(late 1950s)

WOODROW WILSON AS A POLITICAL PHILOSOPHER

I am not sure that Woodrow Wilson would approve of a lecture about him under this title. Surely not, unless theory is defined as Edmund Burke would define it. Wilson was not a lover of political philosophy as a set of abstractions, and I think it fair to say that he never gave it systematic treatment. He made, likewise, a number of remarks that suggested a less than enthusiastic appreciation of political philosophy. In 1908 in his lectures at Columbia University he insisted that there are no theories in the Constitution. The Constitution is not a mere lawyer's instrument, for "it is a vehicle of life and its spirit is always the spirit of the age."[1] Moreover, he declared in his

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1. Constitutional Government in the United States (1908), pp.60, 69.

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first book, Congressional Government in 1886, that he proposed to study Congressional rule "in a light unclouded by theory." To say that Wilson had little sympathy with doctrinaire theory does not imply that he objected to ideas, or the necessity of principle in political leadership. Wilson, like Burke, objected to the stream of ideology let loose by the French Revolution. Both men held that the philosophy of the French Revolution was "radically evil and corrupting," for it held, among other ideas, that government had its origin in contract rather than in growth and habit. Justice, said Woodrow Wilson, is the true aspect of

government; it is not to be found in liberty.[1]

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1. Mere Literature and Other Essays (1896), p. 154-156.

There is no evidence that Wilson ever accepted a fundamental revision of this idea. With Burke, an uprooted, doctrinaire, speculative, utopian consideration of ideas is cloudy political theory. It does harm and no good. But Wilson would not object, I think, if we assume that valid political theory is rooted in history, use and wont, and established political habit. No doubt it was this Burkean fear of the speculative which prevented him from the using of the support he might have had in the doctrines of natural law and rights. Natural law is deeply embedded in our tradition from the Declaration of Independence through the state and national bills of rights. Rights were put in the Constitution because they were fundamental; they are not fundamental merely because they are inserted in the Constitution. Wilson hardly mentions the Declaration of Independence and the bills of rights, or rather the specific consideration of civil liberty, scarcely engages his attention. Instead of using the law of nature as it was used by our political forebears, Wilson speaks of it in Huxley's sense.[1] In The New

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1. The State: Elements of Historical and Practical Politics (1889), pp. 630-631.

Freedom in 1913 he declared that we should go to Darwin rather than Newton in our search for it. (See p. 47). To see in natural

law, not a moral rule, but the physical laws of the universe, was, let us say as well, a typical modern Protestant position. Natural law as a statement of an objective moral order is characteristically a Catholic point of view.

Let us first inquire what kind of a man Wilson was in his study of political ideas. It should be clear, however, that this lecture is concerned primarily with Wilson's earlier ideas, and it does not consider, except by side glance, the period of World War I. About any man we ask of his education, and the presuppositions that are the foundations of his thought. Wilson's scheme of ideas is drawn primarily from English experience from Burke to his own time. And these ideas, these models, and this inspiration were used in the interpretation of American institutions and history. For to Wilson, American institutions and history were but an extension of the experience of the English race. One can discover little impact of the great nineteenth-century German scholarship, though some German books are cited in The State. The Latin world, in method of thought, in philosophy, religion, and government are given the briefest mention in Wilson's extensive writings. He was content with the English language, English literature, English statesmen, and English and American political institutions. Yet, if Wilson, like Hegel, was weak in philosophical education in his youth, he was a master of the language. And, indeed, it seems that to master the language became early a part of the flaming ambition attributed to him by Edward S. Corwin, his younger colleague at Princeton. "The core of his being," said Corwin, "was a flaming ambition. . . . an

impatient craving for immediate domination."[1]

1. From "Departmental Colleague," in William Starr Myers (editor), Woodrow Wilson: Some Princeton Memories (1946), p. 35. Cited by R. H. Ferrell, "Woodrow Wilson: Man and Statesman," The Review of Politics, XVIII (April, 1956), 131-132.

In essence, his method was a literary examination of historical experience. He set himself to master English expression and he had small patience with other political scientists and historians who had not this genius. In reviewing with sharp criticism John W. Burgess, Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law, he declared: "For political science cannot be truthfully constructed except by the literary method; by the method, that is, which seeks to reproduce life in speech."[1] In

1. Ray Stannard Baker and William E. Dodd (editors), The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, (1925), Vol. I, p. 196.

this review he offered no objection of Burgess' theory of Teutonic superiority. In his essay on "The Study of Politics," he observed that "it has fallen out that, by turning its thoughts towards becoming a science, politics, like political economy, has joined its literature to those books of natural science which boast a brief authority, and then make way for what is 'latest.'" Scientific books have too high a rate of mortality. Politics, thought Wilson, "is the science of life of man in society."[1] The ideal student

1. An Old Master and Other Political Essays (1893), p. 54-55.

of politics would observe as Arthur Young did in his time, he would write as Bagehot did of the politics of England and the Continent, and he would philosophize with Burke.

