

Chapter II

Nonrational Action

Introduction

A decision may be the result of our moral sensibilities or the product of our passions or of the "piled up layers of accumulated collective memory...the dammed up force of our mysterious ancestors within us."¹ A decision may also be the instrument to implement historical forces which we experience as external to ourselves which we must harness or of forces built into our very natures as human beings or of forces which we encounter in the environment in which the society developed. This chapter will explore these six perspectives on understanding a decision to go to war. I refer to them, for reasons which I will give shortly, as nonrational decisions, and the actions which follow as nonrational actions.

In a rational action, the decision and the reasons offered for making that decision are contestable. "Beliefs, on this view, have a rational foundation if they are defensible or challengeable, if reasons in their support can be offered or demanded. Thus understood, rationality serves as a presupposition of contestability: giving reasons makes contestation *possible*."² There is a presumption that a different balance of reasons could have persuaded the agent to do something other than what was decided. There is the presumption that after the decision is made and the action unfolds, the agent could admit that s/he was mistaken.

This does not mean that rational actions are not affected by moral sensibilities, passions and ancestral collective memories, or that the decisions are not taken within a context of historical or natural forces or a socio-cultural context - only that none of these are determinate of the decision that is made or of the action that follows. If an action is rational, one cannot deduce that the action was the 'thing to do' given the sensibilities, passions, beliefs of the agent or the historical, natural and socio-cultural conditions of the agent. Each influences the decision that is made and the action that follows. How it does is an issue that we will explore in the next chapters when we analyze rational decisions and actions. But before we do, it is important to understand non-rational actions that are moved by particular moral sensibilities, passions and collective memories and those that are said to be the products of historical, natural or circumstantial forces.

Non-rational actions are not the same as irrational behaviour. Non-rational actions have a close kinship with rational actions. They follow a deliberative process in at least three respects. Both are about events that are said to

be the responsibility of particular agents, whether individual or collective. In both non-rational and rational actions, the agents acknowledge the reasons for their actions; they understand what they are saying and the goals they intend to achieve. Thirdly, in both cases the agent is capable of attempting to translate those goals into action.

Rational actions differ from nonrational actions in that real choice is involved in a rational action. In a non-rational action, the agent will say that s/he had no choice in the matter. The agent had to do what s/he had to do. Though from the observer or the historian's point of view, the decision may be viewed as hypothetical because it is only *if* the agent had those moral sensibilities, passions, or beliefs, or only if the agent was "compelled" by those historical or natural forces or environmental factors that the agent had to decide what she or he decided. From the perspective of the agent, the decision is categorical and not hypothetical. There is an inner necessity; contingency is ruled out. The convictions of the agent entail the decision.

Unfortunately, much of the work on the analysis of rational explanation has been an attempt to reduce rational action to a model of non-rational action in the sense that the logic was reduced to one of necessary entailment.³ It does not matter whether there is a probability relationship in the judgement or not. What matters is whether the judgement itself was *logically* entailed by the convictions of the agent. If it was, then the action is non-rational, not rational.

In this chapter we will explore and analyze six versions of nonrational decisions. Though we could begin by exploring the six different formal models entailed by each position, we will save this type of analysis for the next chapter. This chapter will focus on a content analysis of these six different perspectives. Further, we will explore them in pairs rather than one at a time. The nonrational view which primarily regards decisions as matters of moral sensibility will be set alongside the perspective that treats such decisions as impelled by the forces of history. The nonrational perspective which regards reason as an instrument to enact our passions will be contrasted with a view which treats reason as an instrument to implement a nature common to all humans, or at least, all mankind. Finally, the perspective which regards reason as a particular way of thinking in response to the collective memories of the society in which we grew up, a collective memory forged either in the dramatic moment of the birth of that society or by the particular physical environment encountered by the society as it developed, will be analyzed in the section on Historicism.

Moral and Patriotic Duty

When faced with a situation that resonates with memory and recalls an historical period full of pain and remorse, indeed, revulsion, then the thing to do might be to avoid, at whatever cost, a recurrence of anything resembling such a situation. "Conduct thy life and make thy commitments so as to stay clear of conflict," might be the appropriate variation of Kant's categorical imperative. Recollections of the Vietnam war fed the fears of the anti-war party. They believed that America was about to repeat that disaster a second time. Morality and the horror of war itself determined a stance which received an enormous boost when the charred bodies of up to 400 civilians in the Baghdad suburb of Amiriya were removed from a bomb shelter. They were killed when a laser-guided US bomb penetrated the reinforced three-metre thick roof, a fact which provided evidence for the American military that the shelter was intended to protect military communications.

The position of President George Bush stood in stark contrast to that of the anti-war party. Bush claimed that America stood at "a defining hour".⁴ "We are engaged in a great struggle in the skies and on the seas and sands...We are Americans - part of something larger than ourselves." "What is at stake is a big idea - a new world order." "We are the nation that believes in the future. We are the nation that can shape the future." "We are the only nation on this earth that could assemble the forces of peace."

Bush hit every note of the believer in patriotic duty. First, the moment of the decision is depicted as a turning point in history. Second, it is seen as part of a new emerging historical order. "We can find meaning and reward by serving some purpose higher than ourselves - a shining purpose, the illumination of a thousand points of light." Third, it is projected as a titanic struggle between those who uphold the noble ideal of this future order and those who would spread evil. "We had to stop Saddam now, not later...this brutal dictator will do anything, will use any weapon, will commit any outrage, no matter how many innocents must suffer." Finally, America, and Bush as its leader are viewed as chosen by history to carry the unique responsibility of leading the historical forces of good against those of evil. Though a moral posture, it is not one driven by moral sensibility but one driven by an historical mission, a duty.

Behind the *rational* antagonists on either side who debated whether military force ought or ought not to be authorized, were the above non-rational rivals whose one area of agreement was that debate was unnecessary. For one, the consideration of the prospect of war should have been ruled out *a priori*. For the other, it was the only and obvious thing to do. The deliberations of Congress, though eventually concurred in to help expedite the decision, was neither legally required nor rationally necessary.

Sophocles' play Antigone provides the model for understanding the stance of both non-rational groups and the implications.⁵ In the drama the two antagonists are Creon and Antigone. "Each of the protagonists has a vision of the world of choice that forestalls serious practical conflict: each has a simple deliberative standard and a set of concerns neatly ordered in terms of this. Each, therefore, approaches problems of choice with unusual confidence and stability; each seems unusually safe from the damages of luck."⁶

Though both groups are akin in rejecting any consideration of an alternative to their own viewpoint, they differ in three fundamental respects. The war party of the right honour and welcome the individual, "who did his best in every way with his spear." The anti-war party of the left honour and welcome the individuals who lay down their spears and turn their backs on war. Secondly, the war party of the right regard dereliction of public responsibility with shame. The anti-war party of the left advocate conscientious objection, blockage of buildings so federal civil servants cannot do their jobs and continual protest against what they regard as the failure of public authorities to do their moral duty.⁷ Thus, while those who agonized over what decision to make tolerate the protesters (though they become angry when those protesters tie up bridges and highways and interfere with the right of the common citizen to get on with his or her life), the war party regards dissent as responsible only if it occurs **before** the decision is made. Once made, everyone is expected to fall into line to support the decision. Any other behaviour is considered "reckless". If the leader of the war party could get away with it, he would prosecute those who trample on the flag, dishonour the symbols of state and show disrespect to those with the responsibility of governing.

There is a third difference. The patriots⁸ believe in power, believe that human ingenuity and resourcefulness can overcome virtually any contingency, except the forces of nature, of which the most formidable was death itself, and the forces of history. Technological innovation is the best security for sustaining the ship of state. "With remarkable technological advances, like the Patriot missile," Bush effused in his State of the Union Address, "we can defend against missile attacks aimed at innocent civilians."

The reference to the Patriot missiles was not accidental. Nor was Bush's visit to a Patriot missile factory the day after the Iraqi bomb shelter was destroyed with the loss of almost 400 children, women and men. The conflict abroad may have been between one sense of Patriotic Duty and another, but the domestic conflict was between two versions of morality, between moral sensibility and moral duty. As Bush said near

the conclusion of his speech, "Our cause is just. Our cause is moral. Our cause is right."

