BELIEFS, VALUES, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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PARTICIPANTS in efforts to promote economic development in the so-called "underdeveloped" countries have noted—often with bafflement and dismay—that progress is thwarted by an apparent unresponsiveness of the people they are trying to help, a phenomenon that is not wholly confined to underdeveloped countries. Powerful beliefs and values regarding the modes of conduct that give men rightful claims to superior status guide their actions in the economic as well as other spheres of life. These need to be better understood.

Traditionalism is the term generally used in denoting the cluster of beliefs and values that functioned as chief guides to problems of social organization and economic endeavor in western society until about the 1600's. Substantially similar beliefs and values still guide thought and practice in most of the so-called underdeveloped countries. When these are laid alongside dominant American beliefs and values, one is struck by opposite attitudes toward economic employments as a proper test of status.

To better understand this fact and its implications, discussion is centered in the following questions: (1) How do traditionalist and modern beliefs differ in the line drawn between economic and noneconomic employments on the one hand, and between work and leisure on the other? (2) How do traditionalist beliefs rank economic and noneconomic employments as ways of demonstrating status deserts—rightful claims to superior standing in one's own eyes and in the eyes of others? It is commonly recognized that, by and large, traditionalist cultures took their start from a belief that prowess is the proper test of rightful claims to superior status. This leads us to ask: (3) What technological conditions underlie the genesis of this belief? (4) What institutional relationships are implicit in the historic prowess test of status deserts? (5) What presuppositions concerning human nature are cornerstones of traditionalist attitudes toward economic employments and master-servant types of institutions?

I. Economic and Noneconomic Employments

Offhand, most people are certain that they know the difference between economic and noneconomic employments. But just how does one test whether a given employment is economic or noneconomic? This question is not an easy one to answer.

1 The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Farm Economics Division, or the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
Certainly, our modern common sense and traditionalist common sense differ sharply on this point. In our highly commercialized culture, the ready answer is that an employment is economic if it is done with pay and noneconomic if done without pay even though exactly the same goods or services are produced in both instances. By this test, a minister's employment, for example, is an economic activity if he receives pay for his sermons and other spiritual services, and his work is productive because it increases the gross national product by an amount equal to the number of dollars he receives for his service. If, however, he delivers these sermons and other spiritual services without pay, his employment is called noneconomic; it adds nothing to the gross national product; therefore, it is unproductive. The whole thing seems ridiculous, but that's the logic of this matter. In the eyes of commercialized common sense, what always stamps any activity as economic or noneconomic is not the kind of good or service it yields but whether its good or service is first exchanged for money and this in turn is traded for different kinds of goods and services.

This kind of common sense would be considered nonsense in traditionalist cultures, where dependence of livelihood on the exchange of goods and services is largely absent since their economy is mainly a subsistence agriculture. To be sure, most traditionalist societies include some businessmen, traders, hired artisans, and wage workers. But their numbers and the scope of their activities are too small to stamp their commercial images into the dominant ways of thought and practice.

In such a society, the common-sense test of whether an employment is economic or noneconomic turns on the kinds of goods and services produced. Economic employments are equated with activities like farming, mining, and manufacture, which provide material subsistence. In contrast, noneconomic employments are equated with activities that produce mainly nonmaterial or "spiritual" goods and services. Into this category fall the priestly, intellectual, artistic, political and military pursuits, as well as sports. In the priestly employments, the objective is not the production of material means of life but the disclosure of the attitudes of the gods and the kind of deeds they require of men. Similarly, in political employments, the objective is the formulation and administration of justice—equitable rules which all must observe for the sake of the general welfare. In military pursuits, the good or service one seeks to produce is the common defense or conquest; in scientific and artistic employments, the objectives are the discovery of new truths and beauteous forms; and in sports, the goal is the infusion of the body with strength, grace, and beauty.

As technical advance at length transformed production for direct use into production for exchange, everyone's livelihood became increasingly dependent on market exchanges of most goods and services, material and
spiritual alike. All goods, whether spiritual or material, thus acquired a common denominator—price tags. As this happened, the older traditionalist belief that the terms “economic” and “noneconomic” referred to physically separate activities, lived on in the modern mind as vigorously as it had in the ancient mind, but the ax used to chop them apart ceased to be the kinds of goods produced and became the receipt or non-receipt of pay.

