Santayana's appeal to reason as the guide to moral essences beyond human experience. Santayana's star pupil, Lippmann read his *Life of Reason*, and quickly impressed the old Spaniard with his wit and curiosity. Santayana shook

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<sup>45</sup>William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for some Old Ways of Thinking* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975) pg. 34

him out of the moral relativism of James' philosophy, condemning it as 'romantic cosmology.'<sup>46</sup> Steel notes a letter Lippmann would later pen to friend and art critic Bernard Berenson ten years after Harvard: "I love James more than any very great man I ever saw, but increasingly I find Santayana inescapable."<sup>47</sup> Lippmann never fully abandoned James, and there is more of Santayana's aestheticism present in his early works than is commonly recognized, but for the more directly political prescriptions in *Preface*, perhaps no one was more influential than Graham Wallas.

In Lippmann final semester at Harvard, Graham Wallas, a leader of the Fabian movement, offered a seminar that would form the substance of his next book, *The Great Society*. So impressed was Wallas with Lippmann, that he dedicated this book to his student. The content of Wallas' work included a critique of politics as an essentially irrational phenomenon directed not by reasoned weighing of facts, but instinct, prejudice and habit.<sup>48</sup> Wallas further imparted to Lippmann a buttressing of his impression of a complex and unwieldy modernity (first initiated aesthetically in reading Ruskin), and skepticism concerning the socialist reform movements, Wallas having disputed with the Fabians, and Lippmann previously flirting with socialist inspired reformism. Wallas' impact inculcated in Lippmann an emphasis on human psychology, and human nature as the center of politics, as he critiqued those who would prefer to govern by statistics alone. Steel quotes Lippmann crediting Wallas as having, "turned back the study of politics back to the humane tradition of Plato and Machiavelli—of having made man the center of political

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<sup>46</sup> Steel, pg. 20. Steel also notes James' rejoinder that Santayana's philosophy amounted to nothing more than 'the perfection of rottenness.'

<sup>47</sup> Steel, pg. 21

<sup>48</sup> Steel, pg. 27

investigation.”<sup>49</sup> Never mind for now what differences might have been overlooked between Plato and Machiavelli; Lippmann’s point was, and would remain, that human nature is the center of good political investigation.

Lippmann left Harvard, ending his position as Santayana’s teaching assistant, to take a job as a reporter with a newly started news magazine, the *Boston Common*. Bored by the shallowness of its moderate progressive rhetoric, he reached out to muckraking journalist Lincoln Steffens for guidance. Steffens, known for his evangelical socialism, and his work on local corruption, *The Shame of Cities*, was preparing to begin an investigation into the practices of big banking and was eager for an apprentice whom he could mold into a journalist, and he offered the job to Lippmann. Together they delved into the underpinnings of big business. Lippmann did the legwork, pouring over documents and interviewing anyone who would speak with him, assembling a dense report describing the secret deals made between big banks, and financial houses on Wall Street. Their work would help trigger the Pujo Committee investigations, which in turn helped create public support for the 16<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the Clayton Antitrust Act, and the Federal Reserve Act. Steffens impressed upon Lippmann more of a method of good, fact based journalism than an intellectual legacy, yet Lippmann left his employ confirming the idea that corruption is an inescapable part of the system, and with a healthy skepticism about the inherent goodness of the common man.<sup>50</sup>

The intellectual mind of Lippmann on the eve of his first book is as mixed as the tensions between Nature and History that begin to manifest in all his works. The emerging

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<sup>49</sup> Steel, pg. 27

<sup>50</sup> Steel, pg. 38



picture is that of an idealistic, reformist, young progressive, as many interpreters have charged, but there as a great depth to that idealism, particularly in regard to what he expected of humanity. On one hand, the young man was fascinated by Ruskin's aesthetic sensibility, including condemnation of the vulgarity of Renaissance art and expressionism. Yet he objects boldly to an elitist work by a professor condemning mass tastes. His religion of reason is confronted by James' emphasis on will and empiricism. This confusion was met with his longing for the neo-platonistic aesthetic beauty from Santayana, and Graham Wallas' emphasis on social psychology, which somehow provided a sort of ground on which to reconcile the expressly political corollaries of these dissensions. With the final experience of corruption in the trenches of Wall Street with Lincoln Steffens, Lippmann had no end of unresolved intellectual currents with which he had to contend. These are large pending questions, and despite the triumph and boldness with which it was written, Lippmann's first book was only his first attempt to resolve them.

Lippmann knew that he wanted to write a book, and even penned a letter to Graham Wallas informing him of his intention to produce a series of essays aimed at popularizing Wallas' *Human Nature in Politics*.<sup>51</sup> To produce such a work Lippmann had retreated to the backwoods of Maine with friend and Harvard alum, Alfred Kuttner. Kuttner, a patient and disciple of Freudian psychoanalysis, was resolved to work on his translation of Freud's *On the Interpretation of Dreams*. In their nightly discussions Lippmann found in Freud a sort of hook, a novelty to invigorate his discursive, intellectually eclectic examination of the progressive platform. Lippmann saw Freud's view of the unconscious as an ally in the

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<sup>51</sup> Steel, pg. 45

difficult problem presented by Wallas' social psychological approach to political and cultural life—that reason is insufficient for understanding human actions. In Freud Lippmann found not only tools to further Wallas' approach, but also Freudian slogans to explain just how reason might conquer, or 'sublimate,' the political destructiveness of the emotional/irrational man.

*A Preface to Politics (1913)* is traditionally thought of as a progressive tome, emblematic of a young Lippmann and a young century, optimism and reform. And while it is those things, it is also much more, for a nuanced reading easily finds recourse to both Nature and History, to the founders and the progressives, to strands of both progressivism and liberalism across the categories of constitutionalism, natural rights, and human nature. Lippmann consolidates these varied and disparate elements into a defense of a particular vision of human freedom articulated in the mode of philosophical inquiry. Every chapter in this study finds that Lippmann's works all manifest some element of his quixotic desire to diagnose the means by which men enjoy the most political freedom. In this work, widely thought to be his most fancifully progressive, he continues to insist on democratic freedom in his pursuit of a defense of civilization which the modern era so desperately requires.

In many ways, *A Preface to Politics (1913)* is a discursive romp through the stable of progressive reformism, dealing with the expected issues of voting reform, anti-trust and business regulations, muckraking, party politics, and all other manner of corruption in political and social life. However, the excited prose signals a startling optimism about something new Lippmann is bringing to the progressive catalogue. Though Lippmann's optimism is evident, it shouldn't be overstated. To understand his method it is important to

note that he also includes various reminders to his reader that the work is nothing more than a, “a preliminary sketch for a theory of politics, a preface to thinking. Like all speculation about human affairs, it is the result of a grapple with problems as they appear in the experience of one man. For though a personal vision may at times assume an eloquent and universal language, it is well never to forget that all philosophies are the language of particular men.”<sup>52</sup> Though the grand tone of the book is difficult to square with such a disclaimer, it is nonetheless important to understand that Lippmann’s goal here is to sketch a new method of political science, a new ‘philosophy.’ Though he cloyingly admonishes his subjectivity, his objective is sweeping, and his method is political-philosophical. The type and nature of this philosophy emerges in-between undergraduate references to a scattered list of favorite philosophers. Part of the task of interpretation is to determine the character and nature of this philosophy.

Taken with his insistence that the world is undergoing massive, and unwieldy corporate and industrial reorganizations, it’s not difficult to hear Tocqueville’s sentiments in *Democracy in America* echoed in Lippmann’s introduction: “A new political science is needed for a world altogether new.”<sup>53</sup> Lippmann understands himself as on the brink of a discovery of a new politics.

The details of this new philosophy emerge in a tightly argued nine chapters. Though Steffens’ style of factual presentation is obvious in Lippmann’s construction, the book feels oddly unconsummated. Lippmann sticks to his understated goal of developing a ‘preface to

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<sup>52</sup> Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics* (New York: Mitchel Kennerley, 1913), Introduction

<sup>53</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans., ed., Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

thinking,' but therein never fully illuminates a specific way forward. His central argument seems to be that each problem in the 'machine' of political life, particularly in the inchoate, rapidly industrializing/corporatizing modern world, evokes unique brands of corruption. The only means for dealing with these many and varied corruptions is a scientific, inventive social psychology which takes human nature as its guiding principle.

The term social psychology receives somewhat ambiguous usage throughout Lippmann's book. The best source for a concise definition comes instead from Graham Wallas' *The Great Society*, the book Wallas dedicated to Lippmann and constructed from the seminar he gave at Harvard: "The science of social psychology aims at discovering and arranging the knowledge which will enable us to forecast, and therefore to influence, the conduct of large numbers of human beings organized in society."<sup>54</sup> The type and nature of this knowledge comes in the form of a catalogue of human events and their causes which together illuminate the disposition of the event's actors. Wallas continues: "It is further convenient to use the term 'human nature' as meaning the sum total of the human 'dispositions.'"<sup>55</sup> Taken thusly there is little to connect this view of human nature with a foundation in Nature. Wallas' view, at least superficially,<sup>56</sup> is merely a summation of parts of the human psyche, subject to Historical examination, revision, and (perhaps infinite) modification. Yet the salient question seems to be what arenas remain open to social

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<sup>54</sup> Graham Wallas, *The Great Society* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914). Pg. 20

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, pg. 21

<sup>56</sup> I have not examined Wallas' work in great depth, nor have I found any resource which investigates essentialist roots in his use of "human nature." His *Human Nature*, and *The Great Society* both laud approaches by thinkers as diverse as Plato.

psychological inquiry, and what, if any, limits there are to the modification or perfectibility of human persons.

In Lippmann's case, his view on the fixity of human nature and existence of natural rights is not altogether clear in *Preface*, partly because of the way he treats the irrational. Lippmann's novelty, the twist he imposes on Wallas' method, is to extend social psychology into the realm of the unconscious with the use of Freudian terminology. Lippmann introduces Freud's term, 'sublimation' in a discussion on how a 'boy's gang' might better spend its energies as a Boy Scout troop. He claims, "In each individual the original differences are small. Training and opportunity decide in the main how men's lust shall emerge. Left to themselves, or ignorantly tabooed, they break forth in some barbaric or morbid form. Only by supplying our passions with civilized interests can we escape their destructive force."<sup>57</sup> The goal is clear, but the method is not. Lippmann seems to be arguing that a well-ordered inquiry into these 'ignorant taboos' and small differences will provide a path forward to a better citizen, someone with 'civilized interests.'

The civilized interests by which this civilizing effect is manifest are often enumerated, and include the traditional norms of family, school, religion, art and science.<sup>58</sup> However, there is an unexamined relativism implicit in the assumed value of what Lippmann expects to be considered civilized interests. Nowhere is there a complete discussion of the principle, which is further complicated by the straightforwardly relativistic first chapters which seem to collapse the good and bad in a pseudo-Nietzschean fashion: "Politics does not exist for the sake of demonstrating the superior righteousness of

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<sup>57</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 2

<sup>58</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 2

anybody. It is not a competition in deportment. In fact, before you can begin to think about politics at all you have to abandon the notion that there is a war between good men and bad men.”<sup>59</sup> These opening sentences can be read to suggest that as there is no righteousness, there is no right. Lippmann’s faith appears to be invested in a nuanced, historical development furnished by scientific method. In his case the scientific method applied eschews traditional statistical approaches because he has sensed the depth and complexity of human nature, represented as the encounter with the irrational. This position only serves to obscure the essential promise Lippmann finds in historical development of society, of expected progress in History.

One of the hallmarks of natural right, of classical political rationalism, that politics is pursuit of the question of ‘what is good for the city, for the man?’ further suggests that Lippmann has indeed explicitly rejected Nature or natural right as a source and guide for political order. However, Lippmann’s point seems to extend beyond a superficial dismissal insofar as he goes on to condemn these questions of ‘righteousness’ only in regard to their arresting impact on political organization. He claims, “if one half of the people is bent upon proving how wicked a man is and the other half is determined to show how good he is, neither half will think very much about the nation.”<sup>60</sup> It seems that Lippmann is making a positive claim about the good of the city, that it is stultified by constant bickering, particularly in Congress, over facile claims of the good and evil of an endless litany of parsimonious ejaculations.

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<sup>59</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 1

<sup>60</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 1

It does not seem to be the case that Lippmann understands himself to be a relativist, but rather that he has observed that political culture is easily halted by creeds, taboos and dogmas which attach easily to simple pronouncements of what is right and wrong. The real issue stems from the great difficulty the average person has in discerning the politically salient issues and responses:

If you stare at a checkerboard you can see it as black on red, or red on black, as series of horizontal, vertical or diagonal steps which recede or protrude. The longer you look the more patterns you can trace, and the more certain it becomes that there is no single way of looking at the board. So with political issues. There is no obvious cleavage which everyone recognizes. Many patterns appear in the national life. The "progressives" say the issue is between "Privilege" and the "People"; the Socialists, that it is between the "working class" and the "master class." An apologist for dynamite told me once that society was divided into the weak and the strong, and there are people who draw a line between Philistia and Bohemia.<sup>61</sup>

This sixth paragraph of the twenty-three year old's first book uses an analogy which would re-emerge in various forms throughout his future works, and draws attention to the basis of his critique of democratic citizenship on the grounds that most citizens are unprepared and incapable of the complexities of political life. But even at this stage Lippmann knows that his argument is insufficient—while he has critiqued the inefficiency of the good/bad dogma, he does not have a replacement mechanism by which political life is to be understood.

Lippmann reframes the conflict experienced in political life as that between the routineer and the inventor, those given to an inflexible machine politics, and those willing

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<sup>61</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 1

to invent and create. Lippmann condemns all who subscribe to a 'machine conception of government,' including the American Founders and constitution.<sup>62</sup> He favors a dynamic style of government led by statesman who interpret will and sentiment derived from sound political psychology. The proposition is strange, particularly at this early stage of the argument when Lippmann has yet to provide a convincing example of such leadership.

Lippmann struggles throughout the book to define the statesmanship he seeks, hinting that it may be ineffable except in practice. He echoes Nietzsche in a description of this brand of the 'inventor' which opposes the routineer: "It is, I believe, this power of being aggressively active towards the world which gives man a miraculous assurance that the world is something he can make."<sup>63</sup> Nietzsche's influence is again apparent. The epigraph of the entire book becomes clear: "A God wilt thou create for thyself out of thy seven devils." It is from Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, in the first book, under the subheading "The Way of a Creating One." For all the passages that Lippmann could have chosen from Nietzsche, he picked one that highlights both a clarion call and an admonishment to those who would follow it. To create in this fashion is to be alone, and to affirm a value of life amidst the nihilism and loneliness of 'the creating one' is as much a damning as it is a freeing endeavor. There is only a little-ease<sup>64</sup> at the hands the seven demons,<sup>65</sup> and Nietzsche includes in that passage a line which Lippmann does not quote, that it is, "Terrible it is to be alone with the judge and avenger of thy own law."

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<sup>62</sup> This criticism, which Lippmann would reverse later in his career, is largely incoherent in *Preface*, and reflects a deep misunderstanding of the founder's political science. More will be discussed on this subject below.

<sup>63</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 1

<sup>64</sup> A little-ease is a medieval torture device such that prevents an occupant from standing or lying in a resting position. Often it is accompanied by spiked walls.

<sup>65</sup> Mark 16:9



While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss Nietzsche's place in the situation of the foundational ideas of Nature and History, it is clear that Lippmann moves away from natural right in embracing this Nietzschean inventor-statesman. Lippmann again references Nietzsche in the definition of the inventor as someone capable of sublimating the passions in service of civilization, as, "he who has the courage of existence will put it triumphantly, crying "yea" as Nietzsche did, and recognizing that all the passions of men are the motive powers of a fine life."<sup>66</sup> It seems that the early Lippmann is indeed hostile to natural right, and to its foundation in Nature. Yet there remains a difficulty in placing him in the historicist/relativist persuasion: his recourse to philosophy.

Lippmann has charted for himself a truly unique line as a Natural Rights progressive. It is clearly facile to claim that any positive assertion about human rights belongs to the same category as a natural right foundation in Nature, in essences and philosophical reasoning. However, Lippmann's tie to a foundation in Nature is present through his continued appeal to rationalism amidst the strange naturalistic reasoning that he is forcing to accompany his ideal of statesmanship. The awkwardness of this comportment pits the 'wisdom of civilization' against a social naturalism, that is, an anti-rationalistic method of problem solving that escapes a priori theorizing. Lippmann does not seem to have a solution to, nor even see, the problem: his enterprise in *Preface* builds a philosophical statecraft.

The reader is left with a confusing choice: either take Lippmann at his word and accept that there is no foundation to his prescriptions other than an expectation of

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<sup>66</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 2

progress, or to accept that his philosophic enterprise also expresses philosophical openness. Both premises seem to be operative. Take for instance Lippmann's description of the inventor in contradistinction to the routineer: "While the routineers see machinery and precedents revolving with mankind as puppets, he puts the deliberate, conscious, willing individual at the center of his philosophy. This reversal is pregnant with a new outlook for statecraft. I hope to show that it alone can keep step with life; it alone is humanly relevant; and it alone achieves valuable results."<sup>67</sup> Constant references to this philosophy imply that Lippmann expects the scientific method ostensibly grounded in historical development to be carried by digestion of experimentation and subsequent improvement at the hands of inventors. The inventor more and more resembles a philosopher, as a sort of expert who supplants the inevitably routineer-ing politician. After blamelessly drawing attention to the way the inventive Woodrow Wilson inescapably descended to routineer status through campaigning, Lippmann makes the curious comment: "If a nation's destiny were really bound up with the politics reported in newspapers, the impasse would be discouraging. If the important sovereignty of a country were in what is called its parliamentary life, then the day of Plato's philosopher-kings would be far off indeed."<sup>68</sup> Though he does not claim it explicitly, the lesson is appears to be that the ideal society is in fact that ruled by the philosopher, and that, perhaps, this is exactly the sort of person the inventor has to become.

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<sup>67</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 1

<sup>68</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 3

Though Lippmann isn't blind to the difficulties in this proposition, he suspects that this is already partly the function of the government ancillaries of which the bureaucracy is composed:

Certainly nobody expects our politicians to become philosophers. When they do they hide the fact. And when philosophers try to be politicians they generally cease to be philosophers. But the truth is that we overestimate enormously the importance of nominations, campaigns, and office-holding. If we are discouraged it is because we tend to identify statecraft with that official government which is merely one of its instruments. Vastly over-advertised, we have mistaken an inflated fragment for the real political life of the country.<sup>69</sup>

The refrain against machinist political culture again is heard. Lippmann's optimism extends in the form of the unnamed trappings of the political organism as philosopher-kings adopt a rather more humble role as scientific managers. However, Lippmann insists that they retain a philosophical attitude, one that shuns dogma and creed (a fundamental attribute of any philosopher unburdened by sophistry), and, critically, that thereby wisdom is left in charge of politics. While placing wisdom at the helm of politics is far from securing a natural right foundation in Nature, it does temper the creative zeal of the inventor through philosophical openness to new ideas and information. What most commenters have seen as an exercise in progressive triumphalism can in fact be tempered by Lippmann's essential reliance on reason as the source and structure of philosophical statesmanship which advances the progressive cause. This is certainly not to say that his position is without

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<sup>69</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 3

difficulties, but that there is a present tension concerning his treatment of natural right between History and Nature.

This ambiguity continues into the only examples Lippmann attempts to give of his experimental, inventive statecraft. In the middle of the book, the Fifth Chapter, "Well Meaning but Unmeaning: The Chicago Vice Report,"<sup>70</sup> finally gives an example by which to explain and critique social organization. The Vice Commission was tasked with determining whether Chicago should continue allowing regulated prostitution in special 'vice' districts, or to outlaw the districts altogether. The investigation included interviews with local community leaders, police, prostitutes, and neighborhood organizations, as well as a detailed statistical section. The Commission decided to abolish vice districts altogether, and enumerated a list of procedures to end prostitution in Chicago. Lippmann concludes that, "the Commission's method was poor, not its intentions. It was an average body of American citizens aroused to action by an obvious evil."<sup>71</sup> To rid itself of vice is a noble goal, but to draft measures limited to re-education, and law enforcement amounts to fruitless repression of the human impulse toward vice.

His criticism of the report hinges on two lines which he highlights together:

"So long as there is lust in the hearts of men it will seek out some method of expression.

Until the hearts of men are changed we can hope for no absolute annihilation of the Social Evil."

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<sup>70</sup> Mary Linehan, *The Electronic Encyclopedia of Chicago*. Chicago Historical Society. Date Accessed: 11/30/2015. <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1303.html>

<sup>71</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 4

"Constant and persistent repression of prostitution the immediate method; absolute annihilation the ultimate ideal."<sup>72</sup>

Lippmann suggests that advancing these two contradictory notions is not an intellectual or semantic failing of the Commission, but rather that it is emblematic of the deep 'confusion of mind' which plagues politics. By dealing with vice as a taboo to be eliminated, they fail to engage it was an artifact of human nature, and something which can be sublimated, or made right through the substitution of the civilizing of sexual impulse through other means and institutions.

Lippmann's goal, as he constantly reminds the reader, is to describe a new method of politics, not to engage the problems of prostitution. Nonetheless, his off-hand prescriptions are hopelessly vague, suggesting that "dance halls" and "social centers" hold the key to conquering prostitution.

His lack of appropriate examples is critical as he condemns the proposals of the committee on the basis that their goal is repression instead of substitution. "I am not engaged in drawing up the plans for a reconstruction or in telling just what should be done. Only the co-operation of expert minds can do that."<sup>73</sup> To his own conscience, this deficiency is resolved through his continual appeal to great statesmen who can apprehend and act in the massively complex world of economic realities which must be mastered before gradual (he does stress that the change is slow and patient) change can occur. Like any progressive he emphasizes economic factors, but also stresses that method is equally critical, that sexual

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<sup>72</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 5

<sup>73</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 5

impulse can be civilized if only human nature is properly understood, and if the taboos and creeds which support it are abolished. "What stands between Chicago and civilization? No one can doubt that to abolish prostitution means to abolish the shun and the dirty alley, to stop overwork, underpay, the sweating and the torturing monotony of business, to breathe a new life into education, ventilate society with frankness, and fill life with play and art, with games, with passions which hold and suffuse the imagination."<sup>74</sup> Frankness about the human condition is his cure, but economic reality is only a constituent difficulty of politics that do not take human nature for their guide. Thus the typical preoccupations of progressive policy are, in Lippmann's view, unreasonable if their genesis does not rest in an appropriate psychology attentive to human nature.

Lippmann's method hinges on an understanding of the world as new, with new challenges which demand a 'human politics.' The emerging philosopher statesmen who somehow juggle its complexities are the ones that deliver change through social scientific experimentation. It is important to note, however, that Lippmann is no utopian. He claims that, "there is no short cut to civilization. We say that the truth will make us free. Yes, but that truth is a thousand truths which grow and change. Nor do I see a final state of blessedness. The world's end will surely find us still engaged in answering riddles."<sup>75</sup> The quest for knowledge to govern does not rest only History in this aspect of Lippmann's thought, even in his 'Idealistic' youth. "This changing focus in politics is a tendency at work all through our lives. There are many experiments. But the effort is half-conscious; only here and there does it rise to a deliberate purpose. To make it an avowed ideal— a thing of

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<sup>74</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 5

<sup>75</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 4

will and intelligence— is to hasten its coming, to illumine its blunders, and, by giving it self-criticism, to convert mistakes into wisdom.”<sup>76</sup> There is a mixed heritage of progressive idealism, and recourse to an enduring notion of wisdom in Lippmann’s early thinking. Wisdom may be circumscribed by the ‘thousand changing truths,’ but the truth/wisdom is none the less at the center of Lippmann’s politics.

Lippmann’s progressivist reaction is to what he sees as an endlessly evolving and changing world. He is an empirical progressivist rather than a fatalistic progressivist. This allows him to hold his strange position on natural rights, human nature, and other ‘constants’ which seem open to change but nonetheless change very little in history are impossible to reconcile with a fatalistic progressivist’s expectation of apotheosis through government. Change is practical in *Preface*, for all its high-mindedness. There is no utopianism in Lippmann: “That is the great lesson which the Utopias teach by their failure— that schemes, however nicely arranged, cannot be imposed upon human beings who are interested in other things.”<sup>77</sup>

The corollary of the statesmen that gather this wisdom and discern action is that they must act. Unfortunately there is no greater hurdle for action than constitutional limits. Lippmann is fairly unrestrained in his contempt for the Founders and their “machine” conception of politics. Following Woodrow Wilson, Lippmann opens *Preface* with by aligning the Founders with the routineers, suggesting that they “Worked with the philosophy of their age,”<sup>78</sup> Newton and Montesquieu. Though Lippmann makes a

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<sup>76</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 4

<sup>77</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 4

<sup>78</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 1

distinction between the conservative and the routinier, and the inventor and the progressive, it seems that what distinguishes them is not so much ideology, but approach, or the method applied to politics. Conservative, or liberal, the founders' political science was arresting, yet another idol to be smashed en route to a human politics.