Three types of Patriots can be distinguished - conservatives, reactionaries and extremists. Conservatives do not believe they can ignore natural forces. The conservative Patriots differ from the reactionaries in believing that they also cannot disregard the forces of history. They evoke Otto von Bismark's contention that man can neither create nor direct the 'stream of time'. "He can only travel upon it and steer with more or less skill and experience; he can suffer shipwreck and go aground and also arrive in safe harbours."⁹ Reactionary Patriots believe they can direct history itself as long as they follow the natural laws that govern the use of force. Extremist Patriots believe they can ignore both natural laws and historical forces for they serve a transcendental cause. George Bush is a Conservative Patriot. Saddam Hussein is an extremist one.

The most extreme version of a Creon, one who makes the reactionaries and conservatives alike look like wimps, is the extremist leader who also gives the appearance that he can also command death itself. The individual by his command murders not only other people with impunity, which Rozkolnikov tried to do in Crime and Punishment, but in addition murders thought and contention, orchestrates emotions and destroys sensibilities. He not only risks the human world of his own children as well as those of his enemy, but seems prepared to destroy the natural world as well. Almost because he attempts to go beyond the realm of good and evil itself, he is invested with a macabre glamour by his followers. The murderer becomes the prince of a black fairy tale with a mesmerizing effect on his community who are transfixed by the leader's power over life and death which makes that leader seem superhuman. His stature is exaggerated by the popular honour given to a perverse superior. He is a leader willing to destroy his own nation and the surrounding environment. He is a leader who places himself above the law and relishes casual sadism.¹⁰ Saddam Hussein, projects himself as the superpatriot of the Arab cause.

Whatever the degree of symbolic patriotism in America, and in spite of the fact that America can throw up a conservative patriot, the American polis has not been built upon the exaltation of the patriot. In the words of George Washington, "We must take the passions of Men as Nature has given them, and those principles as a guide which are generally the rule of Action. I do not mean to exclude altogether the Idea of patriotism. I know it exists, and I know it has done much in the present Contest. But I will venture to assert, that a great and lasting War can never be supported on this principle alone. It must be aided by a prospect of Interest or some reward."¹¹ Most Americans may

support Bush but they don't idolize Patriots.

That does not mean there are not plenty of patriots in the American public. The most poignant moment of the antiwar film, "Born on the Fourth of July" occurs when the mother, out of deep attachment to her husband, out of faith in America and respect for the symbols of the state and, most of all, her religion, turns her back on her son whom she has deeply and truly loved and casts her crippled offspring, the Vietnam veteran transformed into an angry war protester, out of the house. Duty must come before filial affections. The bonds of marriage, of state and religion are stronger than the ties which bind a mother to her child. It is a melodrama, of course, not a tragedy, for the parents never go through the agony of understanding the errors of their 'ill-reasoning reason', thought which only served to provide knee-jerk responses to the call of duty, even if that duty meant the crippling of their own son for an unjust cause. In a reversal of the classical sex roles, the mother is Creon and the son plays Antigone.

In contrast, the dissidents and protesters admire the hero of "Dancing with Wolves". They turn their backs on the madness of technology and the conquest that marches in its stead. Harmony with nature, not conquest, is the supreme value. Jacques Ellul, Ivan Illich, George Grant, Vera Franklin - those who lament the direction of modernism - are their gurus, for they have no heroes.

Nevertheless, in spite of the fundamental differences between the patriots and the anti-war party, the stance of both parties stands in stark contrast to the individual who does not know what to do when faced with two alternatives, both of which are unpleasant. Should we wait and let sanctions work their course even though that will mean enormous suffering to the Kuwaitis, the gradual devastation of their country and unknown political repercussions in the Arab world? Or should we commit our military forces not knowing for sure whether the casualty rate may be very high on both sides and what the political fallout could be? There are arguments for both sides. And s/he is unclear even of any of the rules or norms for making such a decision. In the face of two alternatives and knowing that the issue is very important, the individual is confused.

Not so Creon. In the play, Antigone. "Insoluble conflicts cannot arise, because there is only a single supreme good, and all other values are functions of that good."¹² Just as Creon identifies Athens with a ship which must be kept in tip-top shape lest it flounder and its citizens become castaways or refugees, so the American state began to be regarded by its strongest patriots as a ship of state on which the individual depended for his very life and being. For the patriotic zealots, the state and the historical purposes it serves

become an end in itself; the state is not an instrument to serve the commonweal.

It is against this sense of self-sacrifice, and the contemporary conception of the state that accompanies it, that the protesters burn flags, engage in sit-ins and demand reversing the march to war. Law and power are identified with violence and error. They are not satisfied to write words disapproving the decision made. Direct action is required, for their ethical consciousness must be made actual. They know they won't stop or even inhibit this war. It is war in general that they want to stop. The purpose of their action is to make real their purpose. They can chain themselves to the fence of military establishments. They can go limp and be dragged off to prison to be "punished", a punishment they readily accept for they claim to bear the guilt which the rest of us will not acknowledge. "Because we suffer we acknowledge we have erred."¹³

Going off to war is not brave and honourable, but a matter of shame and dishonour. Insofar as the war is not stopped, as long as the organized killing goes on, the evil not only belongs to Saddam Hussein and his henchmen or Bush and the military. We are forced to participate in it; it becomes yours and mine. In the play, Antigone, there was a war. There are two armies on either side. One appeals to the homogeneity of the people, to their common religion and their national brotherhood. The other, led by Creon, is a motley collection and depends for its real strength on foreigners. In Creon's terms, everyone on the other side of the line dividing Iraq from the rest of the world is a foe, bad and unjust. Everyone on his side, the Saudis, the Syrians, the Kuwaitis who fled, becomes indiscriminately a friend and ally.

Antigone denies any distinction between those on either side of the line in the Gulf. If she denies any real differences, she creates a substitute disjunction. She draws an imaginary circle which unites protesters in Germany, in Britain, in Canada and in America. Those who join her to protest against the war, not just its waste and ruthlessness and destructiveness, are her sisters and brothers. Thus, the Palestinians who protest the war in Amman (and cheer as the Scuds head for Tel Aviv) become her sisters and brothers. She forgets that she and the other protesters did not appear before the Iraqi embassy when Saddam Hussein's troops marched over Kuwait. It is a family feud, but Antigone turns the conflict into a cosmological one of good versus evil. She does not recognize that Hussein was not regarded as a member of the family requiring a remonstrance if not a demonstration. The protest is rather directed at the head of the family, at America, when Bush goes on the march.

This homogenization of the two sides is as true of those who use their heads to advance the cause of their moral

sensibilities as those who use their bodies. Anatol Rapoport, for example, questioned Robert Osgood's thesis that the problem of war was, "How can the United States utilize its military power as a rational and effective instrument of national policy?"¹⁴ Rapoport's problem was not with the 'how' but with the assumption of 'rationality' and the conception that war was a mere 'instrument'. "The very notion of 'rational decision' dissolves into ambiguities and so loses the meaning ascribed to it in other contexts."¹⁵

Rapoport takes as his paradigm problem the confrontation between two superpowers in which the consequences of any decision to go to war would be mutual annihilation. Simultaneous disengagement from a confrontation (such as from the Cuban missile crisis) is the only way to avoid annihilation. The decision to disengage cannot, however, be encapsulated by any model of rational decision making.

"Each knows that if he *tries* to disengage (e.g. turns his back on his enemy), then he alone will be annihilated. Assuming that mutual annihilation is preferred to only his own annihilation, what is the 'rational thing' for each combatant to do? 'Rationality' dictates against disengagement *whether* the other disengages or not, since, if the other tries to disengage, one can save oneself by annihilating the other with impunity; if one does not try to disengage, it is suicide for the other to do so. If, however, mutual disengagement is preferred by *both* combatants to the continuation of this combat, then the 'rational' choice by both actors *prevents* the outcome preferred by both. What then does 'rationality' mean in this context?"¹⁶

This dilemma in game theory, of course, depends upon rationality being restricted to a strict calculation of prudence in which the only value input is self-survival. Further, it assumes that the only instruments available are the extremes of war or turning one's back on war, when, in fact, a whole range of alternatives are available, such as tiny step by step processes of disengagement or, alternatively, proxy wars and war fought with limited goals and limited means whatever the capacities of either side. Finally, it assumes equal power and the same goals by each side.