But neither pay nor the kinds of goods and services produced has any scientific standing as a means of designating the economic and noneconomic nature of employments. For the foundation axiom of economic theory is that men seek to act in ways that will maximize their satisfactions. In line with this presupposition, the term “economic” means simply the “rational” accomplishment of given purposes with the least possible expenditure of limited means: time, energy, personal capacities, and other resources. Thus, any activity is economic to the extent that it is accomplished in this way, irrespective of whether it be done with or without pay, and also irrespective of the kind of goods or service it yields—whether a poem, a prayer, a painting, a pair of shoes, or an ear of corn. By the same token, any activity is noneconomic to the extent that it involves waste of the means for achieving its objective. Thus, every phase of life from the cradle to the grave is economic or noneconomic, depending upon whether it is characterized by a rational or wasteful use of limited means for given purposes. This scientific meaning of the term “economic” permits no physical separation of life into a sphere of economic employments on the one hand, and noneconomic employments on the other. There is no room for such dichotomies in scientific thought, although they flutter around in common-sense discourse like crows in a cornfield.

II. Concepts of Work and Leisure

Common sense uses the same ax for dividing time into work and leisure that it uses for dividing employments into economic and noneconomic activities. Thus commercialized common sense equates work with time spent in employments with pay, and leisure with time spent in activities without pay. If, for example, the minister receives pay for his sermons and other spiritual services, his activity is called work, but if he receives no pay, the same activity is called leisure. Similarly, child care and training is called work if done by a salaried nurse or teacher, but leisure if done by the unpaid parent. In like manner, one and the same expenditure of time and energy in baseball, or any other sport, is called work if the player is paid, but leisure if he is not.

Traditionalist common sense, however, equates work with time spent in the fashioning of physical materials and forces into the material means
of life, and leisure with time spent in other activities. By using pay as the measure of productivity and also as an ax for chopping time into work and leisure, our commercialized common sense can draw no clean-cut distinction between productive and unproductive leisure. All leisure is unproductive, although indirectly it may contribute to productivity in so far as it is used in ways that replenish energies expended in paid employments.

Traditionalist common sense is not burdened with this absurdity. Productive leisure is time spent in creating nonsubsistence or spiritual goods and services. Such leisure includes religious, scientific, artistic, and political employments. In saying that leisure is the foundation of civilized life, Aristotle did not mean idleness, or unproductive leisure, but use of time in the production of social and economic justice, civil order, sculpture, architecture, drama, science, philosophy, and the like.2

To all practical intents and purposes, our commercialized common sense equates all productivity with work and unproductivity with leisure. In contrast, traditionalist common sense equates all real productivity with productive leisure. It looks upon work as a curse—an evil suffered only because of the fear of the worse evil of starving if we don't work.

In contrast to either commercial and traditionalist common sense, the modern scientific concept of the economic and noneconomic aspects of any activity precludes any substantive difference between productive leisure and productive work. Productive work is simply the intelligent, methodical accomplishment of given purposes with the least possible expenditure of limited time and other resources, irrespective of whether one's employments be paid or unpaid, or whether the products be material subsistence or spiritual goods and services. But this is also true of productive leisure. Thus, the substantive meaning of productive leisure and productive work alike is the effective unfolding of one's prized interests and capacities into goods and services. When this is not the case, one's employment is drudgery; it is not only boring but a waste of his highest potential, irrespective of whether he is paid or unpaid, or whether he paints pictures or makes mousetraps.

III. The Traditionalist Imperative

Far more striking and of profounder import than the opposition in modern and traditionalist common sense concepts of economic and non-economic employments, and of work and leisure, is the opposition in their deep-seated beliefs with respect to employments that are deemed to be correct ways of proving that one possesses qualities of mind and char-

2 For provocative remarks on the difference between idleness and leisure see Josef Pieper, Leisure the Basis of Culture, Faber and Faber, Ltd., 24 Russell Square, London, 1957, pp. 49, 51, 75.
acter which entitle him to the ever higher standing which each of us seeks in his own eyes and in the eyes of others. For the fact is well recognized that traditionalist cultures are anchored in the belief that prima facie evidence of deserts to high standing is exemption from all employments having to do with fashioning the material means of life, and that dependence on such employments is unquestioned proof of deserts to inferior status.

This belief obviously includes the axiom that maximizing happiness and minimizing discomforts lies in limiting work to the amount required to support one's customary mode of living so as to be able to spend the greatest amount of time and energy in noneconomic employments. In this axiom resides the central traditionalist imperative—the feeling that one fails in his responsibility to do all he can to uphold his own high standing and that of his fellows as well unless he limits the expenditure of his time and energy in economic employment to the minimum required to support his customary way of life. Rooted in this belief, reason and conscience can offer no explanation, except greed or miserliness, why anyone should forego leisure for the sake of doing more work than is necessary to support his customary needs.

