

## Thomas Jefferson on the Moral Foundations of Individual Rights

Matthew S. Holland, assistant professor of political science, Brigham Young University

Even—perhaps especially—in today’s pluralistic society, questions abound concerning the nature, meaning, and scope of individual rights, and concerning how those rights, and the operations of a democratic, rights-based government, should or should not be affected by religiously-grounded moralities. This paper seeks to shed light on some of those questions by carefully examining Thomas Jefferson’s concept of individual rights and how that concept was affected by shifts in his own religious outlook.

To appreciate, however, the full import and complexity of Jefferson’s thought, it is helpful to first look at another key figure in the American political thought tradition, John Winthrop. Winthrop led the largest, initial wave of Puritan settlers from England to America in 1630, settled Boston, and was elected the first governor of Massachusetts, an office he held for all but six of the nineteen years he lived in the New World. In *Democracy in America*, a work described by one as, “if not the best book on America, certainly the best book on America by a non-American,” Alexis de Tocqueville singles out John Winthrop as a figure of founding importance for America. As de Tocqueville sees it, the most important cause of America’s singular democratic success is not her fertile land, kindly separated from aristocratic Europe, or her ingenious constitutional and federal laws, but her national character: her ideas and ideals. For de Tocqueville, the decisive influencers of these powerful American mores were the Puritans, amongst whom John Winthrop stands out above all others (Tocqueville, pp. 31–46).

Just what is our Puritan inheritance, as inspired by John Winthrop, among others? Perhaps our richest resource for answering this question comes from Winthrop’s political sermon delivered on the deck of the *Arbella*, the lead ship of the 1630 Puritan migration. This sermon spelled out his vision of public life in New England and was titled “A Model of Christian Charity.” It contains at least five ideals that had, and continue to have, a profound impact on American culture and public life.

First, Winthrop taught that this land was to be a model society of Christian love, which meant, generally, that they should care for each other as they cared for themselves, and specifically, that there should be no poor among them. One of Winthrop’s chief criticisms of England and her church was that not nearly enough was being done to help the poor. Historical studies show that such was not the case in Winthrop’s Boston, where a remarkably efficient system of welfare pro-

vided for those who could not provide for themselves.

Second, they must learn to rule themselves. Winthrop himself was a trained lawyer and would do much to see that the fundamentals of the English legal tradition would take root in Massachusetts. On a related note, both community and church business would be done by consent. Though a hierarchical society by contemporary standards, the Massachusetts Bay Colony practiced an unusually advanced form of democracy. Almost forty years before Locke would publish his *Second Treatise*, these hardy Puritans were making their own social contracts, holding regular elections, extending the franchise, and separating legislative and executive powers.

Third, they must be educated. To purify the faith and arm themselves against the influence of Anglican clerical powers, the Massachusetts Bay Colony needed highly educated preachers and widely educated parishioners. Thus, even in the very earliest and challenging years of the colony, Winthrop and his fellow Puritan leaders set up a college. They called it Harvard.

Fourth, they must be a “City on a Hill.” Borrowing this image from the book of Matthew, Winthrop taught that the charity they practiced must not just be toward one another but to the rest of mankind as well. They were to be a people whose positive influence knew no boundaries. The sense that America has a special mission in the larger world is one of the most permanent and powerful ideals passed on by this visionary Puritan.

Lastly, Winthrop taught that they must persecute each other. Of course, Winthrop did not preach this explicitly, but the Puritan tendency to punish severely those that opposed their orthodoxy, in any point, large or small, was built into the very logic of Winthrop’s view of Christian charity. According to Winthrop, charity is not just a matter of loving others but also of loving God. In the particular case of the Puritans, they believed that the love, or charity, between God and man was of “a most strict and peculiar manner.” They saw themselves as a special, covenant people, not unlike the Children of Israel, an image that crops up repeatedly in Winthrop’s sermon. Because God loved them above all people, if they would love him above all other things, manifest through a strict and careful obedience to the covenant they would establish with him, they would prosper like no other plantation in the world. Alternatively, if they stumbled in their collective covenant with God, God would, like a jealous and jilted lover, punish them severely. Specifically, Winthrop

warns of shipwreck on the way over, or perishing out in the wilderness once they get there. Thus, it was a matter of life and death to see that not only you, but also your neighbor, was strictly adhering to the communal covenant with God.