Lippmann argued against constitutionalism itself as a means to govern well. The balancing of branches of government seems to him as though the founders "put their faith in a scaffold, and it has been part of our national piety to pretend that they succeeded."<sup>79</sup> Against limited constitutionalism, the direct manifestation of the popular, irrational will should come through active political actors: "[Statesmen] must find popular feeling, organize it, and make that the motive power of government. If you study the success of Roosevelt the point is re-enforced. He is a man of will in whom millions of people have felt the embodiment of their own will."<sup>80</sup> Lippmann thus criticizes the machine conception of politics he claims the founders (the routiniers) orchestrated and rejects their liberalism. There is little accord between this view of the constitution as anachronistic, and the founder's political science.

Yet, in the realm of human nature he finds implicit accord with the founders insofar as he pleads for the return to setting human nature at the center of politics:

In other words, we must put man at the center of politics, even though we are densely ignorant both of man and of politics. This has always been the method of great political thinkers from Plato to Bentham. But one difference we in this age must note: they made their political man a dogma— we must leave him an hypothesis. That is to say that our task is to temper speculation with scientific humility. A paradox there is here,

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<sup>79</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 1

<sup>80</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 7



but a paradox of language, and not of fact. Men made bridges before there was a science of bridge-building; they cured disease before they knew medicine. Art came before aesthetics, and righteousness before ethics. Conduct and theory react upon each other. Hypothesis is confirmed and modified by action, and action is guided by hypothesis. If it is a paradox to ask for a human politics before we understand humanity or politics, it is what Mr. Chesterton describes as one of those paradoxes that sit beside the wells of truth.<sup>81</sup>

Although the practical difference between hypothesis and dogma is unclear, there is more than a whisper here of a search for an essential understanding of human nature, despite his ultimate rejection of the premise of an *essential* fixity to human nature. Confusingly, even in regard to human nature, Lippmann remains antagonistic towards the founders despite a deep and obvious kinship between his advocacy for attention to human nature and the skepticism of the founders regarding direct democracy. Lippmann practically echoes *The Federalist* when claiming in conclusion, “The one thing that no democrat may assume is that the people are all dear good souls, fully competent for their task.”<sup>82</sup> He remains as critical as the founders of direct democracy, and for much the same reasons. Take for instance Madison’s *Federalist* 51: “Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place. It may be a reflection *on human nature*, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections *on human nature?*”<sup>83</sup> Benjamin Wright attributes this to a lack of understanding on the part of a young

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<sup>81</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 3

<sup>82</sup> *Preface*, Ch. 9

<sup>83</sup> *Federalist* 51, emphasis mine

Lippmann,<sup>84</sup> and there is little reason to disagree, since Lippmann would reverse this thinking later in his career. For now, the lesson seems to be that in *Preface* he holds sincere disagreement about the machinist political system of the founders, but also dramatically misunderstood and underestimated the importance of human nature in their design.

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<sup>84</sup> Benjamin F. Wright *5 Public Philosophies of Walter Lippmann* (University of Texas Press Austin and London, 1973) pg. 23

### Chapter Three – Drift, Mastery, and Scientific Organization

At some level Lippmann understood that *Preface*, with all its talk of iconoclasm, of Nietzschean will and intuitionism rightly understood, was something less than a concrete step towards a new politics. It was, as he pointed out throughout the text, and in its introduction, merely a sketch of a method of thinking. No sooner had the book been published than was Lippmann struck with a notion to write another. His political views had grown less inclined towards the socialistic intellectual circles in which he traveled at Harvard, and instead began to gravitate more towards the New Nationalism of Theodore Roosevelt, to the more mainstream politics of the new American progressivism, and particularly to the thought of Herbert Croly. With help from Graham Wallas, who was eagerly expecting Lippmann's sequel<sup>85</sup> to *Preface*, Lippmann retired to Woking, Surrey, to a comfortable country Inn, where he wrote the pages that would become *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest (1914)*.

Though *Preface* had given Lippmann a solid reputation among the intellectually and politically interested, he still lacked the sort of readership and influence he ultimately desired. However, it was perhaps not simply influence Lippmann sought, but understanding. From his diary, dated July 5, 1914, he writes, "A writer on public affairs can't pretend to despise reputation, for reputation is not only flattering to the vanity, it is the only way of meeting the people you've got to know in order to understand the world."<sup>86</sup> Lippmann found the answer to this new need in the form of an unexpected invitation to

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<sup>85</sup> His friends and admirers, notably Graham Wallas, expected this book to be a sequel to *Preface to Politics*. Indeed, most commentators did view it as a continuance of Lippmann's youthful iconoclasm, though my argument contends that there is a deeper divide between *Preface* and *Drift*.

<sup>86</sup> Steel, pg. 59

meet with progressive theorist Herbert Croly who intended to recruit him as a founding editor to a planned weekly periodical that would become *The New Republic*.

Croly had been impressed with Lippmann's *Preface*, writing to Judge Learned Hand that Lippmann, "has real felling, conviction and knowledge to give a certain assurance, almost a certain dignity to his impertinence, and of course the ability to get away with the impertinent is almost the best quality a political journalist can have."<sup>87</sup> Croly was as suitably impressed by Lippmann's person as he was by his idealism, and Lippmann leapt at the chance to join Croly and Walter Weyl in their new endeavor, especially with Croly's claim that the weekly would be 'radical without being socialist, pragmatic without being doctrinaire.'<sup>88</sup> Lippmann's only quibble was with the addition of the adjective, 'new,' to the original title, 'The Republic.' They changed it after finding "The Republic" to be an already existing publication, but not without grumbling from Lippmann of a "positive dislike for utopianism."<sup>89</sup>

Some of Croly's influence was present in *Preface*, though more emerged as Lippmann sought to make his politics more concrete, more attainable in *Drift*. Their primary arenas of confluence were that both Lippmann and Croly advocated, in similar fashions, big government control of big business though capable, strong national leadership. Both were partly influenced by the observation of the practical politics of Teddy Roosevelt, and both shared a certain degree of resignation towards the existence of big business and a desire to render it profitable though government interventionism,

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<sup>87</sup> Steel, pg. 60

<sup>88</sup> Steel, pg. 60

<sup>89</sup> Steel, pg. 61

Lippmann being especially dismayed by the low probability of constructive socialist change after his work as a reporter under Steffens.

Croly's fame and philosophical influence stem largely from his seminal work, *The Promise of American Life* (1909), a dense, thought-provoking attempt to assimilate elements of American political thought into a new, and radical synthesis. It is difficult to overstate Croly's influence among the progressive intelligentsia. His argument in *Promise* is that what restrains the pursuit of a more perfect democracy in America was not simply intractable conservatism stultifying new liberals, but a more profound misunderstanding of the American regime: both Jeffersonian agrarian individualism and democracy, and Hamiltonian nationalism were alone insufficient to realize the promise of American ideals. Jefferson refused overtures to expanding national power, and Hamilton feared and rejected democracy. Jeffersonian individualism fought the Hamiltonian centralization of power. Croly's solution was to resolve this was to combine the two into a new nationalism: to achieve Jeffersonian ends with Hamiltonian means.

Key to Croly's argument is that for his purposes the role of government is essentially unlimited. This was not the case for *either* Jefferson or Hamilton. Whatever most progressives thought about Jefferson's arguments for natural rights, they were hitherto unable to resolve Hamiltonian centralization of power with free democracy. Croly's emphasis on nationalism and his purposeful forgetting of the founders' view of the role of government took place together: "The Higher American patriotism, on the other hand, combines loyalty to historical tradition and precedent with the imaginative projection of an

idea of national Promise.”<sup>90</sup> Like Lippmann’s *Preface*, Croly assures the reader that this synthesis will benevolently manifest in leaders with pure visions of the national interest.

The national interest amounts to the redistribution of property through centralized government. Jeffersonian ‘equality’ through Hamiltonian ‘government.’ Croly argues that property rights are an artifact of the open frontier, and industrial reality dictates that future prosperity depends on the “individual subordination and self-denial...and [the] necessity of subordinating the satisfaction of individual desires to the fulfillment of a natural purpose.” Croly rejects laissez faire economic policy which motivated to some extent both Jefferson and Hamilton, further arguing that, “The automatic fulfillment of the American national Promise is to be abandoned, if at all, precisely because the traditional American confidence in individual freedom has resulted in a morally and socially undesirable distribution of wealth.”<sup>91</sup> This argument for redistribution moves society towards an equitable outcome at the cost of the constitutional mechanisms and natural rights protections favored by the founders.

Croly ignores the importance of enforcing liberty through institutional checks on Hamiltonian government, and likewise ignores the construction of Jeffersonian democracy and limited government. His purpose reflects animosity toward natural rights doctrine, and instead reveals a nationalistic desire to form a democratic community, composed of citizens inherently perfectible through proper progressive ‘education’: “Democracy must stand or fall on a platform of human perfectibility. If human nature cannot be improved by institutions, democracy is at best a more than usually safe form of political organization;

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<sup>90</sup> Croly, Herbert. *The Promise of American Life*, (New York: MacMillan Company (1909). pg. 2

<sup>91</sup> *The Promise of American Life*, pg. 22

and the only interesting inquiry about its future would be: How long will it continue to work?"<sup>92</sup> The unlimited purpose of Croly's government is to bring about the unlimited perfection of man, to abjure constitutional restraints rather than to enforce constitutional mechanisms around a permanent human type. Croly's work has certainly some degree of influence on Lippmann, in both *Preface* and *Drift*, but ultimately Lippmann's views diverge foundationally from Croly and other progressives.

Lippmann's 'sequel' to *A Preface to Politics*, called *Drift and Mastery* (1914), retained the iconoclastic spirit of its predecessor, but also contained many revisions and new ideas such that it is difficult to draw too strong a connection to *Preface*, a book written just one year prior. Nearly all of the secondary literature on Lippmann eagerly lumps these two works together, perhaps because of the similarity of some of Lippmann's themes, but also perhaps because of their close chronology. Yet, *Drift* is a very purposeful response to *Preface*, in particular because Lippmann seems to be sensitive to the obvious lack of prescription omitted by the methods of political-emotional catharsis crudely outlined in *Preface*. Where they are similar, *Drift* continues the themes of rejecting the past with hope for the future, and increases the emphasis on the development of the future through scientific realism and what Lippmann calls "industrial statesmanship."

The book moves Lippmann closer to one of his idols, Teddy Roosevelt, and his 1912 "Bull Moose" political platform, and includes striking condemnations, not of private property in its full scope, but rather private property as a stultifying, sacrosanct tradition. Lippmann both claims that the productivity of the economy should not be hampered by

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<sup>92</sup> *The Promise of American Life*, 400.

government action, and that the time has come for government takeover of basic industries, mining operations, railroads, etc.<sup>93</sup> The seeming paradox is resolved in Lippmann's mind because of his stark optimism for a scientific/bureaucratic management that takes little account of scarcity (except for the often implicit expectation that it will decrease sharply), and offers a curious contrast from the later Lippmann who values property rights more fully. Lippmann also continues to write passionately and paradoxically in the realm of natural rights and philosophy, where it is attractive to try and reconcile his bold, almost Nietzschean claims, such as his exhortation to, 'break up routines, make decisions, choose our ends, select [our] means,'<sup>94</sup> with his other statements which imply great philosophical openness, but there is a danger in trying to compartmentalize these issues into a cohesive political philosophy. To understand *Drift* requires circumspective reflection on Lippmann's movement away from *Preface*.

The defining characteristic which offers continuity between Lippmann's works is philosophical openness in pursuit of a politically free, sustainable liberal democracy. The introduction to *Drift* promises a following address to restricted political freedoms and questions about the path of liberal democratic order. In early March, 1914 a man named Frank Tannenbaum, a leader of the International Workers of the World union, led unemployed protesters into New York City churches to demand restitutions for the poor, a demand which many happily met. However, the result of this and other activisms was continuing agitations from unemployed masses and sharply elevated consciousness in the social elite. Lippmann, who spoke in Rutgers Square during the agitations,<sup>95</sup> solemnly

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<sup>93</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1914) Ch. 6

<sup>94</sup> *Drift*, Ch. 14

<sup>95</sup> Steel, 54



reports on the anarchist mood months later in *Drift*, almost exasperatedly cataloguing the predictable counter by city administration to crack down on basic freedoms of assembly. He makes note of both the inappropriateness of the city's response, and, importantly, the role of the protestors who had no message to give: "They knew what they were against, but not what they were for, and their intellectual situation was as uncomfortable as one of those bad dreams in which you find yourself half-clothed in a public space."<sup>96</sup> His concern for the basic political freedoms is evident, yet implies that the entire situation is a result of a deeper problem having to do with liberalism: "Without a tyrant to attack an immature democracy is always somewhat bewildered."<sup>97</sup> There are two points to be made here: One, that Lippmann attributes the agitations to bewilderment rather than, or at least as much as, structural grievances with corporate compensatory systems, and, two, that liberty is not an end in itself.

Lippmann is searching for purpose and how to wield the democratic sword, a replacement for the tyrants democracy has overthrown. He explicitly aligns the foundation of his thinking with Progress, claiming that: "The adjective 'progressive' is what we like, and the word 'new,' be it the New Nationalism of Roosevelt, the New Freedom of Wilson, or the New Socialism of the syndicalists."<sup>98</sup> He takes it for granted that the newness of the world implies change; it is his empirical/observational progressivism that suggests new methods are needed to achieve new ends—that "the battle for [progressives], in short, does not lie against crusted prejudice, but against the chaos of a new freedom."<sup>99</sup> Lippmann

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<sup>96</sup> *Drift*, Intro.

<sup>97</sup> *Drift*, Intro.

<sup>98</sup> *Drift*, Intro.

<sup>99</sup> *Drift*, Intro.

concludes that to live with meaning, radicals now need to confront the weaknesses of democracy with some “vision for the future.” He claims that this book will be some approximation of his vision of that future.

Key to understanding the work is understanding the ‘modern condition’ of man.

Fortunately, it is on this issue Lippmann writes most authoritatively:

All of us are immigrants spiritually. We are all of us immigrants in the industrial world, and we have no authority to lean upon. We are an uprooted people, newly arrived, and nouveau riche. As a nation we have all the vulgarity that goes with that, all the scattering of soul. The modern man is not yet settled in his world. It is strange to him, terrifying, alluring, and incomprehensibly big. The evidence is everywhere: the amusements of the city; the jokes that pass for jokes; the blare that stands for beauty, the folksongs of Broadway, the feeble and apologetic pulpits, the cruel standards of success, raucous purity. We make love to ragtime and we die to it. We are blown hither and thither like litter before the wind. Our days are lumps of undigested experience. You have only to study what newspapers regard as news to see how we are torn and twisted by the irrelevant: in frenzy about issues that do not concern us, bored with those that do. Is it a wild mistake to say that the absence of central authority has disorganized our souls, that our souls are like Peer Gynt's onion, in that they lack a kernel?<sup>100</sup>

Lippmann offers deep questions about human place and purpose, and dares to offer some hope about how these conditions, this drift, can be ameliorated, or mastered. His attempt to offer a vision of how to proceed and master this restlessness of the new democratic age is critically informed by the implications of a word so ‘incomprehensibly big.’

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<sup>100</sup> *Drift*, Ch.10

The first part of his 'vision' seems to be introduced in his first chapter, much as he had in *Preface*, by calling into question the capacity of citizens to participate in democracy. He points out that even unfounded accusations in politics have the same practical consequence as true claims, and cites the exploitation of the "Big Business" bogey as the, "material for the feverish fantasy of illiterate thousands thrown out of kilter by the rack and strain of the modern world."<sup>101</sup> He calls into question the muckrakers, but not their motives. Muckrakers express the concerns of the bewildered and the downtrodden, exposing their unknown grievances. For Lippmann, former aide to Lincoln Steffens, to suggest that the muckrakers were insufficiently helpful in pursuit of this new order also suggests how critically he saw the need for positive prescription in the wake of the comparatively unhelpful *Preface*. In the light of his discussion of the restless anarchists, the muckrakers seem little better than the agitators themselves, especially if they bring a sort of chaos, albeit an enlightened one.

The great promise of the muckraking enterprise is that it continues to expand, and itself thrives on, the demand of citizens for good governance: "when men's vision of government enlarged, then the cost of corruption and inefficiency rose: for they meant a blighting of the whole possibility of the state. There has always been corruption in American politics, but it didn't worry people very much, so long as the sphere of the government was narrowly limited."<sup>102</sup> With the (appropriately, in his mind) expanding government, the concomitant expression of good government is a mixed blessing: more agitations, more response. The key for Lippmann is that a positive vision of the future is

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<sup>101</sup> *Drift*, Ch. 1

<sup>102</sup> *Drift*, Ch. 1

needed to quell the present troubles. While this may on one hand seem to be a most solid grounding for Lippmann's thought in the value of Progress, it may in fact be quite the opposite. While he is perhaps soundly animated by the observation that the distinctiveness and rapidity of the world's changes demand a new and unique response from government, he is also attempting to explain a definite program for that change. It remains to be seen whether a more fatalistic form of Progress would sustain the sort of exercise that Lippmann believes integral to sustainable liberal democratic forms.

The demand for greater competence and honesty in government filters through to a greater demand for competence and honesty in business. This demand is what Lippmann diagnoses as the cause of the elevation of consciousness in the working classes, and the commercial-government model is the entry point for his 'vision' of the promise of future industry. Lippmann begins this way because this is the key to his prescriptive impulse in *Drift*, and he needs to lay the philosophical groundwork for supporting the sort of industrial statesmanship which he hopes will process the inchoate nationalization of the great industries. Lippmann carefully explains that it is not commercial activity in general, but 'profit motive' that he and the new progressive world have called in to question. He notes that when radium was a suspected cancer cure, it was subject to ubiquitous calls for the government to seize and ration it, thus demonstrating that man is naturally suspicious of the profit motive, and that there is reason to doubt the simple laissez-faire notion that profit-seeking can justly organize a complex commercial society.

Lippmann's future argument for the public management of great industries depends on the distrust of profiteering as well as suggesting, in principle, that competent

management holds a vague, though great, promise for the spread of generalized well-being. However, Lippmann also takes care to distance himself from those who would arrest all commercial and industrial activity in the name of idealism: "I am not speaking in chorus with those sentimentalists who regard industry as sordid. They merely inherit an ancient and parasitic contempt for labor. I do not say for one instant that money is the root of evil, that rich men are less honest than poor, or any equivalent nonsense."<sup>103</sup> This is one source of continuity with the late Lippmann, whom many know from his defense of freedom of commercial activity in *The Good Society* and his later writings. He has always recognized that the civil market society depends on political freedoms as a condition of its wealth creation, and was always hesitant to limit that enterprise. What he does emphasize is a product of his faith in a new scientific realism, of an emerging capacity to centrally manage large industries in the public interest. He continues, "I am simply trying to point out that there is in everyday life a widespread rebellion against the profit motive. That rebellion is not an attack on the creation of wealth. It is, on the contrary, a discovery that private commercialism is an antiquated, feeble mean, and unimaginative way of dealing with the possibilities of modern industry."<sup>104</sup> At this stage, Lippmann's expectation is little more than a hunch, and his drive to be prescriptive causes him to overstate this optimism in various ways, just as his intellectual honesty prevents him from fully enumerating precisely what industrial statesmanship looks like in practice.

The corollary question to Lippmann's ambiguous but limited syndicalism is the question of private property. For varied reasons, progressives tend to be dismissive of

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<sup>103</sup> *Drift*, Ch. 2

<sup>104</sup> *Drift*, Ch. 2

private property, often rejecting the premise of private possession in a modern state, or the natural rights doctrine which supports it, or rejecting it on behalf of a competing rights claim grounded in equality. The argument from the last option usually implies that some concentration of wealth is protected by the right of the individual to ownership, and that property should be confiscated in some measure to end cyclical and unequal distribution of wealth. Consider Croly, “Americans who talk in this way seem blind to the fact that under a legal system that holds private property sacred there may be equal rights, but there cannot possibly be any equal opportunities for exercising such rights.”<sup>105</sup> For Croly and most other progressives, while there may be a sort of equality under the law, there is no effective equality without some form of redistributive compensation for complex modern mechanisms.

Croly and others did not fear to tread over private property rights in pursuit of effective equality. And while Lippmann is attempting to articulate some grounding for the manufacture of more effective equality and freedoms upon which liberal democracy thrives, he makes his case in the language of natural rights doctrine. Croly and others made appeals to equality, but as a principle tied to the expectation of redistributive policy, linking it through that expectation to a foundation in History. Lippmann confronts the natural rights background of private property to suggest that it is insufficient to its glorified past: “Compare [the stockholder] with the farmer who owns his land, the homesteader or the prospector, compare him with anyone who has a real sense of possession and you will find, I think, that the modern shareholder is a very feeble representation of the institution of

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<sup>105</sup>*The Promise of American Life*, 181

private property.”<sup>106</sup> Often prone to impertinence, Lippmann abjures any glibness in this discussion, illuminating an understanding of the right of private property as something attached to individual rights grounded in Nature, in the natural order that comes through labor and ownership. He points out that while other forms of ownership depended very much on the sort of person who owned and maintained his property, any part of human nature is omitted in the facelessness of stock holding.

The collectivism Lippmann proposes is supposed to remain in only the staple industries and “public service corporations” such as railroads, leaving competitive business and most agriculture to operate on the more traditional model of private property. By accentuating the aspect of private property that qualifies ownership, Lippmann hopes to reorient the question of collectivizing under public trust many industries: if private corporate ownership is impugned, then there is more to be gained, or at least nothing is to be lost, in terms of property rights, through transfer to overt public ownership. Like other progressives, Lippmann’s prescriptions are influenced by the expectation that scientific bureaucratic management will improve the efficiency of some industries: “The real problem of collectivism is the difficulty of combining popular control with administrative power.”<sup>107</sup> However, without an exaggerated optimism in the efficiency of state-run industries, it is not clear Lippmann would not have endorsed such a recommendation, even in his early work. Thus the question of this industrial statesmanship is essentially a practical issue, rather than a moral or class based advocacy. While Lippmann is not blind to the mounting challenges of balancing the public and the private, he also pacifies himself,

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<sup>106</sup> *Drift*, Ch. 3

<sup>107</sup> *Drift*, Ch. 3

and the reader with occasional references to triumphs of supposed public collectivism, such as the Panama Canal.

The other great limitation to the possibility of collectivism also curiously points Lippmann to a fixity in human nature that seems more grounded in Nature than History. Croly, social Darwinists, and other progressives typically expected to ameliorate the theoretical limits of human socialist association by seeking a degree of change in the aspects human nature which limit collective actions and ownership. Not so for Lippmann, who does advocate a new approach for a new age, but is nevertheless adamant that significant change is unworkable: "It lies at the root of most theoretical objection to socialism in the famous "human nature" argument. Far from being a trivial question, as socialist debaters like to pretend, it is the hardest nut they have to crack."<sup>108</sup> He suggests that the syndicalists who are inclined to nationalize most, or all forms of commercial activity, are themselves insufficiently prepared to deal with the exigencies of the modern world because of their repeated overtures to unworkable systems: "They are proposing a reconstruction of human society, and in all honesty, they cannot dodge the question as to whether man as we know him is capable of what they ask."<sup>109</sup> Lippmann looks instead to the historical distrust of the profit-motive, especially by the unemployed and disenfranchised, and, combined with his discussion of rising consciousness, thereby adds urgency to the development of new 'progressive' modes and orders of organizing commercialism and labor.

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<sup>108</sup> *Drift*, Ch. 2

<sup>109</sup> *Drift*, Ch. 2



Much of Lippmann's economic discussion hinges on the notion democracy is imperiled, that we 'drift' where we have no clear strategy to combating the future challenges of the industrial age. He argues that democracy itself depends on the presence of labor unions insofar as they were the most available politically supportable means by which consumers could press their demands on the industrial system. Strong unions were a necessary component of the emergent democracy: "It seems to me simply that the effort to build up unions is as much the work of pioneers, as the extension of civilization into the wilderness. The unions are the first feeble effort to conquer the industrial jungle for democratic life. They may not succeed, but if they don't their failure will be a tragedy for civilization, a loss of cooperative effort, a baulking of energy, and the fixing in American life of a class-structure."<sup>110</sup> The discussion of property and ownership served to raise the question of unearned wealth in an industrialized society, and the corollary response for the labor union is to create a mechanism by which these demands can be brought to the fore.

Labor is a curious issue for Lippmann. His argument is a full-throated endorsement of unions, even going so far as to justify the physical 'clubbing' of scabs, "Far from being the independent, liberty-loving soul he is sometimes painted, the scab is a traitor to the economic foundations of democracy. ... The clubbing of scabs is not a pretty thing. The importation of scabs is an uglier one."<sup>111</sup> This new frontier initiated by the labor movement seems appropriately violent, justified by the metaphor. Yet Lippmann's aim still appears to be stability and freedom. He attempts to provide context for his support of unions though appeals to constitutional rights as well as necessities of democratic progress: "They have

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<sup>110</sup> *Drift*, Ch. 5

<sup>111</sup> *Drift*, Ch. 5

won the very things the lack of which makes rebellion necessary. For if men are ground down in poverty, if the rights of assemblage and free speech are denied them, if their protests are ineffective and despised, then rebellion is the only possible way out. But when there is something like a democracy where wrong is not a matter of life and death, but of better and worse, then the preliminaries of civilization have been achieved, and more deliberate tactics become possible.”<sup>112</sup> It seems as though Lippmann views the unions as a sort of release valve for the growing consciousness of the working class and their increasing demands. However violent the situation is, it is buttressed through the context of democratic institutions as well as the vague sense of civility that follows from the amelioration of the first, basic threats of scarcity.

