“Jefferson’s Grand Experiment: Education and the Challenges of Citizenship”

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ABSTRACT

In a letter to James Madison, Thomas Jefferson wrote: “Above all things I hope the education of the common people will be attended to; convinced that on their good sense we may rely with the most security for the preservation of a due degree of liberty.” As this quotation indicates, Jefferson viewed education as the cornerstone of a free and enduring democracy, for he conjectured that all citizens could receive an education in morality and critical thinking which prepared them for citizenship. He detailed duties for citizens, freedoms granted to citizens, and checks to limit the power of the government, based on an assumption of an educated citizen body using their education to participate in the democracy. For Jefferson, morality, reasoning, and education intertwined to influence his conception of democracy. In order to comprehend Jefferson’s notion of democracy, therefore, one must also understand his educational plans and the connections between the two. Likewise, in order to appreciate Jefferson’s educational plans, an awareness of the role those plans played in Jefferson’s democracy is critical.

This thesis begins with a discussion of the changes in philosophical thinking taking place in the Enlightenment era, as Jefferson relied on these changes to construct his experiment in democracy. As the elites transitioned from a world defined by God and religion to one defined by science and rationality, the value of an education rose accordingly. Jefferson capitalized on the new mode of thinking to design an educational curriculum that cultivated individuals trained to feel morally and reason critically, in an independent manner, as discussed in Section Two. This section highlights Jefferson’s moral philosophy, the faith he placed in the power of education, and the separation of religion from education.

Section Three explains Jefferson’s definition of democracy, his plan for a system of

universal education, and the University of Virginia as a model for a secular state. Jefferson viewed a de-centralized government, which incorporated a diversity of elected officials at all different levels, as the best form of democracy. To ensure the success of that democracy, he asked all citizens to participate, either as elected officials or as voters who monitored the actions of the government. Jefferson assumed that a system of universal education prepared all citizens to face those challenges in an intellectual manner.

Given Jefferson's assumptions about his educated citizen body, Jefferson desired the Bill of Rights, as educated citizens deserved those freedoms. Section Four analyzes Freedom of the Press and Freedom of Religion as a means in which the citizens protected their rights from the government, and as a way in which Jefferson tried to stop the government from corrupting the analytical and independent thinking skills of his citizens. Additionally, Jefferson rejected political parties, as they, too, corrupted the independent thinking of citizens. Lastly, Jefferson recommended rebellions as a means of speaking out against the government when they violated the rights of citizens in an extreme manner. The conclusion extends this conversation to today, commenting on the role of Jefferson's philosophy in today's political discourse and our system of education.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION:

Studying Jefferson Through the Lens of Education

In a letter to Judge John Tyler, Thomas Jefferson wrote: “No experiment can be more interesting than that we are now trying, and which we trust will end up in establishing the fact, that man may be governed by reason and truth.”¹ In this quotation, Jefferson described his experiment in education, which he used as the foundation of American democracy. Jefferson viewed himself as a practical man concerned with building a successful and enduring democracy, and not as a philosopher. He turned, therefore, to education as the tool that allowed him to create the Enlightened democracy in which he theoretically believed. In order to understand Jefferson’s conception of democracy, therefore, one must analyze more than his political philosophy. Studying Jefferson’s experiment – his plans for education – as the pragmatic actualization of his philosophical thinking illuminates the connections between his different theories. He linked his disparate ideas together using education as the thread. One cannot appreciate the nuances in Jefferson’s conception of a democracy and the reasons for the different parts of it without also understanding the way it incorporates his assumption of an educated citizen body and the faith he placed in that education. Analyzing the value Jefferson attributed to the powers of education enriches our understanding of Jeffersonian democracy and the rights and duties granted to citizens in that democracy.

This thesis uses Jefferson’s correspondence to explore his theories on education, linking them to his conceptions of a democratic society. An engaging and personable writer, Jefferson

¹ Thomas Jefferson, Correspondence, “To John Tyler, June 28, 1804”. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, 1993). <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/JefLett.html>. From this point on, I will list each letter by its recipient and the date. I do not refer to page numbers in the letter, as the page numbers vary. In Jefferson’s letters, I updated the spelling.
corresponded prolifically with numerous other men and women on topics ranging from farming techniques, proper etiquette, and models for living a happy life, to philosophy, politics, and education. Letter writing allowed Jefferson to explore his beliefs and the connections between his different ideas in ways more helpful than writing documents on isolated subjects, such as the Declaration of Independence, for example, or his plans for establishing universal education in Virginia. Jefferson unpacked his ideas through letters; reading those letters deepens our understanding of Jefferson’s thoughts. Whereas in the Declaration of Independence he focused only on man’s civil rights in a democracy, in his letters he discussed the Declaration in conjunction with the happiness of man, and he elaborated on his beliefs that democratic citizens needed an education to fulfill their duties as citizens. Letter writing presented Jefferson with the freedom and opportunity to explore his thinking without boundaries or limits, escaping the confines of philosophical topics. Thus, by studying his letters, instead of moral, educational, and political treatises, the links between the topics are apparent, allowing us to understand Jefferson’s views more deeply. I focused on the letters including syllabi that Jefferson wrote to the students he mentored, and the letters Jefferson wrote discussing his plans for the University of Virginia and his plans for universal education, which he established in Virginia and hoped would spread to the rest of the country.²

Jefferson’s correspondence spanned from 1760 to 1820. In his letters, he wrote to well-known men such as John Adams, James Madison, Scottish philosopher Lord Kames, and Abigail Adams. He wrote to family members, such as his nephew, Peter Carr, his brother-in-law, Robert Skipwith, and his son-in-law, Thomas Mann Randolph, Jr, the twenty-first governor of Virginia.

² As President, Jefferson tried, and failed, to enact a constitutional amendment requiring all states to fund public schools. As Governor of Virginia, Jefferson also tried to implement universal education and again failed. For more information, see Roy Honeywell’s The Educational Work of Thomas Jefferson, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931.).
Jefferson also corresponded with fellow Virginians: Littleton Waller Tazewell, the twenty-fifth governor of Virginia, Joseph C. Cabell, a Virginia State senator, and James Breckenridge, a lawyer from Virginia, as well as other prominent men throughout America and Europe.

Historians tend to categorize Jefferson as a philosopher of a specific philosophical movement – the French Enlightenment, the Scottish Enlightenment, and so on – studying him only as a student of that movement. Yet by obsessing over the origins of Jefferson’s philosophies or with finding the philosophical inconsistencies, they miss the larger picture. Jefferson read avidly and corresponded with a diverse group of philosophers, so he never confined himself to studying only one philosophical movement. Instead, Jefferson was a member of an international republic of letters, focusing on the large picture implementation of his philosophy instead of on the nitpicky details. Jefferson never defined himself as a philosopher; he did not see himself as a Franklin or a Rousseau, so he should not be studied as such. He should be studied, instead, as an educator and creator.

Jean M. Yarbrough’s intellectual history publication, *American Virtues: Thomas Jefferson on the Character of a Free People*, exemplifies the secondary literature. Yarbrough analyzes the impact of Jefferson’s moral philosophy and his belief in the virtues of the common man in his political theory. Yarbrough believes Jefferson’s moral philosophy derived from the Scots, and she shows that although Jefferson believed man could instinctively use moral virtue to make moral decisions, this moral virtue was weak. Cultivation of the moral sense allowed man to strengthen this virtue to make just and benevolent decisions. In her work, Yarbrough neglects the connection between Jefferson’s belief in an individual’s weak sense of righteous instinct and his idea of their role as an Enlightened and moral citizen in a democratic Republic. She glosses over

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the critical role that education played in the cultivation of this moral sense. While she refers to cultivation, she never defines it, nor does she explain how man received the cultivation that produced enlightened decisions. She limits herself, instead, to a discussion of Jefferson’s Scottish moral philosophy. I agree with Yarbrough’s conclusion, and I look at Jefferson’s moral philosophy as aligned with the Scots. I believe, however, that Jefferson did not limit himself to only Scottish moral philosophy, as I find traces of Rousseau in Jefferson, as well as a distinctive mix of pragmatism, romanticism, and optimism. More importantly, I analyze the role of Jefferson’s moral philosophy in both his educational program and his democracy, instead of limiting the discussion to only moral philosophy. I argue that a discussion of Jefferson’s moral philosophy is incomplete without an accompanying understanding of his hopes for moral citizens.

I build upon Yarbrough’s work by widening her scope to include Jefferson’s plans for education and the actualization of his moral philosophy. In my thesis, I use Roy Honeywell’s *The Educational Work of Thomas Jefferson* as a starting point. Honeywell analyzes the entirety of Jefferson’s educational program, providing the historical background and its comparison to other syllabi in circulation at the time. Within my discussion of Jefferson’s educational program, however, I limit myself to discussing only the aspects of Jefferson’s educational program that relate directly to his idea of citizens in a democracy. However, unlike Honeywell, I move outside the confines of education, by connecting Jefferson’s educational plans to his conceptions of mankind, morality, and democracy.

Tom Pangle and Lorraine Smith Pangle published *The Learning of Liberty: the*
Educational Ideas of the Founding Fathers. They trace the development of Jefferson’s educational theories beginning with Aristotle and ending with the Puritans in Massachusetts. They broaden the scope of Jefferson’s educational theories by explaining who Jefferson believed should be educated, why he believed they should be educated, and the benefits of this education for democratic citizens. Their analysis highlights each aspect of the liberal arts curriculum and the role it plays in shaping a student’s mind to prepare them for living in a democratic Republic. They could strengthen their analysis, however, by showing what specific aspects of the government Jefferson proposed because he believed the citizens would be enlightened. There is little discussion of the role a morally cultivated and educated citizen plays in Jefferson’s democracy. Instead, they only discuss the ways in which Jefferson believed that educated citizens warded off tyranny better than the government, without explaining how the citizens accomplished this. I argue that a discussion of Jefferson’s educational plans is incomplete without also discussing the ways in which the educated citizen then used his education to participate in the democracy.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first section discusses how Enlightenment thought radically re-conceptualized the world in the late 18th century by re-defining man, nature, morality and government. Instead of using religion as the starting point for all definitions, philosophers turned to reason and science to define mankind and the world. This switch in optics, in turn, replaced religion with reason as the philosophical basis of government, morality, and education. In this discussion, I focus on the Enlightenment in a holistic manner, believing that it was an integrated and connected movement throughout Europe and the Atlantic world, as argued by Jonathan I. Israel in The Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of

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These Enlightened philosophies colored Jefferson's thinking, as he relied on them to construct his pragmatic beliefs concerning education, civil society, and democracy. I trace the thread of Jefferson's Enlightenment philosophy throughout the paper, as it connects to his concrete actions and statements.

Section Two discusses the educational syllabus that Jefferson designed. The section begins with a definition of Jefferson's conceptions of mankind: man as a moral, romantic being, and man as a rational, analytic being. I then connect Jefferson's philosophy of man to his educational program through a discussion concerning Jefferson's faith in using education to enlighten citizens in a way benefitting democracy. This analysis highlights the influence of popular Enlightenment thought, as well as Jefferson's pragmatism: he designed an educational curriculum that capitalized on Enlightenment philosophy concerning an individual's autonomy and the idea of using human reasoning powers to improve oneself. His educational plan also demonstrates his understanding of human limitations and ways of overcoming them. At the same time, his views of mankind demonstrate his Romantic tendencies that emphasized feelings, literature, and morality, instead of cold reason.