The widespread prevalence of this traditionalist belief is evidenced on every hand. The following instances are typical. For a professional man in India, for example, to work in his own yard or for his wife to clean her own house is to deserve the disesteem of all classes, high and low alike. Even colonial America was so deeply committed to this traditionalist test of merit that a chief function of dress was to symbolize man's standing in the social hierarchy according to the degree of his exemption from, or dependence on, the so-called economic employments. As Nettles observed, "when adorned with pearl necklace, gold pendant, silver earrings, and gold rings, a lady was not to be mistaken for a woman who worked at menial tasks, nor could her husband or father be ranked as other than a member of the upper class."

In his study of Antigua, a sugarcane-producing island of the West Indies, Rottenburg reported that planters:

. . . lament their inability to find sufficient workers to take the crop of the fields within the optimum time period and the unwillingness of workers to perform certain tasks at all. Workers who do accept employment . . . refuse to work full work-weeks but prefer to work relatively few days each week.

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A report of the Economic Policy Committee of Jamaica speaks thus: Many West Indian workers [do] not want to work for wages regularly five or six days a week all the year round. . . . They prefer to have a lower standard of living and more leisure; they are not educated to appreciate a higher standard of living, and would rather take life more easily than add to their material comforts.  

The same principle is set forth in Boudin's account of his conversation with a native Indian of a South American village.

"I like your flute, I will buy it. How much does it cost?"

"Five solas, señor."

"That seems like a lot to me; if I buy half a dozen, how much will you charge me?" Of course, I expect to pay less for each flute, but the reply comes at once: "That will be seven solas, señor."

Slightly puzzled, I continue the experiment. "What if I order a dozen?"

"In that case, it will be ten solas for each flute, señor."

"Look here: The more flutes I order, the more profit you will be getting but instead of encouraging me to order more, you are discouraging me."

The Indian looks at me with an enigmatic and slightly mocking smile as if to say, "These white visitors are certainly strange people."

"But naturally, señor," he says, "to make one flute is fun; to make six would bore me; to make twelve would simply be unbearable."

In the latter part of the 19th century, Weber observed that in East Germany, farmers often tried to induce workers to speed up the harvest by raising the piece rate. They usually found, however, that this resulted in less work instead of more:

The worker reacted to the increase not by increasing but by decreasing the amount of his work. . . . The opportunity of earning more was less attractive than that of working less. He did not ask: How much can I earn in a day if I do as much work as possible? but: How much must I work to earn the wage, 2½ Marks, which I earned before and which takes care of my traditional needs?

In traditionalist cultures, the prospect of higher profits tends to be as ineffective an inducement to greater industry on the part of businessmen as higher than customary wages is on the part of workers. Speaking of the early-day German textile industry, Weber observed that:

The form of organization was in every respect capitalistic; the entrepreneur's activity was of a purely business character; the use of capital, turned over in business, was indispensable; and finally, the objective of the economic process, the bookkeeping, was rational. But it was traditionalistic business, if one con-

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siders the spirit which animated the entrepreneur; the traditional manner of life, the traditional rate of profit, the traditional amount of work, the traditional manner of regulating the relationships with labor, and essentially the traditional circle of customers and the manner of attracting new ones.  

In the same vein, Rottenburg concluded his study of traditionalistic attitudes toward economic employments with these words:

A man who has been brought up in a community . . . which attaches prestige to the possession of material goods will not begin to offer less labor until there is a large increase in the price for his service or until the price is very high. On the other hand, a man who lives in a society which values leisure and which attaches no social stigma to living at a close-to-subsistence level will begin to offer less labor when increases occur and when the price is very low . . . In these circumstances, movement between jobs and the number of hours worked or energy exerted at work may be more powerfully affected by the value system of the community than by the price of labor in different trades. Where this is true, the expression of labor supply as a function solely of price gives the economist a dull analytical tool which obscures perception of the really significant relationships.

The key feature of these observations is the relative ineffectiveness of the so-called materialistic income incentive (higher profits or wages) to induce greater productive effort. In attempting to explain this fact, Weber heaved at us what is supposed to be a clincher in his famous saying:

A man does not "by nature" wish to earn more and more money but simply to live as he is accustomed to live and earn as much as is necessary for that purpose.

What Weber overlooked is that the powerful status drive may operate as either an inhibitor or a generator of economic growth, depending on which of many alternative beliefs men may hold concerning appropriate ways of earning high standing. If for any reason, they should take to themselves the belief that contact with economic employments demonstrates deserts to inferior status, we should then expect the status aspiration to become an aversion to doing any work at all, and that, by and large, this aversion would be counteracted by the fear of privation only up to the point where man 'by nature' desires to earn enough "to live as he is accustomed to live" and then to take it easy. This, as we have seen, is what we do find.