However, a logical critique of this type is somewhat unfair to Anatol Rapoport. For his main thrust is aimed at the assumptions underlying the logic rather than the logic itself. And the basic assumption behind assuming there must be reasons for going to war, if it is necessary for a state to do so, is the "determination to preserve the struggle for power as the theoretical bedrock of political reality."¹⁷ The belief in the struggle for power as the prime mover of politics is as obsolete as the belief in the divine right of kings.

The issue is not the threat to Kuwait. The issue is not the threat to world order and stability. When Antigone says, "It is my nature to join in loving, not to join in hating," she captures the spirit of the love-ins of the sixties which provided the foundation for the present anti-war movement. She does not mean she *feels* love. Her love is pious not passionate. For no intimacy or personal affection is entailed. The love is generalized and dispersed. It floats above the body rather than rooting itself in the groin. It is as asexual as the feelings of those who, out of such deep love for America and her economic interests, also do not endorse the decision to go to war.

"Antigone structures her entire life and her vision of the world in accordance with this simple, self-contained system of duties."¹⁸ The particularities of the case or of the various positions are irrelevant. There is no personal commitment to promises made and broken, to allies versus enemies. It is not the individuality of the person or the situation that brings forth the sacrifice. The contradictions in her own position can be ignored. In the anti-war cause, spouses can be neglected and children can be conscripted who cannot yet think through the issues. There is a ruthless and impersonal simplification of duty and she is its singular author. It is a product of personal conscience with no responsibility to follow a collective decision.

But to what is her duty really directed in the name of a higher piety? The dead. She identifies with the corpse of her brother. She identifies with all those who have been victims of war. The Conservative Patriot recognizes that leadership requires sacrifices, but he honestly tries to minimize them. The Reactionary Patriot will put no such bounds on those sacrificed, provided it ensures and serves to uphold the old order in resistance to the forces of history. Rather than one devoted to a way of life which gives freedom and happiness to the people and sometimes asks for sacrifice in defence of that way of life, his is a devotion to a reified life, a life frozen in time, to repression and order. But it is the extremist version of Creon, Saddam Hussein, who is the real necrophiliac. He worships at the altar of cemeteries and dead bodies, at Memorial parades when the flags will wave, when honour will be recognized and glory given its due. He is willing to sacrifice anyone and anything provided it serves his mission, not to serve history, not to preserve a way of life, but to serve a transcendent cause and his own glory. The extremist would turn himself into god.

So Creon and Antigone are really two sides of the same coin. They are synergistically interdependent. Both give unthinking loyalty and devotion to gods of their own invention. The one serves the god of aggressive exploitation

in the name of spit and polish. The other's duty is more ethereal and other-worldly in devotion and ready sacrifice to a promised land of perpetual peace where the wolves will lie down beside the lambs and do them no harm. In Creon, there is only civic duty; in Antigone, there is no civic duty. Both ignore the real needs of the citizens whom they readily sacrifice on their complementary altars of duty. Both follow unwritten laws inscribed either in their hearts or in history rather than such a mundane entity as the written constitution and the laws of Congress.

Nevertheless, Antigone clearly occupies the higher moral ground. For Antigone sacrifices herself for her cause. Creon would sacrifice the members of society, and, in Saddam Hussein's extremist version, **all** the members and indeed society itself, in dedication to flag and country and the cause. Antigone remains vulnerable and commands our pity and our concern; she awakens our conscience. Creon projects invulnerability and commands respect but not affection.

This does not mean that Antigone's position is not riddled with contradictions. Quite the reverse as indicated above. While driven apoplectic by the rhetoric of George Bush in presenting the conflict as a war of "good against evil"¹⁹ or, as Harold Pinter phrased it, America is "asserting what it conceives to be its spiritual destiny - I am God, get out of my fucking way"²⁰, the anti-war movement portrays the war, not as a mistake in judgement, but as a product of evil intent, of evil norms and one which will result in the most horrid consequences to the people of Iraq, to the infrastructure of Iraq, to the allied soldiers in the field, and most of all, to the ecology of the region and this earth. John Pilger, an Australian war reporter, even excoriates Bush for tricking Hussein into invading Kuwait. When Hussein makes war and devastates Kuwait, we find background noise and misbehaviour. However, when that war is initiated for whatever reason and for whatever cause by a family member who will leave another family member's corpse on the field of battle, then war is *universally* evil.

The homogenization of the evil of conflict not only ignores the way the war was initiated, but seems to take no account that Hussein had built up the largest secret arsenal of chemical and biological weapons which he had shown a clear willingness to use *preemptively*. *He is renowned as the one clear and unequivocal violator of chemical weapons treaties. He was clearly intent on building a nuclear capability as well. He had an abysmal record of human rights violations.* He was bred in the extremist Baathist ideology of Arab triumphalism, that mixture of distorted Nietzschean 'will to power', Alfred Rosenberg racism, state socialism and pan-nationalism that is so endemic to fascism. To that situation, Hussein brought his own brand of bully boy tactics and

opportunism, a personal and party history which did little to diminish his appeal to the dispossessed and the downtrodden as they were inspired and driven by hate rather than hope, by propaganda rather than an exchange of views, and, most of all, by the intimidation of an all-pervasive secret police apparatus.

Rational Scepticism

If the patriots and the moralists question the need for deliberation in making a decision about war and need not undertake any deliberation themselves to know what to do because they **know** what is right, sceptics question the alleged 'rationality' that goes into such a decision because they raise questions about whether any decision to go to war or not to go to war can be fundamentally rational. Decisions to go to war are either driven by our interests (acquisitive interests that is) or driven by the need to protect oneself from the passions of others. In neither case is it a moral decision at all. In both cases, there is a universal factor to account for all human behaviour.

When the France of Louis XIV was in decline, when the pall of the War of the Spanish Succession and the exhaustion it spread to pollute the atmosphere of France gave cause for Frenchmen to look into their minds and hearts, it produced a different kind of revolt against the power politics of the seventeenth century. It also produced a new intellectual outlook. The search was on for the universal causes of all war quite independently of which individual ruled.

If Antigone and Creon were true believers, Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton were true disbelievers. Thomas Jefferson did not trust non-Americans. Alexander Hamilton did not trust the passions of Americans themselves which threatened to become a zealous driving force rather than one guided by the calculations of reason. That distrust focused on others when they expressed in their words and deeds passions and ambitions much more powerful than one's own and threatened the realization of one's own passions. Thomas Jefferson would have opposed the use of military force as the founder and architect of the isolationist tradition in America. Hamilton would have supported the war, not because it was America's destiny to fulfill an historical mission, but because Saddam's unbridled ambition was far more dangerous than America's, and the control of a key portion of the world's oil resources could not be allowed to fall into Saddam Hussein's hands.

It was Hamiltonian rather than Jeffersonian thought that allowed (not propelled) America to become involved in the Gulf War. The roots of this thesis are to be found in the scepticism of David Hume and his contention that reason has no

influence on our passions and action. Reason was incapable of yielding practical judgements. "Moral distinctions...are not the offspring of reason. Reason is wholly inactive, and can never be the source of so active a principle as conscience, or a sense of morals."²¹ Reason was instrumental only in directing passion to its objective or selecting the means to achieve the objective. It was the passions, not our economic interests, that set the goals and the norms by which those goals were to be pursued. Just as for Jefferson where reason was instrumental, but directed towards advancing interests, reason in this model was also instrumental, but as the servant of the passions. Further, "the ultimate ends of human actions can never, in any case, be accounted for by *reason*."²²

Alexander Hamilton in the first Federalist Paper stated that man's reasons could disguise his causes. "Hamilton believed that politics and society can be brought under man's control by knowing the laws of human behaviour based on such universal theorems as cause and effect and means and ends."²³ Hamilton drew directly from Hume the conviction that a theory of human nature, the understanding of the constants underlying motives and intentions, could provide a 'rational' explanation of human behaviour. It also meant that order was not the result of rational, voluntary submission to the authority of the state; habitual deference and submission was.