Section Three links the educational program to democracy. For Jefferson, successful democracies required the distribution of political responsibilities and participation from citizens of all socioeconomic backgrounds. Given this model, and the necessity of an educated citizen body, Jefferson turned to universal elementary education and universities to fulfill this obligation. On the one hand, Jefferson's plan assumed that education cured all evils because enlightened individuals used their education to act morally and think critically every time they participated as citizens. On the other hand, he insightfully delineated different forms of citizen

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participation to reflect the different levels of intellectual ability in men and women. Jefferson's curriculum demonstrates his assumptions concerning humans: through moral exercise, humans can perfect their morality, while an individual's intellectual capabilities limits his participation in the democracy. His universal education allowed him to trust his enlightened citizens to protect their liberties. By analyzing Jefferson's plans for the University of Virginia, as a model for a secular, liberal arts college, with an understanding of Jefferson's moral and educational philosophy, one gains insight into Jefferson's conception of democracy and his adherence to the separation of Church and State in America.

The fourth section discusses Jefferson's design for government based on the assumption of an educated citizen body. Jefferson wanted citizens’ rights stipulated in theory, in the Bill of Rights, so that it was easier for them to use their education and rights of citizen participation to protect their liberties in practice. All educated and virtuous citizens deserved the ability to act in this manner. Similarly, Jefferson also denounced political parties, for they corrupted citizens’ independent thinking. Yet citizens could not protect their liberties in a society based on artificial values — values based on family lineage and wealth. Instead, they needed a society defined by natural values, such as merit and intelligence. Education and values separated the natural individuals from the artificial individuals, and society needed to ensure that the natural men stayed in office. Such actions ensured that American democracy not only succeeded, but also endured.

The analysis in this section highlights Jefferson's almost irrational fear of government institutions, even democratic institutions made up of Enlightened and diverse individuals. Jefferson designed his own exact theory of government: He based it on prominent Enlightenment theory, installed all of the checks to ward off government tyranny, and wanted only virtuous and
educated citizens to participate. Despite these efforts, Jefferson feared the government as an institution. Interestingly, however, he placed complete confidence in the abilities of private, Enlightened citizens, the same citizens who elected officials and from whom the elected officials were chosen, to ward off tyranny and injustice. Although he trusted Enlightened citizens, a government institution made up of those men is still less natural and, therefore, more prone to corruption and degeneracy.

The conclusion emphasizes the links among Jefferson's conceptions of mankind, education, and democracy, and discusses its application to today's world by looking at the current political situation. It is practically impossible to understand why Jefferson stressed education without also understanding his democracy. Likewise, one cannot understand Jefferson's conception of democracy without understanding the ways in which it built on his ideas of mankind's morality and the powers of education. Jefferson entrusted all citizens with the political responsibility in a democracy only because of his beliefs concerning mankind's autonomy and virtue and his commitment to universal education. Such an understanding of Jefferson's philosophy reveals problems with political discourse in America today, and the manner in which American democracy no longer relies on education in the manner that Jefferson envisioned.

SECTION ONE:

A World In Transition: From Religion to Reason

The Enlightenment Era ushered in changes in all areas of thinking, and many historians attribute this to the rise in rationality and science. The switch from natural philosophy to science encouraged individuals to question the authority of Christianity. Such questioning led to the rise
of education, as men and women viewed themselves and their role in the world differently. Education empowered men and women outside of elite circles to capitalize on the philosophical changes and improve their personal lives, as reason became the foundation for religion, government, and ethics.

This evolution in thinking first occurred in the area of Natural Philosophy. In the late 17th century, theologians conducted studies, believing that by observing nature they approached God and his Divine Truth. Their success as scientists, however, undermined the authority of God himself, as their results challenged traditionally held Biblical conceptions of nature. Instead of understanding the world as still, calm, and unchanging, scientists described the world as volatile, evolutionary, and forever improving. Scientists and educated laymen embraced the rational, secular world view, as they rejected the irrational and conjectural theological views of the world. Philosophers such as Hume, Diderot, and Kant, attacked the philosophical goals of natural philosophy, theorizing that to understand nature explained nothing about the intent or evidence of its Creator. Towards the end of the Enlightenment, science replaced natural philosophy, as individuals realized that Natural Philosophy, as an area of academics, was neither rational nor plausible.7

The emergence of science changed the layman's outlook of nature, as he realized that understanding nature allowed men and women to profit both financially and personally. They turned to education to fulfill their need for scientific knowledge, as universities responded to this desire by awarding degrees in forestry, engineering, mining, and agricultural sciences. Scientific societies in London, Paris, Edinburgh, Philadelphia, Germany, and Italy formed, both privately and publicly, allowing academic and non-academic individuals to gather and educate themselves in the current scientific research. By the end of the century, according to library records and

society and individual rights. Locke and Rousseau developed theories of government based on
the idea of citizen participation and accountability. Rousseau’s Social Contract (1762) declared
that individuals were born into an innocent state of nature but society quickly corrupted them.\(^\text{13}\)
He declared, “man is born free and he is everywhere in chains.”\(^\text{14}\) Governments and civil
societies were necessary to stave off that corruption, as they protected the liberties of the citizens
and regulated the behavior of individuals in society. For Rousseau, citizens needed an education
designed to restore humans to their original form of moral perfection.\(^\text{15}\)

To ensure that citizens lived well, philosophers attempted to define republican virtue.
Rousseau, for example, believed that republican virtues were to “love their country, respect the
laws and live simply.”\(^\text{16}\) All citizens in a republic had to place the needs of their country ahead of
their personal needs. Not only was it necessary for them to write and legislate moral laws, but
they needed to follow them and ensure that their family members and neighbors followed those
laws.\(^\text{17}\) With governments dependent on the virtues of their citizens, morality acquired greater
importance. Yet in defining these virtues, philosophers encountered a problem. Just as the
decline of religion and the rise of reason led to a re-conceptualization of government, these same
movements also threatened the religious foundation of ethics.

Scientific thinking, instead of theology needed to explain and define ethics and ethical
behavior. This shift changed the main question in moral philosophy: Instead of explaining how
to follow a set of morals determined by the Church, philosophers questioned what ethics were.
They questioned the foundation of ethics and the ethical system. For the first time in over a
millennium, individuals did not know what ethical rules were or should be governing their

\(^{14}\) Rousseau, Social Contract, 1.
\(^{15}\) Iseult Honohan, Civic Republicanism, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 94.
\(^{16}\) Rousseau, Social Contract, 260.
\(^{17}\) Honohan, 94.
lives. In response to this crisis of morality, philosophers developed moral theories based on reason and an individual’s role as a member of society. In accordance with Enlightenment theory of the individual and rationality, ethicists believed that individuals needed to determine the morality and ethics of situations using their own reasoning and beliefs about morality.

Rousseau, for example, proposed a moral system grounded in feelings, specifically an individual’s sense of pity, as he stated in his essay, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755). All children were born with an innate sense of morality that had to be guided and educated in order to stave off the corrupting influences of society. Rationality and reason played no roles in morality; rather, feelings determined one’s moral actions. David Hume conjectured that reason played no role in determining actions or affections because reason could not determine the rationality of a moral action. The moral feeling of sympathy only determined its approval or disapproval of an action. Moral approbation or disapprobation depended upon what the mind felt in certain situations. Hume titled these emotions “feelings of sympathy”; sympathetic feelings dictated the amount of pleasure or pain perceived by certain actions. With education, an individual directed his sympathetic feelings toward the benefit of society. Both Rousseau and Hume emphasized sympathy as the basis for morality.19

Rousseau recognized the need for a new educational program reflective of the current philosophy of man and nature; he provided an example of an enlightened education in his 1762 treatise, *Emile*. Rousseau developed a program that allowed a man’s natural inner goodness to thrive in a corrupt society and prepared them for citizenship. In Books Two and Four, Rousseau described Emile’s moral, academic, and religious education. In the early years of a child’s education, children should avoid books, learning instead through sensory experiences and

18 DuPre, 113.
19 DuPre, 124.
observations. In the later stages of Emile's education, Rousseau introduced sentiment, as through sentiment, individuals perfected their reasoning skills. Once Emile was past the age of fifteen or sixteen, his reasoning powers were strong enough to begin the study of religion in a rational manner. Although religious study was important, religion itself did not figure prominently in Emile's life. Rousseau's curriculum, based on his assumptions of sentiment and reasoning, influenced Thomas Jefferson as he developed his own educational programs. Rousseau provided a model that linked education to the project of preparing the character of individuals for citizenship in a manner important to Jefferson.

Education acquired prominence during the Enlightenment because of the shift in conceptions about humankind, nature, science, religion, government, and ethics. In response to the desire for utilitarian educations, the practices of education evolved. Instead of a curriculum grounded in religion and super-natural beliefs, a secular and humanistic education replaced it, seeking to explain the world through scientific principles. The study of science provided a cornerstone to the new curriculums: students applied the scientific method in economics, business, and farming. Instead of studying only the ancient authors and languages, educators promoted a more practical and modern Liberal Arts education. Americans such as Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Rush believed that the liberal arts prepared students to meet the challenges of life. It provided a useful foundation for their future careers, as it taught students critical thinking and demonstrated to them different methods of analysis and practice.

Jefferson, a prolific reader and writer, corresponded with philosophers from continental Europe and Great Britain, and lived in Paris. While his views corresponded most closely with those of Rousseau and the Scots, he engaged with a variety of Enlightenment thinkers. Jefferson

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built upon their views, combining them with his own mix of pragmatism, optimism, and Romanticism, to shape his philosophy upon education. In 1795, Thomas Jefferson remarked in a letter to Mann Page, a lawyer from Virginia, that “If anything could ever induce me to sleep another night out of my own house, it would have been your friendly invitation and my solicitude for the subject of it, the education of our youth.” This quotation indicates Jefferson’s passion for education, and his eagerness to engage with the subject. As the upcoming sections of this thesis demonstrate, in order to understand Jefferson’s interest in education, one must analyze his moral and political philosophy, as well.

SECTION TWO:

Jefferson’s Curriculum and the Cultivation of Citizens

Thomas Jefferson began his educational program with the moral education, as it was more important than the academic education. As Jefferson reminded his nephew, Peter Carr, nothing substituted for lost virtue: “The defect of these virtues can never be made up by all the other acquirements of body and mind. Make these then your first object. Give up money ... give up science ... rather than do an immoral act.” Without virtue, education was pointless because individuals used their education for self-interest and not the interests of society. Advising Carr, Jefferson explained that: “Nothing will be necessary to place you in the highest points of view, but to pursue the interests of your country, the interests of your friends, and your own interests also, with the purest integrity, the most chaste honor.” Jefferson defined virtuous individuals as those who placed the needs of their society and country before their own. Duty to one’s country

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22 To Mann Page, August 30, 1795.
23 To Peter Carr, August 19, 1785.
24 To Peter Carr, August 19, 1785.
came before all else in a democracy that depended on active citizen participation. Without virtuous citizens, such a democracy failed. Jefferson’s emphasis on virtue reflected his Deism. Deists did not use Heaven or an afterlife as an incentive for moral behavior. Instead, they used the new conception of ethics. Jefferson could not instruct his students to act virtuously in order that God might accept them into Heaven, so he provided them with a different incentive for acting virtuously.