A recent exhibit at BYU on religion and the founding of America included an etching of Mary Dyer being led to her execution in Massachusetts in 1660. As the exhibit explained, Mary was killed, in part, because she was a follower of Anne Hutchinson, a woman who espoused the evil doctrine of direct, personal revelation—a powerful threat to the orthodoxy Winthrop and others thought needed to prevail for Puritan survival. Something not in the exhibit, but perhaps just as horrific as the etching of Dyer's execution, is an account in Winthrop's own journal, about how, in 1638, he had Mary Dyer's miscarried fetus dug up from its grave so its reportedly monstrous deformities could be catalogued and used as evidence of God's punishment for her unorthodox and headstrong beliefs.

This is the complicated, dual legacy of a figure like John Winthrop, and it underscores the dual and complicated legacy of religion in American political life. A number of the religious influences and related social practices that Winthrop was instrumental in planting deeply in America soil provided a powerful foundation for the unique mores, or national character, that enabled America to scale so quickly and successfully the sunlit uplands of modern, republican democracy. On the other hand, Winthrop is also guilty of helping to import to America a rather awful and severe spirit of persecution in the name of religion.

Thomas Jefferson loathed man's inhumanity to man in the name of religion. And, arguably, no one has done more to stem religious prejudice and persecution in this country than Jefferson. How did Jefferson do this? His first move, it could be argued, was to steer America away from the aspiration to be a "Model of Christian Charity." Just how far afield Jefferson wanted to take America from something like Winthrop's model of charity is evident in the very first clause of the very first sentence of the Declaration of Independence.

Jefferson begins the declaration by recasting the world in which politics takes place. Whereas the opening line of Winthrop's "Model of Christian Charity" situates his constituents' departure from England in the context of an environment where God's care and providence is operating everywhere and at "all times," Jefferson's memorable first seven words, "[w]hen in the course of human events," convey that even earth-shattering political movements, like the American Revolution, take place as part of a drama more mortal than divine. The notion that politics is delimited to the realm of independent human choice and activity is further highlighted by the fact that, while Winthrop's speech endeavors to fully satisfy the demands of a jealous God, Jefferson's words only aim to accommodate "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind."<sup>1</sup>

Of course, God is not entirely missing from Jefferson's political cosmology. It is, Jefferson claims in his rough draft, the "laws of nature and of nature's god" that "entitle" a people to throw off their subordinate status and acquire an "equal and independent station" in the universe of politics. To be entitled to something presupposes the existence of a standard of judgment by which one might ascertain whether one is, or is not, entitled to something. In politics, Jefferson's first sentence argues, such a standard exists: "nature's god" provides a norm by which key considerations of politics can be judged. While Jefferson seeks to liberate America from the extensive demands of the punishing and providential God of Winthrop, he stops well short of an amoral Machiavellianism, which holds that politics is not subject to any moral requirements higher than getting and keeping power.

On one hand, Jefferson's god of nature exerts an omnipresence in the political world by setting a standard by which certain political arrangements may be judged, at all times and in all places. But on the other hand, "nature's god" passively stands outside of politics, doing nothing to actively realize that standard throughout the world, allowing politics to take what "course" humans dictate.

Because the god of Jefferson's politics is a barely visible and inactive presence—sustaining a morality by which to judge politics, but neither punishing those who offend such a morality, or blessing those who follow it—there is no need for Jefferson, or any statesman, to insist on a careful, obedient love of this god. Already then, in just the first sentence of the declaration, Jefferson has done much to ratchet down the pressure in America to persecute our neighbors into a far-reaching, God-pleasing orthodoxy.

While perhaps hard to fully defend on philosophical or theological grounds, Jefferson's view of God provides a number of salient political features—features that come into greater focus by reviewing what Jefferson believes are the fundamental rules, or self-evident truths, that this god of nature sets for politics.

The first truth Jefferson tenders is that "all men are created equal." By this, Jefferson means simply that no man has a God-given, or natural, claim to rule over another. One may in fact possess superior physical, intellectual, or spiritual talents—one may be a potential member of what Jefferson hoped would be a "natural aristocracy . . . of virtue and talents"—but one is not, *ipso facto*, entitled to rule over another. In other words, the view that no natural political authority exists means that all men are naturally free to govern themselves. Thus, Jefferson's claim about natural equality leads to a claim about natural rights, namely that all are endowed with certain, inalienable rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

This troika of rights is tantamount to an inherent freedom from the rule of another. Consider how one scholar has

recently characterized what Jefferson meant by the right to the pursuit of happiness:

When Jefferson spoke of an inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness, he meant that men may act as they choose in their search for ease, comfort, felicity, and grace, either by owning property or not, by accumulating wealth or distributing it, by opting for material success or asceticism, in a word, by determining the path to their own earthly and heavenly salvation as they alone see fit (Hamowy, p. 519).