But we should expect a very different result if for any reason men should take to themselves the belief that increasing proficiency in any employment one may choose is the proper way of proving that one possesses attributes of mind and character that entitle him to increasingly

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higher status. For, as the desire for such evidence is insatiable, men would feel obligated to earn more and more, not primarily because of 'materialistic' desires for physical ease and comfort, but because of their aversion to inferior status deserts which are associated with relatively low earnings. Thus at virtually any level of living, however low or high, we should expect to find that the insatiable desire for deserts to ever higher standing is a far more dominant aspect of the drive to earn than the mere materialistic concern for physical ease and comfort. This is what we do find—a fact never more clearly discerned by anyone than Adam Smith:

For what purpose is all the toil and bustle of this world . . . Is it to supply the necessities of nature? The wages of the meanest laborer can supply them. We see that they can afford him food and clothing, the comfort of a house and of a family. If we examine this economy with rigor, we should find that he spends a great part of them upon conveniences, which may be regarded as superfluities, and that upon extraordinary occasions, he can give something even to vanity and distinction. What then is the cause of our aversion to his situation, and why should those who have been educated in the higher ranks of life regard it as worse than death, to be reduced to live, even without labor upon the same simple fare with him, to dwell under the same lowly roof, and to be clothed in the same humble attire? Do they imagine that their stomach is better or their sleep sounder in a palace than in a cottage? The contrary has been so often observed . . . that nobody is ignorant of it. From whence then arises that emulation which runs through all the different ranks of men, and what are the advantages which we propose by the great purpose of human life which we call bettering our condition? To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency and approbation are all the advantages which we can propose to derive from it.11

Thus the fact is that we can no more equate the desire to work and earn only "enough to live as one is accustomed to live" with the original nature of man than we can the "desire to work and earn more and more." Contrary to Weber, the first is no less an acquired way of life than the second. Which is acquired evidently turns on whether conditions of living and of making a living lead to the belief that exemption from, or that increasing proficiency in, industrial employments is the correct way of demonstrating possession of capacities that entitle one to an increasingly favorable image of himself in his own eyes and the eyes of others. Historically, the first of these beliefs preceded the second. What conditions of living and of making a living gave rise to it?

IV. Prowess Requirements of Early Farm Technological Advance

The most plausible answer seems to lie in the early forward steps in farm technological advance.

11 Smith, Adam, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, first publ. in 1759, Part I, sec. III, ch. II.
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(1) The first was the invention of the spear, the bow and arrow, and sharp-edged instruments. As gadgets for destroying life, these implements were weapons, but as means of increasing the food supply they were among the most productive farm tools ever invented: they made the hordes of wild game available for human subsistence. It is questionable whether any agricultural invention ever increased farm worker productivity as much as did the bow and arrow.

The belief-forming role of these new implements was immense, as their operation brought into play a great reservoir of hitherto untapped human capacities: massive force, agility, ferocity, cunning, and violent strain. The livelihood of the whole community depended upon persons most endowed with these predatory capacities. This fact generated the steadfast belief in superior prowess as the correct and proper way of demonstrating status deserts—an equivalence between one's capacities and the high standing that each covets. In no other way would the approving voice of mind and conscience permit one to gratify his aspiration for being the kind of person who merited a favorable valuation of himself in his own eyes and the eyes of others. Any effort that did not involve predatory qualities was unworthy of man. Thus it became the "able-bodied man's accredited office in the social economy to kill, to destroy . . . to reduce to subservience those alien forces that assert themselves refractorily;" so much so that in many tribes "the man must not bring home the game which he has killed, but must send his woman to perform that baser office." 12

The object of prey was not limited to wild life but extended to man as well; so much so that primitive tribes came to guide their status quest by the belief that proficiency in scalping and head hunting was prima facie evidence that one possesses personal qualities that entitled him to high standing in his own eyes, the eyes of others and the gods alike. When Westerners suppressed this test of status deserts among the Tasmanians, for example, without providing a substitute, they plunged the natives into extreme despair over the meaninglessness of life. For they:

. . . cut the roots of religious life of the natives. They no longer knew how to propitiate their gods. Their religion was undermined . . . They grew apathetic, indifferent to work and the future, and at the same time so proficient in abortion that the tribe was committing suicide by depopulation. 13

(2) The gradual domestication of plants and animals marked the transformation of hunting societies into settled agricultural communities. This advance marked a profound change in the significance of prowess. For as

long as technological conditions limited man's way of living and of making a living to a hunting mode of life, the belief in increasingly proficient economic behavior and the belief in increasingly superior prowess, as the proper way of earning ever higher status, were identical. Under this circumstance, proficient quest for status was the generator, not the inhibitor, of proficient economic endeavor. Superiors in the power to maim and kill were also superiors in the power to expand the total food supply.

