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The Philosophic Soul of Reform: Herbert Croly's Ideal of Progressivism

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Abstract

The Philosophic Soul of Reform: Herbert Croly's Ideal of Progressivism

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American historians have found that within the passionate reform movements that inundated America from the 1890's to 1917, there was a corresponding intellectual movement away from the rigid and abstract formal logic that had characterized nineteenth century thought. This social thought, stressing the limits of the rational and defining itself in opposition to metaphysics, a priori reasoning, and absolute truth, defined the ideology of the progressive era.

Herbert Croly (1869-1930) is commonly referred to as one of the leading progressive minds. His book The Promise of American Life (1909) is consistently cited, by historians, as a representative expression of progressive thought. Using this source and a number of his other writings, this thesis suggests that Herbert Croly's thought was, in fact, at variance with progressive currents. This thesis argues that Croly's idealist political philosophy was heavily influenced by Immanuel Kant's conception of individual freedom and Josiah Royce's idea of community. Croly then, rejected the trend toward the relative and experiential nature of truth and ethics, the strictly empirical nature of social knowledge, and process being exalted over the ideal.

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Thanks must also be extended to Dr. Fred. Bode who introduced me to the rich history of the antebellum South, and who, as a member of my thesis committee, suggested many significant improvements for the final draft after having read it on short notice.

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Finally, I would like to thank my mother whose gentle exhortations to finish what at times, seemed unending, provided a much needed and appreciated absolutism Josiah Royce's writings would have little to recommend it.

These and the like expressions, proceeding out of the hearts of those that loved and were loved again, by the countenance, the tongue, the eyes, and a thousand pleasing gestures, were so much fuel to melt our souls together, and out of many make but one.

St. Augustine

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Introduction

It can safely be admitted that late nineteenth and early twentieth century America supported a critical and reformist spirit based on new modes of thought and a sense of crisis caused, in large part, by rapid urbanization, industrialization and immigration. Intellectually, progressivism was set in relief from previous decades thanks to a number of ideas that established themselves in opposition to the formal and abstract logic that governed "outdated" theological and metaphysical creeds. Pragmatism, "Reformed Darwinism", instrumentalism, and an ethical relativism grounded in scientific (experimental) enquiry, are among these powerful forces that overturned the absolutes of the old "Victorian" intellectual order. This social thought, predicated on the process of scientific discovery, suggested that ideas ought to be tested empirically in an effort to determine whether they were relevant to experience. It was this pragmatic approach to truth, defined by thinkers including John Dewey, Walter Lippmann, William James, and Charles Beard, among others, which increasingly defined the reformist approach intellectuals were taking towards the sweeping changes in social life caused by turn of the century upheaval.

Herbert Croly's ideas no less than those of Dewey or Lippmann were effective tools of social and political criticism. His book The Promise of American Life (1909) is consistently cited by historians as an important and representative expression of progressive thought. While not in disagreement that an

observable intellectual "style" distinguished the progressive era, this thesis suggests that Herbert Croly's thought was most essentially not a part of it. Croly shared with other progressives the revulsion against America's commitment to the laissez-faire gospel, which was expressed in a spirited call to consciously direct the natural order. However, Croly's own philosophical premises and system were profoundly different, and most often these differences articulated themselves in opposition to the intellectual values of the progressives who were his colleagues and contemporaries. Croly's idealist philosophy, influenced by the American philosopher, Josiah Royce, and Immanuel Kant, exhibited a number of distinctly "Victorian" characteristics which he adapted for use in the modern age. Croly had a metaphysician's concern for finding absolute conditions of morality and truth, he celebrated man's rational capacity to discover ultimate meaning which could transcend experience, and he advocated a teleological or ideal oriented approach to reform rather than an evolutionary one. Therefore, subsuming Croly's writings within the labels historians have used to define progressive thought only serves to obscure his intellectual legacy.

To date, only two book-length studies of Herbert Croly have been written: Shaping Modern Liberalism: Herbert Croly and Progressive Thought, (1993) by Edward Stettner, and Herbert Croly of the New Republic: The Life and Thought of an American Progressive, (1986) by David W. Levy. As the above titles suggest, both authors place Croly within the progressive intellectual tradition. Stettner evaluates Croly's body of work as an integral part of the redefinition of liberalism which emerged, itself, as one of the most enduring elements of the progressive legacy. Despite Croly's relative obscurity today, Stettner suggests

he was a committed progressive and pragmatist whose writings yielded a whole set of concrete political proposals for reform. Within this approach, Stettner examines Croly's writings on exceedingly technical terms by narrowly trying to uncover specific political or economic indices of reformist liberal thought, and dismissing his philosophic discussion as mysticism.

In lieu of context, David W. Levy finds in Croly's past, influences that determined the character and substance of his work. Of fundamental importance for Levy was the influence of Herbert's father, David Croly, who was a committed disciple of Auguste Comte's Positive philosophy. David laboured hard to impart his own enthusiasm for Comte to his son. Having experienced an intellectual revolt against Positivism at Harvard, Levy suggests Herbert returned to the philosophy of his father in The Promise of American Life. This thesis argues that while Herbert Croly may have shared the same moral ends as his father's "Religion of Humanity", his over-arching idealist philosophy did not share Positivism's methodology or fundamental premises. The substance of Herbert's revolt at Harvard, issuing from the influence of his teacher Josiah Royce, remained as his most enduring and profound intellectual debt. Thanks in part to the general conception of Croly as a progressive-pragmatist, Levy, like Stettner, does not account for the abstractions and idealism which are so essentially a part of Croly's thought-system.