In like vein, Wilson insisted that "scholarship is the realm of nicely adjusted opinion. It is the business of scholars to assess evidence and test conclusions, to discriminate values and reckon probabilities. Literature is the realm of conviction and vision. . . . Scholars, therefore, do not reflect; they label, group kind with kind, set forth in schemes, expound with dispassionate method. Their minds are not stages, but museums." From literature rather than from scholarship we can look more surely forth upon the world.[1] Nor was the prescription much

1. Mere Literature, pp. 21, 26-27.

different for historians, since to get at the truth of history one must have art. "The historian needs an imagination quite as much as he needs scholarship, and consummate literary art as much as candor and common honesty." Only art can manage the nice adjustment to means and ends; indeed, one is led to believe that only the artist can succeed in his effort to tell the truth.[1]

1. Ibid., p. 185.

It is, let us say, historically remarkable that so gifted a man, a man who had so great a power of telling in chiseled words "the truth" to his generation, lived in such a time of mighty

change. Wilson lived the great contrast before and after the revolution in European culture. When he began his political education as a young man in Princeton, the great assumptions of the nineteenth century stood unquestioned, and the duty of the master was to explain to the youth and to readers the meaning of so vast a cultural achievement as Anglo-American life. As a young student of law, Wilson wrote and spoke at the University of Virginia of the prime years of the last century, and when he was old, sick and broken the revolution of the West had begun. Instead of English prime ministers and statesmen to consider, the civilized nations of the world were struggling against the surge of Bolshevik revolution and terror.

As a graduate student, Wilson dealt with consensus. He lived in a stable world of high consensus which did not question the legitimacy of government; the assumptions of liberal economics were the foundation of empire; and there was none to say that parliamentary government might be a passing institution. The great issues of life and government were solved, and democratic institutions provided a means whereby suitable minor changes might be made. It was a world in which reason functioned without being clouded by Freudian explanation. Wilson devoted his early scholarly efforts to showing how democratic institutions could be strengthened in such wise that the consensus of the age could be passed on to coming generations.

Today we have many political institutions that are called democratic, but the sense of legitimacy has faded from the minds of uncounted citizens. Comparative government is not

as Wilson saw it, a comparison of the effectiveness of leadership in realizing commonly accepted ends, but it has become in the large a comparison between tyranny and freedom. Instead of stability, we have fragility in political, economic, and cultural institutions. Instead of a belief that the common man would each generation come closer to political competence, we are told that he is incapable of ever having opinions on important questions and that he should follow some autonomous elite, the suitable managers of the public mind. The enthusiasm for adult education falters before the psychiatric explanation of human behavior.

One of the sources of the warmth of Woodrow Wilson as political figure was his confidence in public opinion. He did not believe that any view held by the people was good simply because it was popular. But he did believe in the possibility of knowledge and the march of reason, if there were a bold and competent leadership available to the democratic citizen. Wilson was, thus, an historical rationalist. He believed in the progress that had been made in the nineteenth century, and he believed that Britain had pointed the way. It had aided in the formulation of sound judgment, and overall it had stimulated the growth of popular knowledge. His strictures on the growth of secrecy in government are sharp, and his indictment of those who would keep knowledge of government from the people was savage. Such is one of the larger themes of The New Freedom, but it had also been an ingredient in his lectures at Columbia University.[1] "A

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1. See Constitutional Government In the United States (1908), passim.

constitutional government," said Wilson, "is one whose powers have been adapted to the interests of the people and to the maintenance of individual liberty." Political liberty, moreover, is the right of those who are governed to adjust government to their own needs and interests.[1] And again: "Constitutional

1. Ibid., p. 2.

government can be vital only when it is refreshed at every turn of affairs by a new and cordial and easily attained understanding between those who govern and those who are governed. It can be maintained only by genuine common counsel; and genuine common counsel can be attained only by genuine representative institutions."[1]

1. Ibid., p. 222.

II

There are two further important issues that will be considered here. We will examine, first, the concept of Burkean and constitutional leadership, and, second, the emergence of a sense of social issue, that is, the theory of reform to be found in the writings and leadership of Woodrow Wilson. It would be of interest to study his leadership in education as a professor and as the President of Princeton University. While his educational leadership still provides a whip-lash to the imagination, and much of what he wrote and did is as fresh today as the problems we face, there is neither sufficient time or relevance to this discussion. It may be said that through all the periods of his

life there is a process of building upon his own past. As a young man he struggled to gain a literary reputation; he attained it before long, writing as beautifully about government as any American ever has. No doubt his reputation as a college lecturer and as a writer was greater than his fame as a formal political scientist. But the literary skill, and many of his early basic ideas in politics carried over into his conception of a university, and from here into his legislative programs in the state, the nation, and in the world. Personally, I do not find different characters in the teacher, the writer, the scholar, the educator, and finally the political leader.