Toward the end of his life, in a letter to Doctor John Manners, Jefferson himself confirms this view by stating that the same god who put it “in the nature of man to pursue happiness” has also left man “free in the choice of place as well as mode” of that happiness (Jefferson, 1907, pp. 15, 124).

From the previous two assertions about equality and rights come two concrete criteria for judging the moral legitimacy of government. One is that government must “secure” the free and safe exercise of these “inherent” rights; the second is that the government that does so must derive its “just powers from the consent of the governed.” Because a state of natural equality implies that no natural political authority exists, and because natural equals cannot individually secure—in the face of historically proven human tendencies toward selfishness and tyranny—the rights their equality guarantees them, they must turn to other natural equals and mutually agree on a form of government that will effect the safe exercise of their right to live their lives as they see fit. By design, this contractually created power will have to set some limits on the full and free exercise of individual rights, for everyone’s rights must be limited to some degree in order to protect A and A’s rights from the unfettered practice of rights by B. This does not signal a surrender of those rights per se. It only signals that natural equals have of their own accord agreed on a conventional form of authority to identify and enforce conventional limits to those rights.

To sum up thus far, Jefferson’s concept of individual rights is clearly grounded in morality. One might even call it a religious morality in that, for Jefferson, it is a morality that is not manmade, but one that emanates from some transcendent power he calls the “god of nature” and is something he believes is universal, something that applies to all humans everywhere. And yet this morality is rather bland and thin compared to most traditional, religious moralities. It does not ask us to be fully committed Jews, Muslims, or Christians. It is the simple morality of treating each other as natural equals with natural rights to pursue our own lives as we see fit. In fact, this morality gives rise to a certain kind of government that must have what Jefferson called “a wall of separation” between churches and the government, lest one religious sect be given the power to impose its will or morality on members of another, thereby curtailing the safe, secure exercise of their individual rights—the *raison d’être* of Jeffersonian govern-

ment. Thus, Jefferson’s views in the Declaration of Independence concerning the moral nature of individual rights is often called a secularist view—and rightly so.

That Jefferson’s views here should be categorized as sitting somewhere between secularist and, at most, quasi-religious is underscored by a careful look at his own religious proclivities. At the time of drafting the declaration, Jefferson was not a great fan of organized religion. Though he was raised a good Anglican, and more or less maintains a lifelong commitment to regular Anglican church attendance, most historians agree that in his teens Jefferson experienced something of a “religious crisis.” In place of his former faith, he appears to have adopted a vague “natural religion” based on reason and moral sense philosophy (Jefferson, 1983, p. 5). That Jefferson’s youthful rejection of the traditional Protestant Christianity of his day can be attributed to a budding preference for evidence and reason is heavily underscored in his *Literary commonplace Book, 1758-1772*, where Jefferson, in his teens and twenties, copied passages from his favorite poets, dramatists, and philosophers. The author Jefferson copies down most extensively, by an order of magnitude, is Lord Bolingbroke, an English Tory whose writings have been characterized by one scholar as “a veritable summa of rationalistic criticisms of revealed religion” (Jefferson, 1983, pp. 5–6).

Jefferson copies Bolingbroke’s rejection, among other things, of the Bible as an inspired text because inspiration cannot be proved by reason and evidence (p. 25), of miracles as testimony of the divinity of Christ because they are found convincing only in an environment where “ignorance . . . abounds” (p. 33); and of the general gospel message as a comprehensive ethical guide because:

It is not true that Christ revealed an entire body of ethics proved to be the law of nature from principles of reason, and reaching all the duties of life. If mankind wanted such a code, to which recourse might be had on every occasion, as to an unerring rule in every part of the moral duties, such a code is still wanting; for the gospel is not such a code (p. 35).

It is also clear that not only did he find Christianity rationally unconvincing, but he also saw it as the source of unacceptable tyranny and malice. In 1822, a minister sent Jefferson some pamphlets and asked for his opinion on them. Jefferson wrote the following in response:

I have never permitted myself to meditate a specified creed. These formulas have been the bane and ruin of the Christian church, its own fatal invention which, thro’ so many ages, made of Christendom a slaughter house, and at this day divides it into casts of inextinguishable hatred to one another (p. 404).