Jefferson trusted that all individuals possessed virtues because of humankind’s naturally social nature. When God created humans, Jefferson theorized, he created all men and women with a sense of morality because he believed they would live together harmoniously in society. Jefferson elaborated on this point to Carr, “Man was destined for society. His morality therefore was to be formed for this object. He was endowed with a sense of right & wrong merely relative to this … it is the true foundation of morality.” As this quotation indicates, Jefferson rooted his moral sense in society — an individual’s sense of moral feeling guided his decisions in ways that benefitted society. As long as individuals acted in accord with their moral feeling, society flourished.

Jefferson, however, separated an individual’s moral sense from his intellectual capacity. Men and women needed nothing more than common sense to ensure the perfection of their moral feeling. In that same letter to Carr, Jefferson explained, “This sense [sense of moral feeling] is

27 Thomas Jefferson was not the first to advocate a moral education not based in Christian theology. Benjamin Franklin believed that young men and women should turn to society’s standards of human behavior in order to learn about virtues. (See R.F. Butt’s A History of Education in American Culture, 79).
28 For a fuller explanation of the specifics of Jefferson’s views on moral philosophy, see books such as Max Lerner’s Thomas Jefferson: America’s First Philosopher-King; Peter S. Onuf’s The Mind of Thomas Jefferson (specifically Part Three), and Jean M. Yarbrough’s American Virtues: Thomas Jefferson (specifically Chapter Two).
29 To Peter Carr, August 10, 1787.
submitted indeed in some degree to the guidance of reason; but it is a small stock which is
required for this: even a less one than what we call common sense.”

A ploughman’s sense of moral feeling was superior to a scientist’s because, in many instances, the scientist relied too
heavily on his intelligence and not enough on his innate moral feeling, as Jefferson explained to Carr: “State a moral case to a ploughman & a professor. The former will decide it as well, &
often better than the latter.” Virtuous behavior was simple, but some learned men complicated moral matters with their philosophical thought. Instead of relying on philosophical and scholarly arguments, Jefferson wanted individuals to follow their intuitive and natural moral feeling.

Although all individuals possessed a sense of moral feeling from birth, not all received this ability in similar quantities. As Jefferson clarified for Carr, “This [moral sense, or conscience] is given to all human beings in a stronger or weaker degree, as force of members is given them in a greater or less degree.” Like physical strength, moral capacity varied considerably. In some men and women, their morality was not yet fully cultivated and developed, while others failed to use their moral sense correctly. They relied instead on analytical reasoning. Both situations caused immoral behavior. Jefferson corrected these two problems by constant exercise of and appeal to one’s sense of moral feeling. In a letter to Robert Skipwith, Jefferson compared exercising the moral feeling to physical exercise, “It may be strengthened by exercise, as may any particular limb of the body.” He wrote, “exercise produces habit, and in the instance of which we speak the exercise being of the moral feelings produces a habit of thinking and acting virtuously.” Just as exercise strengthened and maintained the body in good health, so too practicing the moral sense cultivated, and eventually

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30 To Peter Carr, August 10, 1787.
31 To Peter Carr, August 10, 1787.
32 To Peter Carr, August 10, 1787.
33 To Robert Skipwith, August 3, 1771.
perfected one’s moral feeling.

Given the assumption that all individuals were born with an innate moral sensibility that relied on emotions and not reason, Jefferson found the study of moral philosophy superfluous. He advised his nephew to avoid the subject: “Moral philosophy: I think it lost time to attend lectures in this branch.”

For the same reasons that ploughmen were morally superior to professors, the philosophy of morals confused more than helped students; rather than appealing to their moral sense, such study appealed to their intellect. Young men and women did not need to use moral philosophy to create a moral sense that relied on reasoning. Instead, they needed to learn how to cultivate their moral sense and apply it to daily life. As Jefferson detailed to Skipwith, “a lively and lasting sense of filial duty is more effectually impressed on the mind of a son or daughter by reading King Lear, than by all the dry volumes of ethics, and divinity that ever were written.” Instead of studying moral philosophy, Jefferson wanted his students to exercise their sense of moral feeling by nurturing it through drama and literature.

One exercise emphasized reading in order to develop one’s imagination. Jefferson elaborated on the imagination to Skipwith: “The field of imagination is thus laid open to our use and lessons may be formed to illustrate and carry home the heart of every moral rule of life.”

Jefferson believed that students activated their imagination through reading by acquiring a visceral emotional knowledge. He instructed his nephew to “read good books because they will encourage as well as direct your feelings.” Reading proved useful because students identified with the emotions and decisions of main characters, as Jefferson explained in that same letter to Skipwith:

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34 To Peter Carr, August 10, 1787.
35 To Robert Skipwith, August 3, 1771.
36 To Robert Skipwith, August 3, 1771.
37 To Peter Carr, August 10, 1787.
when any original act of charity or of gratitude, for instance, is presented either to our sight or imagination, we are deeply impressed with its beauty and feel a strong desire in ourselves of doing charitable and grateful acts also. On the contrary when we see or read of any atrocious deed, we are disgusted with its deformity, and conceive an abhorrence of vice.\textsuperscript{38}

Through admiration and disgust, students acquired a moral education, for the scenes in literature affected an individual’s sense of moral feeling. These experiences created a bond of empathy and understanding between the characters and the reader that endured long after the book ended; one felt Juliet and Romeo’s pain and did not forget it. Through literature, students cultivated their sense of moral feeling because they wanted to imitate virtue and avoid vice. Appealing to the moral feeling in this manner strengthened it.

This exercise based on feelings reflected Jefferson’s interest in Scottish Philosophy. David Hume, in \textit{An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals}, and Adam Smith, in \textit{The Theory of Moral Sentiments}, advocated similar methods for cultivating one’s moral sense.\textsuperscript{39} As Hume explained, humans enter into sympathy with other individuals, either in person or through literature.\textsuperscript{40} Smith detailed a similar exercise, but he included the imagination in the process, as well.\textsuperscript{41} Hume trusted that one’s sympathy powers were strong enough to place oneself into another’s situation; Smith believed that an observer used her imagination to place herself in a suffering man’s situation. By using her imagination in such a way, she experienced the same pain and suffering, thereby cultivating her sense of morality.

Jefferson designed another exercise, which used role models and the imagination to

\textsuperscript{38} To Robert Skipwith, August 3, 1771.
\textsuperscript{39} I am not suggesting that Jefferson’s views on cultivating the moral sense descended directly from Smith and Hume. Rather, I offer them as similar examples from Enlightenment philosophers. For a complete discussion concerning the origins of Jefferson’s moral philosophy, please see books such as Garry Wills’ \textit{Inventing America: Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence}; Alexander Kleesforth’s \textit{Scottish Invention of America, Democracy, and Human Rights}, and Alexander Broadie’s \textit{Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment} (Specifically Chapter Seven).
\textsuperscript{40} David Hume, \textit{An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals}. (London: Longman’s Publishing, 1898).
cultivate one’s moral feeling. He recommended to his mentees that when faced with two conflicting choices, they should act as if all of society were watching. Jefferson wrote, “Whenever you are to do a thing, though it can never be known but to yourself, ask yourself how you would act were all the world looking at you, and act accordingly.” This statement reflects Jefferson’s belief that an individual’s moral sense was adjusted to the social good. When a man or woman invoked society’s judgment, even when alone, he chose the virtuous action.

Jefferson explained to his grandson that he had tested this method as a young boy: “Under temptations and difficulties, I could ask myself what would Dr. Small, Mr. Wythe, Peyton Randolph do in this situation? What course in it will ensure me their approbation? ... Whereas seeking the same object through a process of moral reasoning, and with the jaundiced eye of youth, I should often have erred.” Age, with its experience and wisdom, assisted one in feeling morally. Jefferson’s young students were apt to use their moral feeling incorrectly if they relied exclusively on their own judgment, as they had not had time to cultivate their moral sense. By appealing to the judgment of older individuals whom they respected, and to society’s collective judgment, young individuals strengthened and cultivated their sense of moral feeling.

Jefferson expected his students to use these two methods of cultivating their moral reasoning senses because men and women in democracies needed to act in ways that benefitted society. Jefferson prepared American citizens to vote for the candidates who would serve all of the people instead of their own self-interest or selected groups. The academic portion of Jefferson’s education was less important than the moral training because men and women with

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42 To Peter Carr, August 19, 1785.
43 To Thomas Jefferson Randolph, November 24, 1808.
44 Appealing to an external spectator in this way is reminiscent of Adam Smith’s impartial spectator. Smith envisioned the impartial spectator as an imaginary man imbued with the values of his society, to whom all men and women conceived and appealed to when faced with a hard decision.
excellent reasoning skills were useless if they applied these skills to selfish ends.\textsuperscript{45} Jefferson, therefore, began his educational plan with morality and encouraged his students to spend their lives cultivating and perfecting their moral reasoning skills until it became habit.

When looking at Jefferson’s moral philosophy in this manner, it is clear that he draws on many different Enlightenment thinkers in order to construct his own beliefs. To begin with, the crisis in morality caused by the Enlightenment’s emphasis on science and rationality encouraged him to design a system of morals based on the sentimental moral philosophy of the Scots and Rousseau. With its emphasis on human goodness, feeling, and emotions, instead of reason, this Enlightenment moral philosophy highlights the connection between the rationality of the Enlightenment and the emotions of Romanticism. Jefferson’s optimism appears in his belief that all men and women, if properly educated, will act morally, and he demonstrates his pragmatism in his moral education. He designed lesson plans and exercises in order to bring Enlightenment theories about morality, human goodness, and autonomy to other men and women. If his moral education succeed in creating virtuous individuals, then he could create a democracy premised on the idea of virtuous citizens. It is important to understand Jefferson’s moral philosophy, not just from a philosophical standpoint, but from a practical one for it explains his assumptions in his democracy.

In addition to moral education, students received academic training, which prepared their critical reasoning skills to meet the challenges posed by democracy.\textsuperscript{46} Jefferson stipulated that his students study literature, philosophy, science, and the languages in a well-rounded manner.

\textsuperscript{45} To Peter Carr, August 19, 1785.
\textsuperscript{46} I do not discuss the complete academic education that Jefferson proposed. Rather, I chose to include the subjects that directly cultivated the independent thinkers needed in a democracy. For a complete explanation of Jefferson’s education, please see books such as Charles Arrowood’s \textit{Thomas Jefferson and Education in a Republic} (New York: 1930), James B. Conant’s \textit{Thomas Jefferson and the Development of American Public Education} (Berkeley: 1965), and Roy Honeywell’s \textit{Thomas Jefferson – Educational Philosopher} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931).
As Jefferson promised his nephew, "I can assure you, that the possession of it [a fine academic education] is, what (next to an honest heart) will above all things render you dear to your friends, and give you fame and promotion in your own country." Jefferson theorized that a fine education enabled his students to handle all situations in a manner benefitting their society.