The consequence of this in international affairs is that the powers that win the wars usually lose the peace by an excess of passionate ardor that overrules prudent judgement. Wars which are begun with justice, and even from necessity, "have always been pushed too far from obstinancy and passion."²⁴ In addition, Britain had another problem in the seventeenth century which paralleled that of the United States in the current conflict. "Our allies ...always reckon upon our forces as their own and, expecting on war at our expense, refuse all reasonable terms of accommodation."²⁵ There is a third pitfall which the United States would have been well to heed in the Vietnam war. "To mortgage our revenues at so deep a rate in wars where we are only accessories was surely the most fatal delusion that a nation which had any pretension to politics and prudence has ever yet been guilty of."²⁶

The lesson is clear. It is not the rational calculations that we have to attend to primarily, but the excess of the passions. Because all humans are susceptible to precisely the same feelings, and, in all nations in any age, the same circumstances give rise to the same passions ("in all nations and ages the same objects still give rise to pride and humility"²⁷), the knowledge of these constant constituents in human nature, these "regular springs" which are unaffected by history or the differences between societies, allow the observer to use reason to keep the passions within bounds. For Thomas Jefferson, these regular springs were our interests.

For Alexander Hamilton they were our passions. For Thomas Jefferson, that understanding dictated an avoidance of overseas wars unless America's financial interests were involved. For Alexander Hamilton, it would probably have determined American involvement to counter the excessive ambitions of Saddam Hussein, though it would have also put us on guard lest our own ambitions exceed our capacities.

For Thomas Jefferson, the well-being of the America was the only thing which was intrinsically good. Though Thomas Jefferson would have liked to reform the international system, it was unlikely if not impossible. War was the natural state for the rest of the world. A commitment to reform would eventually entail a commitment to intervention and, in turn, resort to the guns of war. The only thing good without qualification and committed to justice was America. An ocean of fire separated America from the rest of the world. The self-interest of America was the highest good to be pursued with steadfastness, determination and an unwavering will.²⁸

Thomas Jefferson might appear to be in precisely the same camp as Antigone, not simply for opposing the war, but because of his purported moral sensibility. He regarded virtue as "a love of others, a sense of duty to them, a moral instinct...which prompts us irresistably to feel and to succor their distresses".²⁹ But his moral responsibility was quite unlike that of Antigone's. Those others to whom he felt a sense of duty were Americans. Jefferson was not a humanitarian.

Don't intervene. Let the corpse of Kuwait remain in the world's public square not to be redeemed by the United States. Thomas Jefferson and George Washington's principles were still operative in the small remnant of the isolationist camp who opposed the war. "It must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves by artificial ties in the ordinary vicissitudes of her (substitute Arabs for European) politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities. Our detached and distanced situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course."³⁰

America is an exemplar to the world, not its policeman. Commerce with all. Alliance with none. Abjure foreign entanglements. Jefferson did experiment with *commercial* coercion, participating in an economic embargo from 1807 to 1809, so enraged was he at the British interference with the neutrality of American shipping. But that was in defense of the only single intrinsic good - the United States of America and its preoccupation with business.

This was not an argument for selfishness. Quite the reverse. It was an argument for self-sacrifice, but the highest entity worthy of personal self sacrifice was America and not Kuwait which had voted almost as often against the

United States as the USSR and could be considered an enemy of the state even if America had never been at war with Kuwait.

What drove all men was their interest in property, owning and controlling as much as they could. Humans were inherently possessive individualists and reason was the instrument to advance that self-interest. If America went to war, America would pay the costs and Germany and Japan, America's main economic rivals, who, unlike the United States, were dependent on the Middle East for the importation of the bulk of their oil, would benefit.

Just as there was nothing in Jefferson's mental make-up to oppose war per se, there was nothing inherent in Alexander Hamilton's to support war. Both measured the circumstances in terms of their own convictions about the nature of man and the world. There are in fact sceptics of the Hamiltonian school who would certainly have opposed the war if it threatened to bring about a superpower confrontation.

Thomas Jefferson had introduced a critique of traditional state relations - that the struggle between states was not a struggle for power, since states were not governed by the quest for power, but simply the duty to protect their own economic interests. Thus, for John Adams, foreign alliances were merely matters of agreements on trade and navigation.³¹ Though John Adams, when he joined Ben Franklin in Paris, complained that his fellow countryman was the "Don Juan of diplomacy" and that his social relations and flirtations with the Parisian ladies³² were interfering with his diplomatic responsibilities, and though John Adams was recalled by Congress for offending the French Foreign Minister, the two Americans agreed on the goals and strategy of diplomacy; they merely disagreed on the tactics. Though Franklin titillated the matrons of France with hugs and kisses and "*amities amoureuses*", he played the international political game with a relatively open deck, in stark contrast to the older traditions of devious diplomacy, a precedent that marked the American style ever afterward.³³ But his goal was identical to Adams, to ensure the survival and future growth of America and the protection of her commercial interests. And he was clearly successful. His obtaining continued financial and military assistance meant that at Yorktown there were more French than Americans fighting when Cornwallis surrendered to General Washington. The Franklin "new diplomacy" not only made victory possible, but it set a precedent for the American role when it became the dominant partner assisting other struggling regimes.³⁴

Historicism

If the Humean sceptics stress the passions which use reason as an instrument, and the Lockeans stress economic

interests which also utilize reason as an instrument, historicists stress forces in history which use the passions and calculations of humans for their own purposes. Individual interests and passions do not command history. Rather, the forces of history reduce the petty ambitions and self-serving schemes of the politicians to insignificance.

In this concern with the Spirit of History rather than the rational calculations of any individual, it must be remembered that, "Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself...Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it."³⁵ When George Bush depicted the Gulf War as America's 'defining time', he sounded like an historicist, but it was all sound without meaning. For from the historicist perspective, the individual does not command history; history commands the individual. The historical agent is not in control of the future trying to steer the ship of state in the right direction; the past sweeps the agent of history into the future in ways he is not nor cannot be aware. The great historical figures, such as Napoleon or the Founding Fathers, may serve to usher in a new age, but they are not the golden Californian or Australian surf boarders with their gleaming white smiles riding the crest of the wave; they are more akin to the dour, pasty-faced haunted Abraham Lincoln who entered war not 'to kick ass' but very sensitive to the fact that the war would be "the terrible historical tragedy of our time". The war is not a conflict between good and evil, but one which arises out of the contradictions of America. If the historical hero is one who does not shrink from death, but tries to remain untouched by the devastation that surrounds him in order that he may maintain his equanimity and not crumble to dust, as President Lyndon Johnson did, his wisdom carries with it a profound and overwhelming melancholy, what Herman Melville called "the fine hammered steel of woe." For man is but history's instrument incapable of comprehending its meaning at the time.

George Bush wanted to rewrite the script for the Vietnam war as the heroic Second World War battle against Hitler as the repository of evil. But he wanted to do it without sacrifice, with the cost of as few American lives as possible. From an historicist perspective, war is not a great epic of victory, but a tragedy whose meaning is realized through sacrifice. George Bush wanted to fight a war that embodied moral purity in imitation of the idol of America, who happens to have the same first name. As one of the characters depicts George Washington in Henry Adams' novel Democracy, "We idolized him. To us he is Morality, Justice, Duty, Truth."³⁶ George Washinton had been made into a Roman God with his face inscribed on the side of Mount Vernon. George Bush had the

same ambition. He did not want to go down in history as a wimp, or as a Johnsonian figure of farce in the face of tragedy. There was no sense that there was an alternative way to face war, to accept it as a tragedy rather than a moment of glory, to recognize and face that tragedy with steely reserve rather than deny it. For George Bush, the spirit of America was "indominatable". There was no recognition that Americans were fighting that war because they, with the Germans and others, had sewn its seeds with their immoral military and industrial sales to a Vulcan of evil. Creon's responsibility is only to his image of the civil society, to the secular civil religion of America. For Creon, you stand tall and straight when you worship at the feet of the gods of war. When you worship before the spirit of God whose will pervades history and is revealed by that history, you humble yourself, you recognize you cannot fathom the meaning and you acknowledge that something in your own soul, in the soul of America, carried you into this war.