However, over time Jefferson’s attitudes toward Christianity change, and this appears to prompt Jefferson to subtly

modify the political philosophy that has been spelled out thus far. In an 1819 letter he sent to William Short, who had earlier written to Jefferson that Epicurus was the “wisest of the ancient philosophers” and the ultimate source of instruction for “the attainment of happiness in this poor world” (Jefferson 1983, p. 390), Jefferson flatly asserts, “I too am an Epicurean” (p. 388). However, a few lines later Jefferson concludes:

But the greatest of all the Reformers . . . was Jesus of Nazareth. . . . [From him], we have the outlines of a system of the most sublime morality which has ever fallen from the lips of man. . . . Epictetus and Epicurus give us laws for governing ourselves, Jesus a supplement of the duties and charities we owe to others (*ibid.*, emphasis added).

This completely inverts the Bolingbroke claim which Jefferson had enthusiastically copied in his youth. So what is going on here?

During the decade before Jefferson’s ascension to the presidency, a series of experiences unquestionably altered Jefferson’s view of the role that Christianity in general, and Christian charity in particular, should play in the public morality of the country over which he was shortly destined to preside.

In December 1789, Jefferson reluctantly accepted George Washington’s request to serve as secretary of state and returned home from France. It was not long before Jefferson locked horns with Washington’s influential secretary of treasury, Alexander Hamilton (Peterson, p. 396). Thus began a long and ugly battle in which Hamilton, and later Adams, worked at vehement cross purposes with Jefferson and later Madison. What Jefferson thought he saw in the actions of Hamilton and Adams, which consistently favored a strong, centralized government over state and local control, big cities and manufacturing concerns over the agrarian interests of rural America, regal pomp and pageantry over democratic simplicity, and royal England over republican France, were courtly intentions designed to turn America from its democratic-republican moorings, for which Jefferson had labored almost all his entire adult life. This split produced a decade-long political battle that would give rise to the “first political parties of modern democratic form” (the Federalist party of Hamilton and Adams, and the Republican party of Jefferson and Madison). It would also go down in history as one of the most acrimonious periods of American politics (Aldrich, pp. 68–69).

From the start, Jefferson saw Federalist actions as grave threats to the sacred truths of human equality and liberty enshrined in the declaration (Ellis, p. 210). However, by the end of the campaign of 1800, the increasingly ugly fight between Federalists and Republicans gave Jefferson pause to consider a different, and nearly as ominous, threat to the full realization and perpetuation of the verities of 1776. Now undermining

successful self-rule was what Jefferson considered a dangerous lack of love among American citizens of different political persuasions (Jefferson 1983, p. 14). One of the very first letters Jefferson writes after becoming president is to Elbridge Gerry, wherein he states, “It will be a great blessing to our country if we can once more restore harmony and social love among its citizens. I confess, as to myself, it is almost the first object of my heart, and to which I would sacrifice everything but principle” (Jefferson 1984, p. 1089).

Jefferson’s mounting alarm over the political dangers associated with a lack of “social love” in America coincided with a fairly dramatic transformation of his views on Christianity. In the mid-1790s, sometime after resigning from Washington’s cabinet, Jefferson read *An History of the Corruptions of Christianity* by Joseph Priestly, the English chemist turned Unitarian theologian (p. 15). In this book, Priestly argues that early Church leaders corrupted original Christianity with esoteric and irrational doctrines like the Trinity, original sin, and the atonement, to appeal to intellectual pagans and exercise more control over commoners through mysteries only the church fathers could interpret. Priestly’s work did a lot to clear away much of what Jefferson found unacceptably mysterious and irrational in Christianity since his young days of reading Bolingbroke.

At roughly the same time that Jefferson’s attitude toward Christianity was being reshaped by the arguments of Priestly, Jefferson was in Philadelphia serving as a bored, marginalized vice president to Adams; he began visiting regularly with Benjamin Rush, his old friend from the Continental Congress, who was prayerfully determined to see Jefferson come to believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ and in the importance of Christianity for America’s political well being (D’Elia, pp. 336–37).