This situation was reversed, however, with the carryover of the belief in prowess test of status from older hunting societies into settled agricultural societies. Under this circumstance, man replaced wild game as the primary object of prey. Hunting graduated from an agricultural employment to a sport—a leisure employment. Losers in the prowess test of merit, as well as their land and livestock, became chattels of the winners. In this way, expenditure of time and energy in producing subsistence goods and services became prima facie evidence that one was so devoid of meritorious capacities that he deserved only servile roles in life. Thus work became irksome not because it was strenuous, but because it became the badge of servility. By the same token exemption from work became gilt-edge proof that one was so gifted with meritorious capacities that he deserved nothing lower than the managerial roles in life. In this way, the deep aversion to inferior standing became a powerful inhibitor of economic growth for thousands of years. Thus, in carrying over the belief in the prowess method of earning status from hunting societies (where it was economically useful) to settled agriculture where it lost this utility, man became a creature who "does not 'by nature' wish to earn more and more money but simply to live as he is accustomed to live and to earn as much as is necessary for that purpose." We know of no traditionalist culture whose basic beliefs and institutions do not trace back to the ancient carryover of the belief in prowess as the proper test of status deserts, from the early hunting stage of technological advance, where it was economically useful, to the settled agricultural stage of technical advance, where it continued to guide the status quest as effectively as ever while stifling economic growth.

V. The Prowess Test of Status Deserts as the Generator of Institutional Beliefs and Values

In addition to rendering the aversion to inferior standing an inhibitor of economic growth, this carryover further generated basic institutional beliefs and values that functioned as key guides to right living and social organization for thousands of years. Four of them are especially relevant here:

1. The carryover obviously generated profound commitment of mind
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and conscience to the master-servant relationship as the right and proper form (model) of social organization. For the prowess test of status deserts distinctly segregates the managerial and labor roles into master and servant classes, often called lords and serfs. The successful in prowess become personifications of divinelike power and wisdom to lay down the rules which all must observe. Failures become personifications of subservient labor power for providing the whole community with necessary subsistence.

This master-servant model arose not merely from mechanical but also from moral necessity—the need of men for a status hierarchy which they can view as giving each his due. For the prowess test of merit confronts rivals with the choice between the heroic death of a proud freeman and the ignoble life of servility. The choice taken turns on the possession or lack of courage. If the weaker have sufficient courage to choose the death of proud freemen, they defeat the efforts of the stronger to reduce them to subservience. If they lack this courage, their just desert is subservience to the stronger.

(2) Commitment to the prowess concept of status deserts further generated profound belief in seizure as the rightful basis of ownership. For under this concept, it is unthinkable that superior industry, rather than seizure, is the proper way of establishing ownership claims to the exclusive use and enjoyment of scarce goods and services.

This prowess form of ownership combines both proprietary and sovereign power in the same skin. As Commons has observed:

In our Anglo-American political economy, beginning with William the Conqueror in 1066, there was no distinction between sovereignty which is physical power, and property which is economic power. William was both the sole sovereign over his subjects and the sole proprietor of all the land which his tenants needed for their living or riches. His subjects owed to him military services in maintaining his sovereignty and they owed it to him as rent for the lands which they were permitted to use.14

A long and painful ripping apart of these two powers from within the same skins marked the rise of the modern Western world. Rise of our Anglo-Saxon political economy involved an epochal series of rips. No one has summarized these more succinctly than Commons:

... beginning with the Magna Carta in 1215, and ending with the Revolution of 1689, the sovereign was ingeniously divided into two personalities, a sovereign and a proprietor. The sovereign now became the legislature, representing the tenants who became landlord and business proprietors. This revolution made the historical sovereign a figurehead, and also made the judiciary independent of the sovereign by giving the judges tenure for life or good behavior, thus depriving the sovereign of his former power to control

their decisions by removing them at will. Finally, the amendments to the American Constitution made the judiciary superior to both the executive and legislative officials of sovereignty, by the simple device of authorizing citizens to bring suit against officials on the ground of deprivations of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law, to be decided by the judiciary.15