War is not just an instrument separate from the ends it serves as if it has no impact on our lives and our consciousness. War is a furnace of transformation. Secondly, paradoxes could be revealed in any rational calculus to go to war. For the sceptics, it entailed understanding the basis for war in the passions of men. For the historicists, it entailed understanding the war from the perspective of its historical forces and the significance of those forces. War was a critical node in understanding and comprehending continuity and change in history.

Giambattista Vico wrote about this new science of history in 1744.³⁷ The point of capturing the internal dynamic of thought was not simply to fix the pattern of thinking of the individual or even of the group, but to determine the way of thinking that is so important to determining the course of action of a nation. For such an interpretation, while focused on what is particular to one decision of one group or even of a nation in a very specific crisis in time, is concerned with grasping what is eternal in that process, what it says about humans, their politics and the way they govern their lives. This is particularly true if what we are grasping is not the thoughts of a bully-boy, however clever, seeking to establish his own glory in history, but the process of thinking, reflection and decision making of a nation on the frontier of time. Through understanding that process, we can begin to define the ideal while immersed in a very concrete situation and a very specific culture. It is not a transcendent ideal, but an ideal which emerges and is defined by what transpires in significant transition points in history and which in turn helps to account for and allows us to understand the significance of those decisions. What the historian is out to discover is the 'idea' that has revealed itself in its clearest light. In sum, the internal thought processes of an individual are but clues to the life of a nation which gives

that nation its unity and coherence and which in turn provides a torch for others on the direction of the path of history.

For example, Quincy Wright, the dean of modern studies of international relations, in both his original work, A Study of War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), and in the work that capped his career, The Study of International Relations (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1955), argued that international relations was not so much a product of the struggle between states per se, but the arena in which states acted out the personalities and capacities of the society. National policy was a product of competing interest groups, the personalities of the leaders, technological capacity, resource availability, social structures and last but definitely not least, national values.

The vision that foreign affairs was not driven primarily by power or commercial interests, but was the product of acting out internal conflicts and values can go even further in irrational rather than non-rational explanations. In the works of researchers such as Bernard Fensterwald, Jr., an individual's attitude towards foreign relations could be directly correlated with attitudes toward child raising, punishment of sex offenders, etc.³⁸ War was not so much an expression of an external power or economic struggles as the acting out of internal power struggles within the society and within the individual. War is then a product of the irrationality, contradictions and conflicts within the society and the individual. Thus, for example, Arthur Gladstone argued that our conception of the enemy was more a product of projection than of objective analysis.³⁹

Game theorists, like Thomas Schelling⁴⁰, argued that rational players were influenced by various factors unrelated to the balance of power and John Harsanyi extended that critique to Schelling himself to demonstrate that the very fact that they were influenced by such irrelevant factors represented irrational behaviour.⁴¹ In a nonrational historicist account, the ideas that infuse and direct the collective memory of Americans must be unpacked if we are to understand why Congress decided to use military force in Iraq. But even these ideas can be construed as irrational rather than nonrational.

Men and women come to the United States Congress imbued with a strong sense of American history and the place of America in the world. They have been generally taught to celebrate that history. If one is pessimistic about democracy and the role of history one can attribute such beliefs to the mythology that infuses the education of an American. "The first function of the founders of nations, after the founding itself, is to devise a set of true falsehoods about origins - a mythology - that will make it desirable for nationals to continue to live under common authority, and, indeed, make it

impossible for them to entertain contrary thoughts...Americans reckoned values in the marketplace and by consensus, unlike the Europeans, who reckoned them through traditional institutions and by absolute standards. Now, one of the peculiarities of the American way is that when contests of ideas arise, the view held by the winning side comes in time to be regarded as the unqualified truth, the only possible view; indeed, all subsequent battles must begin with the outcomes of earlier battles as unquestioned premises."⁴²

Like many American intellectuals who respond with revulsion and rejection of much of the jingoism that is part of America, it has become a commonplace to disparage the America of the late twentieth century, to smile slyly at her economic decline, to attend critically to the hypocrisy that imbues American action, not to see through it, but to gorge in self-satisfaction and self-righteousness in a refusal to identify with that which is American. This was not always the case. Alexis de Tocqueville, who also remarked that, "Nothing is more embarrassing in the ordinary intercourse of life than this irritable patriotism of the Americans,"⁴³ also noted that the patriotism of all, however distasteful, was preferable to the government of the few. Tocqueville also stated that although, "The men who are entrusted with the direction of public affairs in the United States are frequently inferior," and although, "They may frequently be faithless and frequently mistaken...they will never systematically adopt a line of conduct hostile to the majority; and they cannot give a dangerous or exclusive tendency to the government."⁴⁴

Is that generalization true any longer? Has the American Congress embarked on a dangerous course which is simply the continuation of Pax Americana in a new dress, an imperial America, an America focussed on policing the world while its traditional pride in the centre of its concerns and excellence, commerce, spirals downwards? Tocqueville also remarked that he knew, "of no other country in which there is so little independence of mind and real freedom of discussion as in America."⁴⁵ Though Tocqueville observed America and gathered his notes in the heyday of Jacksonian populism when "democracy has been abandoned to its wild instincts" and no resources were allocated to the support of an independent intellectual class, the question remains relevant. Did the debate indicate a lack of intellectual independence? Was the discussion restricted in any way. If so, what do those restrictions indicate?

The restrictions do not have to be externally imposed. After World War II, a war in which America broke out of its isolationism, the intellectuals of America looked inward and took a different tack than the self-confident celebration of progress of Jackson Turner and Charles Beard and Vincent Louis Parrington. For their historicism was optimistic rather than

pessimistic, goal directed rather than caught up in the unfathomable depth of the world historical spirit, teleological and future directed rather than focused on the past to understand the present. It was an historicism imbued with the vision of progress and America as its leader in the triumph of freedom and liberty for all mankind. After WW II, this outward looking historicism was replaced by which gazed inwardly at the soul of America.

Tocqueville, for one, was rediscovered. The concept of national character was again a matter of concern.⁴⁶ Louis Hartz of Harvard, in his classic study, The Liberal Tradition in America (1955), concurred with Toqueville that the liberal tradition was so uniform, so all pervasive, so unchallenged in America that political debate was little more than shadowboxing. Daniel Boorstin of Chicago, in The Genius of American Politics (1953) and The Americans: The Colonial Experience (1958), agreed by seconding the second observation of Toqueville concerning the mediocrity of America. The United States had produced a homogeneous and undifferentiated society which was the source of its stability but which also produced a wet blanket on dissent. Americans had gone out to see the world and found their own society wanting.

This was not in a period of post-Vietnam blues, of a shift in economic prospects from the wealthiest to the most indebted nation. These books were published when America was at the pinnacle of its power, but also at a time when corporate executives were portayed as clones in grey flannel suits.⁴⁷ Edmund S. Morgan in The Birth of the Republic, 1763-1789, and his intellectual successor, Bernard Bailyn in Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (1967), found this conservatism rooted in the inherited Puritan values and the Lockean intellectual traditions that the Americans had brought with them from England. Whereas John C. Miller in the Origins of the American Revolution (1943) had portrayed the genesis of the American polis as the beginning of a perpetual revolution and a tension between the Whigs who had "aspired to step into the shoes of the former Tory aristocrats and to rule the masses in the name of the rich, the wise, and the good"⁴⁸ and a revolutionary democratic tide, the new postwar historians were pessimistic about revolution, democracy and progress. Though some celebrated that pessimism precisely because they were opposed to revolution and believed that the Americans, of all the world's peoples, are, "the most materialistic and most vulgar and least disciplined" but had surprisingly produced "a governmental system adequate to check the very forces they unleashed"⁴⁹ in the American revolution, they were one with the Whig, progressive and radical historians in viewing America as a place of intellectual mediocrity and repressiveness.