The implicit appeal to institutions is odd because of Lippmann’s continued (from *Preface*) challenges to the American constitution. However, it appears that he continues to denounce the founders and the constitution on the basis of a general suspicion of old modes and orders for a new and modern world. Nowhere does Lippmann fully enumerate the features of American constitutionalism and subject them to the scrutiny of the new world, sufficiently content to lambast the routine tendencies of those who would glorify the past without addressing modern needs. He continues the critique by rearticulating his support of masterful politicians, the coming industrial statesman (presumably men like Teddy Roosevelt) against the New Freedom of Woodrow Wilson. While Lippmann does recognize Wilson’s progressive rhetoric, ultimately Lippmann argues that Wilson is a contradiction: a man who recognizes a brand new, shifting economic landscape, but who

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<sup>112</sup> *Drift*, Ch. 5

tries to apply unworkable 19<sup>th</sup> century policies. Lippmann argues that simple trust-busting only makes way for incremental solutions: “That is the push and force of this New Freedom, a freedom for the little profiteer, but no freedom for the nation from the narrowness, the poor incentives, the limited vision of small competitors, no freedom from clamorous advertisement, from wasteful selling, from duplication of plants, from unnecessary enterprise, from the chaos, the welter, the strategy of industrial war.”<sup>113</sup> Wilson is for Lippmann something of an unwitting ally to the old forces, offering nothing unique or preferable because of his unwillingness to nationalize various industries through scientific management.

Despite the repeated antagonism to constitutional form in favor of active political figures, Lippmann’s true quibble with constitutional democracy is not in actuality a discussion of institutional norms or their value. In fact, there is a great consensus at the heart of Lippmann’s fears about mastering the democratic century and the aim of the founders: capacity for self-government. Both the founders and Lippmann envision systems that rise or fall based on the capacity of citizens. “A republic, if you can keep it,” Ben Franklin is said to have quipped to an interrogatory woman after leaving the constitutional convention. Lippmann is perhaps more pessimistic: “Men will do almost anything but govern themselves. They don't want the responsibility. In the main, they are looking for a benevolent guardian, be it a ‘good man in office’ or a perfect constitution, or the evolution of nature. They want to be taken in charge. If they have to think for themselves they turn either to the past or to a distant future: but they manage to escape the real effort of the

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<sup>113</sup> *Drift*, Ch. 7

imagination which is to weave a dream into the turning present.”<sup>114</sup> Lippmann thus identifies the two central problems of self-government: do people actually want to rule themselves, and can they? His unwillingness to trust in the ‘good man’ or in a constitutional order, or ‘evolution of nature’ rejects the social Darwinism and apotheosis seeking behavior typified by some progressives, the limited capacity of even his favorite political actors to maintain vast institutions, and a form of constitutionalism based strictly on social contract theory, of the typical balancing of the liberal arrangements. He continues, “But no one of these substitutes for self-government is really satisfactory, and the result is that a state of chronic rebellion appears. That is our present situation. The most hopeful thing about it is that through the confusion we can come to some closer understanding of why the modern man lacks stability, why his soul is scattered. We may, perhaps, be able to see a little better just what self-government implies.”<sup>115</sup> What then is the solution?

Lippmann is again brought closer to the founders than even he realized. Recall that the founders’ liberalism tended to be predicated on either a Christian or classical rationalism, political psychology, or some amalgam thereof, which amounted to a sort of natural rights doctrine which was the basis of a more balanced, and perhaps more sustainable liberalism. Lippmann’s search for sustainability brings him to a similar precipice of natural rights doctrine, but he couches his prescriptions in terms of philosophical openness. Where in *Preface* he placed much emphasis on the relativism of Nietzsche, and thereby put himself in the untenable position of waiting on the ubermensch for sustainable political order, his condition of ‘mastery’ refocuses this idea around a more

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<sup>114</sup> *Drift*, Ch. 9

<sup>115</sup> *Drift*, Ch. 9

humble philosophical openness in *Drift*. The central problem of the book is how to introduce, as he says of his definition of 'mastery,' "the substitution of conscious intention for unconscious striving."<sup>116</sup> He claims that the entire enterprise of civilization, much less liberal democracy, "is just this constant effort to introduce plan where there has been clash, and purpose into jungles of disordered growth. But to shape the world nearer to the heart's desire requires a knowledge of the heart's desire and of the world."<sup>117</sup> He nearly suggests the Delphic injunction. For Lippmann politics ultimately rest on knowledge, no matter the institutional form. Know thyself, know thy political order. Lippmann is an avatar for philosophical openness. He roundly rejects romanticism from cultural conservatives and reactionaries, criticizing his former teacher, Irving Babbitt, and all forms utopianism from progressives. Philosophical openness is the middle ground between his search for sustainable liberalism and his seemingly endless optimism in the continued observable progressivism of his age: "This is what morality meant to the Greeks in their best period, an estimate of what was valuable, not a code of what should be forbidden. It is this task that morality must resume, for with the reappearance of a deliberate worldliness, it means again a searching for the sources of earthly happiness. In some men this quest may lead to luminous passion."<sup>118</sup> While it cannot be gainsaid that he intentionally or fully substitutes a progressive faith in process and future for the calm of natural rights and tradition, he is concurrently replacing the dogmatic corollaries of tradition with a sort of technical philosophy which is linked necessarily to a sort of philosophical openness. He still believes that the cohesion of the American political order depends on looking to the future, but that

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<sup>116</sup> *Drift*, Ch. 14

<sup>117</sup> *Drift*, Ch. 14

<sup>118</sup> *Drift*, Ch.15

faith is represented through the management of science, an endeavor he will go to great lengths to correctly orient in regard to democratic impulses.

Lippmann's final chapter, "Fact and Fancy," is a startling aberration from the rest of the book. The half-conscious reader would likely have to look up and wonder if he had not drifted into a different work. Every prescriptive inclination Lippmann offers depends on some version of the scientific approach, and it is in his final chapter where he decides to harshly interrogate the sort of scientific realism which is relentlessly trusted by other progressives. He warns of scientists who, "seduced by a method of thought, the rigorous, classifying method where each color is all one tone...come to regard...method as more important than the blendings and interweavings of reality."<sup>119</sup> In a continuation of his concern for open philosophical inquiry, Lippmann worries about "scientific bigots," who may seek to "annihilate all that they cannot weigh."<sup>120</sup> This scientist is prone to the romanticism of the measurable world, and "like any dreamer he gives up the search for truth in order to coddle himself in his simple, private universe. The hardness of such a rationalist is on the surface only: at bottom there is a weakness which clings to stiff and solid frames of thought because the subtlety of life is distressing."<sup>121</sup> Lippmann invokes James' religious pluralism and psychic investigations as an example of falsely lampooned research, and Santayana to offer a case for the aesthetic authority of tradition.

The concern in the metanarrative of his vision for democratic political order doubtlessly involves the role of authority: sensing a lack of will and direction (aka Drift),

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<sup>119</sup> *Drift*, Ch.16

<sup>120</sup> *Drift*, Ch.16

<sup>121</sup> *Drift*, Ch.16

science inserts that authority for direction and stability (Mastery). No sooner had he made the case for a new authority than he feels the need to investigate its flaws. Critically, his version of scientific mastery differs from Croly and other progressives insofar as he recognizes that humans are the ultimate authors of the momentum and character of this new authority, buttressing modern science with philosophical openness which is sensitive to the human person. Science is therefore grounded in the natural world and the human interpreters of it. "If we try to ignore the desire that moves our thought, if we try in short to be 'absolutely objective,' we succeed only in accumulating useless facts, or we become the unconscious victims of our wishes. If thinking didn't serve desire, it would be the most useless occupation in the world."<sup>122</sup> There is no internal mechanism which drives science towards an end in History. Lippmann starkly confronts its limitation and finds its promise in the human endeavor to understand Nature.

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<sup>122</sup> *Drift*, Ch.16

## Chapter Four – Public Opinion and the Tyranny of the Masses: A Democratic Critique

The First World War was an eventful and formative time for Walter Lippmann. His political philosophy, already fomenting concerns about the capacities and requirements of democratic citizenship, was shaken further by his experience as a propagandist, and his hope and idealism on behalf of the American war effort lapsed into pessimistic realism about international diplomacy. The essential feature of his political philosophy in this tumultuous time is the development of his critique of knowledge and the capacity of the democratic citizen. Though the focus of this chapter is on the democratic critiques of Lippmann's most famous book, *Public Opinion* (1922), and its sequel, *The Phantom Public* (1925), Lippmann also penned two significant works about the war and politics, *The Stakes of Diplomacy* (1915), and *The Political Scene: An Essay on the Victory of 1918* (1919), as well as the theoretical precursor to *Opinion*, and *Phantom*, *Liberty and the News* (1920). Overall, the war years treated Lippmann about as well as anyone. In addition to this period of prolific writing, he married his first wife, Faye Albertson in 1917, and gained influence within the Wilson administration, particularly with Wilson's advisor Colonel Edward House, which put him in a position to help draft Wilson's Fourteen Points, and later, on a day's notice, prepare an interpretation of the Fourteen Points for House in the seminal peace talks between America and her European Allies before the Paris Peace Conference. By the end of the war Lippmann had gained a great appreciation for the complexity of international affairs and public opinion, and an even greater distrust of undirected democratic action and policy.

Lippmann's former antagonism to Wilson in *Drift* began to wane in the years leading up to American involvement in the war. Teddy Roosevelt had begun to fall out of favor with



the *New Republic* crowd over an editorial which offered light criticism to Roosevelt for criticizing Wilson's deficient response to the German invasion of Belgium when he had himself remained silent on the issue, and further questioning Roosevelt's strengthening ties to more conservative members of the GOP. Roosevelt was, as Croly predicted, disproportionately furious with the *New Republic*. Lippmann, began to gravitate to Wilson, whom he described as the "most freely speculative mind we've had in Washington, and as disinterested as a man could wish. If only so many people didn't make it their chief business to distort his phrases."<sup>123</sup> Putting aside Lippmann's freewheeling interpretation of Wilson in *Drift*, he certainly had a point that Wilson was prone to laborious grammatical construction. Teddy Roosevelt himself once called Wilson a "byzantine logothete supported by flub-dubs, molly-coddles, and flapdoodle pacifists."<sup>124</sup> Regardless of whatever misunderstanding may have divided Wilson and Lippmann in the past, Wilson did prove to be a friend to the progressive cause, passing favorable child labor laws, work day and farm bill legislation. Perhaps most importantly, Wilson and the editors of the *New Republic*, especially Lippmann, were unified in support of the Supreme Court nomination of Louis Brandeis. The *New Republic* worked fervently to ensure his nomination, and by the beginning of American involvement in the war Lippmann and Croly were meeting weekly with Colonel House, which helped secure the *New Republic* a reputation as the preeminent insider's journal.

As the war in Europe began, Lippmann and the other editors at the *New Republic* initially prevaricated, undecided on which approach the United States should take to

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<sup>123</sup> Steel, 100

<sup>124</sup> MacDougal, Walter A. *Promised Land Crusader State..* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997)

dealing with the issue. Besides the aforementioned break with Teddy Roosevelt, Lippmann was as of yet unsure if Wilson, or anyone, really understood the matter properly. Prior to *The Stakes of Diplomacy*, Lippmann hadn't addressed foreign policy in any great detail, however, with the war as the preeminent issue of the day, he turned to the subject with many of the same critiques of idle, ineffectual reformism which he had characterized as "drift" in his previous work. Though Lippmann's work on foreign affairs is not the primary subject of inquiry of this work, his views on diplomacy are informed by his emerging distrust of the public. He opens *Stakes* with the declaration, "this book is primarily an analysis of that popular gullibility which makes democracy the victim of its diplomacy. It attempts to show how patriotism and idealism are subtly entangled in imperialist politics, how they are unconsciously exploited for purposes which rarely appear on the surface of public opinion."<sup>125</sup> The 1915 book already heralds the democratic critique to be solidified in *Opinion*, but is marked and distinguished by a frank realism characterized by Lippmann's anger toward the utopian politics of the pacifists and early proponents of any sort of 'world government.' Furthermore, Lippmann's positive dislike of utopianism is difficult to square with what appears to be an unabashed optimism in the expansion of democratic politics through war. A survey of *The Stakes of Diplomacy* will show Lippmann's early views on diplomacy and war to be plausibly consonant with some of the high rhetoric he and *The New Republic* would later seem to embrace because Lippmann, for a time at least, held the view that 'making the world safe for democracy' did in fact further the more realist objectives laid out in *Stakes*.

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<sup>125</sup> Walter Lippmann, *The Political Scene*. (New York: Holt, 1915), Preface

In *Stakes*, Lippmann was especially disdainful of the pacifists, arguing that their opinions were essentially useless: "The reason for this attitude towards pacifism is that the world is not helped much by being told every morning that two and two are four. It is not helped by being told to love men as brothers. Men have been told that for ages, and their invariable retort is: 'I would gladly love him if only he weren't so cussed.'"<sup>126</sup> Insightfully, Lippmann argues that every war is justified to its people in terms of defensiveness or essential national interest. Thus the pacifist position is utterly irrelevant to the very real problems of both peace and war because all nations were fighting for their perceived interests.

The actual stakes of the current diplomacy were, in Lippmann's mind, the undeveloped nations and the prestige battles to control them. In a vividly matter-of-fact paragraph he starkly enumerates the stakes of the current conflict:

Austria began the contest to secure her position as a great Power in the Balkans; Russia entered it to thwart this ambition; France was engaged because German diplomatic supremacy would reduce France to a "second-class power," which means a power that holds world power on sufferance ; England could not afford to see France "crushed " or Belgium annexed because British imperialism cannot alone cope with the vigor of Germany ; Germany felt herself " encircled," which meant that wherever she went — to Morocco, Asia Minor, or China — there a coalition was ready to thwart her.<sup>127</sup>

Lippmann clearly held no illusions about the nature of the war as an economic/political instrument, and was in response critical of those who would use it as a moral crusade, stating at one point, "No nation risks war for the sake of abstract justice in some corner of

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<sup>126</sup> *Stakes*, Ch. 16

<sup>127</sup> *Stakes*, Ch. 7

the world.”<sup>128</sup> The real issue was which nation was going to lead the gentle imperialism of the undeveloped world, and in this regard Lippmann felt there was little practical room for America to remain isolationist. Because Lippmann would later advocate that it was in America’s enlightened self-interest to become involved in the war, and it isn’t clear whether he can be said to have remained above the temptation to moralize on behalf of a democratic crusade.

Part of the confusion concerning Lippmann’s wartime democratic moralism is the way he viewed the role of the democratic citizen. The contribution of *Stakes* to Lippmann’s view of democracy is tied up in how the conditions of foreign affairs affect the practical conditions of domestic affairs, “A victory for liberal democracy, the resurrection of a weak people, makes life safer and prosperity more certain in all the regions where men work.”<sup>129</sup> For Lippmann, there does seem to be an implicit link between the victory of liberal democracy and prosperity. Though this may often be assumed by liberal democrats, Lippmann’s early analysis prefigures more recent democratic peace theory as he suggests that consciousness of foreign affairs in democracies also serves to insulate against the ‘submissive tendencies’ required by autocracies. This insight is especially important for evaluating Lippmann’s later, seemingly paradoxical enthusiasm for the war effort on behalf of liberal values and democracy. By this account, Lippmann wasn’t torn between his original, modest and self-interested foreign policy advocating intervention on behalf of preserving the ‘Atlantic community’ against German encroachment and his ardent fervor following Wilson’s War Address to Congress. Rather, the positions were intrinsically linked

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<sup>128</sup> *Stakes*, Ch. 8

<sup>129</sup> *Stakes*, Ch. 15

through the sort of gentle imperialism he expected of American leadership in the peace process and ensuing governorship of undeveloped state actors. Consequently, the culmination of *Stakes* is a complex and nuanced argument for balance between the democratic patriotism which is required for vitality in national actors on the international stage and internationalists who understand the value of diplomacy as guarantor of peace in contentious international disputes. This balance ultimately rests on the stewardship of individuals of their own patriotism: "It is always possible that men will lose sight of the ends and become fanatic about the means. There is no guarantee against this insidious danger. Only constant criticism and candid discussion can guard against it."<sup>130</sup> As he will argue, time and time again, it is the patience and virtue of the individual upon which rest the conditions of peace and justice.

*Stakes* was by no means the end of the development of Lippmann's view of public opinion and knowledge in liberal democracy. He was deeply influenced by his role as head of Wilson's "The Inquiry," a study group established to prepare materials for the peace process to follow the war. Lippmann found this work essential to the role and exercise of American power in the war effort, specifically in securing a profitable peace buttressed by the liberal democratic tenets he believed guaranteed prosperity. Lippmann would eventually leave his immediate position within the Inquiry for a role as a propagandist in 1918. He was commissioned as a captain in military intelligence and assigned to General Pershing's staff in France, where he prepared propaganda leaflets for German soldiers, served as official liaison to the Inquiry, and was an unofficial advisor to Colonel House.

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<sup>130</sup> *Stakes*, Ch. 16

Later writing in the *New Republic* Lippmann would say that “one of the genuine calamities of our part in the war was the character of American propaganda in Europe. ... It was run as if an imp had devised it to thwart every purpose Mr. Wilson was supposed to entertain.”<sup>131</sup> Despite Lippmann’s defense here of Wilson, Lippmann’s association with the Wilson-appointed head of the Commission on Public Information, George Creel, began to further erode Lippmann’s optimism for genuine political participation. Lippmann had previously butted heads with Creel in a *New Republic* article concerning Creel’s insensitivity to civil rights and free speech issues, but their antagonisms reached a height upon Creel’s censorship of socialist leaning publications in 1918. Lippmann, who argued that the chief challenge of American ‘propaganda’ would be controlling untruthful, rather subversive information, was horrified by Creel’s belligerent censorship and furious when Wilson seemed unwilling to restrain Creel.

The entire experience with propaganda and democracy raised deep questions which Lippmann would not resolve until he furthered his investigation in *Liberty and the News*, and extrapolated the theory in *Public Opinion* and *The Phantom Public*. However, the other side to his disillusionment with Wilson was what Lippmann saw as a failure to win the peace, one of the chief reasons he outlined in *Stakes* for American involvement in the war. Lippmann himself did not take part in the Paris Peace Conference: House had fallen out of favor with Wilson, who had decided to conduct the negotiations personally. Lippmann instead returned to America where he waited on news and rumor, growing more despairing in the face of mounting bad news. In 1919 when he published a collection of

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<sup>131</sup> Steel, 147

essays under the title, *The Political Scene*, Lippmann had fully broken from Wilsonianism. As previously mentioned, it was not entirely because his belief in the viability of the idea of war on behalf of expanding democratic ideals became untenable, rather he was distressed by the inability to reconcile the philosophy behind the war aims with the practicalities of peace.

In *The Political Scene* Lippmann is critical of the Fourteen Points<sup>132</sup>, particularly where they were prone to abstract generalizations and the world that existed before the war. A familiar refrain from *Preface and Drift*, Wilson and the others seemed most guilty of routine policies and an incomprehensible failure to anticipate the vacuum of power that would exist in the world and for peoples once run by authoritarian regimes: “And until we master the fact that the empires of Hohenzollern, Hapsburg, Sultan and Czar were the foundations of law and order in Europe before 1914, we shall not understand either the meaning of their destruction, or the consequences of our own victories.”<sup>133</sup> Further, because the Wilson doctrine lacked a clear vision of what was in our national interest, we were bound to a defense of the status quo, a situation made especially untenable by the borders being drawn around Europe that Lippmann thought were doomed to breed revanchist sentiment, especially in Germany. Lippmann also refused the naive suggestion common to the peacemakers that the war was solely the province of greedy elites, that the masses had no appetite for war, “It assumes as its working theory that democratic faith in regard to the causes of war, which says that aggression is the work of a minority; that the

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<sup>132</sup> Lippmann does not acknowledge his own role in drafting the Fourteen Points. However, as Ronald Steel notes, (*American Century*, 134-7) Lippmann himself was responsible for drafting points six through thirteen, by far the most specific points which can be largely reconciled with the goals he outlined in *Stakes*.

<sup>133</sup> Walter Lippmann. *The Political Scene*. (New York: Holt, 1915), Intro.

masses in no nation have anything to gain by conquest, and that the masses would refuse such wars if they had a chance to examine their pretexts, and put pressure upon their governments. This faith may be unfounded. It may be that there is a universal pugnacity which requires war for its satisfaction, and the League may in the course of time fail to keep the peace.”<sup>134</sup> Lippmann stresses that there is cause for hope that the Fourteenth Point, the League of Nations, might yet embody the hoped for ideals of democratic statesmanship, but he was skeptical if its operators refused to deal directly with human nature, specifically the nature of humans who had for so long been under autocratic rule.

Lippmann’s views on diplomacy in the war years do not clearly place him in either the liberal camp of nature or in that of the Progressive idealist with faith in the future and history. His nuanced definitions of the *Stakes of Diplomacy* offer a complicated picture of the requirements of a moderated nationalism and patriotism with respect to international affairs. He supports a nascent idea of the democratic peace theory, fully expecting that liberal democracies would protect nations from avoidable wars, hopefully in the context of some League of Nations framework, but he also continues to invoke recourse to human nature, and ground this argument not in the inevitableness of History, but rather imploring to raise the quality of democracies and democrats to achieve those ends. Yet, he saw presciently the fatal nature of the Paris Peace Conference and Treaty of Versailles, and combined with the indictment of free speech by his propaganda work, Lippmann grew cynical of the entire experience, remarking that the war was “an anti-climax in a dreary, savorless world.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> *Scene*, Ch. 6

<sup>135</sup> Steel, pg. 176



Lippmann was not alone in his cynicism. Many progressives had expected that the idealism of the democratic war effort would carry domestic reformism. Lippmann himself concludes *Scene* with the hope that, “we who have gone to war to insure democracy in the world will have raised an aspiration here that will not end with the overthrow of the Prussian autocracy. We shall turn with fresh interests to our own tyrannies — to our Colorado mines, our autocratic steel industries, our sweatshops, and our slums.”<sup>136</sup> Yet, despite this optimism, or perhaps because this optimism went largely unrequited, many felt that the age of progressivism had come to pass. Herbert Croly wrote in the *New Republic* that “the chief distinguishing aspect of the Presidential campaign of 1920 is the eclipse of liberalism or progressivism as an effective force in American politics.”<sup>137</sup> For many, the distasteful idealism surrounding ‘the war to end all wars’ became bound up with the idealism of the progressive movement generally, a result of the great destruction of the war and the end of the obvious practical progress of the industrial era.

For his part, Lippmann turned his criticism to the world of journalism. In light of the wartime propaganda and censorship to which he was privy, the chief threat to sustainable liberalism now seemed to be the failure of truth in reporting. He argued that a democracy’s health depends of its access to an accurate picture of the events which surround it, particularly in a world becoming more modern, more complex, and more obscured. Other critics sensitive to the problem of free speech sought to remove government interference, thus expecting unhindered speech to resolve the issue. Lippmann, however, was more troubled by the assumption of knowledge so prevalent in the polite opinion-mongering of

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<sup>136</sup> *Scene*, Ch. 10

<sup>137</sup> Cited from Ricco, Barry. *Walter Lippmann: Odyssey of a Liberal* (Transaction Publishes, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1994) pg. 57

sincere journalists. As Lippmann had once warned about George Creel, the struggle of censorship is not so much bound in the careful construction of favorable news, but the battle against untruth. He went so far as to claim that, “There can be no higher law in journalism than to tell the truth and shame the devil.”<sup>138</sup>

Lippmann had little doubt about the sincerity of journalists, but his appeal in his book, *Liberty and the News*, was simply to make an acknowledgment that it was human nature to give unconscious bias to one’s predilections. The chapter, originally an article in the *New Republic*, *A Test of the News*, chronicles the *New York Times’s* coverage of the Russian Revolution. Lippmann and his fellow *New Republic* editor, Charles Merz, demonstrate that the *Times’s* coverage was dramatically influenced by reporters who saw the Russian communist revolutionaries as a sort of boogymen. Their failure to see truth resulted in their absurd assurances, offered on ninety one occasions, that the Bolshevik regime was on the verge of collapse.