Down to World War I, most of the political ideas of Woodrow Wilson converge on a conception of leadership in the constitutional state. Leadership to Wilson was rooted in his conceptions of history and of institutions. It is an expression of the spiritual freedom of man, for history and tradition are made by free man. It seems that the background for leadership should be a state formed in the inspiration of Burke. In sum, Wilson proposed for America as close an approach as might be possible to the British cabinet system of government. He realized that is could not be identical, but in the end what he insisted on was the possibility that under the Constitution some use of cabinet ideas might be made.

Wilson's conception of institutions was not speculative; he tried to be intensely practical, yet nevertheless organic with life, rather than mechanical in his attitude toward governmental structure. He wanted no French ideology. Lord Acton said of

James Bryce that he evaded the force of philosophical ideas in America, yet here we have precisely the basis of Wilson's admiration for Bryce. Wilson admired Bryce because he had no sense of abstraction. When Bryce argued that America had no theory, Wilson nodded approval in his review of The American Commonwealth; but Wilson did not like calling American government an experiment as Bryce did, for said Wilson "we are in fact but living an old life under new conditions. Where there is conservative continuity there can hardly be said to be experiment."[1] Moreover Burke

1. See Robert C. Brooks (editor), Bryce's American Commonwealth: Fiftieth Anniversary (1939), pp. 181, 184.

expressed well this common foundation of American and English institutions. "There is no page of abstract reasoning to be found in Burke. . . . Noble generalizations, it is true, everywhere broaden his matter: there is no more philosophical writer in English in the field of politics than Burke."[1] And Burke

1. Mere Literature, p. 128.

believed liberty to be the character of the English race.

Such a spirit of political interpretation could brook no admiration for French political ideology, or, indeed, of any Latin institutions. Wilson liked neither the Catholic faith nor the liberal ideology that swept forward from the French Revolution. In 1880 he argued that the Catholic Church was a menace to

American institutions,[1] and during the Mexican crisis he bitterly

1. Baker and Dodd, op. cit., Vol. I, 60ff.

resented Catholic criticism of his support of Mexican "liberals."[1]

1. See in general Arthur S. Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917 (1954), pp. 93ff.

Upon reflection it appears to me that his rejection of French revolutionary ideology was the source of many of his judgments in politics, and this rejection probably stems from his admiration of Burke and Bagehot. Wilson declared that Burke did not understand the condition of France when he defended the falling institutions of the French nation, however he was right in his strictures on French philosophy. He was defending England with justice against this philosophy. Speaking of Burke in this connection, Wilson said: "He hated the French revolutionary philosophy and deemed it unfit for free men. And that philosophy is in fact radically evil and corrupting. No state can ever be conducted on its principles. For it holds that government is a matter of contract and deliberate arrangement, whereas in fact it is an institute of habit, bound together by innumerable threads of association, scarcely one of which has been deliberately placed. It holds that the object of government is liberty, whereas the true object of government is justice; not the advantage of one class, even though that class constitute the majority, but right equity in the adjustment of the interests of all classes. It

assumes that government can be made over at will, but assumes it without the slightest historical foundation. For governments have never been successfully and permanently changed except by slow modification operating from generation to generation. It contradicted every principle that had been so laboriously brought to light in the slow stages of the growth of liberty in the only land in which liberty had then grown to great proportions. The history of England is a continuous thesis against revolution; and Burke would have been no true Englishman, had he not roused himself even fanatically, if there were need, to keep such puerile doctrine out."[1]

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1. Mere Literature, pp. 155-156.

Just as Wilson rejected the doctrine and speculative ideas that came from the French Revolution, he was opposed to any merely mechanical explanation of government drawn from Newton and Montesquieu. Such a mechanical view seemed to him to be the ideal of many students of government in the eighteenth century, even to some of the founders of the American system. The Whigs wanted a figurehead king surrounded by checks and balances, modelled on Newtonian dynamics. It was Montesquieu who showed the Whigs what they had done, and the Framers and The Federalist followed Montesquieu. Wilson insisted that government is a living thing, and it is accountable to Darwin and not to Montesquieu with his Newtonian political mechanics.[1]

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1. Constitutional Government in the United States (1908), pp. 54ff.