Though Jefferson never came to share Rush’s millennial vision for America, or accept the divinity of Christ or the seemingly irrational concepts of miracles and atonement, these conversations, combined with Jefferson’s readings of Priestly and growing concern over the social animosity that seemed to jeopardize the survival of the republic, appear to have completely transformed his attitude about the general moral validity and political importance of Christian morality (p. 19). On 21 April 1803, just two years into his presidency, Jefferson wrote to Rush, in a letter that sits out in this exhibit, “To the corruptions of Christianity, I am indeed opposed; but not the genuine precepts of Jesus himself. I am a Christian in the only sense in which he wished one to be; sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others” (p. 331).

Both the strength and direction of Jefferson’s changing views is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that, just two years into his presidency, Jefferson spent what he later reported was “one or two evenings only, while I lived at Washington, overwhelmed with other business” cutting out

what he believed were the unadulterated teachings of the New Testament and pasting them onto large sheets of folded paper, which he then had bound, and titled *The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth* (p. 27)—the index is illuminating. Prominent are the more compassionate, mercy-oriented parables found in Luke, like the “Lost Sheep,” “Prodigal Son,” and the “Good Samaritan,” which Jefferson specifically characterizes, in his table of contents page, as “true benevolence” (Jefferson 1983, p. 58). One also finds the passages from Matthew concerning the two great commandments of Christian love,<sup>2</sup> which Jefferson singles out as Jesus’ “general moral precepts.” Alternatively, Jefferson did not include any passages concerning the divine elements of Christ’s birth, the miraculous moments of his ministry, and, most notably, the atoning, sacrificial nature of his death. There are comparatively few passages from the more esoteric book of John.

The pressing question then is this: how, if at all, did Jefferson’s altered views on what he called true and charitable “doctrines of Jesus” affect his political philosophy? The most fertile ground for such an exploration is Jefferson’s First Inaugural—one of his very few public speeches, and perhaps his very best.

There are several things to note about this speech. First, unlike the Declaration, Jefferson is now speaking only for himself, unconstrained by writing for a committee and larger voting assembly. Additionally, at the delivery of his First Inaugural, Jefferson was a few weeks shy of his fifty-eighth birthday. When he drafted the declaration, he was only thirty-three years old. To sum up, the First Inaugural is entirely Jefferson, pure and mature.

It is also significant that this speech was written and delivered in the spring of 1801. In other words, it comes immediately on the heels of the bruising election of 1800, and right in the heart of his intense reflections on his views of Christian doctrine and belief, as prompted by Priestly and Rush. Together, the timing and importance of this speech make it an unmatched platform for understanding Jefferson’s revised and most influential thoughts on charity and politics.

Jefferson’s opening paragraph introduces something of a controlling theme for the whole address. The second half of Jefferson’s long second sentence speaks of the “the *happiness*, and the hopes of this beloved country committed to the issue and the auspices of this day” (emphasis added). Peppered throughout the rest of the address are six more direct references to happiness. From beginning to end, national happiness rings as the leitmotif of the First Inaugural. That the speech then goes on to connect, at least implicitly, some view of Christian charity (for he never uses, explicitly, the terms Christian or charity) as essential to America’s national happiness seems quite clear.

After the introductory paragraph, Jefferson’s very first move is to extend a charitable olive leaf of peace to his for-

mer Federalist enemies, saying, famously, “Every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all republicans—we are all federalists.”

John Marshal, one of Jefferson’s most ardent Federalist foes, called it “well judged and conciliatory” (Peterson, p. 659). And Benjamin Rush was positively delighted to discover that in response to the publication of the address in Philadelphia, “Old friends too long separated by party names were reunited” (*ibid.*).

All this had to be gratifying for Jefferson, for just such a reaction was his stated objective. Early in the second paragraph, Jefferson writes the following:

Let us, then, fellow citizens, unite with one heart and one mind. Let us restore to social intercourse that harmony and affection without which liberty and even life are but dreary things. And let us reflect that having banished from our land that religious intolerance under which mankind so long bled and suffered, we have yet gained little if we countenance a political intolerance as despotic, as wicked, and capable of as bitter and bloody persecutions.

This is more than just a poetic plea that partisan citizens be kinder and more respectful toward each other.