Lippmann condemned the proliferation of unexamined doxastic reporting, but had little to offer as remedy, other than to point to some hope that the schools of journalism could inculcate a love of the truth, and imbue it with a sort of moral imperative: “reporting is a post of peculiar honor. Observation must precede every other activity, and; the public observer (that is, the reporter) is a man of critical value. No amount of money or effort spent in fitting the right men for this work could possibly be wasted, for the health of society depends upon the quality of the information it receives.”<sup>139</sup> He acknowledges the naiveté of his position in part, but also is clear that he fails to see a better way forward than

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<sup>138</sup> Walter Lippmann. *Liberty and the News*. (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), Ch.1

<sup>139</sup> *Liberty*, Ch.3

to emphasize the truth in reporting, and to train journalists of such quality that they will drive out the unserious panderers of opinion. In a way, it seems as though he is calling for the philosophers to purge the sophists through the excellence of their journalism. He concludes by stating that “We shall advance when we have learned humility; when we have learned to seek the truth, to reveal it and publish it; when we care more for that than for the privilege of arguing about ideas in a fog of uncertainty.”<sup>140</sup>

*Public Opinion* takes up the general theme outlined in *Liberty*, pressing the central concern for liberal democracy: if consent is the measure by which liberalism judges legitimate and popular sovereignty, what is the value of consent which is easily manipulated by the complexities of the modern word? The corollary suggests the concern that democracy may simply not be a viable form of political organization since the source of its information depends so strongly on the truthfulness of the reports of the outside world which keep public opinion informed. Lippmann’s thought has evolved from *Preface* and *Drift*, where the primary concerns were the organization of society through masterful statesman and scientific management, to a more fundamental inquiry into the basis of all government: the knowledge upon which decisions are made. *Opinion* is a searching attempt to critique the basic assumption of democracy, that the people possess the knowledge to rule themselves. Lippmann’s general solution is to institute ‘intelligence bureaus,’ which he defines as “specialized private agencies which attempt to give technical summaries of the work of various branches of the government.”<sup>141</sup> The imposition of intelligence bureaus, no matter how vaguely described, demonstrates a counter-intuitive faith in the average

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<sup>140</sup> *Liberty*, Ch.3

<sup>141</sup> *Liberty*, Ch.3

democrat: where *Preface* and *Drift* largely dealt with organizing mass sentiment, *Opinion* offers a means by which that sentiment, rearticulated as public opinion, can be informed. It is misleading, though logical, that to diagnose the need for and nature of truth-seeking information services, Lippmann must levy an incisive attack against the capacities of the average democrat, and dismantle the icons of self-government and consent.

It is no coincidence that Lippmann's epigraph for *Opinion* is taken from Plato's *Republic*. The famous allegory of the cave describes a cave where men are bound in chains such that they are forced to look only at a great wall before them, seeing only shadows of objects reflected from firelight. They suppose the shadows to be real and discuss them together as though they are. Lippmann's recourse to classical philosophy is interesting, and it does reinforce his dramatic point that people, journalists, and political actors respond only to the "pictures in their head" rather than real events. His mounting cynicism reflected the chaos of wartime propaganda and misinformation, but also his own practical investigations from *Liberty* which helped confirm his suspicion that newspapers were unable to be unbiased, even concerning, or perhaps especially concerning, critical issues of political importance. Conscious distortion and manipulation of these channels were widely practiced and curiously irremediable given the mounting complexity of the modern world where biases, publicity, propaganda, advertising, and all kinds of special interests are present, but often concealed.

Lippmann opens *Opinion* with a characteristically imaginative, and incisive analogy of his own: he asks his reader to imagine that there is an island inhabited by Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Germans, in the year 1914. The island receives its mail every sixty days via

steamship. Imagine their surprise when upon that steamship's arrival in mid-September they should learn that, not only are they at war with one another, but that they have been at war for weeks without their knowledge!<sup>142</sup> Lippmann argues that no matter the interval, six days, six hours, six weeks, this was the situation all over Europe before the war, and, further, that this is only one example of the typical, dramatic misinformation that results of the exigencies and fragility of information in the modern world. The people on the island had (incorrectly) treated each other cordially because of a false "picture in their heads" of the world they inhabit.

Lippmann takes care in drawing out the consequences of these pictures in our heads, arguing that, "it is the insertion between man and his environment of a pseudo-environment. To that pseudo-environment his behavior is a response. But because it is behavior, the consequences, if they are acts, operate not in the pseudo-environment where the behavior is stimulated, but in the real environment where action eventuates."<sup>143</sup> This dissonance creates the problem that our actions are not in fact responses to the world around us, but the world as we perceive it. There is the immediate platonic question of the inherent lack of freedom of operating in shadows, but also the consequence for democracy, which depends on consent for legitimacy, and good representation for leadership. Without informed consent, what is democratic legitimacy? How can representatives lead if their information is inaccurate? Lippmann's concern for the sustainability of a liberal democracy is manifest in his central remedy: "I argue that representative government, either in what is ordinarily called politics, or in industry, cannot be worked successfully, no matter what the

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<sup>142</sup> Walter Lippmann. *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co. 1960) Ch. 1

<sup>143</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 1

basis of election, unless there is an independent, expert organization for making the unseen facts intelligible to those who have to make the decisions.”<sup>144</sup> Lippmann’s trust of experts is not so much distrust of the citizenry at large as it is rather acceptance of their limitation. The limitations however, carry over to the elites who are supposed to represent them.

To characterize *Opinion* as simply a movement to trust elites is a misrepresentation of the development of Lippmann’s thought because it ignores Lippmann’s distrust of the representatives themselves. His remedy calls as much for their supplementation as it does for the supplementation of the average citizen: “I attempt, therefore, to argue that the serious acceptance of the principle that personal representation must be supplemented by representation of the unseen facts would alone permit a satisfactory decentralization, and allow us to escape from the intolerable and unworkable fiction that each of us must acquire a competent opinion about all public affairs.”<sup>145</sup> The challenge of representative government is to accurately represent the facts to the decision makers, and to the voters who elect the decision makers. This is a movement to a more democratic system of affairs than in either *Drift* or *Preface* insofar as it seeks to make democratic elections more authentic, more consequential. It is not a break from his earlier thought so much as it is a reorganization, and an attempt at better representation. To be anti-democratic, as any superficial reading of ‘elitism’ might suggest, Lippmann would try to eliminate the influence of the demos rather than educate it. For all the gloom of the post war era, Lippmann is surprisingly sanguine about democratic capacities, provided of course they are properly informed.

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<sup>144</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 1

<sup>145</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 1

Lippmann then turns to some recounting of the difficulties the average citizen faces in determining the facts of the world around him. He reflects on battlefield reports organized favorably as propaganda generated by censorship of omission rather than straightforwardly untruthful, "Without some form of censorship, propaganda in the strict sense of the word is impossible. In order to conduct a propaganda there must be some barrier between the public and the event. Access to the real environment must be limited, before anyone can create a pseudo-environment that he thinks wise or desirable."<sup>146</sup> The point which Lippmann teases out is novel, and as problematic as it is obvious: benign organization of news is as effectively censorious as deliberate misinformation. Given the preoccupation we have with our own affairs, our preconceived ideas, and how little "time and attention"<sup>147</sup> we have to give to the discernment of fact from fiction, the modern world is a rather grim environment for truth.

The central argument of the book is bound up in Lippmann's term for the methods people develop to deal with news, events and ideas in their own lives. He argues that people in modern societies are increasingly dependent on 'stereotypes,' perhaps the most famous of Lippmann's popularized terms,<sup>148</sup> which is defined as a simplification and reification of information applied to various sorts of people, groups, events, or ideas. Stereotypes operate in both in the culture generally and in individuals, and they serve as a sort of shorthand for busy, confused, or disinterested citizens. Lippmann's great strength

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<sup>146</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 2

<sup>147</sup> The title of Chapter Three

<sup>148</sup> He borrowed 'stereotype' from his Art Historian friend, Bernard Berenson, whom he quotes later on: "what with the almost numberless shapes assumed by an object. ... What with our insensitiveness and inattention, things scarcely would have for us features and outlines so determined and clear that we could recall them at will, but for the stereotyped shapes art has lent them."

as a thinker is to bridge the divide between his new political philosophy of modern public opinion and what many would call common sense behind some notion such as, 'people see what they want to see.' Lippmann refines that common sense in one of the most precise definitions in *Opinion*: "For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture."<sup>149</sup> Shaped undoubtedly by his experience with the peace process in Paris, Lippmann recalls how leaders were unwilling to negotiate in terms of the world as it was and would be, but rather as it had been. The political consequence to stereotypes is analogous to lack of prudence or vision in statesmen. The intelligence bureaus Lippmann proposes are a sort of clunky external supplement to the modern statesman.

Lippmann labors over delineating the full consequences of using stereotypes, not the least of which is that stereotypes derived from culture are themselves icons (a refining of his use of 'taboo, creed, and routine' from his earlier work) which provide a measure of security for the culture which employs them. Therefore attacking a stereotype is often defensively rejected by polite society, causing benign, harmful, and even superficially beneficial stereotypes to persist from generation to generation. One of the benign, possibly beneficial stereotypes he mentions, "progress," is of particular interest: "The stereotype represented by such words as 'progress' and 'perfection' was composed fundamentally of mechanical inventions. And mechanical it has remained, on the whole, to this day. In

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<sup>149</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 6



America more than anywhere else, the spectacle of mechanical progress has made so deep an impression, that it has suffused the whole moral code. An American will endure almost any insult except the charge that he is not progressive.”<sup>150</sup> Lippmann takes great care to distinguish the empirical progress of the mechanical world, which implies constant change, with the progress of Herbert Spencer, “progress toward perfection.”<sup>151</sup> Lippmann seems skeptical of the latter, pointing out that the two notions, ‘progress as unalterable change’, and ‘progress as evolution toward perfectibility,’ are entwined together in the popular mind, with unclear consequences. It does not seem that Lippmann is working toward a systematic theory of what ‘progress’ is, but rather he is appropriating Tocqueville’s observation of “self-interest well understood.”

Remarkably, Lippmann does not quote Tocqueville until much later on, Chapter XVII, in a part of the *Opinion* titled, “the Image of Democracy,” however, Chapter XII, “Self-Interest Reconsidered,” is a homage to Tocqueville, and, his discussion in Chapter VIII borrows quite directly from Tocqueville concerning the use of the word ‘progress.’

Lippmann says that,

Certainly the American version of progress has fitted an extraordinary range of facts in the economic situation and in human nature. It turned an unusual amount of pugnacity, acquisitiveness, and lust of power into productive work. Nor has it, until more recently perhaps, seriously frustrated the active nature of the active members of the community. They have made a civilization which provides them who made it with what they feel to be ample satisfaction in work, mating and play, and the rush of their victory over mountains, wildernesses, distance, and human competition has even done duty for that part of *religious* feeling which is a sense of

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<sup>150</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 8

<sup>151</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 8

communion with the purpose of the universe. The pattern has been a success so nearly perfect in the sequence of ideals, practice, and results, that any challenge to it is called un-American.<sup>152</sup>

There is no quotation nor is there any allusion to Tocqueville here, and yet, this is parsed almost directly from *Democracy in America*. It is beyond the scope of this essay to delve deeply into the great work of Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, though Lippmann does encapsulate Tocqueville's observation concerning the American notion of the indefinite perfectibility of man.

Lippmann argues here that the notion of progress moderates acquisitiveness and lust for power into productive work without destroying the essential features of community which are great boons to human flourishing, particularly religious sentiment, and a general sense of purpose. Tocqueville's rather more elaborate theory of the notion of progress is bound in the doctrine of the indefinite perfectibility of man. *Democracy* is written from the point of view of a French Aristocrat, a generation after the terror, understandably preoccupied with the means by which the American democracy is seemingly capable of sustaining itself against the excesses of the chief attribute of democracy: the equalizing of conditions. Tocqueville does not argue that the purpose of democracy can be the health of the soul and is confounded by the fact that democracy trends toward materialism in a directly irremediable rush. The possibility for maintenance of the soul (analogous to Lippmann's comparatively trite, 'communion with the purpose of the universe') is sustained partly in America through the doctrine of the indefinite perfectibility of man because the notion pushes back men's taste for material satisfactions.

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<sup>152</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 8. Emphasis mine.

In a democracy, indefinite perfectibility describes a limit to human action: “as castes disappear, as classes get closer to each other, as men are mixed tumultuously, and their usages customs, and laws vary, as new facts come up, as new truths are brought to light, as old opinions disappear and others take their place, the image of an idea and always fugitive perfection is presented to the human mind.”<sup>153</sup>

Fugitive perfection at once torments men, but also moves their object of action back. “His reverses make him see that no one can flatter himself with having discovered the absolute good; his successes inflame him to pursue it without respite.”<sup>154</sup> The indefinite perfectibility of man suggests to men that there is a great goal which it is in their interest to pursue. This bolsters pride and resists the materialism suggested by democratic ages, and encourages the democrat to make great things to advance the *progress* he senses. “Thus, always seeking, falling, righting himself, often disappointed, never discouraged, he tends ceaselessly toward the immense greatness that he glimpses confusedly at the end of the long course that humanity must still traverse.”<sup>155</sup> Though ‘glimpsed confusedly’, the object of human actions is gracefully pushed back by the idea of the indefinite perfectibility of man: “When men have become accustomed to foreseeing from very far what should happen to them here below, and to nourishing themselves on hopes for it, it becomes difficult for them always to arrest their spirits at the precise boundaries of life, and they are very ready to cross these limits to cast their regard beyond.”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> DA, 427

<sup>154</sup> DA, 427

<sup>155</sup> DA, 427

<sup>156</sup> DA, 524

The similarity of the arguments is obvious, but Lippmann is not straightforwardly arguing that progress is a stereotype which possesses all of the capacities for sustaining democratic order for which Tocqueville was perhaps searching. In a very curious passage Lippmann defines the stereotypes of regimes, including that of “progress,” perhaps in a “cycle” of governments:

The progressive stereotype, powerful to incite work, almost completely obliterates the attempt to decide what work and why that work. Laissez-faire, a blessed release from stupid officialdom, assumes that men will move by spontaneous combustion towards a pre-established harmony. Collectivism, an antidote to ruthless selfishness, seems, in the Marxian mind, to suppose an economic determinism towards efficiency and wisdom on the part of socialist officials. Strong government, imperialism at home and abroad, at its best deeply conscious of the price of disorder, relies at last on the notion that all that matters to the governed will be known by the governors. In each theory there is a spot of blind automatism.<sup>157</sup>

There are many interesting implications of each of these stereotypes, particularly if they are supposed to follow one another in the manner Lippmann expressed, but for now, the most salient stereotype, progress, is importantly identified as a will to work with no cause behind it. Lippmann’s endorsement of progress as the principle behind a particular regime type is explicitly moderated in this passage. Like in *Drift* where he identifies the limits of science without direction, he expands the trouble of progress without cause or clear sight of to what we progress. Especially with his brief on progress as confounded change and evolution, chaos and Darwin/Spencer, it cannot be read as anything other than a continued rejection of fatalistic progressivism. Importantly, it is also the first time Lippmann steps

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<sup>157</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 8

away from the empirical progressivism which sustained much of his hope for the expanding capability of bureaucratic/scientific management and the expectation of a momentarily declining scarcity which characterized his early work.

The immediate corollary is seen in Lippmann's view of human nature in these Tocqueville inspired chapters. In Chapter XII, "Self Interest Reconsidered," Lippmann seems to be identifying interests strongly with Madison in Federalist no. 10, rather than the sort of economic determinism essential to socialist theory. He and Madison both seem to agree that men are divided by their relation to property, with a sort of light probability to align their opinions in relation to their property. The socialists rely on "false determinism" of a proletariat mobilized against the bourgeois.<sup>158</sup> Because the proletariat must be constantly organized to produce the expected revolution, Lippmann finds that sort of determinism, that movement in History, laughable. Lippmann's point is that no matter what sort of economic materialism you expect from a class of property holders, it is impossible to fully predict their interests. It amounts to an argument that human nature is inherently diverse and unpredictable. While he still holds out against a strict appeal to Nature behind human nature worth exploration, he also holds a hard line against economic determinism, soundly rejecting any notion of human nature which is to be evolved through historical process.

It is on the surface difficult to see what Lippmann's title shares with Tocqueville's. Tocqueville's notion of self-interest well understood is that Americans successfully combine their self-interest with the interest of the larger community, and Lippmann just

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<sup>158</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 12

argued that there is a lack of determinism in the way humans develop interests. There is optimism in this part of his argument because it also suggests that men can choose their own goals based on their interests: "He can find no ground for abandoning his highest hopes and relaxing his conscious effort unless he chooses to regard the unknown as the unknowable, unless he elects to believe that what no one knows no one will know, and that what someone has not yet learned no one will ever be able to teach."<sup>159</sup> Assuming that Lippmann did in fact have Tocqueville in mind when writing and titling this chapter, it can be assumed that Lippmann was seeking a remedy for the fragmenting of society, partially through the inadequacies of public opinion. The situation is opened, though also complicated, by the extreme diversity of interests men can plausibly assume so far divorced from, primarily, economic determinism. Tocqueville seems to share this mix of optimism and distress in his chapter on self-interest: "No power on earth can prevent the increasing equality of conditions from inclining the human mind to seek out what is useful or from leading every member of the community to be wrapped up in himself. It must therefore be expected that personal interest will become more than ever the principal if not the sole spring of men's actions; but it remains to be seen how each man will understand his personal interest."<sup>160</sup> The essential question for Tocqueville involves the equalizing of conditions, and how that will affect the development of democratic community: "If the members of a community, as they become more equal, become more *ignorant and coarse*, it is difficult to foresee to what pitch of stupid excesses their selfishness may lead them; and no one can foretell into what disgrace and wretchedness they would plunge themselves lest

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<sup>159</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 12

<sup>160</sup> DA, 502

they should have to sacrifice something of their own well-being to the prosperity of their fellow creatures.”<sup>161</sup> Tocqueville’s chapters connect with Lippmann’s in the shared object of concern in determining interest. If they remain “ignorant and coarse,” these dire consequences follow. Lippmann may as well say, ‘if public opinion remains uninformed.’ The title appears in homage to Tocqueville because it drives the essential concern of Lippmann’s entire book: informing public opinion.

It is no surprise then that the next part of the book is “The Making of a Common Will.” The pending concern is the response to the difficulties of managing interest described in the struggle to inform public opinion. If there is no reliable determinism issued by the constraints of the material world to the variability of human nature, what hope is there for developing some sort of common will by which a democracy should be sustained? Lippmann’s answer seems to be a radical reconsidering of the way we deal with information in the modern age. He first considers the nature of public opinion and the approaches others have taken to making use of symbols and generalizations in order to generate mass action. He quotes Sir Robert Peel, and Gustave LeBon, suggesting that some people approach the manipulation of opinion as either chaos or low character, as “drift and incoherence.” The other option seems to be that because there do appear, from time to time, certain motivations and aims within a body public, there must be something “over and above the inhabitants of a nation.” Proponents of this view, “invoke a collective soul, a national mind, a spirit of the age which imposes order upon random opinion. An oversoul seems to be needed, for the emotions and ideas in the members of a group do not disclose

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<sup>161</sup> DA, 502. Emphasis mine.

anything so simple and so crystalline as the formula which those same individuals will accept as a true statement of their Public Opinion.”<sup>162</sup> Lippmann is suspiciously unclear that he is invoking a third way, something in between the ‘oversoul’ and chaotic ‘drift,’ but that appears to be his goal, nonetheless.

Unfortunately his new theory is not neatly delineated. He descends into a discussion of the uses leaders make of symbols. He approvingly cites Alexander Hamilton, who, as a son of the West Indies, was not given to the particular interstate quarrels which arrested other founding fathers, and could instead embrace and promote the symbol of the “union” to great effect. Lippmann argues that the public interacts with the symbols created by the leaders by simply responding affirmatively or negatively to proposals. Good leaders are able to interpret the value and need behind certain symbols for the public good. However, leaders themselves are often prone to falsely assuming that there is something like ‘thought’ behind public opinion: “Leaders often pretend that they have merely uncovered a program which existed in the minds of their public. When they believe it, they are usually deceiving themselves. Programs do not invent themselves synchronously in a multitude of minds. That is not because a multitude of minds is necessarily inferior to that of the leaders, but because thought is the function of an organism, and a mass is not an organism.”<sup>163</sup> The importance of this point cannot be overstated, especially for the purposes of contrast with democratic theorists such as John Dewey, who had a completely contradictory notion of the possibility of a sort of community intelligence in public opinion. Lippmann is suggesting a focus on the *individual* against public opinion. *Opinion* is often treated superficially as an

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<sup>162</sup> *Chapter*, 13

<sup>163</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 13



anti-democratic text, but delving into Lippmann's nuance paints a more complicated picture. Lippmann's focus is to acknowledge the realities of public opinion while rejecting the notion that it is merely a collective, mysterious force. Mysterious forces are not democratic. Eclectic will and sentiment interpreted by strong leaders was the modus operandi prescribed in *Preface*. Here Lippmann seems to have retained some of the theory that led him to that prescription while simultaneously reversing the recommendation: instead of leaders interpreting will and sentiment of a collective body, leaders offer symbols to individuals who interact with various stereotypes and produce some mass action as a result. To some degree the leaders are the ones who manufacture opinions, but this manufacture is essentially grounded in the response of the public. This position surprisingly reorients the onus of political participation back on the individual: however lacking individuals may be in dealing with the confusing array of information necessary to act in participatory self-government, they are themselves the only ones capable of the sort of thought that sustains democracy against the drift of undirected collective action. It also points towards his proposal to establish intelligence bureaus which offer a means by which that sentiment, rearticulated as public opinion, can be informed constructively.

Lippmann invokes a new phrase, "the manufacture of consent." Lippmann is subject to a superficial criticism for suggesting that public opinion is a force to be manipulated; after all, if a democracy depends on the consent of the governed, manufacturing that consent should corrupt the connection between the citizens and the government. This complaint is easily answered with attention to the only alternative: the chaotic manufacture of consent. Lippmann does not neatly articulate the point, but at the heart of his argument is the implicit rejection of a dichotomy between unregulated consent and

manufactured consent. Rather, as he struggles to explain, the manipulation and manufacture of consent is unavoidable in the modern state, leaving the choice between some attempt to lobby on behalf of truth and resignation to the George Creels of the world. As was common to the progressive mind, and common to Lippmann's approach to political philosophy, he sees the problem in terms of the new world of complexity and mass culture. In the past, forms of demagoguery had directly manipulated passions and ideas. In the great giddy whirling of the modern age the impact of this style of manipulation has advanced: "But it has not died out. It has, in fact, improved enormously in technic, because it is now based on analysis rather than on rule of thumb. And so, as a result of psychological research, coupled with the modern means of communication, the practice of democracy has turned a corner. A revolution is taking place, infinitely more significant than any shifting of economic power."<sup>164</sup>

Part of the aim of *Opinion* is to begin to understand the depth and power of the force of public opinion and how it is shaped by the modern world. As was previously examined, public opinion is not just an intractable force, above and within a democracy, but operative in individuals, individuals prone to persuasion as much as humans ever were. To *maintain political freedom* within democracy depends on understanding how this persuasion is effected: "Within the life of the generation now in control of affairs, persuasion has become a self-conscious art and a regular organ of popular government. None of us begins to understand the consequences, but it is no daring prophecy to say that the knowledge of how to create consent will alter every political calculation and modify every political

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<sup>164</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 15

premise.”<sup>165</sup> Lippmann has hinted throughout that the goal is to eliminate untruth, the pictures in the heads of those participating in politics.

Lippmann’s focus then is set upon how best this could happen in the liberal democratic state, which he views as deficient in attempting to account for public opinion: “Yet democracies, if we are to judge by the oldest and most powerful of them, have made a mystery out of public opinion.”<sup>166</sup> He obliquely references America as the oldest and most powerful democracy, and his critique is a continuation of his observation that there was a hubris associated with the rise of democracy: that the liberal democratic state had done away with the evils and susceptibility of classical demagoguery, and that instead the average citizen had it within himself to participate in self- government. He claims, “just as Aristotle had to insist that the slave was a slave by nature, the democrats had to insist that the free man was a legislator and administrator by nature. They could not stop to explain that a human soul might not yet have, or indeed might never have, this technical equipment, and that nevertheless it had an inalienable right not to be used as the unwilling instrument of other men.”<sup>167</sup> Putting aside his reading of Aristotle, he sees the democrat suspended and arrested by the central dogma of the omniscient citizen. To sustain liberal democracy he must complete the critique of this view in order to open a discussion of a way forward with the intelligence bureaus.

His critique of the founders and view of constitutionalism is a mix of praise and disdain. On one hand Lippmann has clearly abandoned his facile view of the founders as

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<sup>165</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 15

<sup>166</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 16

<sup>167</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 16

mechanistic routineers. He sees them instead as appropriately cautious initiators of representative safeguards against the democratic masses. Speaking generally of the founders, he says, "The collisions and failures of concave democracy, where men spontaneously managed all their own affairs, were before their eyes. The problem as they saw it, was to restore government as against democracy."<sup>168</sup> Lippmann sees the founders' view of representation is a means to ensure national aims supersede local vicissitudes. Limited as this understanding is, it does point towards Lippmann's evolving understanding of the founders as observers of human nature, which he must admit for the first time they took into account. However, it is upon the central point of their observation of human nature which they failed. He attributes to Jefferson primarily the false notion of the omniscient citizen: "Jefferson thought the political faculties were deposited by God in farmers and planters, and sometimes spoke as if they were found in all the people. The main premise was the same: to govern was an instinct that appeared, according to your social preferences, in one man or a chosen few, in all males, or only in males who were white and twenty-one, perhaps even in all men and all women."<sup>169</sup> The source of Lippmann's antagonism is that in their optimism concerning human nature, the founders were anti-democratic. This is a difficult point to understand, and many, if not most, Lippmann commentators miss it. By subscribing to a view that the democratic capacities were inscribed within human hearts, the founders robbed democrats of a truly effective means by which they could actually see their character reflected in self-government. This state of affairs has only become more and more calamitous with the increasing technical

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<sup>168</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 18

<sup>169</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 16

capacity to manipulate opinion through unscrupulous and underprepared media. So while the founders and Lippmann disagree (at least in Lippmann's current understanding) on the capacity of human nature, they are both appealing to it as a standard for making decisions about what constitutes good governance.