But no such extensive transformation of the older seizure form of ownership has occurred in most of the so-called underdeveloped countries, where industry has made few inroads and farming methods for the most part are still those handed down from the mists of history. Throughout these vast areas, most of the world's population are still farmers, living under feudal or semi-feudal systems of land tenure generated in the long ago by primitive belief in and practice of prowess as the proper way of achieving meritorious distinction.16

(3) In addition to generating the master-servant relationships and feudal tenure as the proper political and economic model of social organization, the ancient belief in, and practice of, the prowess test of status deserts necessarily induced a self-sufficiency concept of freedom, which is incompatible with dependence on market exchange. For, within the master-servant relationship, the freeman can be envisioned only as one who has absolute control over all personal services and other resources necessary to meet all his needs. To the feudal lords, for example, it was self contradictory to think of men as free and at the same time dependent for their livelihood upon a market exchange between producers and consumers. No one has expressed this self-sufficiency concept of freedom more truly than did Jefferson in his saying that commerce involves dependence on "the caprice of customers," which "begets subservience and venality," which in turn "suffocates the germ of virtue" and therefore renders men "the fit tool for the designs of ambition."17

(4) The historic prowess test of status deserts necessarily generated belief in the superiority of landed proprietors with respect to responsible citizenship—the stalwart spirit of personal independence that brooks no interference with self mastery. For, as previously explained, as plants and animals became domesticated, man shifted the ancient hunter's prowess test of merit from wild game to fellowman and his possessions as the most profitable object of prey. In this way, landed proprietorship over the holdings of the subjugated were deemed the legitimate reward of strong, high-spirited men who earned their free status in mortal combat. Landed proprietorship was gradually substituted for the sword as

15 Ibid.
17 Notes on State of Virginia, 1782, Query XIX.
the evidential symbol of a passionate devotion to free status that prefers
death to servility, which is the sum and substance of solid citizenry. This
substitution of symbols survives in such sayings as “farmers are the salt
of the earth,” “the balance wheel of society,” and “the backbone of de-

cracy.” More important, without their unquestioned confidence in the
validity of these substitute symbols, our forefathers could scarcely have
laid the foundations of democratic America. Jefferson typified them when,
with one eye to agriculture as the incubator of the spirit of liberty and
responsible citizenship, he declared:

Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God . . . whose breasts
He has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the
focus in which He keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape
from the face of the earth.18

Then, with his other eye to commerce as the incubator of “subservience
and venality” through enforcing dependence on the “caprice of custo-
mers,” he declared:

. . . generally speaking, the proportion which the aggregate of other classes
of citizens bears in any state to that of its husbandmen, is the proportion of its
unsound to its healthy parts, and is a good enough barometer whereby to
measure its degree of corruption. . . . The mobs of the great cities add just so
much to the support of pure government, as do sores to the strength of the
human body.19

VI. Traditionalist Presuppositions Concerning Human Nature

While master-servant ways of life (institutions) were first generated by
the primitive belief in and practice of prowess as the appropriate way of
earning high standing, more powerful supports were soon developed
from presuppositions concerning human nature. This fact is readily illus-
trated through two such presuppositions that were worked out by the
ancient Greeks.

The first presupposition is that all human interests fall into a hierarchy
of lower and higher wants with respect to intrinsic worth. The general
term for the lower wants is the appetitive self, as their common denomi-

21 Plato, Republic, translation by John Llewlyn Davies and David James Vaughn,
22 Ibid., p. 289.
social role (or roles) in life. The unnecessary wants also fall into two subclasses: those which are relatively harmless if gratified in moderation, and those which constitute the "wild beast in our nature."22

The general term for the higher wants is the rational self, as their common denominator is the desire for nonmaterial satisfactions.23 Satisfying objects of the higher self include logical patterns, which gratify the thirst for the "nature of things" as revealed in their definitions and necessary connections; beauteous forms, which fulfill aesthetic hungers; and virtues, especially justice, which gratify the aspiration for the system of privileges and responsibilities that give each his due—a social role in life whose skill requirements are equivalent to his creative, serviceable capacities. For each to have such a role is justice.

The second presupposition is that men divide into different character types or classes, depending upon the extent to which they are guided by the demands of the higher or lower self. For example, the highest type of character is called the aristocratic man. This term derives from two words: aristes meaning best or noblest, and kratein, meaning to manage, rule, or govern. Thus the aristocratic type of character denotes the relative few in whom the higher self is completely lord and master of the lower wants, limiting their gratification to the amount required for customary ease and comfort so as to devote the greatest amount of time and energy possible to fulfilling the higher wants.