The above historians drew their insights into the American character from the American Revolution, "the central

event in American history,"⁵⁰ usually interpreted as the period which expresses what is best and most permanent in the American spirit.

"The strength and future of a republic depends upon its capacity for periodic self-renewal through the reaffirmation of the pristine ideals that once inspired it. A republic owes its meaning to the act of founding, to the historical 'moment' of its creation."⁵¹

But was that birth based on a pristine ideal or a trauma which instilled in Americans a basic neuroses? "The fate of a nation, like that of a person, may be the working out of the traumas of early childhood, the outcome of some basic character defect."⁵² the history of a country may be the process of tracing the roots of a recurrent neurotic pattern of behaviour which inhibits and distorts rationality. Other historians rooted the deformities of America in its development rather than locating them in America's roots. In either case, they would produce explanations of irrationality, not non-rational explanations.

If some historians found a restrictive liberalism and others a narrow religious and intellectual economic conservatism, still others told a tale of decline and fall before America had evinced any of the external manifestations that are so widely discussed throughout the newspapers and magazines of the world. William A. Williams (The Contours of American History, 1961) of the University of Wisconsin, a neo-Marxist, depicted the emergence of an American capitalist oligarchy running America for their own interests and at the expense of the vast majority of Americans. There were two American minds, not one. Richard Hofstadter (Age of Reform, 1955) pictured the progressives and reformers as inept failures and Henry May (The End of American Innocence, 1959) traced the institutionalization of that failure and sell-out in the destruction of previously inherited values brought about by the First World War. It was as if the guilt and despondency that had previously been viewed as the predominant self-image of the American south (C. Vann Woodward, The Burden of Southern History, 1960) had crept through the whole fabric of America.

This was **before** the disaster of Vietnam. These books were written before the Bay of Pigs fiasco and before the Cuban missile crisis. But they were written under the shadow of the nuclear bomb, in the chill of the cold war and the aftermath of McCarthy. What a contrast these views were with the visions that inspired the American revolution and which have pervaded American belief systems, when America was viewed as "the protector and propagator of liberty everywhere" and "the cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind,"⁵³ the sentiments George Bush echoed in his State of the Union Address on January 29, 1991.

"For two centuries, America has served the world as an inspiring example of freedom and democracy. For generations, America has led the struggle to preserve and extend the blessings of liberty. And today, in a rapidly changing world, Americans know that leadership brings burdens, and requires sacrifice.

"But we also know why the hopes of humanity turn to us. We are Americans; we have a unique responsibility to do the hard work of freedom. And when we do, freedom works."⁵⁴

That work 'defined the state of our union'. Bush declared unequivocally that 'America served the world as an inspiring example of freedom and democracy'.

R.R. Palmer, who celebrated the origins of America as a remarkable revolution in the cause of freedom and instantiating the principle that sovereignty belonged to the people (The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1769-1800, 1959) (Bush repeatedly referred to 'the people' as the source of American strength), however, agreed with other postwar historians that the flame of revolution and dedication to freedom had been frozen in time as a nostalgic memory rather than a dynamic force in the life of America.

From this inversion of the American self-image, the picture became worse and worse as historians delved into issues of slavery, treatment of the working classes, of women and of native Americans.

Instead of a picture of a bland, conformist, repressive, somewhat mediocre America, the underbelly of American society began to be painted by the historians. John Howe in his article, "Republican Thought and the Political Violence of the 1790's"⁵⁵ suggested that the conformity was both ideological and deeply imbued with violence. He pictured it as "a peculiarly volatile and crisis-ridden ideology, one with little resilience, little margin for error, little tradition of success behind it, and one that was vulnerable both psychologically and historically. Within this context, politics was a deadly business, with little room for optimism and leniency."⁵⁶ It was a society that was testy, trigger happy, venomous, abusive, malevolent, brutal with a low flash-point and quick to resort to arms to resolve disputes, as the Civil War seemed to confirm. The reference to democracy and the rule of law is all empty rhetoric. The motives, intentions and integrity of opponents were not simply distrusted; they were assumed to be the worst. America sees Saddam Hussein as a Creon because a Creon lives in the core of the American soul. It is the savage strain in America, reflected in its politics as well as its literature.⁵⁷

What was behind this violent temper in American politics? An inborn insecurity, for one thing. Underlying the bullying

image of America that is so pervasive, an America that invades Grenada and Panama, is what underlies any bully, a fear, a deep fear that enemies abound and surround America and, secondly a deep fear that America was not strong enough to hold together. For the essence of America was commerce, but what held it together was virtue, which included a sense of public responsibility, of integrity, of frugality, of industry, of honesty. When the passions were unreigned, selfish greed and anarchic competition in the devotion to wealth and luxury undermined those virtues and threatened the future of the republic. As Thomas Paine noted in Common Sense, "commerce diminishes the spirit both of patriotism and military defence."⁵⁸ Periods of rapid growth and economic expansion are followed by superego attacks and moral self-flagellation that quickly seeks out another real target for physical abuse because that other is a threat to America.

In the eighties, American citizens witnessed what Martin Mayer entitled, The Greatest-Ever Bank Robbery: The Collapse of the Savings and Loan Industry. With government guarantees, the public treasury had been looted by commercial lawlessness, financial and legal skullduggery, by foxes who had been allowed into the chicken coop, by cartels of corrupt professionals who paid lip service to 'market forces' for a windfall that would accumulate to over a \$500 billion cost to the American taxpayer to the benefit of its better off citizens whose deposits of up to \$100,000 plus accrued interest *per account* (not per individual) were insured fully by the government, including the ill-gotten gains of drug traffickers. Unlike previous periods of excessive greed, the public underwrote the whole scam. We observed a unique innovation, the creation of welfare criminalism. America had just gone through its worst period of moral decadence based on excessive and lawless greed. It was an era in which the greedy had become heroes. Crooks, swindlers and charlatans were seen as models to emulate. It was a decade of an Orwellian capitalist world in which losses were presented as profits, liabilities became assets and assets were valued on the basis of projected incomes in the best of all possible worlds in the guise of traditional conservative financing. It was a period in which the virtues of economic risk were celebrated by the American President just as the controllers of the economic levers of government removed any risk element by investors and homogenized wildly speculative banking practices with prudent investment policies.

Whether virtue resides in government provided it expresses the will of the people and embodies that will, and vice in commerce, or, alternatively, whether it is government that is the embodiment of vice and *virtue* is attributed to money, whether one values the power and stability of the state in the tradition of Hamilton and Madison or the autonomy and freedom of the individual in the tradition of Jefferson and

Paine, these two positions have formed the alternating poles of the American self-conception. Ironically, it is the populist who most trusts the collective value of individual greed, while the defender of representative government sees the wickedness of greed when it is institutionalized in banks and the virtue of government when it serves high principle. Reagan and Bush may both be Republicans, but they belong to opposite orders of thought. Reagan followed the rhetoric of Thomas Paine. "Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices."⁵⁹ Only Reagan, in what Hofstadter called "a democracy of cupidity", used government to promote wickedness and to allow private vice to proceed unrestrained. "The Age of Reagan ... saw the wholesale and institutional disenfranchisement of memory as a governing principle in our institutional life."⁶⁰ Contrast this with Jefferson's view that while the state's prime function was the defence of acquisitiveness, there was a danger that it would become a tool of those who already acquired wealth rather than the defender of everyone's right to do so. For Jefferson, "Banking establishments are more dangerous than standing armies."