Lippmann concludes the book by insisting that the stake of self-government is the extent to which the citizen can be relied upon to choose good government against the 'self-centered' opinions which stem from the pictures in their heads. "For the traditional democrat risked the dignity of man on one very precarious assumption, that he would exhibit that dignity instinctively in wise laws and good government. Voters did not do that, and so the democrat was forever being made to look a little silly by tough-minded men."<sup>170</sup> The new democrat, it seems, is not forced to bind his hopes for self-government on the mistaken impression that he is naturally capable of it. Lippmann lays the seeds for his coming works on economics in a remarkable passage: "The criteria which you then apply to government are whether it is producing a certain minimum of health, of decent housing, of material necessities, of education, of freedom, of pleasures, of beauty, not simply whether at the sacrifice of all these things, it vibrates to the self-centered opinions that happen to be floating around in men's minds."<sup>171</sup> The capacity for truth and self-government is linked to a sort of baseline of material well-being. *Opinion* is not in this regard an anti-democratic text, on the contrary, the condition Lippmann estimates for self-government and sustainable liberal democracy is the manifestation of the heart of democracy: the equalizing of material conditions. The inherent equality of man is the foundation of his

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<sup>170</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 20

<sup>171</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 20

capacity to transcend the dull limitations of the pictures in his head. Democracy as the driving manifestation of the equalizing of conditions is therefore a precondition for truth.

Still, Lippmann resists the temptation to draw this conclusion too casually. He proceeds to enumerate the reasons why it is so critical for some form of his proposed intelligence bureaus to come to pass: “It is because they are compelled to act without a reliable picture of the world, that governments, schools, newspapers and churches make such small headway against the more obvious failings of democracy, against violent prejudice, apathy, preference for the curious trivial as against the dull important, and the hunger for sideshows and three legged calves.”<sup>172</sup> The curious position the modern democrat finds himself in, is one such that simply seeking truth through conventional means, merely having a passion or love of the truth is insufficient. Democratic theory must catch up to democratic practice, and the first remedy is intelligence bureaus that will organize the information necessary for people and institutions, from schools to newspapers, to make use of in articulating for themselves a genuine form of self-government. Only through some form similar to this can liberal democracy be sustained.

Lippmann’s description of the nature of the intelligence bureaus remains frustratingly discursive given their centrality to his theory. The most precise definition is given in *Liberty* as “specialized private agencies which attempt to give technical summaries of the work of various branches of the government.”<sup>173</sup> In many ways he is foretelling the think-tank, and could perhaps even have in mind (though he does not mention it) The Institute for Government Research, which would later become The Brookings Institution.

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<sup>172</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 24

<sup>173</sup> *Liberty*, Ch.3

However, concerning the nature of Lippmann's political philosophy, it is more important to consider the theory behind this move, and hopefully to resolve any pending concerns that he is somehow an anti-democrat.

The remaining theoretical issue concerning public opinion and democracy can be detailed by sketching Lippmann's conversation with John Dewey. Lippmann concludes *Opinion* emphasizing that political truth ultimately rests in the people who participate in politics: "No electoral device, no manipulation of areas, no change in the system of property, goes to the root of the matter. You cannot take more political wisdom out of human beings than there is in them."<sup>174</sup> No matter how well constructed the intelligence bureaus, and the secondary institutions which make use of them in dispensing the pictures inside the heads of citizens, there is no fundamental elimination of the problem of truth for democratic society. We are left in a sort of metaxic condition, left seeking truth, but, with the problem properly diagnosed, finally seeking after it in a productive way: "When men act on the principle of intelligence they go out to find the facts and to make their wisdom. When they ignore it, they go inside themselves and find only what is there. They elaborate their prejudice, instead of increasing their knowledge."<sup>175</sup>

Throughout the 1920s Lippmann's arguments put him in conversation, directly and indirectly with democratic philosopher John Dewey, offering particularly fruitful discussion in regard to the role of natural rights in each of their philosophies. Dewey's work *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, published in 1920, had an immensely important influence on American political and philosophical thought. Speaking generally, Dewey's aim was to

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<sup>174</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 26

<sup>175</sup> *Opinion*, Ch. 26

reorient philosophy such that it could enter into and solve the problems of the social sphere: "When it is acknowledged that under disguise of dealing with ultimate reality, philosophy has been occupied with the precious values embedded in social traditions, ... it will be seen that the task of future philosophy is to clarify men's ideas as to the social and moral strife of their own day. Its aim is to become so far as is humanly possible an organ for dealing with these conflicts."<sup>176</sup> His work is a sustained critique of natural rights theory, and an argument for a faith in progress<sup>177</sup> which is aloof from empirical examination.

The strong point of the appeal to fixed principles transcending experience, to dogmas incapable of experimental verification, the strong point of reliance upon a priori canons of truth and standards of morals in opposition to dependence upon fruits and consequences in experience, has been the unimaginative conception of experience which professed philosophic empiricists have entertained and taught. A philosophic reconstruction which should relieve men of having to choose between an impoverished and truncated experience on one hand and an artificial and impotent reason on the other would relieve human effort from the heaviest intellectual burden it has to carry. It would destroy the division of men of good will into two hostile camps. It would permit the co-operation of those who respect the past and the institutionally established with those who are interested in establishing a freer and happier future.<sup>178</sup>

Dewey both seems to reject fixed principles, and promulgate a blithe satisfaction in the result: cooperation and a happier future.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Dewey, John. *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, (Henry Holt and Company, 1920), pg. 26

<sup>177</sup> Manifesting in what is perhaps best understood as a sort of idealism with nuanced similarities and differences from the Kantian tradition.

<sup>178</sup> *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. 101

<sup>179</sup> His argument is more complex than this caricature, but for the purposes of brevity, this short analysis will have to suffice.



Dewey was very satisfied with the structure of Lippmann's *Opinion*, which he reviewed in *The New Republic*, and is particularly impressed by the portion of the work where Lippmann critiqued the shortcomings of democracy. However, Dewey was more skeptical of Lippmann's constructive solution, the intelligence bureaus. Acknowledging that such an institution would be obviously welcome to any state of political affairs, he criticizes Lippmann for overstating the measure of political affairs: "But his argument seems to me to exaggerate the importance of politics and political action, and also to evade the problem of how the latter is to be effectively directed by organized intelligence unless there is an accompanying direct enlightenment of popular opinion, as well as an ex post facto indirect instruction."<sup>180</sup> Traced into Lippmann's response, *The Phantom Public*, and Dewey's counter, *The Public and its Problems*, it becomes clear that the center of their dispute is differing opinions on the nature of truth itself.

*Phantom* deepens significantly Lippmann's critique of the omniscient citizen, to the point where Lippmann often feels as though he is belaboring what has already been made rather obvious. Nothing changes much from *Opinion* to *Phantom*, and Lippmann struggles generally to argue how public opinion can be enlightened simply through exposure to truth seeking and a communicating to all a broad recognition that truth is ultimately penultimate. Dewey's critique from *The New Republic* seems to haunt Lippmann, however, who concludes the book rather resignedly:

I have no legislative program to offer, no new institutions to propose. There are, I believe, immense confusions in the current theory of democracy which frustrate and pervert its action. I have attacked certain of the confusions with

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<sup>180</sup> Dewey, John. "Book Review: Public Opinion." *The New Republic*, May 3, 1922, pp. 286-287

conviction except that a false philosophy tends to stereotype thought against the lessons of experience. I do not know what the lessons will be when we have learned to think of public opinion as it is, and not as the fictitious powers we have assumed it to be. It is enough if with Bentham we know that “the perplexity of ambiguous discourse...distracts and eludes the apprehension, stimulates and inflames the passions.”<sup>181</sup>

Dewey’s critique amounted essentially to two points: that the intelligence bureaus were insufficient for sufficiently illuminating public discourse through an educational paradigm, and that Lippmann makes a mistake in the general enterprise of looking to uncover truth. Lippmann, in *Phantom*, reemphasizes the need to seek a particular truth, arithmetically, not existentially working to eliminate untruth through the efforts of individuals freed of their chains in Plato’s cave. Dewey had already voiced his doubts of the very notion of *truth* in his *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. In *The Public and Its Problems* Dewey articulates the replacement for objective truth as a sort of efficient truth elaborated through communication between citizens: “Without such communication the public will remain shadowy and formless...Till the Great Society is converted into a Great Community, the Public will remain in eclipse. Communication can alone create a great community.”<sup>182</sup> Dewey rejects the notion of truth advocated by Lippmann, which is more easily aligned with a natural rights foundation, and endorses a more specifically progressivist faith in History, in the apotheosis of the Great Society (a term borrowed by both Lippmann and Dewey from Graham Wallas) in the Great Community. By appropriating the term in *The Public and Its Problems* Dewey is jabbing Lippmann’s reliance on and love for his former mentor, Wallas.

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<sup>181</sup> Walter Lippmann. *The Phantom Public* (New York: Macmillan, 1925) Ch. 16

<sup>182</sup> John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, (Holt Publishers, New York, 1927), p. 142

Lippmann's acquiescence in the end of *Phantom* stems from the inescapable patience and ineffability of his overarching argument. Still skeptical of the doctrine of natural rights as a cloak for political idealisms, he nonetheless sides with some notion of objective truth against the pseudo-environments democratic citizens are prone to constructing for themselves. *Opinion* structures many of Lippmann's major themes: in three decades he would find himself writing in *Essays in the Public Philosophy* an argument for the rearticulating of the 'traditions of civility,' a sort of broad educational system based on great works that would instruct people to be good citizens—to teach them to expunge the pictures in their heads. For now, the lack of a legislative program leads him to pay more attention in his next work, *A Preface to Morals*, to the character of the individual's minds who inhabit a democracy and, in the subsequent economic works, *The Method of Freedom*, *The New Imperative*, and *The Good Society*, the material conditions necessary to facilitate the individual's pursuit of truth.

## Chapter Five – Solving Society: The Disinterested Humanist

To Lippmann, the next decade was a chaotic time of social upheaval and frenetic change amidst attempts by a lost generation to deal with the fallout of the Great War. For Lippmann personally, however, the twenties were largely a time of success and stability. Amidst editorial conflict, and a sense that his efforts at the *New Republic* were leading nowhere, he was lured away to the *New York World*. The *World* offered him a wider audience and a larger salary, and by 1924 he had taken over the editorial lead upon the death of Frank Cobb. It was an odd fit for Lippmann, for though the paper had begun to take on respectability as a legitimate news source under the direction of Joseph Pulitzer's son, Ralph Pulitzer, its crusading tenor contrasted with Lippmann's contemplative style. Lippmann would write for the paper for over nine years and draft over twelve hundred editorials, a majority of them on foreign affairs.<sup>183</sup>

Over the decade Lippmann would become a journalistic celebrity, writing a monthly column for *Vanity Fair*, and other regular work for various periodicals including *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Harper's Magazine*, the *Saturday Review of Literature*. He even continued writing for the *New Republic* when time allowed, including a series of articles critical of Intelligence Quotient tests wherein he argued that they were an ineffective gauge of human capacities and could lead to a sort of implicit caste system. In this busy schedule not only did he publish *Opinion* (1922), *Phantom* (1925), and *A Preface to Morals* (1929),<sup>184</sup> but also two smaller books, *Men of Destiny* (1928) and *American*

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<sup>183</sup> Steel, 199

<sup>184</sup> The title, *A Preface to Morals*, borrows from Lippmann's first work, *A Preface to Politics*. Lippmann likely did not intend to draw a strict comparison between the two, however, the shift does display the withdrawal of *Morals* from the explicit world of politics.

*Inquisitors* (1928). *Destiny* was a collection of his works from many of the aforementioned periodicals, the most interesting of which is an essay called, 'Second Best Statesmen.'

Lippmann was suspicious that reason had become an empty shibboleth after the failures of optimism and organization of the previous decade. His deepening concern over the tyranny of the uninformed masses led him to attempt to reconcile this love of reason with its actual operation on political matters. Too often, he found, reason was employed to serve the cult of 'interests' where men employed reason in their own particular service, rather than on behalf of what was objectively right: "reason was an apologist and an advocate rather than a counsellor and a judge."<sup>185</sup> Lippmann specifically damns the "sophists" who conflate the meaning of interest as the feeling of concern with the fact of actually being concerned with an issue, and thereby exploit the masses for whatever gain they see fit. The true statesman, it seems, is hindered by a facet of democracy which leaves him frustrated, for the excellence of his character and intentions is not only confronted by the practical contingencies of social/political life, but also by "a certain moralized and highfalutin doubt about whether it is not undemocratic, unpleasantly superior, and almost sinful to do what they feel to be the first rate thing." Lippmann was no elitist, but he was quickly becoming aware of the danger democracy posed to excellence. Reason was the current problem, but also the solution: "It is as if the intellect of mankind had conspired against itself and had lamed its right arm the eternal war of light against darkness. It is the business of criticism to destroy this cult of the second best."<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Walter Lippmann. *Men of Destiny*. (New Brunswick, N.J.; Transaction Publishers, 2003), pg. 232

<sup>186</sup> *Destiny*, pg. 241

His concern over the tyranny of the masses was predominant in *Phantom*, and in *Destiny* his solution seemed to be philosophic criticism on behalf of the good against the cult of the 'second best.' In *Inquisitors*, a publication from a series of lectures delivered at Virginia University in 1927, he assumes the role of Socrates, whom Lippmann puts in conversation with William Jennings Bryan, Thomas Jefferson, and an unnamed 'teacher.'<sup>187</sup> If the dialogues were not humorous, they would be abhorrently self-indulgent. Yet there is in them a great sincerity, and a working out of the ideas arresting Lippmann concerning faith, reason, and authority. The use of the dialogue (and of Socrates) points to Lippmann's ultimate conclusion that there is no easy answer to the general problem represented by the conflict of faith and reason, and the locus of authority in the political realm. Socrates often admonishes his interlocutors to reexamine their 'foundational principles,' and Lippmann concludes in translation of his Socrates' teaching: "In our age the power of majorities tends to become arbitrary and absolute. And therefore it may well be that to limit the power of majorities, to dispute their moral authority, to deflect their impact, to dissolve their force, is now the most important task of those who care for liberty."<sup>188</sup> The lectures were given in the context of the Scopes case which had intellectually perplexed Lippmann as a conflict between not only science and religion, but the deeper questions of authority implied by democratic capacities and self- government. His reluctant conclusion, echoing his inability to produce a 'legislative' answer at the end of *Phantom*, led him to become a partisan of liberty as a check on *all* tyrannical sovereigns, be they religious authorities in Tennessee, or concentrated power structures in Washington.

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<sup>187</sup> The teacher character seems to hold many of Lippmann's own positions.

<sup>188</sup> Walter Lippmann. *American Inquisitors* (New York: Macmillan, 1928) pg. 111

*Morals* reflects primarily Lippmann's mounting need to defend reason insofar as he had lost faith in the ability of reason to govern democratic society and restrain the masses. Ronald Steel echoes the sentiments of other interpreters of Lippmann at this stage in his career by stating that he was, "coming to look upon the public as a Great Beast to be tamed rather than a force that could be educated."<sup>189</sup> This is partially correct, yet misses the essential point that Lippmann made contra Dewey, that for all its seeming mysticism and intractability, the force of public opinion consisted of the confused and nefariously malleable notions of individuals. *Morals* offers almost no political theory, and is accordingly concerned with the state of the souls of democrats, only venturing into the realm of politics when discussing how a statesman ought to manage orienting this new class of disinterested humanists towards an authoritative 'good.'

*Morals* was written beginning in the year 1925, shortly after the publication of *Phantom*. By the summer of 1927, Ronald Steel writes that *Morals* had 'taken over [Lippmann's] life.'" Lippmann kept to a grueling writing schedule, rising at five in the morning and working on the book before breakfast, he would write his editorial for the *World* after breakfast, go into the office for a busy day of meetings and editing, return home for supper, and work on the book until midnight.<sup>190</sup> All of his work was set to the backdrop of rising tensions in Mexico, the Sacco and Vanzetti affair, and the failing health of his father. Lippmann finished the first draft in the summer of 1927 and revised edits for nearly a year before sending the manuscript to his publisher.

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<sup>189</sup> Steel, 218

<sup>190</sup> Steel, 261

Lippmann spent himself admirably in what was an intellectually draining exercise. *Morals* reflected the dilemma of the lost generation, and lost progressive reformers. Many had wilted, become disillusioned after the war, retreating into academic bastions, apathy, or mysticism. Lippmann was similarly disillusioned by the lost promise of progressivism, the trials of the prohibition era, the failure at Versailles, union organizations and union busting, and the general frenetic chaos of the decade. Lippmann dutifully set himself to the task of treating the age, and despite the thoroughly unpolitical nature of *Morals*, Lippmann nonetheless is attempting to present a way of life which offers consistency with the quandary of the world he observed. What Lippmann had sensed in his critiques of mass culture and concern for liberty was precisely the problem of liberal democracy: a vacuum of authority. Yet he was unable to address it through legislative means. His only recourse was to turn towards the self, in a sense retreating from politics in order to tend to the divided souls of democrats.

The predicament of liberalism generally is bound up in the retreat of aristocratic mores, and the principle of political freedom expressed through political freedom from all restraints, particularly the warring authorities of the state and the church. Lippmann's great concern for sustainable liberalism reflects this central problematic as his diagnosis seems to mirror the conditions of liberalism's crisis. In his first chapter he claims that "the modern man who has ceased to believe, without ceasing to be credulous, hangs, as it were, between heaven and earth, and is at rest nowhere. There is no theory of the meaning and value of events which he is compelled to accept, but he is none the less compelled to accept the events. There is no moral authority to which he must turn now, but there is coercion in



opinions fashions and fads.”<sup>191</sup> This is the ‘problem of unbelief.’ Lippmann is acutely aware what has been lost specifically by the increasing secularization of society, by the ostensible battle between religion and reason. Yet, he does not unambiguously take the position that there has been some great progress in this development. Rather, he is deeply concerned by the continued oppression of the human person by the mechanisms of the modern world. He continues, “[Man] can believe what he chooses about this civilization. He cannot, however, escape the compulsion of modern events. They compel his body and his senses as ruthlessly as ever did king or priest...They have all the force of natural events, but not their majesty, all the tyrannical power of ancient institutions, but none of their moral certainty...But they do not convince him that they have that dignity which inheres in that which is necessary and in the *nature of things*”<sup>192</sup> Two important things happen in this construction of the problem: Lippmann argues that the modern man is primarily disadvantaged because he lacks political freedom, a freedom which is no less arrested by a lack of purpose than by physical tyrannies, and, two, that however terrible these calamities are which visit themselves upon modern man, no tyranny ultimately must affect him essentially, for these events, “they do not compel his mind.”<sup>193</sup> Lippmann’s solution is implicit in his premise: to provide for more political freedom, men must train their minds. To secure liberalism and give it direction, the minds of individuals must be mastered in such a way which safeguards them against the vicissitudes of modern events, particularly

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<sup>191</sup> Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers 1982), Ch.1

<sup>192</sup> *Morals*, Ch.1 [emphasis mine]

<sup>193</sup> *Morals*, Ch. 1 [left out of previous quotations through first ellipsis]

the deleterious consequences of tyrannical majorities and the potentially disastrous effects of public opinion on mass politics.

Lacking a clear authority, and unwilling to return to the authority of the church or to that of the state, Lippmann sought a new way: “When men can no longer be theists, they must, if they are civilized, become humanists.”<sup>194</sup> The church’s authority was crushed by the scientific method, and the secular state which had begat the Great War and failed to arrest the emerging, decadent (more importantly, directionless) life of the twenties, had failed to secure any real purpose through its institutions. Lippmann exhorts his readers to adopt an enlightened ‘disinterestedness’ from political affairs, constraining their emotional response to the stimuli of their environments. There isn’t so much a general philosophy, but an expanded role for virtue and general civility in their daily conduct. The mature man, “would take the world as it comes, and within himself remain quite unperturbed. When he acted, he would know that he was only testing a hypothesis, and if he failed he would know that he had made a mistake...For the aspect of life which implicated his soul would be his understanding of life, and to the understanding, defeat is no less than victory. It would be no effort therefore, for him to be tolerant, and no annoyance to be skeptical.”<sup>195</sup> Lippmann’s humanist is an ascetic, a calculator and ballast of disinterest against a world of agitation. “He would face pain with fortitude, for he would have put it away from the inner chambers of his soul. Fear would not haunt him, for he would be without compulsion to seize anything and without anxiety as to its fate.” The disinterested humanist fulfills Lippmann concerns about public opinion by retreating from the political area in order to strengthen

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<sup>194</sup> *Morals*, Ch.7

<sup>195</sup> *Morals*, Ch. 15

it. How much harm can be done by the tyranny of the masses or by the force of public opinion against men grounded dispassionately in an ascetic humanism?

Ronald Steel notes that, “The book was perfectly attuned to its times, codifying the anxieties of a generation that had grown tired of its binge and was ready for a little renunciation.”<sup>196</sup> The book was an instant commercial success, a best seller and was chosen by the Book of the Month Club. In its first year it had gone through six editions and was eventually translated into over a dozen languages.<sup>197</sup> The irony that the demanding program outlined for the ascetic humanist was Lippmann’s greatest commercial success is indicative of Lippmann’s character both as a public philosopher and as a democrat. His style and prose made the book accessible to all, thus inducting the common man into the society of civility which Lippmann thought was the only cure for the ails of democracy. H.L. Mencken would be content to lambaste the ‘booboisie’ in his critique of democracy, but Lippmann’s specific attempt to civilize them is a practice in optimism, and though his ascetic outlook at this stage of his career presents certain philosophical lacunas, his overall paradigm places high demands on the practice of virtue in the common man.

Though the book was also warmly received by critics, not everyone shared Lippmann’s high religion of disinterested humanism. Among the dissenters was Lippmann’s former teacher, George Santayana. In a review of *Morals*, Santayana wrote that Lippmann’s view was, “an epilogue to all possible moralities and all possible religions.” And that from the vantage point of the detached humanist, “the pure intellect is divorced as far as possible from the service of the will – divorced therefore, from affairs and from morality;

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<sup>196</sup> Steel, pg. 263

<sup>197</sup> Steel, pg. 263

and love is divorced as far as possible from human objects, and becomes an impersonal and universalized delight in being.”<sup>198</sup> By insisting that the human adopt an inhuman position, Lippmann was ending the search for morality which Santayana thought brought such aesthetic value to a morally relativistic world. Lippmann had misunderstood his former mentor’s embrace of moral relativism acutely, and failed to see the consequences of his withdrawal to dispassionate reason, namely, that the ungrounded man is no longer a man. Lippmann’s sensitivity to this critique was highlighted in his sharp response to Santayana, and is revealed throughout *Morals* in his loose attempts to ground his universalistic rationalism in an ambiguous and idealized form of virtue.

At stake in *Morals*, in the scope of interpreting Lippmann’s intellectual movement is the degree to which his disinterested humanism is essentially relativistic. While his appeals are often to Historical contingency as the basis of ethical attitudes, there are obvious refrains and an ultimate appeal to ground rationalism in human virtue. However, it is difficult to say whether that virtue is grounded in an appeal to Nature or to History, as the contingent morality is ambiguously bound up in the notion of ‘man’ as disinterested spectator. Importantly this disinterested humanist is a response to the threats of mass politics to sustainable liberalism, but it also sets the theoretical framework for the conclusion of Lippmann’s political philosophy in *Essays in the Public Philosophy*. For now it must be shown that there is this ambiguity about the grounding of natural rights in the appeal to Nature and History, and that, to the extent that Lippmann does explore political life in *Morals*, he links the freedom of the mind with political freedom, thereby accepting

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<sup>198</sup> George Santayana, “Enduring the Truth,” *Saturday Review* 12/7/29

individual responsibility as the paramount consideration for sustaining a liberal democracy.