One of Wilson's earliest political theses, which he considered neither speculative nor mechanical, and one to which he adhered as long as any other, was the defense of cabinet government against the American Congressional system. In 1879 Henry Cabot Lodge, as editor, accepted Wilson's first article for the International Review, the title of which was "Cabinet Government in the United States." The theme was continued later in Congressional Government, and in many articles and speeches in subsequent years. But this was no doctrinaire defense of the English Constitution or of the interpretation of it offered by Walter Bagehot, "the man who first clearly distinguished the facts of the English Constitution from its history." When Bagehot died some wit said (with Wilson's later approval) that he "carried away into the next world more originality of thought than is now to be found in the three Estates of the Realm."[1] What Bagehot

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1. Mere Literature, pp. 74-76.

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had explained to Woodrow Wilson was the sublime achievement in England of responsible political leadership; it was the generous crowning of the English struggle for liberty. It was not the product of theory, but the creation of use and wont. Only a people long habituated to responsible liberty could achieve it, and only the sober-minded and the practical could succeed in preserving it.

Against the realities of English experience, Wilson placed the unhappy use of experience in our own government. In

both Congressional Government and Constitutional Government the same theme is explained with marshalled facts and earnest discourse. English leadership was, with Santayana, "a harmony woven out of accidents, like every work of time and nature, and all the more profound and fertile because no mind could ever have designed it."[1] American leadership, in contrast, sprang from the mechani-

1. George Santayana, Character and Opinion in the United States (Anchor Books, 1956), p. 143.

cal imitation of a Whig and Newtonian universe, and in result there was no naturalness, no harmony, and, indeed, no leadership either from the President or from the Committees of Congress. American leaders had tried to imitate English government when our own was founded, but they did less well than they had conceived. Had they really succeeded in constructing ours according to the English system there would have been leadership for a Congress that was supreme. It seemed clear to Wilson that the Framers intended Congress to be a reformed and properly regulated parliament. But evolution almost immediately began to work changes. When Congress rejected the leadership of the "government" in legislation, it was alone among the legislatures of the world in so doing. Against a proper and natural executive leadership, the power of Congressional committees dominated the scene and provided no organized, centralized, or responsible leadership in legislation.[1]

1. Constitutional Government, pp. 82ff.

In 1897 Wilson wrote in the Atlantic Monthly: "There are few things more disconcerting to the thought, in any effort to forecast the future of affairs, than the fact that we must continue to take our executive policy from presidents given us by nominating conventions, and our legislation from conference committees of the House and Senate." He then referred to the leaderless structure of our government.[1] As a result, "public opinion has

1. Baker and Dodd, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 331.

no easy vehicle for its judgments, no quick channel for its action. Nothing about the system is direct and simple."[1]

1. Congressional Government, p. 331.

If we pause for a moment of evaluation at this point, we sense immediately the difficulty of it. First of all, Wilson's comparison of institutions is not broad, for it does not include the methods of operation among parliamentary or cabinet governments in other countries than Britain. How can one know that parliamentary government would work in this country like the British system rather than like the French? In the 1902 edition of The State some attention is given to this problem, for in this edition Wilson became critical of the multiparty system. The first edition was in 1889. Wilson noted that between the first and second ballotings in France the candidates might even be changed, and "France cannot afford to foster factions."[1] In

1. The State, 2nd ed., (1902), pp. 211-22.

close relation to the multiparty system, Wilson was impressed with Bagehot's observation in the second edition of The English Constitution in 1872 that the French ministry does not have the right to dissolve the chambers if a non-confidence vote has been passed. What assurance would we have in the United States that there would not be a multiparty system if we had cabinet government, and what assurance is there that the right to dissolve Congress would be given to a responsible American ministry? In sum, parliamentary or cabinet government has worked well and not so well in various situations; hardly can it be said that England's transplanted institutions have worked with British assurance except in the British Commonwealth of nations.

Or, another query may be made. Is not the acceptance of the "Oregon System" for state government inconsistent with his theory effect and responsible executive leadership. In his inaugural address as Governor of New Jersey in 1911 he outlined his program of reforms dealing with labor, health, and other items, but especially the regulation of corporations. In addition, the Oregon System of popular legislation should be instituted. Though the American people are normally conservative and they are unwilling to touch the stable foundations of the political system, yet they are willing to control "the interests" or the reactionary forces in American society. The adverse criticism of direct legislation was particularly strong when it was insisted that it would undermine representative government, if it worked at all as it was planned. By the same token it would remove from a vigorous governor his leadership in legislation.