In the second line, Jefferson explains that, without affection, “liberty and even life itself are but dreary things.” By taking dreariness, a clear antonym of happiness, and linking it to the absence of affection, even in the face of enjoying “life” and “liberty,” the other two prominent components of the declaration’s famous triad of rights, Jefferson alerts his careful listeners/readers to an insight concerning the declaration’s “pursuit of happiness” clause. He is teaching that the pursuit of human happiness will be a difficult, if not impossible, task in an atmosphere absent of affection, or, one might say, at least a mild form of charity.

That Jefferson sees a connection between a specifically New Testament-inspired love and human happiness comes through more explicitly in later private correspondence, where he declares that the charitable “doctrines of Jesus,” as he understands them, “tend all to the happiness of man” (Jefferson 1983, p. 405).

With this in mind, consider the next paragraph of the First Inaugural, where Jefferson asks and answers the question, “What more is necessary to make us a *happy* and prosperous people?” (emphasis added). Just before uttering the question, Jefferson listed a number of “blessings” he thought were essential. One was allegiance to “federal and republican principles,” at least those that were both grounded in a philosophy of natural rights. The second is what he calls a benign religion:

Enlightened by a benign religion, professed, indeed, and practiced in various forms, yet all of them including honesty, truth, temperance, gratitude, and the love of

man; acknowledging and adoring an overruling Providence, which by all its dispensations proves that it delights in the happiness of man here and his greater happiness hereafter.

Given Jefferson's early avowals, public and private, on the subject of religion, this statement is nothing short of astonishing. Jefferson is now, for the first time, openly congratulating America for its widespread religiosity, especially because that religiosity generally promotes a "love of man," and adoration of God—two staples of traditional Christian charity. Of course, keeping consistent with his firm view that government should not endorse or be governed by specific religions, Jefferson is careful here to present religion in the most pluralistic light possible. Thus, he chooses the generic term "religion" over even a general reference to Christianity. Similarly, Jefferson prefers a vague reference to "Providence" over a more anthropological sounding "God" as the stated object of religious devotion. However, given what Jefferson is revealing in his private communications with Rush and Priestly immediately behind the scenes of his ascension to the presidency, it seems most reasonable that his reconsideration of Christianity is coloring much of this statement.

But how much, if at all, does this change Jefferson's political philosophy? Consider, again, Jefferson's question, "What more is necessary to make us a happy and prosperous people?" Jefferson goes on to say that "one thing more" is needed to "close the circle of our felicities":

A wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, which shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned.

As Jefferson notes, this is the "sum of good government," which rounds out America's circle of happiness.

At first blush, it would seem we are left with a government little different than the one coming strictly out of the public morality of natural rights; it is simply limited and individualistic, protecting wide swaths of human freedom. But, consider the following. Jefferson's phrase "the circle of our felicities" suggests a different conceptual framework than that laid out in the discussion on Jefferson's views as found in the declaration. Rather than a foundation of a thin morality of natural rights that gives rise to secular walls of separation, we now might think about separate arcs on the same circle, where some of the powers and virtues of private, traditional religion feed into and off of both a public morality of natural rights and a wise and frugal government unmistakably devoted to protecting individual rights.

Also, by publicly teaching that the practice of some form of charity is essential to national happiness and helps ensure the stable perpetuation of democratic, rights-protecting forms of government, and by privately teaching that the best resource

for an understanding of charity is located in the New Testament, Jefferson signals, in ways he never did in his early career, the political importance and legitimacy of a specifically biblical concept of charity. And while the public morality of natural rights would continue to properly limit the statesman from deploying discriminating and coercive legal sanctions to shore up this religious ideal, Jefferson appears to be saying that the wise statesman will readily use the noncoercive but nonetheless political powers of his office to carefully advance important elements of this virtue. This also raises the prospect of other considerations for a larger, religio-cultural morality necessary to fully support a regime of natural rights. Clearly, Jefferson saw some concept of religiously inspired love as necessary to support a regime of rights. Is it possible that Jefferson felt there were other teachings from the Judeo-Christian heritage he knew that were also central for stabilizing and promoting a safe democracy of individual rights? There are clues that he did think so, but this must remain a study for another day.

### Notes

1. Concerning those notable lines at the end of the declaration that appeal to the "supreme judge of the world" and humbly acknowledge a "a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence," they were not written by Jefferson. They were added in by his editors, namely the full Continental Congress. Nor is Jefferson responsible for the famous "endowed by their Creator" line in the second sentence; this comes from the drafting committee, which slightly revised Jefferson's original rough draft before forwarding it on to the full congress.

2. See Matthew 19: 19; 22: 35–40

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