In Part One of *Morals*, Lippmann diagnoses the milieu of modern liberalism and finds it arrested by its great successes. The destruction of barriers to freedom has resulted in more problems than solutions. Lippmann draws a quotation from Thomas Henry Huxley's *Address on University Education*: "a man's worst difficulties begin when he is able to do as he likes."<sup>199</sup> Recall this issue from the birth of liberalism: once the obstacles to freedom are eradicated, towards what goal should society direct itself? Lippmann has identified a crucial problem, and remains unsatisfied with the delinquent truth behind the experimental pluralism of Jamesian pragmatism which leaves no authentic room for revelation and belief, and the delinquent truth of Santayana's aesthetic approach which would effectively relegate truth to a means to an end. For Lippmann, truth is an end in and of itself: "When Mr. Santayana says that 'matters of religion should never be matters of controversy' because 'we never argue with a lover about his test, nor condemn him if we are just, for knowing so human a passion,' he expresses an ultimate unbelief."<sup>200</sup> In neither James nor Santayana does Lippmann find a reasonable alternative to the authorities of the church and the state. The pluralist pragmatism of James offers no solace to a believer who knows God is made in his own image, and Santayana's aestheticism similarly fills an emotive need for a fatuous personal satisfaction. With the authority of revelation destroyed by the scientific method, and neither James, Santayana, nor Dewey and his collectivist-relativism able to offer a satisfactory scientific alternative for the deep questions which

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<sup>199</sup> *Morals*, Ch. 1

<sup>200</sup> *Morals*. Ch. 2

interrogate men, Lippmann is forced to articulate a 'new' method of truth-seeking humanism for the modern age. There is a deep logic which underwrites this premise: a prima-facie need for authority, for truth. Implicit in his principle is the position that there is a natural truth-seeking instinct which demands satisfaction.

Part Two is Lippmann's attempt to roughly sketch the major elements of his humanist alternative. He attempts to build from the inescapable need for an authority, acknowledging that "the popular faith does not prove the existence of its objects, but only the presence of a desire that such objects should exist." Lippmann understands as a part of his experience and repeated instructions in his earlier works to make man the center of politics. What is emerging in *Morals* is the constituent elements of that man-centered psychology and interpretation of human experience that is plausibly consistent with an articulation of natural rights doctrine. He continues, "The popular religion, in short, rests on a theory which if true, is an extension of physics and of history: the humanistic view rests on human psychology and an interpretation of human experience. It follows, then, that in exploring the modern problem it is necessary consciously and clearly to make a choice between these diametrically opposite points of view."<sup>201</sup> Lippmann himself places the choice between psychology/interpretation of experience and history. This pushes back against the relativistic inclinations of his humanism by grounding his psychology in the nature of man and experience. It is curious, however, that he associates the historical view with that of the church. He claims that there has been a great emancipation for the modern man in the wake of the retreating dogmas of the church, for which the replacement of those

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<sup>201</sup> *Morals*, Part 2, Introduction

dogmas with the search for truth is the source of our present difficulty. This is perhaps partially resolved in that some of the great religious leaders were also teachers of elements of this valuable humanism. Of all the sources he cites as early teachers of this emergent modern humanism, among Confucius, Spinoza, Buddha, and Jesus, he writes that they have placed a greater emphasis not on the character of commandment and obedience, but on the education and discipline of the human will. "Such beliefs as they had about God were not in the nature of oaths of allegiance to a superior; their concern was not to placate the will of God but to alter the will of man...because it is intrinsically good for man."<sup>202</sup> Though Lippmann believes we have eclipsed the capacity for revelatory authority, he finds in religious expression some essential constitutive elements of his humanism, which set the foundation for the appropriately disinterested man.

In Part III, Lippmann moves to show the benefits of the practice of disinterested humanism. The driving force of his argument, that neither the system of 'naïve capitalism' nor collectivist socialism is capable of producing meaning, would not be out of place in even his first two books of political philosophy, *Preface*, and *Drift*. "The early doctrine of laissez-faire was utopian because it assumed that unregenerate men were destined somehow to muddle their way to a harmonious result. The early socialism was utopian because it assumed that these same unregenerate men, once the laws of property had been altered, would somehow muddle their way to a harmonious result. Both ignored the insight of high religion that unregenerate men can only muddle into muddle."<sup>203</sup> Lippmann continues to argue that the acquisitive dogma promoting simple pursuit of individual

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<sup>202</sup> *Morals*, Ch. 10

<sup>203</sup> *Morals*, Ch. 12

interests leads nowhere, least of all to a utopian land of plenty. Likewise he remains disdainful of socialists who idealize man despite premising their theories on the faults inherent in the acquisitive traits of man. Lippmann has yet to abandon his own utopian dreams which turn toward the well managed society. Instead of the industrial statesmanship of *Drift*, Lippmann seems to hope that his disinterested humanism will moderate the acquisitive instinct in men of business into objective executive actions and prudent risk management. The capitalist gives way to a host of Weberian managers and bureaucrats (stoic and calculating, of course). Lippmann hopes that in the future “we shall discern the ideals of our industry in the necessities of industry itself.”<sup>204</sup> Lippmann is not fully utopian, of course, for all the hopes of a well-managed industrial society lie in the excellence of the dispassionate humanists whose mastery of self is far from vouchsafed. The important takeaway is that Lippmann has moved the standards of economic affairs from centralized authorities to the individual authorities of executives and managers who have been elevated by their ‘high religion.’ Utopian, yes. But there is also a great theoretical consonance with Lippmann’s delicate embrace of private enterprise as an element of successful economic associations in his late work.

To the small extent which Lippmann is expressly political in *Morals*, it is fair to say he extends many of the boons he foresees in the humanist executive to the statesman. The key principle to his thought is the introduction of the necessity of decentralization to the management of political affairs. No commenter has pointed to this explicitly, and Lippmann himself does not emphasize it, but it is the key to his limited political reflections in *Morals*,

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<sup>204</sup> *Morals*, Ch. 12



and generative of much of his thought in *The Good Society*, and *Essays in the Public Philosophy*. He foresees that the power structure of modern government lacks the coercive structure of the authoritarian ancien regimes, and that “the crucial difference between modern politics and that to which mankind has been accustomed is that the power to act and to compel obedience is almost never sufficiently centralized nowadays to be exercised by one will. The power is distributed and qualified so that power is exerted not by command but by interaction.”<sup>205</sup> Decentralized authority is not only contingently the contemporary modus operandi of, but a necessary condition for sustainable liberalism. Lippmann argues that the government cannot direct affairs through centralized authority without losing the force of that authority, for it must remain invested in the communities made up by individuals: “The prime business of government, therefore, is not to direct the affairs of the community, but to harmonize the direction which the community gives to its affairs.”<sup>206</sup> Ordering from on high through the great leadership of masterful men is doomed to failure unless the great men become more like serious men of practical virtue who are invested in their societies. Thus his new favored statesmanship “consists in giving the people not what they want but what they will learn to want. It requires the courage which is possible only in a mind that is detached from the agitations of the moment. It requires the insight which comes only from an objective and discerning knowledge of facts, and a high and imperturbable disinterestedness.”<sup>207</sup> Far from the interpreters of will and sentiment of *A Preface to Politics* and the commanding industrial statesmen of *Drift*, the statesman of *Morals* is one who needs the objective information so prized in *Opinion*, but

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<sup>205</sup> *Morals*, Ch. 13

<sup>206</sup> *Morals*, Ch. 13

<sup>207</sup> *Morals*, Ch. 13

primarily to lead modestly by elevating individuals in their high religion of disinterested humanism to the proper political action.

From the perspective of a meta-analysis, Lippmann's recommendations look simplistic at best, ironically utopian at worst. However, a final examination to exonerate his position from a ultimate, damning relativism shows his prescriptions in *Morals* to be rather more humble than the pomposity of a 'high religion' of disinterestedness might seem to suggest. For instance, the task of the moralist in the unbelieving world is not a grand systematizing articulation of the good. Lippmann begins his final chapter by critiquing the old ecclesiastical orders for overemphasizing morals in the vein of sanction and reward. The new moralist must adapt to the circumstances of his new world: "The disesteem into which moralists have fallen is due at bottom to their failure to see that in an age like this one the function of the moralist is not to exhort men to be good but to elucidate what the good is."<sup>208</sup> That there is a good is a given, but Lippmann also stresses that the authoritative force of any moral code depends on confluence with the disposition of the society in which they live. Yet, morals do not appear to be historically contingent; Lippmann merely expresses the practical nature and problem of relating truth to historical circumstances, a far cry from an essentially relativist position. It does seem to be an enduring truth observed by his humanism that civilization requires self-knowledge of its ideals, which is the central problem of a liberal society set adrift seeking an authority. "There must exist in the form of clearly available ideas an understanding of what the fulfillment of the promise of that civilization might mean, an imaginative conception of the *good* at which it might, and if it is

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<sup>208</sup>*Morals*, Ch. 15

to flourish, at which it must aim. That knowledge, *though no one has it perfectly*, and though relatively few have it at all, is the principle of all order and certainty in the life of that people. By it they can clarify the practical conduct of life in some measure, and add immeasurably to its dignity.”<sup>209</sup> Lippmann is humbly suggesting that there is a penultimate quality to any ‘truth’ sought after by the humanist teachers and statesmen of a society, though there are great benefits to the act of seeking and promulgating it.

Lippmann concludes by rejecting the possibility of revealed authority and dogma, even channeled through ecclesiastical authorities. His argument is that the way forward is in some measure easier without the baggage of traditional attempts to understand God: “The ideal way of life for men who must make their own terms with experience and find their own happiness has been stated again and again. It is that only the regenerate, the disinterested, the mature, can make use of freedom.”<sup>210</sup> Lippmann is effectively arguing for the rebirth of virtues essential to the good life, though he does it closed and against the encumbrances of tradition and experience with the authority of revealed truth and dogma. It is unfortunate that the last words of Lippmann’s great searching book are his most fatuous: “Since nothing gnawed at his vitals, neither doubt nor ambition, nor frustration, nor fear, he would move easily through life. And so whether he saw the thing as comedy, or high tragedy, or plain farce, he would affirm that it is what it is, and the wise man can enjoy it.”<sup>211</sup> Lippmann’s reach exceeds his grasp, and the essential point of Santayana’s critique rings true: Lippmann’s dispassionate rationalism robs humans of their humanity. The

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<sup>209</sup> *Morals*, Ch. 15 [emphasis mine]

<sup>210</sup> *Morals*, Ch. 15

<sup>211</sup> *Morals*, Ch. 15

disinterested man may balance and master his passions as far as he is able, and in this humanism Lippmann may momentarily think he has found a way to balance the dangerous lack of authority and the dangerous alternatives of church and secular state by investing intellectual resources in the minds of individuals, but his thought would not rest there. His final books, *The Method of Freedom*, *The New Imperative*, *The Good Society*, and *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, would (especially among the first three) seek to guarantee the material security of the individual through natural rights and compensated economies, and (in *Essays*, primarily) Lippmann struggled to reconcile the claims of tradition expressed as natural law as the final indispensable piece of a sustainable liberalism.

## Chapter Six – Economics, Material Well-Being, and The Good Society

Despite the great success of Lippmann's *Morals*, by the end of the 1920s the *World* was on the verge of collapse. The paper was running a great deficit, and Joseph Pulitzer's youngest son, Herbert, had assumed control of the paper from his brother Ralph in an effort to eliminate the financial 'burden' to which he felt the paper was subjecting him. Lippmann had done great work for the paper, but it was always a bit of an awkward fit with his intellectualism at odds with the crusading tone of the paper, not to mention much of the readership. Upset with massive cuts and restructuring, as well as having grown weary of the nature of his journalistic enterprise at the *World*, Lippmann told Herbert Pulitzer that he planned to leave when his contract concluded. In a curious letter to his friend, the art critic Bernard Berenson, Lippmann wrote that, "I have never taken newspaper work very seriously. It is to me a livelihood, a means of practical influence, and a laboratory for testing theories. I am not at all worried about myself, and would like to wind up my term on the *World* in a pleasant way and see that my own staff was provided for."<sup>212</sup> Shortly afterwards, Herbert told Lippmann in confidence that he was planning to sell the paper to the Scripps-Howard chain. Lippmann would stay on until the sale in part to lobby for extended compensation for his staff before setting out to seek a new avenue of 'influence.'

He fielded many offers, including the presidency of the University of North Carolina, an office for which he felt unqualified, and many other journalistic opportunities. He was most intrigued, however, by an offer to write for the *Herald Tribune*, a conservative paper run by Ogden and Helen Reid. From the outside, it seemed to be a strange offer, for while

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<sup>212</sup> Steel, pg. 271

Lippmann had moved away from some of the more radical/progressive opinions of his youth, he was still firmly a liberal, and fresh off the editorial board of one of the nation's largest Democratic papers. The Reids, however, were so impressed by Lippmann's caliber as an analyst that they were entirely unconcerned with his political affiliation and made their pitch on the basis of Lippmann's complete intellectual freedom: "It doesn't matter that you've been running a Democratic paper, and we're a Republican one," Ogden Reid told him. "We want the Democratic circulation of the *World*. Come and write Democratic editorials for us and sign them. Take any position you wish. We would never try and restrict you."<sup>213</sup>

The Reids' offer of editorial freedom clearly appealed more to Lippmann and his search for a 'laboratory to test theories' than Adolph Ochs' offer that Lippmann could run the *Times* Washington office, a position more suited to a daily executive journalist. Lippmann wanted to pursue intellectual analysis, and his perspicacity would carry his new column in the *Tribune*, called, "Today and Tomorrow," to great fame and wide readership. His column would eventually run in all the major newspapers in the United States for thirty-six years. Ronald Steele observes that, "Lippmann commanded a loyal and powerful constituency, some ten million of the most politically active and articulate people in America. Many of these people literally did not know what they ought to think about the issues of the day until they read what Walter Lippmann had said about them."<sup>214</sup> The calm and stability of his position there allowed Lippmann a vantage point from which to work

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<sup>213</sup> Steel, 275

<sup>214</sup> Steel, xvii

out the ideas that were he felt were the most pressing to the republic and of the most interest to his readers.

Despite the stability of Lippmann's professional position, the Wall Street crash of 1929 would follow just a few months after the publication of *Morals* and become the preeminent issue for most Americans. Lippmann held a mixed opinion of Hoover; though the president was keen on many of the principles which Lippmann admired, Lippmann thought his temperamental leadership ultimately doomed any small opportunities for remediation which lay open to him. Lippmann supported Newton Baker for the Democratic nomination against Franklin Roosevelt, fearing that FDR's affability and lack of concrete policy left too much ambiguity concerning which course of action he would take once he became president. After a hotly contested convention, and a biting editorial against FDR which FDR never forgot, Lippmann ultimately endorsed him in the general election against Hoover. His new relationship with Reid was strained over yet more biting editorials against Hoover, which had become unsettling to the conservative readership of the paper. He embraced FDR and would be cautiously won over for the early designs of the New Deal, which offered in some respects a sharp distinction from the disinterested statesmanship Lippmann favored in *Morals*. However, the second key to that work, and to *Opinion*, and *Phantom* before it, was that there must be a baseline of material security before one could pursue disinterested humanism. The crisis of the depression had brought that insight tragically to light and motivated Lippmann's support for the initial activity of FDR and the New Deal programs.

The collapse of the markets brought to Lippmann great intellectual turmoil. Ever concerned with the influence of tyrannical majorities, he was also wary of the over-encroachment of the executive branch. However, the situation had grown so dire in his view that he would state that “The danger we have to fear is not that Congress will give Franklin D. Roosevelt too much power, but that it will deny him the powers he needs.”<sup>215</sup> Emergency situations called for emergency actions. Lippmann backed most of FDR’s early New Deal reform packages (though not always without reservation), peaking in 1933 in his endorsement of FDR’s plan to move off of the gold standard. All the measures undertaken by FDR were circumscribed by domestic prices which were intractable insofar as the U.S. currency was tied to the international value of gold. Lippmann’s Wall Street contacts urged him to editorialize against the gold standard, and he adopted their view in an early column of “Today and Tomorrow.” After the move from the gold standard, the international economic community was thrown into a panic as world delegates met in London to work on an agreement concerning international stabilization of currency. Lippmann covered the conference and the fallout after FDR announced that the US would reject any and all international stabilization measures. It was at the conference Lippmann also found time to renew his friendship with Maynard Keynes.

Lippmann valued Keynes’ friendship highly, and combined with Lippmann’s budding interest (not only of necessity) in economics, Keynes was particularly influential upon him. Some of Keynes’ general theories on economics had been known for a few years, following the publication of his *Treatise on Money*, which investigated the relationship

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<sup>215</sup> Steel, 300



between saving and investment. Keynes argued that where there was more savings in the economy than there was investment, recession or depression would occur, and he advocated general spending and deterrence to savings. During a long lunch Keynes detailed his forthcoming book, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, to an impressionable Lippmann.<sup>216</sup> Keynes separated the classical economic link between the price of labor and employment, and instead emphasized the impact of spending on employment. Keynes argued that there is by the nature of the market economy an unacceptable level of unemployment and underinvestment, absent active administrative measures. Practically, this new insight dissuaded Lippmann from any lingering desire he had for enforced balanced budget initiatives, for Keynes had plainly convinced him of the potential effectiveness of countercyclical spending. Philosophically, Lippmann would connect this new insight to an existing belief that political freedom, as well as the life of the truth seeking philosopher/humanist, depends on a base level of material well-being. If the modern economy had in its DNA underemployment, was it not simply just to enact remediation procedures to save the common man from the gears of the economic machine? The notion played well with Lippmann's ever-present sense of a new world in need of new solutions and his natural distrust of the large modern mechanisms of marginalization.

It was perhaps for this reason that Lippmann was so happy to support the early reforms of the New Deal. To those that sense discontinuity in Lippmann's own thought before and after his break with the second wave of New Deal reforms, it bears mentioning

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<sup>216</sup> Steel, 305

that even in the midst of his enthusiasm for the New Deal, Lippmann was already warning against it:

These experiments have their roots in the desire for recovery rather than in a popular enthusiasm for the ideal of an authoritarian state and a planned economy. They are, therefore, practical expedients rather than revolutionary processes. But it is possible that the dislocation may not yield to the expedients, thus compelling resort to more drastic ones. It is possible that the expedients may themselves deepen the dislocation by inhibiting the free enterprise upon which an essential part of recovery depends. It is possible that the expedients will seem admirable and equally possible that they will seem detestable.<sup>217</sup>

Lippmann was clearly still concerned about these expedients transgressing into the realm of authoritarianism, but many of the collectivist controls which could insinuate the US down that pass were also in his view plainly necessary. Much of Lippmann's thought in this period is a struggle to reconcile these ideas, and in the spring of 1934 Lippmann delivered the Godkin Lectures at Harvard which would later be published as his book, *The Method of Freedom* (1935). The book took a largely laudatory view of the New Deal, and elaborated Lippmann's conversations with Keynes into a new theory of "free collectivism."

Lippmann was looking for an explanation of the logic behind a third way between laissez-faire and collectivism. His conversations with Keynes and the drama of the depression had led him to enthusiastically endorse FDR's New Deal, and many commentators point to *Method* and *The New Imperative* as signs of Lippmann's inconsistency, but the philosophical logic behind his embrace of modest collectivism would

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<sup>217</sup> Foreign Affairs *Self-Sufficiency*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1934-01-01/self-sufficiency> Accessed 3/11/2016

be the same reason for his later split with FDR. The forward for *Method* is particularly telling, and Lippmann sketches out his theory which indicated that his cautious embrace of elements of collectivism were the same as his reasons for avoiding it previously. He is adamant that his notion of “free collectivism” is consistent with the views of the Lecture’s namesake, Edwin Lawrence Godkin, a defender of laissez-faire, the gold standard, and free trade. “The things I have to say would have been meaningless while Godkin was still alive. At the time of his death in 1902 the issues with which we have to deal were in the making but they had not been precipitated. In the past twenty years, in the two decades since the beginning of the Great War, they have been precipitated. Yet I confidently believe that while the principles set forth in these lectures depart radically from the liberal programs which Godkin expounded so eloquently, they are nevertheless consistent with the spiritual purposes of which those programs were the transient expression.”<sup>218</sup> In essence Lippmann is saying that the moderated collectivism represented by New Deal, and by other nations in response to the changing economic atmosphere after the war and depression, could be theoretically continuations of the promises of freedom and equality guaranteed by laissez-faire policies in the previous centuries. As in every one of his books of political philosophy, Lippmann believed he was enumerating a response for a modern, unique problem which required fresh thinking. He tells us, “Purposes and ends embodying a conception of the good life and of what makes for dignity in human existence are older than all our working principles and will survive them. And, therefore, he who would be loyal to the end must in changing circumstances be prepared to alter the means; even the gods on Olympus took

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<sup>218</sup>Walter Lippmann. *Method of Freedom* (New York: Macmillan, 1934), Forward

diverse shapes when they walked the earth.”<sup>219</sup> What remained was to find how a new method of economic situation can best provide for freedom, the good life and human dignity. The aims are the same between *Method*, *Imperative*, and *Good*, as they have been throughout his career in search of political freedom. It is the method which has to change to provide that freedom: “I do not believe that liberty is, as we have been told on high authority, a corpse. But neither do I believe it can live only or live forever in the body it inhabited during the Nineteenth Century. And it is in the conviction that freedom is finding a new incarnation in a new body of principles that these lectures have been written.”<sup>220</sup>

In part one, Lippmann explains the conditions under which laissez -faire died, and why it is impossible to move forward without conscious acknowledgment of the situation. He picks up the same themes he expressed in *Opinion*, arguing that the great equalizing of conditions manifested and promised by the democratic state can only be fulfilled and stabilized through external action. While in *Opinion* it had been intelligence bureaus, now, influenced by Keynes, he argues that the economy must be managed by expert knowledge in times of crisis. The old style, neutral state, “leaves out of account the rise of democracy with all that that involves in the way of resistance and activity on the part of the masses of the people. As long as democracy was unconscious of its power, it was possible to let hard times be the purge of previous mistakes. But with democracy become active, there can no longer be a fatalistic acceptance of the purge.”<sup>221</sup> Boom and bust cycles have become unacceptable as the modern economy has become so powerful that the state must protect

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<sup>219</sup> *Method*, Forward.

<sup>220</sup> *Method*, Forward

<sup>221</sup> *Method*, Part One

the standard of life against the economic forces which stand outside the purview of the common man who lives in civil society. Lippmann, with Weimar Germany and the Nazis in mind, cautions that the failure to secure the basic necessities of life through a compensated economy would greatly threaten liberty, “as we can see in all of Europe east of the Rhine.”<sup>222</sup>

In Part Two, having shown that the neutral state of laissez -faire has passed, Lippmann defines Free Collectivism by juxtaposing it to the planned and autocratic collectivisms of the socialist and communist world. Free Collectivism “is collectivist because it acknowledges the obligation of the state for the standard of life and the operation of the economic order as a whole. It is free because it preserves within very wide limits the liberty of private transactions. Its object is not to direct individual enterprise and choice according to an official plan but to put them and keep them in a working equilibrium. Its method is to redress the balance of private actions by compensating public actions.”<sup>223</sup> Lippmann seems to have Keynesian central banking concepts primarily in mind when discussing the mechanisms of collectivist control in a private, unplanned economy, but is nonetheless open to further developments in the field. He is only attempting to establish the principle against that of unfettered capitalism and the strictly planned economy. The planned economy cannot operate in a state given to liberty, for it is in its internal mechanics an economy for planned scarcity. Even at the height of his admiration for economic control, Lippmann is adamant that prosperity rests with the consumer-driven market of free enterprise.

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<sup>222</sup> *Method*, Part One

<sup>223</sup> *Method*, Part Two

In Part Three Lippmann attempts to reconcile his recommendations for a compensated economy with the standard practice of democracy through representative government. For all the great, though surmountable technical challenges of the economic balancing tools the government should employ, the greatest threat to those actions are from transient majorities and special interest groups. Lippmann lauds the founders with glowing language, who “foresaw clearly all the real difficulties of political democracy, and the Constitution is undoubtedly the greatest attempt ever made consciously by men to render popular rule safe for the nation as a whole, the local community, and the individual.”<sup>224</sup> It is striking that Lippmann congratulates the founders for their prescience and their ideals of limited government unabashedly in his endorsement of a massive expansion of collectivist control. Yet, Lippmann still believed that a modest expansion of these controls would be reconcilable with the principles of the founders if these essential premises of democratic government are revisited in order to rebalance the executive and legislative authority needed to operate economic controls. The precise controls, looking backwards, put one in mind of the modern Federal Reserve System, though Lippmann does not once mention it directly. If there is a general principle to his theory, it is that executive authority should increase in times of crisis and recede once the crisis has passed. This could help explain some of his eventual turn against the New Deal, which he never endorsed as a social reform, but rather a necessary remedy and experiment. However, it is not overall clear what precisely Lippmann has in mind to establish this constitutional balance on behalf of limited government. For now, it is important to note that he has embraced the founders’ principles of constitutionalism, and though he also plainly thinks

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<sup>224</sup> *Method*, Part Three

that the founders simply never considered the problems of the modern economy, their methods would yield a similar result as that which he has in mind.