Earlier Wilson had said: "We shall not again have a true national life until we compact it by such legislative leadership as other nations have. But once thus compacted and embodied, our nationality is safe."[1]

1. An Old Master and Other Political Essays (1893), p. 138.

Wilson was convinced that we faced a crisis in leadership. Those like Maine, Lord Roseberry, and Mr. Goldwin Smith who praised the Constitution because of the restraints it had placed on democracy, and on the usurpation of the popularly elected House of Representatives, were clearly wrong. In the House, said Wilson, there is none who stands for the nation.[1]

1. Ibid., 135-136.

Along with strong executive leadership, there must be a legislative system operating under the principle of party responsibility. Legislation should be prepared by a single committee in each house, composed of distinguished leaders from the majority. Official representatives of the executive should be admitted to either House to answer questions or to engage in debate. On the other hand, to introduce ministerial responsibility would involve constitutional changes, though they would be worth it, and he believed that our constitution and the federal system would both be preserved under such a system.[1]

1. Ibid., pp. 176-179.

Wilson's consciousness of party responsibility was, I believe, a slow growth. One does not sense it in the earlier works, such as The State, and his first serious inspiration to the acceptance of the party as the undergirding of the cabinet system probably came from Bryce. At least it is clear in Wilson's review of Bryce's American Commonwealth that Wilson regarded the study of the party system as the crowning achievement of Bryce's method.[1] Yet party responsibility was only to be found at the

1. Brooks, op. cit., p. 175.

end of a long march of historical development. There were, it seems, stages in the development of free or constitutional government. With Bagehot, he agreed that most nations remained in a condition of stagnation, they did not break the thick crust of custom, and they made no progress toward the protection of liberty. Wilson admired the political creativeness of Elizabeth I and Frederick the Great, though in Prussia the contribution was a kingly office and a bureaucracy, both of which the king himself had created. The final stage of constitutional government is the attainment of either parliamentary or presidential government, a term which Bagehot invented, and which was not a happy choice in Wilson's estimation. But in either system the cement which holds it together and the signet of political maturity is the existence of responsible political parties.[1] Such is the lesson

1. See in general Constitutional Government, pp. 28 ff.

of political progress, and such, indeed, is the political law of history. But in America the Whig theory of government had produced its peculiarities. Parties had acquired in the United States an extraordinary degree of authority because they were necessary to hold the government together. But having authority, they had not at the same time become responsible. Nowhere else in the world is electoral machinery so complicated, and "nowhere else in the world is party machinery so elaborate or so necessary."[1]

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1. Ibid., p. 198ff.

To those for whom democratic government was historically destined, the path to party responsibility and executive leadership was clear. History may, thus, be used to explain institutions, and to show why democracy is possible, "nay natural" to some nations and "a quick intoxicant or a slow poison to France and Spain, a mere maddening draught to the South American states." Democracy , said Wilson, was a fruit of maturity, and with the English race it was not accident but an organic development in which the most liberal forms of government of all times had been realized. Free government was a habit of the English race.[1]

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1. Brooks, op. cit., p. 186.

III

The second major topic I wish to examine is Wilson's conception of reform. It is here that one of the most controversal of the points about Wilson can be raised. It is customary with

some to stress the great change that came into Wilson's political life when he became governor. From being a conservative, it is said, he became a great Progressive leader. Some believe that George L. Record provided the ideas that made it possible for Wilson to become the President of the United States. But in his early writings there was a keen sense of the pace of social change, of the necessity of social and economic reform, and of the constitutional method of bringing about necessary changes in economic life. Moreover, it may be said that the degree of change in Wilson at this point was limited, for it can be argued that the "New Freedom," fitted into the laissez-faire theory connected with classical economics, while the "New Nationalism," which Wilson accepted in 1916, was the great step toward change. It was at this time that the function of governmental control was accepted in supplement to the principle of the mere restoration of competition, the avowed objective of the earlier program of reform. Arthur S. Link has said that in the end Wilson accepted most of the New Nationalism theory of the regulation of business by a powerful trade commission. He deserted the idea that one should remove merely restraints of trade by anti-monppoly laws.[1]

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1. Arthur S. Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917 (1954), pp. 56, 70ff.

Wilson became a new type of Progressive in the campaign of 1916; he had moved from the New Freedom to the New Nationalism. The most significant series of social measures in the history of the country up to that time was enacted in 1916. By the fall of 1916

nearly every plank of the Progressive Platform of 1912 had been enacted. As a consequence, the Progressives supported Woodrow Wilson in 1916 as they had not in 1912.[1]

1. Ibid., 224.

A theorist must of necessity inquire in Wilson's ideas of social justice, but the intellectual history of the time can be illuminated by asking about the source of his convictions on justice and reform in society. One source was certainly his Christian point of view, and apparently he retained his Presbyterian orthodoxy to the end. Wilson's addresses to religious groups show the continued depth of his religious beliefs. A strong Protestant flavor runs through his discussions of education, and his address, for example, in 1904 to the Pennsylvania Sabbath School Association shows clearly the fundamental character of his faith.[1] It has been customary to attribute some of the unfortunate

1. Baker and Dodd, op. cit., Vol. I, 474ff.

aspects of Wilson's personality to his Presbyterian upbringing. Presbyterianism to the political Freudians has become a source of mental unbalance, rather than the inspiration of a love of justice. In any case, the Freudian argument proves too much, even for Professor Hofstadter, since one must first evaluate it by considering a Freudian analysis of the man who proposes the argument. What were the obscure motivations that lead him to apply it to others?