At a lower remove is the businesslike character whom the Greeks called the "oligarchical man," meaning the type of person who gratifies only his relatively few "necessary wants" so as to be able to devote the greatest possible amount of his time, energy, and savings to accumulation of wealth, unlimited by any conceivable level of living. Under the higher-lower self formula of human interests, no reason for such unremitting thrift and industry is conceivable except miserly greed. Accordingly, Plato scathed the businesslike man as a "penurious, laborious character . . . a shabby fellow who saves something out of everything;" reduces reason to a calculating machine for figuring out ways "by which lesser sums may be converted into larger ones;" perverts the love of honor and fame "into the worship and admiration of riches and rich men;" and allows himself no ambition except "wealth accumulation and the means of acquiring it."24 Nonetheless, the business type of character is governed by the higher self to some extent as he asserts mastery over his many expensive but unnecessary appetites.

However, according to traditionalist presuppositions, even this virtue

22 Ibid., pp. 305-6.  
23 Ibid., pp. 143-4, 149, 187-196.  
disappears in the "democratic man," which is the Greek term for the rank-and-file type of person in whom the higher self is so weak that he regards all his wants as having equal claims upon him, saying that each of them is the equal of any other with respect to intrinsic worth. Thus in the traditionalist view the democratic character is highly unstable, gratifying whichever passion strikes him with greatest force at the moment: If anyone says to him that some pleasures are the satisfaction of good and noble desires, and others of evil desires . . . he shakes his head and says that they are all alike, and that one is as good as another." Thus, "he lives from day to day indulging the appetite of the hour: sometimes he is lapped in drink and the strains of the flute; then he becomes a water-drinker, and tries to get thin; then he takes a turn at gymnastics; sometimes idling and neglecting everything, then once more living the life of a philosopher; often he is busy with politics, and starts to his feet and says and does whatever comes into his head; and if he is emulous of anyone who is a warrior, off he is in that direction, or of men of business, once more in that. His life has neither law nor order: and this distracted existence he terms joy and bliss and freedom: and so he goes on . . . He is all liberty and equality.25

But the fact remains that in believing that all his wants are of equal worth, the "democratic man" prevents enslavement of himself to his most destructive appetites—"the wild beast" in his nature. Accordingly, the lowest type of character is "the tyrannical man," meaning the type of person in whom all the rational capacities of the higher self have become enslaved to the carnal appetites of the lower self. With these enthroned as his lord and master:

. . . he breaks out in a frenzy, and if he finds in himself any opinions or appetites such as are deemed good, and there is in him any sense of shame remaining, to these better principles he puts an end, and casts them forth until he has purged away temperance and brought in madness to the full.26

VII. Political Implications

These presuppositions concerning human nature bind the mind and conscience of men to master-servant political models as firmly as prowess binds their bodies into the higher and lower nitches. Four observations bear out this point:

(1) The presuppositions generate alternative conceptual political models. For, as the higher and lower aspects of our nature may combine into alternative types of persons (depending on which aspect becomes master of the whole man), so these natural types of men may combine into various political hierarchies, depending on which class is invested with complete managerial control over the others. We may have an aristocratic (elite) model if we put complete managerial power in the

25 Ibid., pp. 332-3.
26 Ibid., pp. 348-9.
gifted few who are governed by the higher self’s knowledge of and desire for an impartial justice; a business model if we vest complete power in a relative few who are so dominated by acquisitive greeds that they gratify only their necessary wants so as to maximize their material possessions; a democratic model if we put complete power in the ‘many’ who are governed by whichever turbulent passion may seize them from moment to moment; or we may have a tyrannical model if we allow total power to fall into the hands of the relative few who are habitually enslaved by the basest lusts of the lower self. Thus, the central policy consideration posed by traditionalist political theory is simply a question of which master-servant model of social organization represents the wisest choice.

(2) As it is absurd for the inferior to manage the superior, the best possible choice is the elite model, and the worst possible choice is the tyrannical model, and the next worst is the democratic model.

(3) In line with the principle of natural inequality, some are so deficient in managerial capacity that their own best interests and the public interest alike require them to be the bond servants of their superiors. “By nature,” these incompetents are slaves or serfs just as the more gifted are nature’s freemen. In Aristotle’s blunt words:

... from the hour of birth some are marked out for subjection, others for rule ... For he who has enough of the rational principle to recognize sensible rules but not enough to formulate them, is a slave by nature.