Lippmann's theory depended in large part on his reading of Aristotle, whom he quotes and references multiple times in the last few sections of *Method*: "The best political community is formed by citizens of the middle class," followed by another extended quotation from Book IV, Chapter 11 of *Aristotle's Politics* which elaborates the same point. Lippmann states clearly that the greatest threat to free government is "proletarian insecurity" and that the only remedy is to seek a balance between security and freedom in the stability of the middle class. Since Keynes had convinced him the nature of the market economy resulted in a level of unemployment and underinvestment without active administrative measures, the principle of the stable middle seemed impossible without his new free collectivism. Following this principle he advocates that the government guarantee a right to work and protect private property as the "foundation of liberty." Lippmann rejects a natural right to property, but also maintains that it is the essential ground of liberty because "Men cannot be made free by laws unless they are in fact free because no man can buy and no man can coerce them."<sup>225</sup> *Method* concludes on this note, with optimism for the procedure of crisis management through free collectivism, and a tension between property and work as essential features of liberty, but not themselves natural rights.

*The New Imperative (1935)* was a collection of two essays written in the spring of 1935. Lippmann advances mostly the same ideas he did in *Method*, notably finding that the

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<sup>225</sup> *Method*, Part Three

Hoover and Roosevelt administrations had largely the same attitude towards recovery, thus demonstrating that the principle of a free collectivism was already widely accepted and that its advancement depended on this recognition. He also reopened the issue of laissez-faire, and curiously advanced it as an attractive option with no practicality at this time. The laissez-faire system had the same utopian defects as the syndicalist/socialist utopias he critiqued in his early works. In the modern world he would claim laissez-faire economics lost its practicality and its authority, "because those who preach this gospel do not practice it."<sup>226</sup> He then repeats his refrain from *Drift and Method* in particular, about big business, industrial cartels and stock holding as poor imitation of truly free markets expressive of the ideal of private property. He concludes by arguing that individual liberty was in fact compatible with active government mediation of the economy. Lippmann would rest assured that government intervention in the economic realm did not constitute intervention in the intellectual realm.

It wasn't long after the spring of 1935 that Lippmann began to weary of some of the New Deal programs initiated by FDR. He had always reserved a great deal of criticism for some of the overreaching of the National Recovery Administration, but it was not until Roosevelt announced his court-packing plan in 1937 that Lippmann turned fully against the administration. In Lippmann's view the time of emergency had passed, and the programs failing to get through the courts now were reform acts rather than emergency actions. All along Lippmann had consistently advocated for emergency actions (in various forms), while warning against the inclination to overreach after the situation had passed.

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<sup>226</sup> Walter Lippmann. *The New Imperative* (New York: Macmillan, 1935), Part II



His work in *Imperative* and *Method* did argue for the expansion of executive control into the management of the compensated economy, but this expansion was both tied to (admittedly ambiguous and idealized) constitutional mechanisms, which were offered as morally necessary and practically effective given the intricacy of the modern economy.

It is important to bear in mind for the forthcoming discussion of *Good*, the logical point Lippmann reached with Keynes that justice requires some compensatory mechanism for modern economics. For however much a partisan of liberty Lippmann becomes, two major themes of continuity with *Method* and *Imperative* exist: one, that the model of free collectivism is refined rather than completely abandoned, and two, that what progressives and some liberals see as a retreat to free market moralism, comes only with heavy qualifications through familiar repudiations of past dogmas of laissez-faire. To the former, his explicit rejection of New Deal style programs is tempered by a call, repeated from *Method* and *Imperative*, for money spent, not on direct public assistance, but on public works, education and health as both “relief and remedy.”<sup>227</sup> To the latter, Lippmann emphasizes what he sees as a false dichotomy between individual rights/laissez faire and progressive statism/collectivism. He envisions property rights as managed extensively through a court system that depends on common law jurisprudence.

The more substantive reasons for Lippmann’s reversal on the New Deal are consistent with his overriding preoccupation with a stable liberal democracy, and it is a change in his philosophy only so far as he bases his argument against Roosevelt’s overreach in constitutional merits. Where early in his career the court was simply a cloak for self-

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<sup>227</sup> Walter Lippmann. *The Good Society* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers 2005), Ch. 11

interested actors to protect their property, it had now become an essential part of the regime of liberty guaranteed through the separation of powers. Even at the height of Lippmann's enthusiasm for the New Deal he was lauding the founders for the separation of powers as a principle of self-government. When news of the court-packing plan was announced, Lippmann's core belief in the necessity of the separation of powers doctrine and firm conviction that the time of grave emergency had passed, led him to explode in vitriol against the plan, calling it, "a bloodless coup d'état which strikes a deadly blow at the vital center of constitutional democracy."<sup>228</sup> He was shaken by the attempt to arrogate power to the executive, and the overreach was likely a source of much of his motivation to write *The Good Society* (1937).

*Good* serves two main purposes: to enumerate the features of liberalism and to denounce collectivism. Lippmann's exuberance in the latter aim, and comprehensiveness in the former, were artifacts of his decaying optimism in the affairs of government. However, it is important to understand that this decay of optimism is neither motivated nor manifest in the often cited turn towards neoliberal economics, 'natural law,' or free markets of old style liberalism. Rather, the tone of *Good* is impacted by Lippmann's continuing conviction that the old style laissez-faire economics must, for moral and practical reasons, be a part of the compensated system, and that, as a result, the compensated economy must be directed by executive functions which place the entire governmental system, the stability of the liberal democracy, into constant peril. His final two books are attempts to address that peril by describing the horrors of collectivism, particularly in response to the unexpected toll

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<sup>228</sup> Today and Tomorrow. February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1937

(unexpected to Lippmann) the expanded centralized government was having on intellectual freedom.

In the acknowledgments of *Good*, for editions after 1937, Lippmann claims to have begun the book in 1933,<sup>229</sup> thus refuting any commentator who would seek to diagnose a sharp break in his thinking on Roosevelt and the New Deal. As has been indicated, Lippmann was already keenly aware the inherent dangers collectivism posed to liberty, while simultaneously respecting a need to compensate for those caught in the machinery of an economic system dependent on underemployment. Yet he also felt a great need to reconcile his growing distrust of collectivism as a threat to intellectual security with Keynesian methods of economic control that seemed to him to be so necessary. It is therefore difficult to diagnose a hard break between *Method* and *Imperative* with *Good*, particularly when Lippmann acknowledges a debt to Hayek and Mises as well as Keynes within the same sentence.

Lippmann's introduction is equally revealing, for he comments unusually directly on his first two books, *Drift* and *Preface*, saying that he had assumed that "in a regime of personal liberty each nation could, by the increasing exercise of popular sovereignty, create for itself gradually a spaciouly planned and intelligently directed social order."<sup>230</sup> The war, he claims, robbed him of this simple belief that organization would produce the free and just society for which he had hoped, and that he now believes that the world's difficulties are "inherently unsolvable." He may have grown disillusioned, but it is not so clear that he was ever wrought with despair over the situation of liberalism. He continues by arguing

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<sup>229</sup> *Good*, Acknowledgments

<sup>230</sup> *Good*, Introduction

that the liberal vision was “devoid of any meaning whatsoever,” and, in *continuity* with his early works, diagnoses part of the derailment with the laissez-faire old style capitalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century unadjusted for modern needs. He hopes to rearticulate the vision for the modern world, and preserve the dignity and purpose of liberalism. The revelation that is truly unique to Lippmann’s body of thought is not then a pivoting and balancing of economic positions or disillusionment with scientific bureaucracy/management, but the recognition of the need for a creed at the center of the wayward liberalism in order to regain its lost promise.

In Book I of *Good*, Lippmann seeks this creed by returning to the basis of the liberal paradigm—human flourishing depends on human freedom. In his observation there is a sort of false choice between old style capitalism on one hand and mounting collectivist totalitarianisms on the other. Liberalism, if its foundation can be reclaimed, offers an alternative to them both. Lippmann identifies the method of liberalism in a way that is present, but underemphasized in his earlier works: “For more than two thousand years, since western men first began to think about the social order, the main preoccupation of political thinking has been to find a law which would be superior to arbitrary power.”<sup>231</sup> The tradition of western civilization has supplied the reasoning behind the restrictions on arbitrary power, and the modern state, with its limitless faith that it would ‘providentially’ move towards apotheosis by any means necessary, was becoming increasingly hostile to the liberty on which liberalism depends. Lippmann’s empirical progressivism was shattered by the Great War, and while the depression had led him to conclude the necessity

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<sup>231</sup> *Good*, Ch. 1

of some collectivist controls, the seeming inexorability of FDR's power after the crisis had passed, along with the 'barbarians at the gates' in Europe, cemented a new observation: that fatalistic/providential authoritarianisms could not be restrained except through the western tradition, which was itself spawned to emancipate men from arbitrary regimes. The new observation for Lippmann was that arbitrary power was a greater threat to human flourishing and liberal democracy than the concern that a government would fail realize its capacity to serve its citizens. Where in his early works the concern was 'when shall we end drift and achieve mastery?' he now perceives the complexity of the answer.

This clear rejection of fatalistic progressivism inherent in the collectivist regimes does not necessarily mean that Lippmann makes his appeal to Nature concomitantly with the appeal to western tradition. However, he does seem to argue that the collectivist regimes which threaten human flourishing with arbitrary power are often set against the traditions of western civilization, the purpose of which has always been to find justification for the exercise of power. Lippmann says,

Men, have sought it in custom, in the dictates of reason, in religious revelation, endeavoring always to set up some check upon the exercise of force. This is the meaning of the long debate about Natural Law. This is the meaning of a thousand years of struggle to bring the sovereign under a constitution, to establish for the individual and for voluntary associations of men rights which they can enforce against kings, barons, magnates, majorities, and mobs. This is the meaning of the struggle to separate the church from the state, to emancipate conscience, learning, the arts, education, and commerce from the inquisitor, the censor, the monopolist, the policeman, and the hangman.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> *Good*, Ch. 1

This seems to suggest that there is a pragmatic reason to rearticulate the basis of liberalism as the resistance to arbitrary power and its dismantling. Similar to the humanism of *Morals*, reason guides Lippmann's search for sustainable liberalism to a legitimate option for the operation of philosophy in the public sphere; unlike *Morals* Lippmann has, through reason, found legitimacy specifically in tradition to push back against the foundationless rhetoric which supports collectivist and authoritarian regimes. There is some instrumentality to his adoption of custom and religious revelation as bulwarks against arbitrary rule, but the long history of debate and practice has formed these arenas of civility as foundations and made them more supported than the directionless alternative: "The burden of proof is upon those who would reject the ecumenical tradition of the western world. It is for them to show that their cult of the Providential State is in truth the new revelation they think it is, and that it is not, as a few still believe, the gigantic heresy of an apostate generation."<sup>233</sup> It remains ambiguous if Lippmann has found a solid foundation in Nature, though it is clear he has lost faith in a foundationless Historical method to provide value and direction necessary to protect liberalism.

Another feature Lippmann has carried with him through all of his works is that the modern world, or industrial revolution, has precipitated a great change upon the nature of human organization. He does not abandon this principle in *Good*, or later in *Essays*. In fact, in *Good*, a central piece of his argument denouncing authoritarian collectivist regimes is that the sheer complexity of the market economy which does so much to enhance the effective, material freedom of its constituents, is fundamentally compromised by the

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<sup>233</sup> *Good*, Ch. 1

attempt to plan human activity. “Directive laws, by their nature static and inert, are technically suited to the highly dynamic character of the industrial revolution.”<sup>234</sup> This is a key point. In Book II Lippmann argues that as a general principle the planned economy seeks to make its plan manifest—the plans of the people are therefore overridden or ignored. Only a perfectly benevolent despotism makes freedom compatible with the planned economy, and the planners of a collectivist society will always hope against reason that their despots will be just. “Thus, by a kind of tragic irony, the search for security and a rational society, if it seeks salvation through political authority, ends in the most irrational form of government imaginable in the dictatorship of casual oligarchs, who have no hereditary title, no constitutional origin or responsibility, who cannot be replaced except by violence.”<sup>235</sup> The collectivists’ resignation to hope for progress through benevolent despotism is to also ignore that they have no plan, no recourse for selecting or replacing the despot, thus, “The reformers who are staking their hopes on good despots, because they are so eager to plan the future, leave unplanned that on which all their hopes depend.”<sup>236</sup>

In Book III, Lippmann further elaborates the principles of the regime of peace, the government of laws rather than the government by commands. He fully embraces the American founders, going so far as to call them geniuses, but curiously, this should not necessarily be looked upon as a sharp divergence from his earlier contempt for the founders’ methods. Lippmann’s frustration with the founders’ mechanistic constitution was primarily because he found it to be a cloak to retard society and secure vested interests and

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<sup>234</sup> *Good*, Ch. 2

<sup>235</sup> *Good*, Ch. 6

<sup>236</sup> *Good*, Ch. 6

privileges of the propertied classes. The ‘Herbert Spencerians’ and others had used the law to pervert the intent of the law such that it would protect property derived from the corporate capitalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This perversion is at the expense of Adam Smith and other classical liberals’ ideal of an “obvious system of simple and natural liberty.” Interpreted correctly, Lippmann seems to think that returning to the foundations of the founders’ prescriptions and particularly their reliance on natural law can undo the very evils with which he had identified them earlier in his career.

Lippmann argues that the founders’ prescience lay in their perception that the political problem of their age was not only the one that faced the new liberals of the old world, to seek protection against arbitrary power, but rather, having achieved roughly that freedom, their problem was how to organize the power of the masses. Lippmann identifies the founders’ position with his position in *Phantom* (which he cites at the end of this quotation): “And since it was obvious that no mass of men can as a mass make more than the simplest decisions of yes and no and is physically incapable of administering its affairs, the practical question was how a government could be made to represent the people.”<sup>237</sup> In fact, Lippmann still declares some of the mechanical nature of the constitution to be “defective”<sup>238</sup>, but this doesn’t negate the deep wisdom of their system of checks and balances which guarantees as far as the document is able, the rule of law instead of the arbitrary law of commands, and protects the true will of the people against the ‘arithmetic’ calculation of the tally of votes belonging to individuals who are easily beguiled by

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<sup>237</sup> *Good*, Ch. 12

<sup>238</sup> He is referring to the institutional imbalances of representation as they relate to complex modern curios such as the management of the compensated economy of the free collectivism.



demagoguery. Lippmann notes that Madison would be unsurprised by Hitler, and that it was against leaders such as him that the founders set up their system of elaborate representation.

Book IV delves more deeply into the nature of the law and the common law foundation of the constitution of the founders. Lippmann makes the case that the checks and balances of the constitution are inherent in the development of the common law tradition, and particularly in the English struggle since the Magna Carta to check the privileges of the King and of arbitrary power. "Constitutional restraints and bills of rights, the whole apparatus of responsible government and of an independent judiciary, the conception of due process of law in courts, in legislatures, among executives, are but the rough approximations by which men have sought to exorcise the devil of arbitrariness in human relations."<sup>239</sup> Without these approximations, Lippmann argues, men have no appeal against arbitrariness, no recourse from the immediate situation. This seems to incline him to a grounding in Nature, for he also says that, "Among a people which does not try to obey this higher law, no constitution is worth the paper it is written on: though they have all the forms of liberty, they will not enjoy its substance."<sup>240</sup> Effectively the positive law is tied to a larger ideal of precedential consideration as a part of a body of law tied to serious reasoning about the nature of things. Lippmann senses criticism and responds preemptively, "To those who ask where this higher law is to be found, the answer is that it is a progressive discovery of men striving to civilize themselves, and that its scope and

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<sup>239</sup> *Good*, Ch. 15

<sup>240</sup> *Good*, Ch. 15

implications are a gradual revelation that is by no means completed.”<sup>241</sup> He situates law, and therefore his constitutionalism as an unfolding, from Hammurabi to the human rights doctrine he began to explore in *Morals*, in pursuit of greater liberty within a constructive, stable government. This does not appear to be an appeal to process, for Lippmann also seems to sense the inherent fragility of the unfolding of common law, thus repudiating any sort of historicism or relativism in the law as reaching its own apotheosis.

The pursuit of good law and of good institutions is tied to Lippmann’s conception of man. Consistent through all his works is an insistence that man be placed at the center of politics. In *Good* Lippmann’s consistency on this principle leads him to argue that because of man’s inherent drive for liberty and freedom, because of an ‘energy’ within us that pushes us forward with an image of man with inviolable rights and duties, we must order politics around civility and dignity. To stabilize a liberal democratic regime, to render it profitable against the collectivist totalitarian regimes budding in Europe, and nascently present in some of FDR’s excesses, modern liberalism must re-interrogate its foundations around this common drive:

Its essence is an energy, however we choose to describe it, which causes men to assert their humanity, and on occasion to die rather than to renounce it. This is the energy the seers discerned when they discovered the soul of man. It is this energy which has moved men to rise above themselves, to feel a divine discontent with their condition, to invent, to labor, to reason with one another, to imagine the good life and to desire it. This energy must be mighty. For it has overcome the inertia of the primordial savage. Against this mighty energy the heresies of an epoch will not prevail. For the will to be free is

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<sup>241</sup> *Good*, Ch. 15

perpetually renewed in every individual who uses his faculties and affirms his manhood.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> *Good*, Ch. 17

## Chapter Seven – Making Liberalism Sustainable: The Public Philosophy

The years surrounding the Second World War were predictably busy for Walter Lippmann. Still bearing scars from his struggle navigating the personal and political divide between realism and Wilsonian idealism, Lippmann's position as one of America's preeminent political commentators again thrust him into the spotlight of civic discourse. In the thirties, he walked a fine line, seeking to make a case for at least some limited American involvement without alienating the strong isolationist sentiment that was prominent in the country at the time. However, with the fall of France, Lippmann was forced to make more explicit the degree to which American security depended on British independence and Anglo-American control of the Atlantic.<sup>243</sup> If the British naval power was destroyed or captured by the Germans, Lippmann argued that for the first time in American history we would be threatened at home. Remarkably, Lippmann's policy prescriptions still displayed a strong consistency to his pre-WWI concerns, particularly in defense of the Atlantic corridor. Ronald Steel notes that Lippmann recycled some of his rhetoric from that time in a 6/15/40 "Today and Tomorrow" article,<sup>244</sup> and went further, arguing that the lesson from the previous war was that our interest lay in thwarting unlimited German submarine warfare and keeping the Atlantic corridor safe. To this end Lippmann labored tirelessly, even enlisting General Pershing and others to support circumvention of the Neutrality Acts, which forbade weapons sales to Axis or Allied powers. Prior to Pearl Harbor, Lippmann was also noticeably less worried about the Japanese threat except the extent to which our navy would be threatened by a war in two oceans.

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<sup>243</sup> Steel, 382

<sup>244</sup> Steel, 382

Yet, none of his policies for keeping America safe and out of the war would prove effective enough to accomplish their aims. Anticipating the conflict to come, in an address to a reunion of his Harvard class, Lippmann foresaw that, “We shall turn from the soft vices in which a civilization decays...we shall return to the stern virtues by which a civilization is made, we shall do this because, at long last, we know that we must, because finally we begin to see that the hard way is the only enduring way.” The soft mores of the civilization that took its stability for granted were about to be tested. In late 1941 we would write that, “The modern skeptical world has been taught for some 200 years a conception of human nature in which the reality of evil, so well-known to the ages of faith, has been discounted. Almost all of us grew up in an environment of such easy optimism that we can scarcely know what is meant, though our ancestors knew it well, by the satanic will. We shall have to recover this forgotten but essential truth—along with many others we lost when, thinking we were enlightened and advanced, we were merely shallow and blind.”<sup>245</sup> Lippmann was not perhaps a pessimist in the sense of America’s hope for victory in the coming conflicts, yet in the midst of post-depression listlessness, the recovery of the human spirit required to endure those wars seemed far from vouchsafed.

By the end of the war Lippmann had emerged as the outstanding American foreign affairs expert. In 1943 he would write *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic*, where he repudiated a growing idealist belief in world government, and instead grounded policy in national interest and balanced alliances. The dissolving of wartime alliances after WWI he argued had led to the inability to check German power which began WWII. It expressed

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<sup>245</sup> Today and Tomorrow, October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1941

primarily realism and national interest in foreign affairs, though Lippmann would modify his thesis slightly in his next work, *U.S. War Aims (1943)*. Writing in the shadow of the failed peace accords of WWI, Lippmann acknowledges that the lack of shared values between the US and the Soviet Union would prevent the sort of cooperation between nations for which he argued a year prior. Instead he favored conceding a sphere of influence of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe (with parallel spheres for the US in the Western hemisphere), and arguing against limitless interventionism. Lippmann saw lingering Wilsonianism as the greatest threat to secure this new peace, and instead argued that by tying together national interest with stabilizing alliances, international relations could maintain moral perspective on international conduct. Lippmann's brand of realpolitik attempted to save morality against moralism by limiting the assumptions of intervention though the balance of national interest in the coming cold war. And though Lippmann was sharply critical of interventionists, Wilsonians, and other globalists in the first 5 years after the war, he would accept the general consensus behind the US cold war strategy between 1950-65, while often arguing and critiquing some ways in which it was implemented.<sup>246</sup>

Though Lippmann gained even more fame and respect for his writings on foreign affairs, it was the domestic situation which continued to drive the development of his political philosophy. Lippmann's refutation of this ungrounded liberal democracy began the entire project of *Essays in the Public Philosophy (1955)*. He opens the work under the subheading "my reason for writing this book" with the comment, "During the fateful summer of 1938 I began writing a book in an effort to come to terms in my own mind and

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<sup>246</sup> Steel, 490

heart with the mounting disorder in our Western society.”<sup>247</sup> Like so many progressives before him, his reliance on the observable progress of the world was halted with the first World War, and the depths of the possible evil seen in the Second World War not only reinforced his suspicion of ‘progress,’ but forced him to reconsider the foundation of a secularism unchained from the vocabulary necessary to condemn such evil. To this end, Lippmann advocated two lines of reasoning in *Essays*: One that the totalitarian cataclysms of the past century had to do with executive weakness and ineffectualness in constitutional government; and two, increasingly secular societies lacked a common language, the traditions of civility, to bind them together, and through which laws could command with authority and legitimacy. The problems are linked, Lippmann would argue, through the inability of the modern masses to “believe in intangible realities”<sup>248</sup> thus stripping executive authority of wisdom and veneration needed to balance with the more representational legislature. The difficult argument would depend on the fraught rearticulation of the natural law doctrine for modern society.

For these reasons, Lippmann’s mature work of political philosophy is undeniably *Essays in the Public Philosophy (1955)*, his great attempt to recover a place for natural law doctrine within a society struggling with postmodernity and purposelessness. Whatever vicissitudes Lippmann’s thought underwent, he always remained preeminently concerned with the problem of freedom in the modern world. *Essays* is no different. It is a crystallization of the issues with which he struggled through his career and the riddle at the heart of politics: human nature. Political freedom, as he had established in *Morals* had to be

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<sup>247</sup> *Essays*, Ch. 1

<sup>248</sup> *Essays*, Ch. 5

more than simply unencumbered movement, and yet was also tied to the material well-being of the individual. After struggling to balance the issues in *Method to Good*, he concluded that to extend political freedom in both the realm of the mind and the soul, and the material well-being of the citizen, the maximization of this effect, of freedom would come through public philosophy. Where collectivist sentiments of *Method* and *Imperative* led in some sense to a logical conclusion in the extremes of the authoritarianisms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the trick it seemed was to provide for legitimate authority without succumbing to totalitarian impulses engendered by proletarian insecurity, whether that insecurity be of directionless liberalism, or economic scarcity. While *Good* had elaborated the beginning of a liberalism which remained committed to the rebuttal of unrestrained laissez-faire, and authority issued through constitutional law instead of command, Lippmann clearly remained unsettled by his concluding prescription to seek out the energy “which causes men to assert their humanity.”<sup>249</sup> His notes for *Essays*, which began about the time *Good* was published and his pessimism peaked, reflected the paralysis of democracies in the face of totalitarianism, and included scrawling such as, “the deracinated masses...A civilization must have a religion...Communism and Nazism are religions of proletarianized masses...Laws which lead to monopoly and proletarianism destroy law and are a method of civilized suicide.”<sup>250</sup> He was in search of a ‘religion’ that could serve the modern needs of liberalism and extend political freedom to as many, as effectively, and as securely as possible. It is for this end that he sought out the fundamental tenets of the public philosophy through the natural law tradition.

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<sup>249</sup> *Good*, Ch. 17

<sup>250</sup> Steel, 491



Part of Lippmann's central thesis in *Essays*, is that the founders who established our free and democratic political institutions "adhered to a public philosophy." "Though there have been many schools in this philosophy, there are fundamental principles common to all of them: that, in Cicero's words, 'law is the bond of civil society,' and ... that these laws can be developed and refined by rational discussion, and that the highest laws are those upon which all rational men of good will, when fully informed, will tend to agree."<sup>251</sup> Lippmann contends that our modern democracies stand radically divorced from this foundation, and that apart from this public philosophy, liberal democracy "is not an intelligible form of government". He sees an inherent inconsistency between the rejection of reason's ability to uncover the natural law, and the belief that men in a condition of freedom are capable of self-governance. In the founders Lippmann saw a constitutionalism established on the basis of the balance of authority vs. authoritarianism. Unlike Diderot, and the Jacobin heretics who wished essentially to abolish government, "Jefferson and his colleagues, on the other hand, were interested in government. They were in rebellion because they were being denied the rights of representation and of participation which they, like other subjects of the same King, would have enjoyed had they lived in England. The Americans were in rebellion against the 'usurpations' of George III, not against authority as such but, against the abuse of authority."<sup>252</sup> The founders rebelled in order to take control of government, not to "deny or subvert ... the moral foundations of [its] authority."<sup>253</sup> In so

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<sup>251</sup> *Essays*, Ch. 9

<sup>252</sup> *Essays*, Ch. 1

<sup>253</sup> *Essays*, Ch. 1

doing, the founders were exemplary planners, rebels, and liberals whose pursuit of political freedom was grounded in Nature in their declaration of independence.