With Hofstadter, Presbyterianism seems to become a problem in abnormality, rather than the source of conviction, moral firmness, and ultimate political purpose.[1]

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1. See in general Richard Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition and the men Who Made it (1948), Ch. X, on "Woodrow Wilson: The Conservative as Liberal." Hofstadter speaks of "the ruthlessness of the pure in heart." (p. 248).

If one is a socialist, the criticism of Wilsonian reformism is clear, since he manned no frontal assault on capitalism. To the Socialist, indeed, Wilson seems much like a nineteenth-century liberal, filled always with the ideas of that century. It is possible in an age of general crisis to charge that a leader does not understand the failure of a time. But it is a charge that may be directed at all ideologies of the last century. None of the generally held positions foresaw what was ahead, the failure of economic reform, the outbreak of war, the starvation of Europe, the bankruptcy of traditional solutions, and the rise and spread of the new revolutions. True, Wilson's ideas of reform did not foresee the depth of crisis in a second World War, but then the worst descriptions of capitalism by the doctrinaire in peace have hardly touched the realities of post-war situations. The present is always alive with indications of the future, but we always look in part to what is behind.

There are too many theories of the failure of reform and reformism for one to be comfortable with only one. But I am convinced that limited reformism is based on a common stock of ideas drawn from the great experiences of past politics and from

the intellectuals who have tried to explain such periods. Along with a Christian sensitivity to social injustice, it is apparent that many of Wilson's basic perceptions were classical. The ancient world was well acquainted with the uncertain arts of maintaining social stability. From the time of Solon through the Gracchi reform in government and law and corrections in the distribution of wealth went jointly together. It is not uncommon in the end to suggest that the fall of Rome, or even of Classical civilization, was a failure to reform at the right time. Almost any political leader must be some kind of reformer, and Wilson was no exception. Years before he entered New Jersey politics he had seen the issue of reform in the economic organization of the United States. There was never a time when Woodrow Wilson was not a reformer. The reformer of the Progressive period can be drawn directly out of the Classical period, and more particularly Wilsonian reform has a close affinity with his understanding of the fall of the Greek City and the Roman Republic.

Wilson argued in The State in 1889 that the city should correct the distribution of wealth, in much the manner that Aristotle suggests. The independent farmer must be protected against the large owner, and the freeman must be assured against the encroachment of slavery. Had there been a greater development of administrative devices, and had the principle of representation been more extended, the failure of the past in economic reform would have been less disastrous. But it was true that pastures encroached on the grain field, there was the lasting strain of militarism, the poor accumulated in the City of Rome as a result of the failure of

the economy, and the distribution of wealth was increasingly distorted, while the foundations of republican government crumbled away. Wilson plainly has sympathy for the Gracchi.[1] Perhaps

1. The State, Sec. 162.

the lesson of history is not that it shows what should be done, but that it shows what should not be done.

Wilson was never a doctrinaire when he discussed the functions of the state. Though individualism seemed to him to run deep into Teutonic experience, there is no argument that individualism means a laissez-faire economy. As early as 1889 Wilson is unwilling to make any categorical statement on the functions of the state. Function depends on the form of the state, as it has from the ancient world down to modern times. Moreover, the functions of government are pretty much what they have always been. For "government does not stop with the protection of life, liberty, and property, as some have supposed; it goes on to serve every convenience of society. Its sphere is limited only by its own wisdom, alike where republican and where absolutist principles prevail." The modern state, like the ancient, regulates the property of the individual, and with the exception of Sparta, there is not much real difference.[1] After affirming that government

1. Ibid., Sec. 1246.

does now whatever experience permits or the times demand, he insists

that the end of government is the facilitation of the objects of society. "The rule of governmental action is necessary cooperation; the method of political development is conservative adaptation, shaping old habits into new ones, modifying old means to accomplish new ends."[1] And the rule of historical continuity may not be

1. Ibid., 1287.

departed from under any circumstances. Nothing radically novel may be attempted with safety in politics, while each people, each nation, must live upon the extrapolation of its own experienee.[1]

1. Ibid., Sec. 1286.

Wilson's admiration of Burke must forever be a stumbling block to those who would reshape society without tarrying for history to catch up. The critical mind will observe tardiness in Wilson in the acceptance of some of the ideas of the Progressive movement, but, indeed, it was as early as many of the notable Progressives. Was it unusual for Wilson to be critical of the Pullman Strike, the Haymarket anarchists, of some Populist proposals, and some of the constrictions of the closed shop?[1] It is

1. Cf. Hofstadter, op. cit., p. 239.

not exactly an accident that men like George L. Record, and many other so-called "Progressives" supported Theodore Roosevelt in 1912.