Jefferson believed in a broad, liberal arts curriculum that did not delve too deeply into any one subject. He instructed his son-in-law to, "Be contented with a course of lectures in most of them, without attempting to make yourself master of the whole." For Jefferson, mastering all subjects was superfluous. The high-level intricacies of most subjects were impractical for many individuals in their duties as citizens, workers, and family members. Knowing the basics of many subjects, however, assisted them as citizens in making informed decisions about the polity.

A knowledge of many subjects, for example, allowed Jefferson's students to more converse with others. They received a useful foundation in the ways of the world, as each subject provided students with a different manner of thinking. Scientists approached the study of the world differently from historians, and a familiarity with each method allowed students to choose the discipline they found most appropriate or useful in certain situations. Jefferson believed that a well-rounded education produced Enlightened individuals able to reason in any type of situation, a belief familiar to many Enlightenment thinkers.

Throughout their training, Jefferson instructed his students to acquire knowledge through primary sources because it taught them to use their own reasoning skills. As Jefferson insisted to his son-in-law, "the original authors are to be preferred." When students read textbooks that directed their thinking and opinions, they learned to follow the voice of authority rather than thinking for themselves. By studying and analyzing original documents, students cultivated

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47 To Peter Carr, August 19, 1785.
48 To Thomas Mann Randolph, Jr., August 27, 1786.
49 To Thomas Mann Randolph, Jr., August 27, 1786.
independent thinking. Regardless of their plans for life, all students benefitted from this training, as it prepared them to question everything and to form their own opinions, skills necessary for farmers, businessmen, politicians, and citizens.

Jefferson began his education with a study of the classics because it provided students with a basis for their later studies. The sciences used Latin or Greek roots in its terminology; in history, students needed to understand Latin and Greek in order to read primary source documents. Jefferson wrote, "It may truly be said that the classical languages are a solid basis for most, and an ornament to all the sciences." The classics also provided a model for writing essays and compositions, as the Greeks composed perfect essays. From "reading the Greek and Roman authors in all the beauties of their originals," students learned how to write, speak, and to appreciate fine things. Oratorical skills prepared students for careers in politics, and helped citizens desiring to express their opinions to and about elected officials.

After mastering Greek and Latin, they studied French, and then Spanish. Students studied French because many mathematical and scientific studies were conducted in French, and because America enjoyed diplomatic relations with France. Spanish, too, was important, because Spain was developing relations with America: "Our future connection with Spain renders that the most necessary of the modern languages, after the French." In languages, Jefferson remained practical, instructing his students to study the languages that would help them to navigate the world.

Although Jefferson included the classics in his curriculum, many of his contemporaries did not. During the Enlightenment, educational reformers split themselves into ancients and moderns. The ancients supported a classical education, focusing on ancient Rome and Greece

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50 To John Brazier, August 24, 1819.
51 To John Brazier, August 24, 1819.
52 To Peter Carr, August 19, 1785.
because they believed such an education taught students to appreciate the beauty of the languages, cultivated their taste, and instilled in them a life-long desire for learning. The modern camp, however, believed that a classical education was antiquated and useless in a new Enlightened age, for Greek and Latin served no function in the modern world. Modern educators advocated a useful education, in which the study of languages included French, Spanish, and German because students needed to understand and speak those languages.

Jefferson included both the classic and modern languages in his educational plan because he believed in the theories advocated by both groups of educators; he combined the arguments to create his own theory. Jefferson advocated the classics for the same reasons advanced by the classicists, but also because he believed the classics to be useful for students as they continued their education. Similarly, he advocated the study of modern languages for practical reasons.

Jefferson began his education with languages because the study trained a young person’s mind in the correct mode of critical thinking before he studied subjects that required more thinking and less memorization, as he explained to John Brazier: “Their acquisition should be the occupation of our early years only, when the memory is susceptible of deep and lasting impressions, and reason and judgment are not yet strong enough for abstract speculations.”

Young people needed to develop their minds while they were young by studying subjects concerned with facts and less concerned with abstract philosophical theories. If students started with abstract studies too early in life, they might struggle, become disenchanted, and reject learning altogether. Languages developed core academic skills, setting the foundation necessary for later learning, while also instilling confidence in one’s intellectual abilities.

In the second phase of his plan, Jefferson directed students to study history, the sciences,

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53 Butts, 182, 223.
54 Butts, 182.
55 To John Brazier, August 24, 1819.
and mathematics. In history, Jefferson asked his students to analyze and learn from the governments and political situations of the past. By studying ancient democracies, Americans could replicate the successes of those societies and avoid their failures, Jefferson wrote to Carr: “I advise you to begin a course of ancient history, reading everything in the original and not in translations.” Students started with the histories of Greece and Rome, and continued with the histories of the European countries, paying particular attention to the history of Great Britain. Jefferson advised his son-in-law that, “After the history of England that of America will claim your attention. Here too original authors & not compilers are best.” Jefferson focused on the ancient countries because they provided models of democracies, and on English and American history because it was necessary and useful to know the history of one’s country and mother country.

Although Jefferson advocated primary sources in all subjects, it was particularly important in history in order to avoid bias. If students studied history from textbooks, they became accustomed to swallowing what the authors said about situations, instead of analyzing the evidence and drawing their own conclusions. Using these textbooks caused students to replicate the biases that the authors harbored. As most of the textbook authors were English and living in societies based on aristocracies and wealth, this bias was especially dangerous. David Hume’s six volume The History of England served as an example of an author’s bias, as Hume’s Tory sympathies influenced his presentation of England’s history. Speaking about Hume’s history book, Jefferson wrote, it “seems intended to disguise & discredit the good principles of the government, and it so plausible & pleasing in its style & manner, as to instill its errors &

56 To Peter Carr, August 19, 1785.
57 To Thomas Mann Randolph, Jr., August 27, 1786.
58 To Thomas Mann Randolph, Jr., August 27, 1786.
heteries insensibly into the minds of unwary readers.” If Jefferson’s students read this history, they would imbibe Toryism, instead of becoming the critical and independent thinkers that Jefferson envisioned.

Within the sciences, Jefferson asked students to study different subjects such as astronomy, natural history, anatomy, botany, and chemistry in order to open their minds to new ways of looking at the world. After understanding the subjects, students picked the one they found the most useful. Jefferson recommended that each student use their situation in life to determine their topic: farmers might choose botany; businessmen and storekeepers might favor the accounting sciences. As Jefferson pointed out to his son-in-law, science, “gives exercise to our reason ... and stores the mind with truths which are useful in other branches.” Although scientific knowledge was useful, science appealed to Jefferson because it helped students develop critical reasoning skills. It introduced them to the Scientific Method of reasoning, questioning, and experimentation, which provided a model for them to emulate in all areas of life. After using these experimental methods in their scientific studies, Jefferson wanted students to apply the same methods to their analysis of the government and authority figures, such as elected officials and clergymen. As Jefferson insisted to David Harding, “In a republican nation whose citizens are to be led by reason ... the art of reasoning becomes of first importance.” Critical reasoning skills were essential for democratic citizens because it ensured their safety — nefarious or power-hungry individuals could not dupe them into giving up their freedoms.

Jefferson’s curriculum reflects Rousseau’s ideas about using education to mold humans. As Rousseau wrote, “We are born weak, we need strength; helpless, we need aid; foolish, we

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60 To John Norvell, June 14, 1807.
61 To Thomas Mann Randolph, Jr., August 27, 1786.
62 To Thomas Mann Randolph, Jr., August 27, 1786.
63 To Thomas Mann Randolph, August 27, 1786.
64 To David Harding, April 20, 1824.
need reason. All that we lack at birth, all that we need when we come to man’s estate, is the gift of education.” Rousseau used education to cultivate individuals able to endure life, as he explained: “To my mind those of us who can best endure the good and evil of life are the best educated.” Education helped individuals because it returned them to a more natural state of nature. Rousseau educated his students, not for specific jobs, but rather, to be men and citizens. Although Jefferson differed from Rousseau, believing instead that certain educations cultivated men for certain jobs, he agreed that all men needed to reason in order to succeed as citizens.

As demonstrated, Jefferson’s program reflected the Enlightenment in all aspects – its organization, its emphasis on primary sources, and the way in which the powers of human rationality were central to all sections. The education built on the work of Locke, Franklin, Rush, the Scots, Rousseau and others. Jefferson understood that democratic citizens, entrusted with the freedoms inherent in democracy, needed to feel morally and reason critically in order to maintain and keep those freedoms. Jefferson capitalized on the philosophical changes concerning human autonomy by understanding the demand for education – he provided citizens with a clear and practical way in which to improve their position in life, at the same time that he served his own means.

The final portion of Jefferson’s education concerned religion. Similarly to Rousseau’s schedule, as soon as Jefferson’s mentees reached an appropriate age and reasoned critically, Jefferson introduced them to the study of theology. As he instructed his nephew, “Religion. Your reason is now mature enough to examine this object.” Before beginning the study, his mentees

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66 Rousseau, 10.
67 Rousseau, 10.
68 To Peter Carr, August 10, 1787.
cleansed themselves from all preconceptions concerning religion and the divinity of the Trinity; their prior education in analytical thinking prepared them to approach the study of theology in an analytical manner. They began by questioning the existence and divinity of God and Jesus Christ: "Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a god; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear." In asking his students to reconcile God and reason, Jefferson removed the divinity from Christianity, and reduced it to the level of any other academic discipline. In encouraging students to question God's existence and not just read the Bible unquestioningly, Jefferson reflected Enlightenment thinking. Deists and rational Christians questioned God's existence in a scientific and rational manner throughout their study of religion.

After they determined their feelings on the divinity of the Trinity, the students moved on to a critical study of the Bible and theological documents. Jefferson taught his nephew the proper manner of learning religion: "You will naturally examine first the religion of your own country. Read the bible then, as you would read Livy or Tacitus ... The facts which are within the ordinary course of nature you will believe on the authority of the writer, as you do those of the same kind in Livy & Tacitus." Jefferson's students viewed the Bible as a text or document like any other and not as a sacred text. In this way, they separated the truthful statements from the sensationalist sentences, by using their moral feeling and critical reasoning to uncover the morality and ignore the supernatural. Jefferson urged students to question comments alluding to the divinity of the Trinity or miracles. Students explored the motives of the authors, trying to ascertain what the author stood to gain, if anything, by promoting Christianity. Following the Rational Christians who questioned miracles, Jefferson wanted his students to apply scientific

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69 To Peter Carr, August 10, 1787.
70 To Peter Carr, August 10, 1787.
laws to the divine aspects of the Bible. They needed to understand that many aspects of the Bible violated natural laws.

In the end, Jefferson cared little if his students believed in God: “If it ends in a belief that there is no god, you will find incitements to virtue in the comfort & pleasantness you feel in its exercise, and the love of others which it will procure you. If you find reason to believe there is a god, a consciousness that you are acting under his eye, & that he approves you, it will be a vast additional incitement.” Religion could reinforce virtue but it was no longer coterminous with it; a secular worldview had replaced it. Jefferson and other deists believed men and women could rely on their own moral feeling and virtue without appealing to God. A citizen’s religious beliefs did not matter, as long as one acted morally. Such philosophy effectively removed God from public places and helped Jefferson develop his thoughts concerning Freedom of Religion and Separation of Church and State.

