

## THE RATIONIST

**TWELVE ESSAYS INTRODUCING A PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO PRESERVE THE DEMOCRATIC-REPUBLICAN MODEL OF GOVERNMENT.**

**ADDRESSED TO THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.**

**BY GRACCHUS, A LOYAL CITIZEN.**

**NUMBER TWO:  
THAT MANKIND IS PROGRAMMED FOR POLITICAL REVOLUTION.**

To the People of the United States of America:

*Inferiors revolt in order that they may be equal, and equals that they may be superior.*

**Aristotle**

Those who are vulnerable prefer safety. Those who are poor desire to attain middling status. Those who are denied the full rights and privileges of citizenship wish for political equality. Those accustomed to middling status pursue luxury and riches. Those who think themselves superior rarely condescend to associate with their social inferiors. And none who achieve distinction are happy to diminish their station or be surpassed by anyone else. The most basic acquaintance with human nature assures us that mankind's chief preoccupation is to **IMPROVE ITS STATUS.**

But an equally basic knowledge of human history, apprehending the infinite reservoir of avarice and ambition that fuels all notorious human endeavors, counsels that **MANKIND'S OCCUPATIONS DO NOT SATISFY ITS PREOCCUPATIONS.** We are no closer to satisfying our aspirations today than we were on the first day of civilization, and therein lay both the inexorable cause and the cyclical course of political revolution.

### **THE RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF WEALTH.**

Mankind's chief preoccupation is to improve its status, but people measure status in one of two ways. The first way to measure status is in **ABSOLUTE** terms. This assesses a person's condition, their standard of living, without reference to that of any other person. For instance, does a person's wealth place him at the level of subsistence, comfort, or opulence? Absolute status asks whether one's physical or material requirements have been fulfilled.

The second way to measure status is in **RELATIVE** terms. This compares a person's condition to that of another person in terms of social or economic parity, or rank. Relative status determines whether one man is inferior to another, equal to another, or superior to another. Relative status asks whether one's ego or pretensions have been served.

Mankind's pursuit of higher status – both relative and absolute – finds expression in various forms but finds fullest expression in the pursuit of **WEALTH.** Of all the metrics by which status can be measured, wealth is the most universal, most useful, easiest to display,

easiest to compare, and most readily translated into power. For most people, wealth reigns over all human virtues. It is easier to purchase bread with money than to demonstrate honor, or to display a mansion than to show valor. The quantity and quality of wealth are accordingly the prevailing standards by which we appraise the worth of persons, enterprises, and nations. So, while mankind's chief preoccupation is to improve its status, its primary occupation is to **INCREASE ITS WEALTH**, for wealth most effectively advances a man's status, whether measured in relative or absolute terms.

In the proliferation of wealth, of material surplus, mankind has succeeded. America especially so. In celebrating our achievements, one generally contemplates some recent advance in science or technology or a new record for the gross domestic product or stock values. By that reckoning, America can congratulate itself for amassing stupendous wealth.

By another standard, however, we have made hardly any progress at all. Aside from dismantling a handful of legal encumbrances for various minorities, there are few recent achievements to praise in the field of American government. Notwithstanding the efforts of legislators, intellectuals, and activists and America's prosperity and hegemony since the Second World War, wealth concentrates, democracy decays, wages stagnate, crime proliferates, racial disparities persist, poverty continues, the middle class declines, socialism gains popularity, polarization rises, and violence looms. Evidently, in the art of government, not much has improved since the American Revolution, John Adams lamenting: *"While all other Sciences have advanced, that of Government is at a Stand; little better understood; little better practiced now than 3 or 4 thousand years ago."*

## **THE UNBALANCABLE SOCIAL EQUATION.**

Behind the spectacle of economic and technological progress, mankind's preoccupation for higher status conceals an insuperable dilemma: it necessarily and perpetually sets one part of humanity against another. In order for some men to be superior, **EQUALS MUST TOLERATE INFERIORITY**. To make all equal, **SUPERIORS MUST TOLERATE EQUALITY**. This conflict between the values of equality and superiority contains no intrinsic resolution: at least one side has to lose. Our ambition for higher relative status therefore creates an inherently unbalanceable social equation.

The impulses for equality and superiority, both deriving from our preoccupation for higher status, both hardwired into mankind, operate in constant tension, rendering political struggle as natural, inevitable, perpetual, and cyclical as any other human process. It is for this reason that most of history is consigned to the chapters written on politics, war, and revolution. And as regards the struggle between the adherents of equality and those of superiority, it is the latter which are favored by mankind having settled upon wealth accumulation as its cardinal measure of success. For, while a condition of inferiority cannot be maintained unless a few surpass the **GREATER NUMBER** of mankind, a condition of equality cannot be attained without suppressing the **GREATER ABILITY** of mankind. Of these two qualities, that of superior ability is more frequently attached to the most enterprising, intelligent, organized, disciplined, ambitious, cunning, and ruthless among us. Thus dedicated to the pursuit of wealth, the ablest and most ambitious – frequently inheriting an advantaged station – threaten to reduce every plan of moderation and reform conceived by egalitarian minds into the basest pacifying measure, as ever more wealth becomes concentrated in the most talented, privileged, predatory, parasitical, and insatiable hands.