Despite his linking the founders with the natural law tradition and effective public philosophy, Lippmann still had issues with the modern balance of the authority of the executive in their constitutional order. The problem arises due to the very nature of mass politics, the center of *Opinion* and *Phantom*, and the difficulty in representing the will of the people without precipitating the tyranny of the majority. Lippmann sets up his discussion of executive power by declaring an emergency “when elected assemblies and mass opinions become decisive in the state, when there are no statesmen to resist the inclination of the voters and there are only politicians to excite and to exploit them.”<sup>254</sup> As a result, in the modern state “There is then a general tendency to be drawn downward, as by the force of gravity, towards insolvency, towards the insecurity of factionalism, towards the erosion of liberty, and towards hyperbolic wars.”<sup>255</sup> The only response is to reevaluate the foundations of popular government, particularly in the management of executive authority as a balance to exaggerated legislative representation.

Lippmann warns that democratic states are in particular danger of the devitalization of executive authority because the electoral process routinely refreshes their dependency on their constituency. He therefore argues that in America “the constitutional mechanisms have never themselves been sufficient to protect the executive.”<sup>256</sup> A representative body is justly responsible to its constituency, and helps revitalize the proper

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<sup>254</sup> *Essays*, Ch. 4

<sup>255</sup> *Essays*, Ch. 4

<sup>256</sup> *Essays*, Ch. 5

role for popular sovereignty and consent of the governed. However, the executive, Lippmann argues, should not be an agent of the people, but rather an agent of the laws. “For while the executive is in honor bound not to consider himself as the agent of his electors, the representative is expected to be, within the limits of reason, and the general public interest, their agent.”<sup>257</sup> Because of the very nature of the electoral process representation is confused with governing. Lippmann says explicitly that he attributes the “democratic disasters of the twentieth century to a derangement of these primary functions.”<sup>258</sup> This is largely consistent with the track of Lippmann’s view of executive power throughout his career, though instead of the early trope of masterful men who are able to transcend petty legal hurdles and realities, Lippmann has linked well-constructed executive power to a need to reexamine the constitutional order on which a strong executive depends. He makes one practical argument, that the exigencies of war and reconstruction have expanded the power of the purse which is in legislative control (perhaps rightly so, perhaps not), but he also makes a linked argument: “The other development which has acted to enfeeble the executive power is the growing incapacity of the large majority of the democratic peoples to believe in intangible realities.”<sup>259</sup> Lippmann argues that the legislative and the executive must balance each other, but only points to the capacity of the masses to believe in intangible realities as the possible solution. It is a frustrating lacuna. However, Lippmann’s point is that secularization has stripped the executive of the prestige it needs in order to govern the people according not to their desires and passions, but their needs. This is not so far a departure from *Morals*, where he

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<sup>257</sup> *Essays*, Ch. 5

<sup>258</sup> *Essays*, Ch. 5

<sup>259</sup> *Essays*, Ch. 5

argued that statesmanship “consists in giving the people not what they want but what they will learn to want. It requires the courage which is possible only in a mind that is detached from the agitations of the moment. It requires the insight which comes only from an objective and discerning knowledge of facts, and a high and imperturbable disinterestedness.”<sup>260</sup> But Lippmann’s thought has developed, and he detects that the mechanism by which the necessary balance between the legislative and executive, between representation and statesmanship, is upset is the secularization of ‘men’s minds.’

In reflection one could suggest that a certain degree of reverence for the Constitution and founding principles could furnish a facsimile of the majesty required for good executive governorship, but that is not the direction Lippmann takes. In fact, he seems to hold the practical concerns of balancing the legislative and executive in abeyance, suggesting by moving forward to a delineation of the natural law, public philosophy, and traditions of civility that somehow de-secularizing men’s minds is the only way to revitalize the executive in a responsible way. It is probable that for readers not predisposed against the very concept of natural rights, this is the most frustrating intellectual gap in Lippmann’s *Essays*. Still, his logic is theoretically sound, if not wholly convincing, and his subject matter does not position itself to easy exegesis.

In addressing natural law, Lippmann retained one element common to the progressive mind: he saw in the modern world a new and unmet challenge to the old order of natural law. “The school of natural law has not been able to cope with the pluralism of the later modern age—with the pluralism which has resulted from the industrial revolution

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<sup>260</sup> *Morals*, Ch. 13

and from the enfranchisement and the emancipation of the masses of the people.”<sup>261</sup> The mature Lippmann, however, instead of rebelling against the tradition, cites that very rebellion as the cause for our inability to cope with modernity’s new challenges. Because we have lost the means of rational inquiry into the structure of natural law, we have lost the ability to adapt the foundational idea of nature to a changing society. As a result, we must seek in the natural law a new understanding for a world at the brink of relativism and postmodernity.

Perhaps the most crucial section of *Essays*, is Chapter 9, “The Renewal of the Public Philosophy,” and its first subheading, “The Capacity to Believe.” Lippmann was not the only thinker who had become sensitive to the questions of postmodern relativism. The political theorist, Leo Strauss, was one of these to whom Lippmann had turned for explication of natural law/natural right.<sup>262</sup> Strauss identified as the chief characteristic of this new modernism as that which “explicitly condemns to oblivion the notion of eternity.”<sup>263</sup> By rejecting the seriousness of the theoretical question of natural rights philosophy, the American public was left foundationless, adrift among nihilism and relativism. Strauss and Lippmann both thought it crucial to seek the revitalization of natural right because, as Strauss said, “the more we cultivate nihilism the less are we able to be loyal members of

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<sup>261</sup> *Essays*, Ch. 8

<sup>262</sup> It is critical to mention that in political philosophy natural law and natural right are not the same issue, particularly for Leo Strauss. Lippmann’s interest however has the effect of collapsing the definitions because he is very broadly seeking understanding that can repair the capacity of men to ‘believe’ in intangible ideas in the modern world. When Lippmann says, “higher law” “natural law” ‘natural right’ he rarely if ever disambiguates nuances, generally satisfied that each term accomplishes to some degree the hoped for effect of, in Strauss’ idiom, ‘rescuing the concept of eternity from oblivion.’ It is unclear to what extent this is a rhetorical device, and to what extent it is a failure of analysis. For more detail about these nuances in Strauss; thought, see, Leo Strauss, “On Natural Law,” in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, Edited by Thomas Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), Ch. 6. And, Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1953)

<sup>263</sup> Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) pg. 55

society.”<sup>264</sup> At a critical point in *Essays* Lippmann quotes Strauss’ *Natural Right and History* indirectly, saying, “Yet when we have demonstrated the need for the public philosophy, how do we prove that the need can be satisfied?” The nature of the indirect quote leaves some ambiguity, but refers to page six of Strauss’ introduction to that work wherein Strauss discusses the temptation to escape the rhetorical obscurantism of the relativists who reject the concept of natural right, warning that “our aversion to fanatical obscurantism must not lead us to embrace natural right in a spirit of fanatical obscurantism. Let us beware of the danger of pursuing a Socratic goal with the means, and the temper of Thrasymachus. Certainly the seriousness of the need of natural right does not prove that the need can be satisfied.”<sup>265</sup> To the question of instrumentality (does Lippmann believe that there is such a thing as natural right to be uncovered, or is it merely a useful device for the masses?), this quotation speaks volumes. Having read Strauss’ argument, and presumably understood it, Lippmann would have understood the futility of engaging ‘natural right’ through any form of sophistry. Indeed, Lippmann seems rather to have embraced Strauss’ admonition and advocacy for philosophic openness, finding great consonance with Strauss’ claim that, “The gravity of the issue imposes upon us the duty of a detached, theoretical, impartial discussion.”<sup>266</sup>

Where Strauss sought to revitalize the theoretical question of natural right, Lippmann was more actively engaged in producing a means by which it could be renewed in the public sphere. To that end, Lippmann offers two examples of natural rights in

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<sup>264</sup> *Natural Right in History*, 6

<sup>265</sup> Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, pg. 6

<sup>266</sup> Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, pg. 6-7

practice: Property, and Freedom of Speech. Lippmann's discussion of property relies heavily on a discussion of William Blackstone and his *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. Lippmann repeats his argument from *Drift* that stock holding and other forms of artificial private property are unsupportable within the tradition of property rights, yet instead of dismissing the notion as pragmatically undesirable, he examines the common law to show that the public philosophy, aligned with the ends of civilization, commanded both a respect for property rights and a refusal to make them absolute and above the needs of a particular society. The discussion is valuable because it forces Lippmann to refine further his idea of the natural law: "When we speak of these principles as natural laws, we must be careful. They are not scientific 'laws' like the laws of the motions of the heavenly bodies. They do not describe human behavior as it is. They prescribe what it should be. They do not enable us to predict what men will actually do. They are the principles of right behavior in the good society, governed by the Western traditions of civility."<sup>267</sup> Reason, he continues, is grounded in examination of the nature of things, and there are therefore obvious limits on the consensus of reason. And further, though there could be a plurality of principles devised by seeking the natural law, without seeking laws as they "should be" society itself cannot be ordered around "freedom and the good life."<sup>268</sup>

In the case of Speech, Lippmann's argument is very similar: free speech needs to be respected in order to have a flourishing society, 'free and good,' but the rights of free speech are also not absolute. The authoritarianisms of communism and fascism exist to propagate their own dogmas, and censorship in liberal society can only, and should, be

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<sup>267</sup> *Essays, Ch. 9*

<sup>268</sup> *Essays, Ch. 9*

delineated by the degree to which speech adheres to the principles of liberalism and the public philosophy (the two seem to have become linked): “The borderline between sedition and radical reform is between the denial and the acceptance of the sovereign principle of the public philosophy: that we live in a rational order in which by sincere inquiry and rational debate we can distinguish the true and the false, the right and the wrong.”<sup>269</sup> Inherent in the public philosophy then is a need for positive affirmation of the values of liberalism’s underlying assumptions, along with a recognition that “tolerance of all opinions leads to intolerance.”<sup>270</sup> Though Lippmann does illuminate a reasonable procedure for establishing a connection between freedom of speech and the values of public philosophy as open debate in pursuit of truth, engaging censorship and allowing debate seem left to the prudence of authority.

These examples highlight the role of prudence in establishing and maintaining liberal order. This has the effect of redoubling the emphasis and importance of good executive function in a liberal society. Unfortunately, Lippmann left this reasoning somewhat scattered after making the initial point about executive authority being linked to public philosophy/the will to believe. Lippmann puts himself in a position where he must elaborate the practice of statesmanship in a general way, while remaining consonant with the demands of a liberal society’s reliance on natural rights and with the revered executive restrained by prudence. The remaining chapters are a gloss on the sort of statesmanship implied by a liberalism dependent upon liberal society.

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<sup>269</sup> *Essays, Ch. 9*

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Confusingly, Lippmann makes an attempt to equate the classical rationalism of Aristotle with the pragmatism of James and Pierce. From James he argues that in the natural 'flux' of things, "things are off their balance. Whatever equilibrium our finite experiences attain to are but provisional . . . everything is in ... a surrounding world of other things."<sup>271</sup><sup>272</sup> Lippmann seems to be undoing the arguments he made for grounding a version of natural rights in reason, but instead suggesting that they are determined by historical contingency: "Words like liberty, equality, fraternity, justice, have various meanings which reflect the variability of the flux of things. The different meanings are rather like different clothes, each good for a season, for certain weather and for a time of day, none good for all times."<sup>273</sup> Yet, on the next page, Lippmann is quoting Aristotle, insisting that the appropriate application of reason appeal to the "nature of things." Lippmann's marriage of experimental pluralism and classical political rationalism is ill advised and not well thought out, but it appears to be the case that he takes from his pragmatist roots not the historicity of essential virtues, but rather the spirit of experimentation and modulation within and for particular societies. This is a far cry from a conventionalist sophistry, however, because Lippmann constantly reiterates that the 'good society' depends on the standards and limits within certain conceptions of these virtues. Essentially, though different meanings of 'liberty' and 'freedom' might be predominately effective in a given time or place, he also insists upon hard limits to the extent of those different interpretations.

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<sup>271</sup> *Essays*, Ch. 10

<sup>272</sup> William James, *A Pluralistic Universe*. In *Essays in Radical Empiricism and A Pluralistic Universe* (1947), pp. 88, 90

<sup>273</sup> *Essays*, Ch. 10

Lippmann attempts to settle any philosophical disquiet by exploring the role of the executive who must make these judgments through the Aristotelian approach to statesmanship and politics. In the good society, judgments which reflect statesmanship are not based on strict understanding of a set of rigid laws, but rather reflect the principle that social conditions are inextricably linked to the state of men's souls by employing similarly diverse methods to achieve fixed ends. The Jamesian pluralist method can be considered in part consonant with this approach.<sup>274</sup> Yet, Lippmann does not in the end embrace James, but rather Aristotle in his approach for the application of natural law by appealing to the Aristotelian virtue of prudence: "In this actual world of diversity and change, how do we find the right rule? We shall not find it, says Aristotle, if we look for more 'clearness' than 'the subject matter admits of.' Matters concerned with conduct and what is good for us have no fixity, and, he added, 'the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion.'"<sup>275</sup> The rule, Lippmann continues, to which these agents appeal is always 'the nature of things'. Consider the extreme and defect of courage: a man who rushes to all danger, and a man who flees from everything. The proper application of the virtue of courage is a mean between the two, though Lippmann cautions, "We must not think of the mean as being a fixed point between the extremes. ... The true mean is at the tension of push and pull, of attraction and resistance among the extremes."<sup>276</sup>

Though Lippmann very closely follows Aristotle, his critics often misunderstand this very crucial point in Lippmann's work. Lippmann recognizes that the outcome of this sort

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<sup>274</sup> Though if pressed on a natural right's efficacy, it seems unlikely that Lippmann would be willing to jettison an 'unpragmatic' natural right, thus limiting the pluralist assumptions. See again the conversation on instrumentality.

<sup>275</sup> *Essays, Ch. 10*

<sup>276</sup> *Essays,, Ch. 10*

of political practice is “imprecise and inconclusive,” but that there” is little reason to think that the wisdom of the world can ever rise above these imperfections.”<sup>277</sup> Lippmann essentially places man in a tensional, metaxic relationship at the center of liberal politics. The success of the liberal project depends on philosophers who know human nature, and can communicate it through the public philosophy to the democratic masses.<sup>278</sup> The responsibility extends to those who must communicate the public philosophy and to those who must be open to it. Liberal politics then depend on philosophical openness, openness to the questions of eternity. Lippmann knows the intellectual milieu into which he writes is less than amenable to this suggestion, and he says near the end of his book that, “I have been arguing, hopefully and wishfully, that it be possible to alter the terms of discourse if a convincing demonstration can be made that the principles of the good society are not, in Sartre's phrase, invented and chosen — that the conditions which must be met if there is to be a good society are there, outside our wishes, where they can be discovered by rational inquiry, and developed and adapted and refined by rational discussion.”<sup>279</sup> To push back against the “anomy of our society” a prudent public philosophy needs to be rearticulated that has at its core the belief that the principles of a good society are not merely contingent, but can be discovered through reason and refined through discussion. Though he grounds this seeking of public philosophy in nature, it is also a re-grounding in the fundamental faith of Liberalism that left to their own devices, given rights such as freedom of speech, they will move towards a good society. The addendum Lippmann offers, is simply that to keep this faith, a society must reject foundationlessness which is anathema to liberal order,

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<sup>277</sup> *Essays, Ch. 10*

<sup>278</sup> *Essays, Ch. 11*

<sup>279</sup> *Essays, Ch. 11*

not to mention very ineffective and prone to authoritarianism. A public philosophy allows Lippmann a balance to the authority and legitimacy of popular government without devaluating and pushing executive authority to extreme ends. Lippmann recognizes that the premise of liberalism cannot be the condition of men's souls, suggesting a return to religious rule or orders, but neither will a society flourish when it has at its heart no motivating principle. By remaining open to these principles, believing that they can be discovered and refined through reason, he pushes against both reactionaries and progressives, finally finding a home, or at least a foundation, for a sustainable liberalism.

## Conclusion

*Essays* was Walter Lippmann's last book of political philosophy. It was a conclusion to a life in search of an understanding of the liberal regime, and the difficulty of the text reflects the nature of the intractable, vast, and uncertain problems faced by any study of politics. *Essays* is not meant to be a final standard of governance for which Lippmann was advocating, and as much was indicated by the tentativeness of the title, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*. Rather, it reflected a concentration of the arc of Lippmann's career as a friendly critic for American democracy.

There is great consistency in the focus of Lippmann's views, and in the way he approached politics, from the beginning of his career, until the end. However, this is not to suggest that his work forms a comprehensive political philosophy. There are continuities to be sure, even perhaps a consistent animating spirit, but Lippmann was too active a thinker, and too engaged in experimentation and public discourse to offer a systematic theory of politics. The value of his thought, seen most prominently by distilling it through his works of political philosophy, is in facilitating evaluation around a central theme: the sustainable liberal polity.

Lippmann's intellectual journey traced, mirrored and reflected the journey of American liberalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, beginning in his early progressive idealism, and culminating in his return to the stability of human rights and political freedom. The purpose of this dissertation has been to understand this journey as a defense of the liberal democratic state, and the political freedoms upon which it depends. By appeal to both Nature and History in each phase of his career, Lippmann always positioned himself

between the reactionary seeking a return from liberalism's excesses, and the progressive full of hope without restraint. Lippmann's philosophical openness and thoughtfulness kept his outlook too philosophical to be ideological, and too curious to reject out of hand arguments from idealistic progressives or democracy's more severe critics. Lippmann occupied a role of conscience and friendly critic, ultimately a consistent supporter of the liberal democratic state. Despite his eventual conclusion that liberalism lacked direction without the 'traditions of civility,' he was certainly no reactionary. Likewise, he was never a blithe idealist, displaying as early as *Drift* an intense concern about the direction and limits of scientific inquiry and organization. Through his entire career Lippmann had a sense that the indeterminable freedom of liberal society was both its great strength and its Achilles heel, and that it must be guided without conceding the extreme good it offers mankind.

In *Preface* Lippmann's enthusiasm for the promise of the organization of liberal societies allowed him to embrace a host of typical progressive positions, but his theorizing was oddly conflicted by his Freudian psychoanalysis, a confused yearning for essentialism, and his misunderstanding of the founders' constitutionalism. The young Lippmann saw the founders only as 'routineers' and missed the ways in which they also appealed to human nature as the guide to politics. Lippmann shared their distrust of democracy, but wouldn't fully appreciate their agreements until decades later. *Drift* as a sequel to *Preface* fills in the inchoate executive functions of the leaders who 'interpret will and sentiment' around inflexible constitutionalism, painting Teddy Roosevelt as the archetypal industrial statesman capable of taking down barriers to progress. Yet at the culminating point of his argument Lippmann retreats from his own conclusion concerning authority. Though convinced that society's lack of will and direction (drift) required scientific organization

(mastery), Lippmann could not escape the corollary problems of his own conclusion: what would then guide science? He recognized that no internal mechanism could guide science to a specific end in History, but rather that that end had to be found in some human investigation into the nature of things. Lippmann's optimism in the future of scientific management suggested that he did have some measure of progressive faith in the direction and movement of History, but it was a faith furnished by the empirical progressivism of observable progress, declining scarcity, and expanding freedoms. His philosophical openness led him to question the direction of his own brand of scientific exceptionalism, grasping instead for another sort of guide.

After the First World War, and Lippmann's conflicted relationship with Wilsonian idealism, many progressives were forced to renounce their empirical progressivism in favor of a fatalistic version that radically placed its hopes on apotheosis in History. But Lippmann was already questioning the logical conclusions of progressivism before the war, and was more concerned with the root causes of misrule. At the heart of his critique of the omniscient citizen and the tyranny of the uninformed masses was the understanding that the case for self-government depends on the extent to which the citizen can himself choose good government above the self-centeredness of his own opinions, and the pictures in his head. Lippmann's policy prescriptions in the middle stage of his career underscore his continued insistence that the modern world required fresh thinking, unbound from old world taboos and mechanical thinking. However, he also sought a foundation in a notion of 'truth' independent of the pseudo-environments of the 'pictures in people's heads.' His endorsement of intelligence bureaus seems undemocratic, but his politics had moved from 'masterful' statesmen alone, to a sincere focus on the preconditions for self-government. In

this manner he expanded the role of the democrat by attempting to describe some way to ensure both self-government and political freedom.

However, these two aims could not be easily reconciled. Lippmann had no legislative program to offer by the end of *Phantom*, and retreated into the moral realm of the individual in hopes of cultivating a spirit of the disinterested humanist who could be a better statesman or citizen in the dangerous, modern world to come. Lippmann laid some foundations for his later work in *Essays*, but ultimately tried to reject both History as a guide, and Nature. *Morals* was a tenuous concoction of experimental pluralism, and an essentialist longing which refused to acknowledge revelation in any capacity of authority. However, this subtly moved Lippmann to the precipice of his great problem: where is the authority needed to give liberalism its direction? By now his critique of the 'acids of modernity' and the resulting directionlessness of liberal society were taken for granted, and he hoped to rest in some great articulation of the 'disinterested humanist' who could serve the practical needs of society without subjecting himself to dogmas from History or Nature. Lippmann could not escape the critique of his old teacher, Santayana, that he had removed the humanity from his humanism, and was ultimately forced to move closer to a foundation in Nature by the time he wrote *Essays* (and perhaps *Good*) as he found it necessary to somehow ground his humanism in 'tradition,' and find direction by taking seriously the claims of Nature.

Lippmann was violently pulled back from his acetic humanism by the Wall Street crash of 1929, and all of its corollary theoretical and practical considerations for politics. Economic stability, one of the great promises of a successful liberalism, had been



threatened and its underlying premises brought into question. Lippmann's difficult relationship with FDR and the New Deal had to do mostly with the distinction he drew between emergency measures, and unconstitutional reform, the former which he felt was necessary and proper. He was convinced that some measure of collectivism was necessary to account for the practical consequences of the modern economy, a conclusion he had reached through discussions with Keynes, but was also consonant with his early, very typically progressive concern with the exigencies of an economy within a closed frontier. And yet his advocacy for a limited, or 'free' collectivism developed at the same time he established a deeper understanding of how self-governance depends on good law and political freedom rather than simply the proper direction of authority, or the proper disinterested humanist disposition. He concluded that to stabilize a liberal democratic regime, and thwart the mounting totalitarianisms in Europe, and perhaps becoming present in FDR's America, modern liberalism had to confront and re-interrogate its own foundations in search of a common drive, a common purpose.

Lippmann found this purpose in the 'traditions of civility,' and a fresh understanding of the public philosophy. Confronted with WWII and its aftermath, Lippmann concluded that the war had been a result of devalued executive authority out of balance with legislative, popular authority. The increasing secularity of the liberal world threatened liberalism in a fundamental way because it left no common ground, no public philosophy, wherein to debate, understand, and act upon political problems. Lippmann was looking for a way to keep the basic principles of liberalism and political freedom operative in a society no longer buoyed by the expectation of apotheosis in History. His attempt to reinvigorate the principles of the good society by remaining open to them, by practicing a prudent,

classical statesmanship, was his culminating suggestion of the last best means to sustain the liberal state.

Nobody familiar with his career should be surprised to find Lippmann so comfortable asserting a prudent public philosophy whose creeping revival depends on the day to day activities of rearticulating it to the intractable mass public he described so well, and fought so hard to educate and understand. For all the messiness of political life which Lippmann was famed for both analyzing and confronting, he seems to have remained hopeful, despite his own brilliance in describing the challenges we face:

“There is not much doubt how the struggle is likely to end if it lies between those who, believing, and care very much—and those who, lacking belief, cannot care very much.”<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> *Essays, Ch. 11*

## Notes

Following Ronald Steel and other Lippmann chroniclers and commentators I will cite Lippmann's books by chapter reference. The reason for this convention is primarily because there are so many editions of his work, particularly in mass media paperback editions which make looking up citations by page number alone difficult. Lippmann typically writes in short form chapters, which make this version of indexing citation worthwhile, and it is why it has been so often employed by those who have studied him. What follows in this section of Notes is a list of books by Lippmann, both major works and reprints/compilations, and the appropriate abbreviation used in the text of the dissertation and in the shorthand citations. The full citation is contained in the bibliography.

### Major Works

*A Preface to Politics* [Preface]

*Drift and Mastery* [Drift]

*The Stakes of Diplomacy* [Stakes]

*The Political Scene* [Scene]

*Liberty and the News* [Liberty]

*Men of Destiny* [Destiny]

*American Inquisitors* [Inquisitors]

*Public Opinion* [Opinion]

*A Preface to Morals* [Morals]

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