For Jefferson, religion provided an excellent means of teaching students to analyze statements from all angles without any preconceived notions or biases; it exemplified the model of behavior for citizens protecting their democracy. In their analysis, they relied on their education, their critical reasoning skills, and their powers of observation to determine the truth. Jefferson desired that students continue this mode of questioning in all aspects of their lives, never blindly submitting to statements made by elected officials, party leaders, or clergymen. Jefferson’s religious education encompassed all aspects of his education, by drawing on the moral feeling, and questioning authority with critical reasoning skills. It furthers demonstrates how he wanted citizens to apply their education to the world outside the classroom. Jefferson’s

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71 Outram, 118.
72 To Peter Carr, August 10, 1787.
73 This perspective is reminiscent of David Hume and his belief that a community of atheists could live and rule as morally as a community of Christians could.
faith in this education allowed him to create a democracy predicated on his idea of the duties of the democratic citizen.

SECTION THREE:

Educating Citizens, Sustaining Democracy

Jefferson believed that the best form of government was a democratic one in which all citizens protected their own liberties and all shared the political responsibilities. He detailed this democracy and explained how all citizens could participate. Yet for full citizen participation, all citizens had to be educated. To accommodate this, Jefferson planned a system of universal education, which sought to educate all white men and women. He thought the public schools could cultivate patriotic and involved citizens, while also creating an enlightened body of citizens. Jefferson created a university to prepare students for the challenges of government positions. The university also served as a model of an Enlightened and secular state. Enlightened citizens helped democracy flourish because the country’s citizens used their education to participate in the government and protect their liberties.74

While Jefferson believed that natural societies generally protected individual rights better than governments could, he conceded that large populations necessitated governments. As he explained to James Madison:

Societies exist under three forms, sufficiently distinguishable. 1. Without government, as among our Indians. 2. Under governments, wherein the will of everyone has a just

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74 As Jefferson's plans sought to educate only citizens, he did not speak about the education of African-Americans. As I am analyzing Jefferson's views on education as they pertained to creating enlightened citizens, I do not discuss Jefferson's views on African-Americans or on slavery. For explanations of Jefferson's views on African-Americans and emancipation, please see Francis D. Cogliano's Thomas Jefferson: Reputation and Legacy (Charlotte: University of Virginia Press, 2006), and Roger Wilkin's Jefferson's Pillow: The Founding Fathers and the Dilemma of Black Patriotism (New York, Beacon Publishing, 2002). Although women did not participate as citizens, Jefferson described an education for them, as well, which is discussed in this section.
influence [emphasis mine] ... It is a problem not clear in my mind that the first condition is not the best. But I believe it to be inconsistent with any great degree of population. The second state has a great deal of good in it. The mass of mankind under that, enjoys a precious degree of liberty and happiness.\textsuperscript{75}

If a government was necessary, Jefferson trusted the republican form in which the people protected their own liberties and happiness. As Jefferson insisted in a letter to Littleton Waller Tazewell, “the people are the only safe depositories of their own liberty.”\textsuperscript{76} These comments highlight Jefferson’s beliefs concerning government. Jefferson’s most important criterion in designing a government was that all citizens possessed influence in shaping the government. Within the government, all males should have a chance at serving as elected officials. It should not just be open to aristocrats or monarchs because they ruled only for the benefit of their own class, and directed the government towards tyranny. If individuals from all classes ruled, they were more likely to protect the liberties of all, and thus maintain a just government.

Even in a democracy, Jefferson still feared the government. Governments were not a natural form of society because they moved away from the diversity of society into an artificially constructed concentration of power. This artificiality led governments to corrupt involved individuals. It became too easy for government officials to collect power and direct the country for their own purposes instead of protecting the citizens’ liberties. As Jefferson explained to John Taylor, “the mass of the citizens is the safest depository of their own rights, and especially, that the evils flowing from the duperies of the people, are less injurious than those from the egoism of their agents [elected officials]”\textsuperscript{77} Jefferson preferred the natural state, and a society was natural.\textsuperscript{78}

He trusted natural society, therefore, more than an enlightened democratic form of government. Jefferson’s fear of government caused him to rely on the citizens to monitor the government and

\textsuperscript{75} To James Madison, January 30, 1787.
\textsuperscript{76} To Littleton Waller Tazewell, January 5, 1805.
\textsuperscript{77} To John Taylor, May 28, 1816.
\textsuperscript{78} To P.S. Dupont de Nemours, April 24, 1816.
vote out officials corrupted by the government’s power. Jefferson’s government depended on turnover, as citizens voted out corrupted officials, thereby requiring a stream of virtuous and educated men prepared to rule as officials.

To bring governments closer to the natural state, Jefferson wanted the government to resemble society, so he spread government responsibilities to a diverse and large group of citizens.⁷⁹ As Jefferson remarked in a letter to Joseph C. Cabell, “What has destroyed liberty and the rights of man in every government which has ever existed under the sun? The generalizing and concentrating of all cares and powers into one body, no matter whether of the autocrats of Russia or France, or of the aristocrats of a Venetian senate.”⁸⁰ Jefferson feared centralized power with only a few individuals involved. He tried, instead, to incorporate a diverse group of individuals as elected leaders and to spread political power between the national and local governments. Jefferson relied on local politics at the ward (akin to a county), district, and state level. Such diversity and political spread rendered government more natural and helped to protect the rights of all groups in society.

A de-centralized and diverse group of elected officials protected liberty because it encouraged citizen oversight: “The hand of the people ... has proved that government to be the strongest of which every man feels himself a part.”⁸¹ This observation reflects Jefferson’s belief in the importance of accountability and human morality. With power distributed to only a small sector of society, uninvolved citizens felt powerless and lost interest in their government. With such apathy, they ceased overseeing the government. This situation granted officials’ unlimited political power to absolve the citizens of their rights. Widespread citizen participation in local

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⁷⁹ When I say “diverse citizens”, I do not mean diverse in terms of race or gender; rather, I mean diverse in terms of socioeconomic status and family background. Although Jefferson limited his government to white, male citizens, he was radical in that he valued and wanted participation across the financial and class spectrum.
⁸⁰ To Joseph C. Cabell, February 2, 1816.
⁸¹ To Edward Tiffin, January 30, 1808.
politics, however, also motivated them to monitor the national and state governments. Jefferson’s
aim to distribute political responsibility reflects his moral philosophy. If a group of government
officials believed that society was neither observing nor judging their actions, they acted only for
their self-interest and not for the benefit of society. Accountability to the citizens forced officials
to rule justly.

The term diversity in this situation pertains only to a diversity of socioeconomic status.
Jefferson had no desire to invite women or African-Americans to participate as elected officials
or citizens, but he highly valued participation from white men across the financial and class
spectrum. To enact that participation, Jefferson used education as his tool. Education prepared all
white men for future careers as elected officials, and identified those capable of serving in office.

In addition to a diverse and de-centralized government, Jefferson wanted private citizens
to share political responsibilities by participating. As Jefferson described to Dupont de Nemours:

We of the United States, you know, are constitutionally and conscientiously
democrats. We consider society as one of the natural wants with which man has
been created ... [when] he has procured a state of society, it is one of his
acquisitions which he has a right to regulate and control, jointly indeed with all
... whom he cannot exclude from its use or direction more than they him. We
think experience has proved it safer, for the mass of individuals composing the
society, to reserve to themselves personally the exercise of all rightful powers to
which they are competent and to delegate those to which they are not competent
to deputies named, and removable for unfaithful conduct by themselves
immediately.82

This quotation highlights Jefferson’s belief that citizen participation was essential to democracy.
All men should be included, even if they could not all participate to the same extent. In contrast
to his egalitarian beliefs concerning moral feelings, Jefferson believed some people were better
suited for political leadership. Education could prepare all men to participate as citizens, but it
could not prepare all for the task of running the country because of the limitations of their

81 To P.S. Dupont de Nemours, April 24, 1816.
intellectual capabilities. Those who could not rule still participated by holding the elected officials accountable for their actions; elected officials ruled for the good of those who could not rule for themselves. Jefferson asked all citizens to participate in the government, for it motivated individuals to share political responsibilities and gain a sense of ownership in a government dedicated to protecting the people's rights. These feelings encouraged men to exercise their rights.

Given that the role of the voter was as important as the role of the elected official, Jefferson specified ways for voters to exercise their rights and protect their liberties. In the same letter to Dupont de Nemours, Jefferson explained:

> The people (by which is meant the mass of individuals composing the society) being competent to judge of the facts occurring in ordinary life, they have retained the functions of judges of facts, under the names of jurors; but being unqualified for the management of affairs requiring intelligence above the common level, yet competent judges of human character, they chose, for their management, representatives, some by themselves immediately, others by electors chosen by themselves.83

This remark returns us to Jefferson's philosophy of morality and reasoning. Since all educated individuals could judge the morality and behavior of other individuals, all people could vote in a responsible manner. Jefferson named this first, and most numerous type of citizen, the juror. Jurors judged the moral character and intellectual capabilities of the political candidates in order to elect the most qualified individuals. In a manner akin to their assessment of religion, they used their education to observe the actions of the government and their elected officials in order to separate the moral from the immoral. In their observations, they relied on their moral feeling and reasoning to analytically question the situation and form their own opinions. They did not listen to political leaders, clergy men, or charged emotions, obeying only their rationality and moral feeling. In theory, they protected their democracy by voting out of office those individuals who

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83 To P.S. Dupont de Nemours April 24, 1816.
did not rule morally, or who excluded certain groups of individuals from justice. Elections held officials accountable for their actions by ensuring that the citizens would not re-elect those whom government corrupted.

Elected government officials made up the second type of active citizen by representing their countrymen on the ward, district, state, and national level. As politicians, they guarded the rights of the country’s citizens and prevented power from concentrating at the top. These categories of participation were not fixed; depending on their intelligence and reasoning, some individuals participated as either, or both, forms of citizen. With active citizen participation, Jefferson aimed to counter the corrupting powers of government.

Jefferson understood, however, the dangers inherent in his democracy, and he knew that it tested the limits of human reasoning. In a letter to John Tyler, Jefferson wrote: “No experiment can be more interesting than that we are now trying, and which we trust will end up in establishing the fact, that man may be governed by reason and truth.”84 This remark demonstrates Jefferson’s naiveté. Not only did he think that all individuals could be educated, he believed that they would apply that education to their duties as citizens. Jefferson knew that he was conducting an experiment of his own philosophy by testing the moral and critical reasoning abilities of his educated citizens. If the democracy succeeded, it proved the truth of his philosophy. Yet in order to test that philosophy, all citizens needed to receive the education that Jefferson believed cultivated their reasoning and morality, preparing them for the duties of citizenship. Jefferson designed a democratic government dependent on the actions of private citizens because of the confidence he placed in the powers of education.

Jefferson’s approach to democracy highlights his philosophy and develops the thematic argument of this thesis. He feared the power of the government and small groups of concentrated

84 To Judge John Tyler, June 28, 1804.
power because both were unnatural and susceptible to corruption. He did everything he could, therefore, to spread power both within and outside government to a large and diverse group of people, a group of people reflective of the citizens in natural society. Within government, large groups representative of society tended to rule morally, especially when society analyzed and judged their actions. Yet for Jefferson, private citizens always protected their liberties better than the government, so he placed the burden of political responsibility with them.