To be sure, the line drawn between freemen and slaves or serfs by the prowess test of status deserts does not coincide with the line drawn by the higher-lower self formula of human action. For this reason, we:

... detest the notion that because one man has the power of doing violence and is superior in brute strength, another should be his slave and subject.

(4) In this way the formula enabled, and still enables, traditionalists to revolt against “irrational” master-servant models that invert nature’s true hierarchy of bond and free. However, the larger fact remains that the formula binds the mind and conscience of men to servile institutions as such. Furthermore, it is well recognized that any class has no difficulty in deluding itself with the conviction that its own particular policy views are identical with what amounts to a Divine perspective of the general interest, and in this conviction feel duty-bound to overpower its rivals in order to establish an impartial justice for all classes. So, while the invention of the higher-lower self formula of human nature was, and still is a great intellectual achievement, the question remains if its historic func-

27 Aristotle, Politics, ch. 5.
28 Ibid., ch. 6.
tion is not simply that of enabling predatory power and privilege more easily to wrap about themselves the robes of righteousness and refuse to be ashamed. More significantly, has any theory of the nature of man and society, traditionalist or otherwise, ever been formulated which the human animal is not able to use as a high-minded concealment of his predatory attitudes from himself and others?

VIII. Economic Implications

In three main ways, the higher-lower self formula of human action undergirds and perpetuates the same economic attitudes and institutions that were originally generated by the primitive belief in prowess as the proper test of deserts to superior status.

(1) It calls for precisely the same division of life activities into economic and noneconomic employments. In both instances, economic employments are those that supply the whole community with material goods and services, whereas noneconomic employments are the activities that supply it with nonmaterial or spiritual goods and services, principally of the kinds already cited. Again, in both cases, work is equated with time and effort spent in economic employments, and leisure with time and effort spent in noneconomic employments.

(2) It generates commitment of mind and conscience to the same traditionalist imperative that was originally generated by the primitive belief in superior prowess as the proper test of status deserts. For in both cases, dependence on economic employments (work) is deemed sure proof of deserts to inferior standing and exemption from such employments (leisure) is viewed as proof of rightful claims to highest standing. The two situations differ only in the justifying reasons for these identical beliefs. Under the older, prowess test of superior standing, the servility of work arises from the belief that economic employments are the just deserts of those who are without sufficient courage to prefer the death of proud freemen to subjugation by the stronger. Under the sophisticated higher-lower self formula, those deserving exemption from economic employments are the relative few in whom the nobler interests of higher self habitually have the upper hand over the materialistic wants of the lower self. The reverse is true of the underlying population who therefore deserve to be saddled with the work of the world.

(3) In generating this belief, the higher-lower self formula of human nature undergirds and perpetuates the same exploitative ownership institutions that were originally generated by the ancient belief in prowess as the proper way of establishing legal rights to the exclusive use and enjoyment of land and other production services. For, when encumbered by the conviction that exemption from industry is sure evidence of
deserts to highest positions, mind and conscience see little or no reason for upsetting feudal or semifeudal institutions except the ignoble one of rewarding the greeds of the "have-nots" by robbing the "haves" of their opportunity and duty to fulfill nobler interests of the higher self and hold in check the turbulence and greed of the lower classes.

**IX. Summary and Conclusion**

The central theme of this analysis has been that the dominant striving of people in all cultures is the aspiration to earn an increasingly favorable image (valuation) of themselves in their own eyes and the eyes of others. Whether or not this striving works as an inhibitor or a generator of economic growth turns on beliefs concerning ways of living and of making a living that are taken as prima facie evidence that one possesses capacities which entitle him to the increasingly higher standing which each covets. This status aspiration functions as a powerful inhibitor of economic growth if it is guided by the belief that dependence on economic employments is indisputable evidence that one lacks the capacities of mind and character that entitle him to the higher positions. But the same aspiration becomes a generator of unlimited economic growth if it is guided by the belief that proficiency in economic as well as noneconomic employments is the appropriate way of earning an ever higher valuation of himself in his own eyes and in the eyes of others.

The key step in the rise of our own economically dynamic Western society was a revolutionary shift from the first to the second of these beliefs—the belief that no amount of riches can ever exempt one from the responsibility to be as proficient as possible in any employment which he believes best expresses his productive potential. Once this shift in beliefs was accomplished, economic incentives became effective inducements to increasingly productive effort over and above the limits imposed by any conceivable level of customary wants. May not the same principle apply to the vast areas of the globe that still share the same traditionalist beliefs and values with respect to the economic employments and master-servant types of institutions which Western society shared prior to the 16th century? If so, the central question is: How may this revolutionary change in traditionalist beliefs and values be facilitated?