There was a difference between the New Freedom and the New Nationalism, though in 1916 when the Progressives rallied to him he had, in effect, adopted the New Nationalism.[1] Wilson did not

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1. R. G. Tugwell, "The Progressive Orthodoxy of Franklin D. Roosevelt," Ethics, LXIV (October, 1953), 1ff. Tugwell indicates that Roosevelt reverted from the idea of experimental social planning to reform, and, thus, to the old Progressive orthodoxy.

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rush headlong into any particular reform. His sense of history, his admiration for Burke and British institutions, and his understanding of the nineteenth-century kept him from many of the errors of simple-minded reformers.

The historical school was one of the great solvent forces of the nineteenth century. It not only remade the past, but it destroyed the present, and it made the future. It taught the relativism of institutions in time and in function. But it was not an unlimited relativism, for, among other things, it believed in the superiority of the Teutons. In Woodrow Wilson the historical method reached one of its high points of integration, for it helped him formulate his conservatism, and to become, as well, one of the Legislators of the modern world. Wilson's historical method was combined with biology, for he approved of Huxley's law of adaptation. In this we see him separating from a political Presbyterianism, but it was still true that the Christian foundation of his belief in justice was not destroyed by any of the thought of the nineteenth century. However much he may have admired the nineteenth century as the culmination of progressive ages, and

however much his reformism both domestically and internally was an attempt to restore the vision of that time, there is still a universal moral purpose in his thought and in his legislative leadership. With his moral conviction, he judged history rationally as he understood it, and institutional relativism was never a full explanation of political reality. For all his Progressive confidence in devices, Wilson yet affirmed the ultimate force of principle. Behind the cabinet system, the League of Nations, or at times government ownership, was still the principle of unfolding justice through historical experience. Because he believed in principle in experience, rather than in abstraction, he was another Burke and not a revolutionary leader. In 1908 Wilson attempted to define true and false conservatism. False conservatism is reactionary. What we need is to return to well-recognized principles, "but a return to them in such a way as will give them a new interpretation and a new meaning for the time we live in." A true conservatism does not discredit tested principles.[1]

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1. "Conservatism, True and False," The Princeton Alumni Weekly, December 16, 1908, p. 188.

For a man who lived at the end of a century of tested liberalism, as it was emobided in British and American experience, it would be difficult indeed to see the full meaning of the twentieth-century revolution. Wilson, it seems, did not understand Continental thought; he did not realize the vast change in the character of war that had taken place, though reflection on the attritional character and cultural destructiveness of the War

Between the States might have taught him much; and he struggled bitterly to understand the new force of Bolshevism and Communism that the Russian Revolution had let loose in the world. But credit must be given where due. Wilson did try to understand the Latin mind after World War I; he did believe, if any affirmation can be convincing, that the League of Nations was a restorer of wrecked economies and benumbed cultures, as well as the preserver of future peace; and he was able at the end of his administrations to bring to the American people a consciousness of the menace of Communism to American liberty and democracy. Had he been able, he would have turned back Communism in Russia, but in this he failed.

Every American must reflect on political revolution, since the independence of the United States began in such an occasion. But it seems obvious that everyone, Americansincluded, judge revolution as a means to some good or evil end and not simply as a desirable process in itself. For us a revolution can mean growth, and surely the revolution of 1776 meant growth. In 1896 when Wilson spoke of Princeton University during the American Revolution, he said: "There is nothing so conservative of life as growth; when that stops, decay sets in and the end comes on apace. Progress is life, for the body politic as for the body natural. To stand still is to court death. Here, then, if you will but look, you have the law of conservatism disclosed: it is the law of progress. But not all change is progress, not all growth is the manifestation of life. Let one part of the body be in haste to outgrow the rest and you have malignant disease,

the threat of death."[1] It seems to me that Wilson never deserted

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1. Baker and Dodd, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 273.

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such a position, or, if he did, he returned to it in the new revolutionary crisis after World War I. Is not this the way that Burke could speak of revolution, as he contrasted that of 1688 with the French Revolution of a century later? If Wilson ever left Burkean thought, he returned to at the end, when he struggled in 1919 with disorder at home and the spread of Communism in Europe.