Additionally, although Jefferson was pragmatic in his evaluations of human intelligence and capabilities, he placed his confidence in the powers of education and an individual’s moral feeling and reason. While he implemented an educational system designed to assist people with that role, he showed an almost irrational faith in the powers of that education. He assumed that citizens would use their education to assist them in their political responsibilities, thereby solving all of the ills of society. Jefferson wagered the success of his democracy on that conjecture. He insisted, for example, that “Enlighten the people generally, and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day.” Although risky, this optimism allowed Jefferson to build a democracy on the notion of the freedoms of an educated citizen body. It allowed him to transform his abstract philosophy into reality.

Lastly, Jefferson’s democracy clearly demonstrates the influences of the Enlightenment. Although Jefferson used political theories similar to those of Rousseau and Locke, he reached a different conclusion. Unlike his predecessors, Jefferson trusted the people more than the government and vested power in them. Jefferson developed a system of government dedicated to the idea that the enlightened human majority could rule virtuously in a democracy built upon citizen participation and shared responsibilities.

In order to fulfill the requirements of his experiment, therefore, Jefferson needed to

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85 To P.S. Dupont de Nemours April 24, 1816.
prepare the citizens. In a letter to Littleton Waller Tazewell, Jefferson wrote “Convinced that the people are the only safe depositories of their own liberty, & that they are not safe unless enlightened to a certain degree, I have looked on our present state of liberty as a short-lived possession unless the mass of people could be informed to a certain degree.”

Jefferson recognized that men and women were not born with the ability to safeguard their liberties. In order to do so, they needed an education that cultivated their morality and rationality. As Jefferson wrote to George Wythe, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and Jefferson’s law tutor, “By far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised, for the preservation of freedom and happiness.”

In an effort to protect his democracy, Jefferson devoted more time to education and the establishment of the University of Virginia during the later part of his life than to any other issue.

Jefferson’s pragmatism returned, however, in the manner in which he designed the implementation of his educational curriculum. Instead of believing that all human beings could rationally improve their intelligence to the point of perfection, he recognized the limitations of human intelligence, and designed a two-tiered system of education that tracked individuals based on their aptitude. Jefferson explained to Littleton Waller Tazewell how to use education to protect democracy:

This requires two grades of education. First some institution where science in all its branches is taught, and in the highest degree to which the human mind is carried. This would prepare a few subjects in every State, to whom nature has given minds of the first

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86 To Littleton Waller Tazewell, January 5, 1805.
87 To George Wythe, August 13, 1786.
88 Honeywell, 67.
order. Secondly, such a degree of learning given to every member of the society as will enable him to read, to judge & to vote understandingly on what is passing. Both tracks ensured that individuals could participate as active citizens because all individuals received an elementary school education. This education freed their minds from prejudices, preparing them to assess government actions and officials. It guaranteed that students could feel morally and reason critically, allowing Jefferson to test his experiment. The students of higher intellectual capacities continued with their education in order to assist the country in whatever way they chose, whether as jurors or elected government officials.

Given the need for universal elementary school education, Jefferson concluded that taxes should finance free public schooling: “It is highly interesting to our country, and it is the duty of its functionaries, to provide that every citizen in it should receive an education.” Jefferson argued that all individuals deserved three years of free schooling in which they received a moral education and instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and analytical thinking. Universal elementary schools provided basic academic skills to individuals of all socioeconomic and hereditary backgrounds. Universal education was Jefferson’s first step in making his government representative of society, for it meant that all citizens could participate in whatever capacity most fitting to their intellect.

Although women could neither vote nor serve as government officials, Jefferson supported their education. He sensed that women needed an education in order to participate as Republican Mothers, educating their sons. Jefferson clarified his beliefs on the education of women to Nathaniel Burwell: “Considering that they would be placed in a country situation, where little aid could be obtained from abroad, I thought it essential to give them a solid

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89 To Littleton Waller Tazewell, January 5, 1805.
90 To Peter Carr, September 7, 1814.
91 To Peter Carr, September 7, 1814.
education, which might enable them, when become mothers, to educate their own daughters, and even to direct the course for sons, should their fathers be lost, incapable, or inattentive."\(^{92}\)

Mothers needed an elementary school education to instruct their daughters and, if necessary, their sons. Additionally, Jefferson wanted to create a society without superstitions, prejudices, or ignorance. By educating both genders, the schools helped to rid society of those evils. Even though women did not participate directly, they influenced their children and the makeup of society in a positive manner because of their education. This view reflects Jefferson’s embrace of Rousseau who asked in *Emile*, “How can a child be well educated by one who has not been well educated?”\(^{93}\)

Public schools provided more than a means of educating citizens; they also fostered patriotic fervor. Jefferson believed that each ward in Virginia needed a locally controlled public school. The men in each ward elected a leader who oversaw and directed the public school. Together with the other men in the ward, the leader hired and fired teachers, determined the curriculum, and regulated the finances.\(^{94}\) As Jefferson explained to General James Breckenridge, the men understood the importance of their task once they realized that “The boys of this age are to be the men of the next; that they should be prepared to receive the holy charge which we are cherishing to deliver over to them; that in establishing an institution of wisdom for them, we secure it to all our future generations.”\(^{95}\)

Democracies only prosper, Jefferson sensed, if each generation was prepared to assume leadership. Educating the youth for this task was just as important as establishing the democracy or serving in the Revolutionary War. Unlike voting, which might occur once a year, running the school provided citizens with a frequent and tangible

\(^{92}\) To Nathaniel Burwell, March 14, 1818.
\(^{93}\) Rousseau, *Emile*, 19.
\(^{94}\) To Joseph C. Cabell, February 2, 1816.
\(^{95}\) To General James Breckenridge, February 15, 1821.
way of participating in the government. By investing themselves in their schools, citizens acquired a sense of personal investment. This both prepared them for other civic duties and encouraged them to volunteer. This investment also led them to more vigorously regulate the government’s actions, speaking out against them when necessary. By granting local male residents the power to run the schools, Jefferson shifted political responsibility away from the federal governments and to local governments. The public schools served as a model for how citizens should approach larger, more national, issues, and they also helped Jefferson articulate the operation of his democracy.

After the initial three years of elementary education, the teacher split the students into two different groups based on their academic achievement, aptitude, and promise. The students who did not continue their education had already learned enough to exercise their right to vote as well-informed jurors. The students who continued their education at the general school were destined to become the second type of citizens – active statesmen, lawyers, professors, and other types of policy-makers. In the general schools, students pursued training in fields useful to their professional careers. Students bound for vocations such as banking or business received apprenticeships and educations tailored to their chosen vocation; students with a future in the law or government received a more knowledge-based education. The poor but deserving students received merit-based scholarships in order to continue their education at the general school.

Scholarships demonstrated Jefferson’s practical streak. As he wrote to the former President John Adams, “Worth and genius would thus have been sought out from every condition of life, and completely prepared by education for defeating the competition of wealth.

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66 To Peter Carr, September 7, 1814.
67 To Peter Carr, September 7, 1814.
and birth for public trusts.” Deserving students received scholarships from their ward until one boy from each ward received a full scholarship for a university education at The College of William and Mary. Jefferson’s scholarship system attempted to break the hold of the hereditary elites on America’s political system by rewarding hard work and natural aptitude. Different socioeconomic classes received political power when members of the deserving poor became political leaders. This system highlights Jefferson’s understanding of the actual needs of his proposed democracy. Instead of simply saying that all individuals from all classes should become leaders or voters, he facilitated their entrance into political society, thereby creating a truly democratic and meritocratic society.

In order to continue developing the reasoning powers of the most intelligent citizens, Jefferson established a university in Virginia for the future leaders of the country. As Jefferson described his plans to his nephew, Peter Carr: “We wish to establish in the upper & healthier country, & more centrally for the State, an [sic] University on a plan so broad & liberal & modern, as to be worth patronizing with the public support, and be a temptation to the youth of other states to come and drink of the cup of knowledge & fraternize with us.” Jefferson viewed the University of Edinburgh, in Scotland, and the University in Geneva, in Switzerland, as the best universities in the world. He believed that studying at European universities, however, tainted a young American’s pure sense of reasoning and morals, so he designed the University of Virginia to rival the best European universities. In this sense, Jefferson differed

98 To John Adams, October 28, 1813.
99 To Peter Carr, September 7, 1814.
100 For a complete discussion of Jefferson’s political moves in trying to found the University of Virginia, see books such as Mark R. Wenger’s “Thomas Jefferson, the College of William and Mary, and the University of Virginia” The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 103, no. 3 (July 1995): 339-374, and Roy J. Honeywell’s Honeywell, Roy J. “A Note on the Educational Work of Thomas Jefferson” History of Education Quarterly 9, no.1 (Spring 1969): 64-72.
101 To Dr. Joseph Priestly, January 18, 1800.
102 To John Banister, Jr., October 15, 1785.
from the majority of other progressive educators in the new Republic.\(^{103}\) Benjamin Franklin, for example, sponsored young men to study at the University of Edinburgh, for he was certain that it provided young men with a wonderful educational experience while also allowing them to explore European societies.\(^{104}\)

Jefferson, however, did not want his students to experience the European lifestyle. He believed that America cultivated healthier and more moral individuals than those in Europe, not only because America was cleaner and more natural in a physical sense, but also because its society was untainted by a hereditary, artificial aristocracy.\(^{105}\) As Jefferson wrote to George Wythe, “If all the sovereigns of Europe were to set themselves to work to emancipate the minds of their subjects from the present ignorance & prejudices, & that as zealously as they now endeavor the contrary, a thousand years would not place them on that high ground on which our common people are now setting out.”\(^{106}\) European countries had existed for centuries, giving them time to become artificial. In America, the country was still natural and less artificial. Jefferson wanted Americans to preserve their natural background, not allowing European artificiality to corrupt them. European citizens harbored prejudices and a love of the artificial and hierarchical society that Jefferson’s education aimed to eliminate. If students received an education in Europe, they would spend time living as upper-class gentlemen in the hierarchical European society, becoming the opposite of what Jefferson envisioned.

After those students returned to America, their reasoning would no longer be pure. Instead of ruling for the good of society, they would rule in a European manner. They would promulgate a hierarchical and aristocratic society in America, conceptions antithetical to

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\(^{105}\) To George Wythe, August 13, 1786.

\(^{106}\) To George Wythe, August 13, 1786.
democracy and corruptive for a more natural state. As Jefferson explained to Wythe: "It appears to me then, that an American coming to Europe for education, loses in his knowledge, in his morals, in his health, in his habits, and in his happiness...the consequences of foreign education are alarming to me, as an American." To ensure that Americans received a top education in America, Jefferson invited the best professors from the European universities to teach in America, but he stated that he would only employ Europeans once. The top professors, once in America, would train and cultivate a future generation of excellent American professors.