American historians of a more conservative bent began to read acquisitiveness as not simply a danger that needed to be bounded, but as a foundation with the seeds of its own destruction as the acquisition of wealth replaced the desire to produce goods and the nation sunk into a morass of materialism without any redeeming virtue. The state could not be relied upon to impose the restraint needed to control the greed of the individual, for the state could be and has been coopted in service of that greed. Further, the deeper religious tradition rooted in a belief in original sin and the corruptibility of man which previously was relied upon to control vice no longer seemed to be active in the American polity. The disappearance of that deeper religious tradition, the Protestant Calvinist roots of America in contrast to its liberal foundation, a religious concept of virtue which demanded that Americans be suspicious of themselves, was offered as an explanation for the unboundaried indulgence of greed, even before that excess expressed itself in the rampant corruption of the eighties.⁶¹

If Jefferson viewed the state as a necessary evil to protect the acquisitive realm, a state which became virtuous by limiting the excesses of that realm and setting it on the course of higher purpose, Adams, another founding father, put it more positively and saw the state as governed by the love of power, but power in the service of freedom operating by challenging the power of anyone within the country or outside who chose to use power to limit another's freedom. "The same principle in human nature - that aspiring, noble principle founded in benevolence, and cherished by knowledge: I mean the

love of power, which has been so often the cause of slavery, - has, whenever freedom has existed, been the cause of freedom. If it is this principle that has always prompted the princes and nobles of the earth, by every species of fraud and violence to shake off all limitations of their power, it is the same that has always stimulated the common people to aspire at independency, and to endeavour at confining the power of the great within the limits of equity and reason."⁶²

Power in the service of freedom may be viewed as an instrument to define limits for those who would infringe on freedom, but this very vision itself may be interpreted as a mode of acting out internal tensions and conflicts. If, as Barrington Moore Jr. depicts it⁶³, class societies ridden with antagonism between the rulers and the ruled, feudal and industrial classes, keep social peace in some cases (Germany and Japan) by a compact between the old landed aristocracies and the new capitalist classes and export their mutual hatred onto convenient scapegoats and an aggression towards the rest of the world, then America, torn as it is either by a new type of class warfare⁶⁴ or by a conflict between virtue and greed, between the politics of the heart and the politics of the gut, may also be acting out those tensions in aggression towards an enemy and the stooges of that enemy within the body politic of the United States of America.

Perhaps that is why America's aggressive rhetoric and actions externally and internally, whenever they fear the republic is threatened, can be reconciled with the picture Richard Hofstadter gives in a book published almost fifteen years later than the one mentioned above, The Idea of a Party System (1969). The vision he depicts is an America of boundaried debate and accommodation in a determination to make sure that differences do not lead to an unravelling of the state. America is a *civil* society in the political realm and an uncivil one in what is normally the civil realm, commerce, precisely because the violence that lies just beneath the surface of the civil realm cannot be allowed to permeate the political one lest the state be torn to pieces. Hence, the cultivation of virtue that is the hallmark of the American politician when he is not exercising his greed. Hence the expression of that virtue through calculation and guile to coopt the opposition, a practice which dated back to Thomas Jefferson. Bush, in his 1991 State of the Union address, was applauded loudly when he depicted America as a country that 'resolutely confronts evil for the sake of good'. The rough and tumble of parliamentary question period, the posturing pomposity of much that goes for parliamentary debate, are not integral to the American system. Acerbity belonged to rhetoric but not to divisive action. As Jefferson enunciated the principle, once an issue is decided, all unite behind it for the common good.⁶⁵ Senator Mitchell and Biden, who had led the

opposition to authorizing the use of military force against Iraq, echoed precisely those sentiments immediately after Bush completed his State of the Union address to rally all of America to back 'our young men and women dedicated to serving the cause of freedom in the Gulf'. As they had said earlier, in deciding issues in the face of a crisis, each American is to vote with his/her conscience but act to support whatever decision is made law. "Let this then be the distinctive mark of an American that in cases of commotion he enlists under no man's banner, enquires for no man's name, but repairs to the standard of the laws. Do this and you need never fear anarchy or tyranny."⁶⁶ The United States would be recreated as a gentler and kinder nation by acting out its aggression on others.

In this vision, historicism is reduced to acting out the irrational rather than acting as the willing accomplice of Spirit in history. In nonrational historicist explanations, the recognition of the contradictions in the values and their dynamic are the means to understand the 'cunning of reason' in history. It is not sufficient to depict those values as reified constants. Seymour Martin Lipset, a political sociologist, has written a series of books⁶⁷ to document the stability and continuity of the American character and identity established at the time of the American revolution so that the return to a kinder and gentler nation is but the traditional wheel of the American identity crisis taking one more turn back to the moral side of its heritage. Unlike most who, on first glance, saw little to differentiate Canada and the U.S.A., Lipset has documented those differences in identity and self-conception through his comparative studies. For Lipset, the changing face of America is primarily a change on the surface, from rural to urban, from industrial to service society, accompanied by a myriad of institutional changes. The real America, its value system, remains a constant. Such a view is inadequate to grasp the historicist perspective and is more akin to providing a law-like explanation in terms of alternating cycles, an impoverished and relativist version of the Humean project.

That value system would permeate the debate on whether Congress would authorize the use of military force in the Gulf conflict. In order to have that debate, the vast majority of Americans and the representatives they elected could not be simplistic patriots or moralists. Nor could they be sceptics who dismissed the notion of the controlling voice of reason. Nor historicists either believing they were only acting out the deeper values and contradictions in being an American. They had to believe in an America, to again use Bush's words from his State of the Union Address, founded on both 'rock solid realism and clear-eyed idealism'. They had to believe that they were endowed with the freedom to choose and the rational ability to make that choice. They had to believe,

with Tiresias and in opposition to both Creon and Antigone, that 'good deliberation' is 'the best of possessions', and once entered into requires an abandonment of stubborn willfulness, a flexibility and a willingness to yield.

1. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Ansprache gehalten am Abend des 10. Mai 1902 im Hause des Grafen Karl Lanckoronski," Gesammelte Werke, Prosa, vol. II (1959), 27, as quoted by Theodor Schieder, "The Role of Historical Consciousness in Political Action", History and Theory, Beiheft 17, Historical Consciousness and Political Action, p. 2.

2. F.M. Barnard, "Accounting for Actions", History and Theory, xx:3, 1981, p. 301.

3. cf. Howard Adelman, "Rational Explanation: The Hempel-Dray Model", History and Theory, : , 1974, pp. .

4. George Bush, State of the Union Address, January 29, 1991. The quotes are either taken from my notes or from the publication of the Address in The New York Times, January 30, 1991, A8.

5. cf. Martha C. Nussbaum, The fragility of goodness: Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, esp. Ch. 3. "This play examines two different attempts to close off the prospect of conflict and tension by simplifying the structure of the agent's commitments and loves. It asks what motivates such attempts; what becomes of them in a tragic crisis; and, finally, whether practical wisdom is to be found in this sort of strategy or in an entirely different approach to the world." p. 51. I am grateful to Martha Nussbaum for many of her insights into this situation.

6. Ibid, p. 52.

7. Antigone rejects governmental law in the name of a higher morality. This does not mean that those who reject this position, also reject the role of conscience and morality in the application of law. Ronald Dworkin, for example, argues that although a citizen's allegiance is to the law and the constitution, a citizen may disobey the law and refuse to accept judicial interpretations of the constitution as conclusive provided that behaviour was based on a considered and reasonable view of what was required by the law. We will return to the concept of "reasonableness" in Chapter 3.

8. America is certainly not the only country that produces Patriots. Daoub Kattoub, the Palestinian journalist, in a CNN interview (Feb. 15, 1991) following Baghdad's radio announcement that the Revolutionary Council had agreed to

withdraw from Kuwait, with a number of conditions attached, explained Palestinian support for Saddam Hussein because he was an Arab patriot. Similarly, the conservative reactionary anti-democratic forces in the Soviet Union who were behind Gorbachev's reversal on glasnost and perestroika stated, "We, the patriots, will now dictate the future direction of the country." The Washington Post, December 28, 1990, A23 as requoted by Peter Reddaway, "Empire on the Brink", The New York Review of Books, January 31, 1991, XXXVIII:3, p. 8.