Wilson's great message of December 2, 1919, as he contended with illness, is yet one of the most prophetic in his long line of public papers. For more than two years he had considered the Russian Revolution and the Communist movement. His mind had finally been shaped on one of the greatest of contemporary issues. He refers to the "restlessness in our body politic." It has arisen from the failure to have a just and permanent peace that might bring back normal conditions of life; it arose because there was a "transfusion of radical theories" from the seething centers of Europe. And along with profiteers and the high cost of living, one also encounters the work of malevolent agitators." Congress, said Wilson, should act to remedy these causes "with ameliorated living conditions under the minimum restrictions upon personal liberty that is consistent with our reconstruction problems. And it should arm the Federal Government with power to deal in its criminal courts with persons who by violent methods would abrogate our time-tested institutions. With the free expression of opinion and with the advocacy of orderly political change,

however fundamental, there must be no interference, but towards passion and malevolence tending to incite crime and insurrection under the guise of political evolution there should be no leniency. Legislation to this end has been recommended by the Attorney General and should be enacted."

Though the seed of revolution might be repression, he would look to the International Labor Office to govern the relations of labor and capital, and, I assume, the relations of economic classes. He would not, indeed, see any hope for the workers in the Russian Revolution. "Russia today," he said in the Message of December 2, "with its blood and terror, is a painful object lesson of the power of minorities." No minorities will be allowed to dominate in America; instead the great reforms will come through representative government, the only proper way. Those who propose any other method are enemies of this country, asserted Wilson, and they are enemies of the ballot and justice to all classes. "Let those beware who would take the shorter road of disorder and revolution. The right road is the road of justice and orderly process."[1] I think it is fairly obvious that

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1. Cf. Robert W. Dunn (editor), The Palmer Raids (International Publishers, 1948). It is argued here that one objective of the so-called Palmer raids was to strengthen the administration's policy of intervention in Russia, which was trying to maintain a "self-chosen government." Obviously, this was one of the objectives, but another was surely the protection of American free institutions against the Communist conspiracy.

Wilson determined until the present the basic objectives of our policy toward Bolshevism, both in this country and abroad.

IV

Some final words of evaluation are clearly in order. As a political theorist Wilson was not primarily a critic of intellectual history. His reading must have been wide-ranging indeed, but it does not show by specific citations of the writers he read. In nearly every instance, of course, he wrote better than those he read, and quotations would have been anticlimax and citation a baroque gesture. Surely, he must have covered intensively the writings of Englishmen during the nineteenth century, but one can only guess that he read Cardinal Newman, or whether Newman's classic treatment of higher education was reflected in his valient but failing battle to reform Princeton University. He must have read Bentham and the Mills, and while one may imagine his anguish in reading the tortured and unrevised sentences of Bentham, and the wearied ponderosities of John Stuart Mill, still we would like to know what critical and analytical thought was in his mind at such a time. Might he not have found intellectual friendship among the Oxford idealists, especially Thomas Hill Green? One does not know. Henry S. Maine is rewarded with a word of refutation, Burke and Bagehot parade proudly as the noblest of his heroes. Obviously, Wilson read the Germans, for in degree they are cited, but aside from a Teutonic interpretation of the middle ages and the rise of individualism there is little evidence of their influence upon him. One misses with sharp regret, as well, a lack of comment on his American contemporaries. George Santayana, one of the most brilliant of students of American character and institutions, is not mentioned, and Wilson made no effort in his political

thought to mediate between the flashing minds of William James and Josiah Royce. Perhaps Woodrow Wilson had few original ideas, and he drank unceasingly from the wells of his time, but he wrote them as if they had hardly been written before. Both in literary effort and in the polished eloquence of his public address, the steady idea, strengthened by the use and wont of ordinary men, is reborn with penetrating freshness.

Our intellectual styles have changed. American intellectuals seem hesitant to affirm the moral values that inspired the leadership of Woodrow Wilson. In our concern to be as radically empirical as William James, we may lose the metaphysical character of Wilson's thought. For in him history and metaphysics seem blended together with simplicity and without ostentation. It is easy to consider any intellectual formation other than our own as superficial. No doubt Wilson was superficial in the expression of his philosophy. His approach to any ontological question is oblique. We must deplore his failure to consider the life and literature of the Latin world, and thus the constricted range of his consideration of human culture.

Yet, if one should ask how the political theory of Woodrow Wilson should be classified in accordance with the philosophical traditions of the West, I believe it can be said that his was Aristotelian. Such, indeed, is the characteristic method of thought of the political scientist who is concerned with historical development. It is the common attitude of those who believe that wisdom may be gained from history. The revolutionary mind is, I think, more likely to be Kantian; it is surely materialistic if