The ideal university resembled an academic village that cultivated learning. Jefferson asked professors to socialize with one another to create a scholarly community, exposing themselves to the different academic subjects. For example, Jefferson placed the classrooms close together in order to encourage cooperative and integrated learning. As he explained the campus plan to Hugh L. White, "The whole of these arranged around an open square of grass and trees, would make it, what it should be in fact, an academical village. All professors and students depended on the others to cultivate a community of learning, research, and thinking. Jefferson's academic village modeled an Enlightened Parisian salon or a Scottish philosophical club.

In his curriculum, Jefferson included the main academic subjects, such as mathematics, history, the new sciences, and languages, and excluded the study of theology. As he explained to Dr. Thomas Cooper, the University of Virginia's first professor of natural science and law "in

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107 To John Banister, Jr., October 15, 1785.
108 To Dr. Joseph Priestly, January 18, 1800.
109 To Hugh L. White, May 6, 1810.
our university you know there is no Professorship of Divinity." Jefferson did not want seminarians teaching his students because it risked clouding the student’s analytical thinking and independent judgment. Jefferson told the seminarians they could establish seminaries at a designated distance away from the university, “preserving, however, their independence of us and of each other.” With this decision, Jefferson’s university stood as a model for a secular Enlightened country. Students could seek religion, but only if they wanted it, approaching it in an analytical manner. Religion never interfered with an individual’s critical or moral thinking, as education and religion existed in separate spheres.

In this regard, Jefferson’s university differed from other American universities that existed at that time. Harvard University, The College of New Jersey (later known as Princeton University), Yale, the University of Pennsylvania, and The College of William and Mary were established by religious groups. Although they expanded academically, they remained affiliated with religious denominations well into the nineteenth century. In the University of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson established the first secular, liberal-arts university in America, as a model for how government should work. The university fostered critical learning while diminishing the influences of untoward groups.

One could read Jefferson’s designs for the University of Virginia as a model for how he believed a secular government should function. All professors and students interacted with each other, sharing in the responsibilities and duties. They were motivated in their search for justice and truth, and did not allow any blinders to influence their judgment. They relied on their moral sense and their critical reasoning abilities, applying those skills to all areas of their life. Although religion may have played a role in their lives, the men distanced it and did not allow it to

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111 To Dr. Thomas Cooper, November 2, 1822.
112 To Dr. Thomas Cooper, November 2, 1822.
113 Butts, 65-97.
interfere with their rationality. This idea reflected Jefferson's views on the separation of church and state.

Clearly, Jefferson's conception of man influenced his moral philosophy, as his political philosophy forced him to rely on his theories of education, in order to actualize his philosophy in practice. He designed a government based on the assumption of an educated citizen because he believed citizens would apply their education in fulfilling their duties as citizens. Although Jefferson believed that a democracy was the best form of government for the people, he did not believe that America's strength as a democracy lay in the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution. Instead, it lay in the people, and in their manner of understanding the democracy, the government, and their role as educated citizens. To ensure that citizens understood the democracy, and were capable of participating in it, he designed a pragmatic system of universal education. Jefferson theorized that universal education prepared the citizens for their duties, by teaching them to capitalize on their education. If citizens utilized their education while fulfilling their duties, it ensured the success of his democracy.

SECTION FOUR:

Jefferson's Vision of Democratic Society

Jefferson's educational program created an enlightened citizen body prepared to accept the challenges of citizen participation. Jefferson, therefore, trusted the people enough to design specific checks on the government that required citizen participation. He implemented these checks to keep the people as free as possible, confident that his citizens would use those rights for the good of the democracy. The Bill of Rights helped citizens to understand the liberties that the Declaration of Independence theoretically granted them. In a practical manner, such an
understanding allowed the citizens to ensure that the government did not encroach upon their liberties. In a philosophical manner, these freedoms also protected the citizens, ensuring that the government could not corrupt their reasoning powers and unduly influence them. In a manner similar to his desire for the Bill of Rights, Jefferson rejected political parties in American democracy, as they also threatened the reasoning power of citizens. Yet in order to capitalize on Jefferson's Enlightened form of government and educated citizen body, society needed to change from an aristocratic society to a meritocratic society in which all citizens voted and elected the most virtuous and capable individuals to office. Finally, if the government violated the Bill of Rights or acted in a similar egregious manner, Jefferson advised citizens to revolt in order to protect their democracy.

According to a letter written to James Madison on December 20, 1787, Jefferson approved of the creation of the legislative, judiciary, and executive branches. Jefferson objected strenuously, however, to the lack of stipulated rights for citizens. As he explained to the future President Madison:

I will now add what I do not like. First the omission of a bill of rights providing clearly & without the aid of sophisms for freedom of religion, freedom of the press, protection against standing armies, restriction against monopolies, the eternal & unremitting force of the habeas corpus laws, and trials by jury in all matters of fact triable by the laws of the land & not by the law of nations...Let me add that a bill of rights is what the people are entitled to against every government on earth, general or particular, & what no just government should refuse, or rest on inferences.

Without these rights, American democracy was democratic in name only. The Bill of Rights, especially the articles defining Freedom of Religion and Freedom of the Press, helped citizens to

\[114\] To James Madison, December 20, 1787.


\[116\] To James Madison, December 20, 1787.
know their rights and oversee the government’s actions, ensuring that the government did not abuse or limit their liberties.

Jefferson particularly valued Freedom of Religion and Freedom of the Press, as both rights helped citizens retain their powers of clear reasoning to oversee the government. As Jefferson wrote to the Reverend Samuel Miller, a Presbyterian minister in New York City: “Be this as it may, everyone must act according to the dictates of his own reason, & mine tells me that civil powers alone have been given to the President of the U.S. and no authority to direct the religious exercises of his constituents.”¹¹⁷ For Jefferson, government control of religion was unwarranted: educated citizens deserved the chance to reject or accept religion on their own in a rational and questioning manner. He feared that a state-sponsored religion would brainwash citizens and deter their rational thinking. Citizens would become accustomed to following religious leaders and start following all leaders. They would then stop rationally assessing government actions, thereby no longer protecting their liberties. Jefferson’s conception of democracy, however, only existed with rational, participating citizens. Freedom of Religion protected the reasoning powers of citizens and Jefferson’s democracy.

Freedom of Religion stopped the churches from corrupting democracy, but Freedom of the Press played an even more important role in Jefferson’s democracy. In a practical manner, it helped citizens participate in the democracy as informed and knowledgeable individuals, serving as a check on the government. If the government censored the press, it prevented citizens from fulfilling their democratic duties. For a democratic government to succeed, citizens needed to understand their government and its actions. Jefferson’s vision came to fruition through Freedom of the Press which allowed educated citizens to actively monitor the government.

In a philosophical manner, Freedom of the Press protected the integrity of Jefferson’s

¹¹⁷ To Reverend Samuel Miller, January 23, 1808.
experiment. As Jefferson explained to Judge John Tyler: “The most effectual hitherto found, is the freedom of the press.” To accomplish this, Jefferson understood that their “first object should therefore be, to leave open to him all the avenues to truth.” Jefferson could only understand the success or failure of his experiment if he knew that his citizens could distinguish between true and false information and act appropriately on that information. If the citizens received a censored version of current events, they could not use that news to participate rationally. Without Freedom of the Press, Jefferson could not judge their reasoning powers based on their actions; he could not test the products of his education.

Jefferson trusted that his citizens would withstand the test: “The firmness with which the people have withstood the late abuses of the press, the discernment they have manifested between truth and falsehood, show that they may safely be trusted to hear everything true and false, and to form a correct judgment between them.” Jefferson believed that his educated citizens deserved the opportunity to search for the truth, and he did not worry that they would be duped. He trusted that his system of universal education would allow reason to triumph. This assertion demonstrates Jefferson’s optimism and his belief that the success of his democracy rested on education: if men failed that test, they threatened the democracy.

Jefferson’s conception of the Bill of Rights demonstrates the extent to which he trusted his educational program to create his democracy – he granted citizens all the freedoms for which he felt his education prepared them. It also demonstrates the holistic nature of his philosophy. Within his explanation for the Bill of Rights, the links between his moral philosophy and his political philosophy are apparent, as both are grounded in his educational theory. Jefferson could not have trusted the citizens with so many freedoms without his optimistic belief in the powers of

118 To Judge John Tyler, June 28, 1804.
119 To Judge John Tyler, June 28, 1804.
120 To Judge John Tyler, June 28, 1804.
an education, and his confidence that citizens would use their education in their lives.

Yet even with the Bill of Rights, there were still other factors outside the government that threatened the reasoning powers of citizens, such as political parties and their leaders. Jefferson loathed political parties. In this belief, Jefferson was not alone. Both George Washington and David Hume believed that political parties threatened democracy. In Washington’s farewell address, he advised against the formation of parties because he believed that they divided individuals into groups. This division caused revolts between the different groups and against the government.121 Washington theorized that the political party in power ruled despotically in an attempt to demolish the other party. Ruling in this manner threatened the people’s liberties, and transformed a democracy into a government of entrenched despotism. David Hume also disliked political parties for the same reason.122 Eventually, the fights between the different political parties caused the demise of the democracy.

Jefferson also feared political parties, but for reasons different than those of Washington and Hume. Jefferson theorized that they removed individual agency and allowed a small contingent of society to collect too much power. Collections of power made the government vulnerable to tyranny and corruption. Jefferson stood outside political parties, and asked others to follow his example. As he explained to Francis Hopkinson, “I am not a Federalist because I never submitted the whole system of my opinions to the creed of any party of men whatever in religion, in philosophy, in politics, or in anything else where I was capable of thinking for myself. Such an addiction is the last degradation of a free and moral agent.”123 Jefferson designed his system of education to create autonomous moral agents. If these individuals joined

123 To Francis Hopkinson, March 13, 1789.
political parties, they lost their spirit of autonomy, as they listened to what their political party leader stated and voted accordingly.

Jefferson’s fear of political parties, like his fear of overzealous religions, contradicts his romantic view that education and human reasoning triumphed over all, yet it demonstrates his awareness of human fallibility. Some men and women, despite an education, still craved direction. If political parties or religions offered such guidance, they submitted to those leaders. While Jefferson affirmed his faith in the powers of education, he also acknowledged that it did not guarantee that all citizens would live as their education stipulated. Therefore, Jefferson wanted to remove any obstacles that lured citizens away from reasoning critically in another effort to protect his democracy.

In numerous ways, Jefferson designed the government assuming that all virtuous and moral citizens could participate as jurors and elected officials. Yet in order for that to happen, America needed a meritocratic society, different from the aristocratic European societies. As Jefferson described European societies to Adams, “There is also an artificial aristocracy founded on wealth and birth, without either virtue or talents.” In late eighteenth century Europe, most societies were based on hereditary aristocracies in which only wealthy individuals could participate; the artificial aristocrats lead the country instead of the most virtuous and rational citizens. Many educated and deserving citizens could not participate. Jefferson feared this type of society, for, if instituted in America, it rendered Jefferson’s educational plans useless and corrupted his experiment.