9. cf. Otto Pflanze, Bismarck and the Development of Germany, 3 vols., Princeton: Princeton University Press, . Pflanze's volumes are dedicated to assessing how Bismarck did as a captain of the ship of state travelling on history's tumultuous stream.

10. cf. Peter Matthiessen's novel, Killing Mister Watson. For many of the phrases in this statement, I am indebted to Patricia Storace's review of Matthiessen's novel in The New York Review of Books, XXXVIII:3, p. 18.

11. George Washington to John Bannister, April 21, 1778, Norton reprinted in Edmund S. Morgan, The Genius of George Washington, New York: Norton, 1980, 50-54. I am grateful to John Diggins for leading me to this quote. See also Edmund S. Morgan, Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1988. Referring to the soldiers in the Continental Army, "They did their duty because they could be made to do it, because there was no fireside waiting to shelter them from the stern discipline an army required. And in the eyes of their contemporaries they earned no credit for their submission to that discipline." p. 162. In that sense, the regular soldiers in the Gulf army may not be much different than those who made up the Continental Army, and the soldiers in the Gulf may be the recepients of far more gratitude than the soldiers who risked and sacrificed their lives to win American independence.

12. Ibid, p. 58.

13. Sophocles, Antigone, I:926. This is the same line Hegel quotes in his famous brief reference to that play in The Phenomenology of Spirit, Para. 470.

14. Clausewitz on War (1968), p. 73.

15. op cit.

16. ibid, pp. 73-74.

17. Rapoport (1968), p. 412.

18. Nussbaum (1986), p. 64.

19. cf. an article under the headline, "Should Canada be at War?", entitled, "Let's Not: it's a terrible misadventure", by my colleague, David Bell, The Globe and Mail, February 4, 1991, A13.

20. cf. Nicolas Rothwell's London article, "Intellectual Opposites Unite for Once", which I saw reprinted in The Australian, Wednesday, February 13, 1991, p. 9.

21. David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, Book III, Of Morals, New York: Everyman's Library, 1740, p. 168. cf. Stanley Tweyman, Reason And Conduct In Hume And His Predecessors, esp. Ch 6, pp. 121-138, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974, for a fuller discussion.

22. David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals, New York: Little Library of Liberal Arts, 1957, Appendix I, V, p. 111.

23. John P. Diggins, The Lost Soul of American Politics: Virtue, Self-Interest, and the Foundations of Liberalism, New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1984, p. 91.

24. David Hume, The Political Essays, Ch. XVII, "On The Balance of Power", New York: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1953, p. 143.

25. Ibid, p. 144.

26. op. cit.

27. David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ibid, p. 281.

28. cf. Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, "Thomas Jefferson and Foreign Policy", Foreign Affairs, Spring, 1990.

29. Thomas Jefferson, letter to Thomas Law (1814), in Adrienne Koch and William Peden, eds., The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson, New York: , 1944, p. 638.

30. John C. Fitzpatrick, ed. The Writings of George Washington, 1745-1799, Washinton: Government Printing Office, 1931-44, Vol XXXV, pp. 233-235 as quoted by Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, "Thomas Jefferson and American Foreign Policy", Foreign Affairs, Spring, 1990, p. 146.

31. cf. Felix Gilbert, History: Choice and Commitment, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977, Part IV, "Diplomacy Old and New".

32. cf. Claude-Anne Lopez, Mon Cher Papa: Franklin and the Ladies of Paris, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press,

33. Franklin set many precedents for the American political style. Another precedent, relevant to the Gulf War, was the expectation that once a direction was decided, all those politicians who occupied positions of political responsibility in America were expected to unite behind the decision. Thus, although Franklin had done his best to preserve America as part of the British Empire by attempting to get Britain to acknowledge the exclusive domestic legislative authority of each colony, once those efforts clearly failed and the dye was cast, he not only gave his full-hearted support to the Revolution, but he never forgave his own son, William Temple Franklin, the Governor of New Jersey, for opposing the Revolution.

34. Edmund S. Morgan, Inventing the People: the Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, p. 163.

35. Ibid, Preface:32, p. 19.

36. Henry Brooks Adams, Democracy: An American Novel, New York: Airmont, 1968, p. 78.

37. cf. Giambattista Vico, The New Science of Giambattista Vico, tr. by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1948. see also A. Robert Caponigri, Time and Idea: The theory of History in Giambattista Vico, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953; Richard Manson, The Theory of Knowledge of Giambattista Vico, Archon Books, 1969; G. Tagliacozzo, ed., Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969; Leon Pompa, Vico: A Study of the New Science, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

38. cf. 17ernard Fensterwald, Jr., "The Anatomy of American 'Isoationism' and Expansionism", I & II, Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol II, Nos. 2 (pp. 111-139) & 4 (pp. 280-309), 1958.

39. Arthur Gladstone, "The Conception of the Enemy", The Journal of Conflict Resolution, III:2, June, 1959, pp. 132-137.

40. Thomas C. Schelling, "Bargaining, Communication and Limited War", The Journal of Conflict Resolution, I:1, 1957, pp. 19-36, and "The Strategy of Conflict: Prospectus for Reorientation of Game Theory", The Journal of Conflict Resolution, II:3, 1958, pp. 203-264.

41. John C. Harsanyi, "Rationality Postulates and Cooperative Games", The Journal of Conflict Resolution, V:2, pp. 179-196.
42. Forrest McDonald, The Formation of the American Republic, 1776-1790, Baltimore: Penguin, 1965, Preface.
43. Alexis de Toqueville, Democracy in America, (originally published in France in 1835 & 1840) New York: Vintage Books, 1945, Vol. I, p. 253.
44. Ibid, p. 249.
45. Ibid, p. 273.
46. cf. John Higham, History: The Development of Historical Studies in the United States, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965, ch. 3.
47. cf. William H. Whyte, The Organization Man, New York: Simon & Shuster, 1956.
48. John C. Miller, Origins of the American Revolution, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1943, p. 505.
49. Forrest McDonald, The Formation of the American Republic, 1776-1790, Baltimore: Penguin, 1965, p. 236.
50. Esmond Wright, ed., Course and Consequences of the American Revolution, p. 11.
51. John P. Diggins, The Lost Soul of American Politics: Virtue, Self-Interest, and the Foundations of liberalism, New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1984, p. 4.
52. J.L. Talmon, The Unique and the Universal: Some Historical Reflections, London: Secker & Warburg, 1965, p. 68.
53. Bernard Bailyn The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967, p. 143 in quotations drawn from the debates prior to the American revolution.
54. George Bush, The State of the Union Address as reprinted in The New York Times, Wednesday, January 30, 1991.
55. American Quarterly, XIX, Summer, 1967, pp. 147-165.
56. Ibid, p. 165.
57. cf. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Moby Dick, Edgar Allan Poe's

horror stories and D.H. Lawrence's Studies in Classic American Literature and the depiction of Fennimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo as the archetypal American hero in which the American soul is depicted as "hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer." cf. fn. 8 and the reference to Patricia Storace's review of Peter Matthiessen's novel, Killing Mister Watson, a black comedy in the same tradition. I am indebted for this reference to Patricia Storace.

58.

59. Thomas Paine, Common Sense, opening paragraph.

60. Michael M. Thomas, "The Greatest American Shambles", The New York Review of Books, XXXVIII:3, p. 35.

61. cf. John Diggins, 1984. "What has characterized American political thought and culture since the Revolution is not the presence of civic virtues but the absence of Christian values." p. 16.

62. John Adams, "A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law," in, Essential Works of the Founding Fathers, ed., L. Kriegel, p. 7.

63. Barrington Moore Jr., Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World, Boston: Beacon Press, 1966.

64. cf. Robert Reich, _____, who depicts America as constituted of two new classes, the 20% connected to symbol manipulation and who hold a monopoly on the new form of capital, intellectual capital, versus the bottom 80%, in the new service industries, who are manipulated by those who control those symbols.

65. cf. fn. , where reference is made to Benjamin Franklin who enunciated the same principle.

66. Thomas Jefferson, Works, Vol. IX, p. 193n.

67. cf. Seymour Martin Lipset, The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective, New York: Basic Books, 1963 and .