Most ordinary or obtuse people may indeed be satisfied and pacified by a sufficiently high standard of living, provided their physical needs are met and elite corruption and intrigue are sufficiently obscure. But for the astute and energetic portion of mankind, progress in the realm of absolute status – improvements in convenience, technology, and prosperity – does not resolve the struggle for relative status. It does not satiate their egos or pretensions. For them, scientific and material progress merely pushes their ambition forward and scales it up. As was well-said by Dr. Brinton: “*Men’s desires are the same, whether they ride toward their achievement in airplanes or on horseback.*”<sup>1</sup> Thucydides earlier articulated a similar conclusion, writing: “*The sufferings which revolution entailed upon the cities were many and terrible, such as have occurred and always will occur, as long as the nature of mankind remains the same.*”

The eternal conflict over relative status within civilization’s ambitious and elite vanguard thus transcends every level of absolute status. Whether the scale of man’s struggle is over cities, nations, planets, or galaxies; whether the object of men’s struggle is over watering holes, or livestock, or land, or markets, whether it fights with swords, or rifles, or missiles, or sanctions; mankind shall be susceptible to this unbalanceable social equation as long as humans remain human, however wide its economic arena, however advanced its technological development. These observations, incidentally, reconcile the debate on whether the progress of our species is linear or cyclical. It is both. Mankind’s material progress trends upward, while its social progress resolves into a cycle. The shape of human history is as **A WHEEL ROLLING UP A HILL.**

## **ON THE UNIFORMITY OF HUMAN NATURE.**

Over the past three or four thousand years mentioned by John Adams above, not all nations have developed alike. Africa, Europe, and Asia boast the oldest civilizations by far. Yet across the continents we find varying success, at least measured by the standard of economic and political development. Some civilizations have accumulated vast wealth, others have remained relatively impoverished. Some have advanced to democracy, others never exceeded chiefdom. From the diversity of human history should we conclude that there exists a diversity of human nature, dictated by race or origin?

We shall not. All human societies at a similar stage of economic progress and practicing similar commercial techniques, despite superficial racial differences, can be expected to react fundamentally similarly to similar stimuli. As Machiavelli noted:

*Whoever considers the past and the present will readily observe that all cities and all peoples are and ever have been animated by the same desires and the same passions; so that it is easy, by diligent study of the past, to foresee what is likely to happen in the future in any republic, and to apply those remedies that were used by the ancients, or, not finding any that were employed by them, to devise new ones from the similarity of the events. But as such considerations are neglected or not understood by most of those who read, or, if understood by these, are unknown by those who govern, it follows that the same troubles generally recur in all republics.*

<sup>1</sup> *The Anatomy of Revolution.*

Where economic conditions are similar, social behavior will be similar. And where social behavior is similar, similar political phenomena will result. To hold otherwise is to espouse a genetic origin to diverse national outcomes.

The varying trajectories of internal political evolution are not attributable to inherent racial differences, but principally to accidents of climate, agriculture, and foreign interference that variously impair or impel the internal economic development of a given system, and in lesser degree to the strictures of local religion and culture to the extent affecting commerce.

Deposit ten thousand men and women native to each of Africa, Asia, Europe, America, and Australia onto five different uninhabited planets – all having comparable resources and environments, none contaminated by the peculiar idiosyncrasies of any unique cultural practices – and watch their political evolution take roughly the same course. Better yet, deposit ten thousand men and women from each continent onto five thousand of such planets as one would culture colonies of bacteria in five thousand petri dishes, and we will prove that the permutations of human political evolution can be reduced to rules as clear and incontrovertible as those which govern the stellar lifecycle. Indeed, to deny the constancy and uniformity of human nature will lead us nowhere but into the dark territories of racism and prejudice.

All nations, being comprised of the same human raw material, are all encoded with the same behavioral programming, and are accordingly ordained to evolve pursuant to the same default evolutionary political sequence. The uniformity of human nature thus renders the core sequence of political evolution in a closed system as predictable as it is inevitable. The speed and extent to which a political system proceeds through this base sequence is determined primarily by the relative distribution of wealth within that system and its security from its neighbors. As such, mankind's preoccupation with higher status spring-loads every human society for a uniform process of internal political evolution: just populate the system, eliminate all supervening external influences, add wealth, toggle for its diffusion and re-concentration, and watch civilization's entire story arc play out before your eyes.

The grinding struggle for subsistence by serfs and slaves, sometimes accompanied by intermittent but failed popular uprisings, constitutes the bulk of human existence. Wealth and power are in most ages the exclusive province of kings and elites. Then comes the diffusion of wealth, which Dr. Scheidel tells us has only ever been enabled by some horrible civilizational shock. The ensuing rare but glorious ages of egalitarianism and democracy reflect the productive energies unleashed by societies anchored to the middle classes. These middle classes defend property rights, the obligations of contract, and the freedom of speech, perfecting the conditions required for robust commerce. As these conditions at first enable, then encourage, the accumulation of ever greater household fortunes, the moderation attached to middling status is abandoned by the most successful economic actors who deploy their influence to their own enrichment. The consequent ruination of the middle classes which follows upon the inevitable re-concentration of their wealth unleashes a violent conflict between a few elites and many commoners which is finally resolved by one warlord. Once stability and order are re-established, power is centralized in an authoritarian regime until the administration fails and the imperial system fragments into tribal chiefdoms, starting the sequence anew. Such is the cover page to political history, described much more eloquently by Lord Byron:

*There is the moral of all human tales; 'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past, First Freedom, and then Glory – when that fails, Wealth, vice, corruption, – barbarism at last. And History, with all her volumes vast, Hath but one page.*

As will be elaborated in later essays, the faction and instability characterizing the final stages of the sequence of political evolution – the late hour where we now find ourselves – arises from middling insecurity, which in turn arises from elite encroachment into the middling share of national prosperity. But first, we will take a closer look at this great cycle just described in our next essay, of which our most cherished political precept – democracy – has as an historical matter been only a brief phase.

***GRACCHUS.***