With educated citizens, Jefferson theorized that America would overthrow the hold of the aristocratic class. As Jefferson explained in a letter to John Adams, “Science had liberated the ideas of those who read and reflect ... an insurrection has consequently begun, of science, talents

and courage against rank and birth, which have fallen into contempt."\(^{125}\) According to Jefferson, science and education allowed individuals to distinguish between artificial and true virtues. The enlightenment of the citizens through universal education created a society based on true values, such as merit and intelligence, instead of artificial ones, such as wealth and family. In an educated society, artificial aristocrats should be excluded as elected government officials: "The artificial aristocracy is a mischievous ingredient in government, and provision should be made to prevent its ascendancy."\(^{126}\) Artificial aristocrats collected offices and influence and then pursued self-interest rather than ruling for justice and truth. Clearly, such leaders impeded and evaded democracy.

To replace the artificial aristocracy, Jefferson proposed a democratic society based on merit. He described it to John Adams, as the "natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents."\(^{127}\) Only intelligent and educated men who reasoned morally for the good of society belonged in the natural aristocracy. The best form of government, therefore, was a government in which the natural aristocrats ruled: "May we not even say that that form of government is the best which provides the most effectually for a pure selection of these natural aristoi [sic] into the offices of government?"\(^{128}\) Natural aristocrats protected the peoples’ liberties better than artificial aristocrats did. Elected natural aristocrats used their offices for good, as Jefferson explained to Adams: "The natural aristocracy I consider as the most precious gift of nature for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society."\(^{129}\) This remark demonstrates Jefferson’s assumptions concerning the natural aristocracy: Their education strengthened their moral sense and critical reasoning abilities. They understood the situation fully because of their

\(^{125}\) To John Adams, October 28, 1813.  
\(^{126}\) To John Adams, October 28, 1813.  
\(^{127}\) To John Adams, October 28, 1813.  
\(^{128}\) To John Adams, October 28, 1813.  
\(^{129}\) To John Adams, October 28, 1813.
balanced and independent thinking, as it helped them put aside their private interests for the good of society to rule in a just manner.

Jefferson believed that the electors should distinguish between the natural and artificial aristocrats: "I think the best remedy is exactly that provided by all our constituents, to leave to the citizens the free election and separation of the aristoi from the pseudo-aristoi, of the wheat from the chaff. In general, they will elect the real good and wise." Instead of allowing wealth and family names to blind them, Jefferson wanted citizens to evaluate candidates using their moral sense and critical reasoning to identify those best qualified to rule. Jefferson, therefore, expected citizens would reason in a manner beneficial to society, instead of voting for candidates who benefited their own private interests.

As demonstrated, Jefferson's government demanded citizen regulation. If the government ever violated the Bill of Rights or if government officials imposed a government based on a monarchy, citizens needed to respond immediately. In these instances, inspired by Shay's Rebellion, Jefferson favored rebellions. He viewed rebellions as a useful way for citizens to voice their displeasure. As Jefferson explained to Abigail Adams, "The spirit of resistance to government is so valuable on certain occasions, that I wish it to be always kept alive. It will often be exercised when wrong, but better so than not to be exercised at all. I like a little rebellion now and then. It is like a storm in the Atmosphere." To Jefferson, rebellions allowed citizens to check the powers of the government. Revolts proved to citizens that they had a voice in their democracy and reminded the government that its citizens regulated their actions. According to

130 To John Adams, October 28, 1813.
132 To Abigail Adams, February 22, 1787.
Jefferson’s moral philosophy, the reminder that society was watching their actions encouraged the elected officials to govern justly.

Interestingly, Jefferson theorized that even in instances when the citizens misunderstood a government’s actions and revolted in error, those rebellions still served a purpose. As he explained to James Madison:

> Unsuccessful rebellions indeed generally establish the encroachments on the rights of the people which have produced them. An observation of this truth should render honest republican governors so mild in their punishments of rebellions, as not to discourage them too much. It is a medicine necessary for the sound health of government.¹³³

Misguided rebellions still identified encroachments on the people’s liberties, and reminded the officials that the citizens observed them. Rebellious citizens were trying to fulfill their duties as citizens, and that attempt should not be punished. Instead, that participatory spirit should be encouraged because it showed their commitment to democracy. For Jefferson, erroneous revolts were a small price to pay for a body of citizens that regulated government actions.

To reduce misguided rebellions, Jefferson recommended that governors turn to education, encouraging their citizens to read the newspapers. Instead of accusing the people of malicious intent, Jefferson theorized that the citizens lacked the information to understand the situation. Educated citizens did not act with evil intent. If the educated citizens understood the facts correctly and analyzed them in the manner they had been taught, they would not revolt in error.

> The way to prevent these irregular interpositions of the people is to give them full information of their affairs tro' the channel of the public papers, & to contrive that those papers should penetrate the whole mass of the people. The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.

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¹³³ To James Madison, January 30, 1787.
But I should mean that every man should receive those papers & be capable of reading them.¹³⁴

For Jefferson, it was not enough that citizens received newspapers; they needed to use their education to assess the government’s actions and respond rationally. Jefferson’s tolerance for unjustified rebellions captures his faith in human nature. Although he did not trust government institutions, he believed individuals generally meant well. Jefferson would never condone punishing rebellions because that curbed the citizens’ spirit. Instead, he emphasized education as a tool which helped citizens identify government actions demanding revolts. His conviction that education had the power to cure most problems reflected his confidence in human nature.

CONCLUSION:

Jefferson Then and Now

In 1785, Jefferson wrote, “Above all things I hope the education of the common people will b attended to; convinced that on their good sense we may rely with the most security for the preservation of a due degree of liberty.”¹³⁵ This quotation, and this thesis, demonstrates how Jefferson grounded his democracy in an educated citizen body. Jefferson premised the civil liberties granted in the Bill of Rights on the principle of universal male education. Yet in today’s political culture, men and women invoke Jefferson’s name to denounce big government or promote libertarian ideas. In so doing, they ignore the key role of education in his concept of freedom. Those who worry about the demise of Jeffersonian democracy should not complain about political matters such as the size of the government. Instead, they should turn to the deteriorating conditions of our country’s schools. Protecting education comes closest to safeguarding the American democracy that Jefferson promoted.

¹³⁴ To Abigail Adams, February 22, 1787.
¹³⁵ To James Madison, December 20, 1787.
When viewed through the lens of education, Jefferson’s moral, political, and religious philosophy acquires concrete form. When viewed in isolation, however, his thoughts are disparate, allowing citizens with vastly differing political views to use Jefferson to support their ideas. The Tea Partiers illustrate this phenomenon. Representative Michelle Bachmann, a Republican from Minnesota, recently praised them, believing that their actions channeled Jefferson’s democratic spirit and protected our country: “It's like Thomas Jefferson said, a revolution every now and then is a good thing ... And by that, what I mean, an orderly revolution -- where the people of this country wake up get up and make a decision that this is not going to happen on their watch...And we can't let the Democrats achieve their ends any longer.”¹³⁶ As we have seen, Jefferson condoned rebellions as a necessary part of democratic practice. But Bachmann misrepresents Jefferson’s beliefs. Jefferson praised rebellions, even though he believed citizens often revolted in error. He did not encourage mistaken citizens to continue revolting on the same issues; instead, he thought that education would teach citizens to use their reason to exercise judgment on the political issues and cease revolting if warranted.

If Bachmann wants to protect Jefferson’s democracy, she should not use Jeffersonian quotes out of context to contribute to the political frenzy. Instead, she should encourage the Tea Partiers to channel their patriotism in a Jeffersonian manner. The Tea Partiers must use their education to free themselves from any political prejudices or religious preconceptions and apply reason to reach the best solution. They cannot rely on political leaders such as Michelle Bachmann and Sarah Palin to tell them what to think. Those leaders enjoy and profit from whipping the crowd into a rage with rumors about Socialism, Big Government, and death panels. Citizens harm themselves, and our democracy, by following the directions of those leaders.

instead of relying on their own analysis.

In fact, statements made by the Tea Partiers indicate that they would stop revolting if they followed Jefferson’s philosophy instead of their leaders. Many Tea Partiers, for example, blindly following their leaders, fight against big government, but also applaud Social Security and Medicare. They do not analyze this contradiction because they do not apply their education and reasoning skills to their political beliefs. They rely, instead, on following the party and their highly charged emotions, as a woman quoted in a *New York Times* article proved. Commenting on the contradiction between disapproval of big government and approval of Social Security, she stated: “That’s a conundrum, isn’t it? I don’t know what to say. Maybe I don’t want smaller government. I guess I want smaller government and my Social Security ... I think I’ve changed my mind.” This woman affirms Jefferson’s faith in the powers of critical thinking. As soon as she followed Jefferson’s model of questioning and analyzing the statements made by party leaders, she discovered the contradiction and changed her mind. The Tea Partiers are problematic, not because of their political views, but for the way in which they blindly follow the party and do not emulate Jefferson’s model of an ideal analytical and questioning citizen — such actions desecrate Jefferson’s ideal of an educated democratic citizen. As Jefferson believed, our democracy will not endure without those ideal and educated citizens. Most frighteningly, polling shows that most Tea Partiers are educated, highlighting the problems with both our schools and the citizens themselves. Although this woman offers hope, the rest of the tea partiers problematize Jefferson’s conviction in the power of education to dispel prejudice and cultivate an independent spirit. They affirm, however, Jefferson’s reasons for rejecting political parties.

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138 Zernike
139 Zernike.
Our schools suffer from problems, as well. The schools are not free from outside influences, as religious and other groups threaten their integrity. In the fall of 2002, the Cobb School Board in Georgia declared that all biology teachers needed to give equal weight to evolution, Creationism, and Intelligent Design, and to affix stickers to biology textbooks stating that evolution was not a fact, merely a theory. In the fall of 2005, the Dover School District School Board ruled that biology curriculums should include intelligent design, a theory stating that the complexity of the universe proves the existence of a creator. In the spring of 2010, a school board in Texas, which influences the country’s largest textbook distributor, ruled that history textbooks needed to de-emphasize the secular basis of our government, and praise American capitalism and Republican political principles more. It is not just, however, the Religious Right threatening our public schools. The Teachers’ Unions obstruct improvements in our educational system, as well, protecting the welfare of the teachers instead of ensuring American children receive the best education possible.

Additionally, students no longer develop their independent thinking abilities, as Jefferson desired because many parents and teachers shelter their students, relying on textbooks that hide stories depicting America negatively and trying to ban books that question Christianity or traditional social norms. Such behavior contradicts Jefferson’s method of educating a young person to develop into a democratic citizen. Jefferson taught his students to rely on their intellect, using reasoning skills to develop their opinions without the help of textbooks or authorities. They relied, instead, on primary sources and observational skills. They were taught to question everything. If students do not develop those skills in school, how can we expect them to use

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those skills as citizens? Teachers must educate students in rigorous critical thinking and stress the importance of students applying those skills in all areas of their life, especially as citizens, and not just in the classroom.

Jefferson’s lasting contribution to our democratic philosophy is not his call for small government, but rather his designs to implement Enlightenment ideals through the university. The size of our government does not matter if American citizens are not prepared for the challenges of protecting their rights and our democracy, or simply fail to apply their education towards those challenges. Those who care about the success of our democracy must fight for the integrity of our schools, using Jefferson’s educational curriculum as the model followed in the public schools, and encourage all citizens to use their education in their understanding of current events and politics as Jefferson asked of educated democratic citizens.
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