A number of other secondary works have chapters or sections analysing Croly's ouevres, the most significant of which are The Paradox of Progressive Thought (1958) by David W. Noble; The Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly, Weyl, Lippmann, and the Progressive Era (1961) by Charles Forcey; and James T. Kloppenberg's Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in

European and American Thought (1986).

In The Paradox of Progressive Thought, Noble discerns a deep change in Croly's work, which gradually reflected the distinct influence of his progressive environment. This process is described by Noble as the "Americanization" of Croly's thought and is revealed most dramatically in the contrast between The Promise of American Life's Hegelian appeal for a strong state and Progressive Democracy's pragmatic and democratic appeal for participatory social and political change.

Charles Forcey's The Crossroads of Liberalism depicts Croly, Weyl and Lippmann as intellectuals who provided distinct yet thoroughly progressive brands of liberal thought. Forcey's main concern in this work is explaining exactly what relations and influences these thinkers wielded vis a vis those in power. Forcey finds in Croly's works a concrete blueprint for progressive-liberal (or what he calls "nationalist - liberal") political reforms. Forcey gives little reference or import to Croly's idealism or his metaphysics since he considers the pragmatism and of William James and John Dewey to have been the most striking influences in all his works.

James T. Kloppenberg's Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought canvasses a broad cross-section of European and American progressive intellectuals who "stressed the importance of subjectivity and the limits of rationality." While Kloppenberg argues that many turn of the century progressives could claim rather eclectic intellectual influences that defy categorization, he does suggest that John Dewey and William James emerge as Croly's defining influences. Like Noble, he asserts that a marked difference can be discerned between The Promise of

American Life which "teetered unsteadily. . . between science and mysticism," and Progressive Democracy which reflected "clearly and unquestionably the influence of [William] James and [John] Dewey."[1]

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Herbert Croly's early life and influences are the subjects of Chapter One. Herbert's parents, especially his father who was an enthusiast for the Positive philosophy, provided a stimulating intellectual atmosphere in which to mature. Herbert's greatest intellectual debt, however, was to Josiah Royce, one of his teachers at Harvard. Royce introduced Croly to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, as well as his own absolute idealism. In absorbing these influences Croly experienced a profound and lasting revolt against his father's Positivism. Herbert then began to fashion these intellectual experiences into a set of beliefs which were tentatively articulated in his early articles in the Architectural Record.

Chapter Two offers an in-depth investigation of Croly's most recognized work - The Promise of American Life. Written to establish the philosophical (especially the ethical) foundations of reform, this book is examined as an exposition of Croly's own philosophy. Immanuel Kant's conception of individual freedom and Josiah Royce's community ideal are suggested as major influences in Croly's thought. Written when the philosophical bases of progressive thought had not yet reached a certain permanence, Croly's ideas are examined in contrast to those of John Dewey, who was also seeking to articulate a progressive philosophy. Croly was a philosopher first, and a political theorist second. As such, the significance of social and political change for Croly, would be its evidence of the acceptance of this fundamental change in

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[1] James Kloppenberg's, Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1986), pgs. 314-315.

thought. It was this desire to establish a neo-Kantian idealist context for reform, which was his defining intellectual feature, and which essentially determined his more programmatic reform suggestions.

In Chapter Three, Croly's Progressive Democracy (1914) is examined as an extension or continuation of The Promise of American Life. Many commentators have suggested this book is less substantive than, or entirely distinct from, Croly's *Promise*, when, in fact, it represented a maturation of his philosophy. Written at a time when the progressive ethos had ripened and had reached a certain acceptance, this book is examined in contrast to the labels and currents of thought that have come to define, quite accurately, representative progressive thought.

Herbert Croly's role in establishing the New Republic, in 1914, is often seen as an example of his essential commitment to the ideas of progressive reform. However, in Chapter Four, a comparison of his Progressive Democracy with the writings of the other two founding editors - Walter Lippmann and Walter Weyl reveal some striking differences. Walter Weyl's The New Democracy (1912), and Walter Lippmann's A Preface to Politics (1912) and Drift and Mastery (1914), as expressions of progressive enthusiasm, articulated a social and cultural criticism that issued from the prevailing intellectual currents; namely scientific relativism and a dedication to evolutionary change. This vivid contrast to Croly's own thought, could be detected in the negotiations surrounding the establishment of the New Republic.

Chapter I

Early Life

In an article written for the Architectural Record entitled "American Artists and Their Public," (1901) Herbert Croly lamented the state of American culture in which art found itself at cross-purposes with civic life. American artists, he wrote, "[are] surrounded by people whose interest in the arts, so far as it exists, is an interest dependent upon conventional motives and fastened upon important but accessory things." According to Croly, modern American industrial values have both debased and homogenized public tastes toward the "didactic" and the "sentimental." Society then, lacked any creditable ideal or tradition, independent from the experience of the marketplace, which could provide an alternative to this conformity. Recognizing this pitfall in the American ethos, artists either conformed and produced popular works of little enduring value and "aesthetic propriety" or they created works "whose language does not carry beyond the studio."[2]

To a great extent, the artists' dilemma thus described was also Herbert Croly's. Beginning in 1891, at the age of twenty-two, Croly began to write for the Architectural Record. These articles, while essentially devoted to narrow architectural themes, put Croly in a position, much like that of the artists, to monitor and comment upon the culture of his day. Moreover, as someone

2 Herbert Croly, "American Artists and Their Public," in the Architectural Record 3 (January 1901): pgs. 256-262.

disaffected from the prevailing conventions, Croly was acutely aware that his cultural criticism would be rejected as "sentimental" nostalgia or archaic reprimands. Nonetheless, Croly's respectable if obscure journalistic career might have continued were it not for the lasting influences of the education he had earlier received from his parents and at Harvard. From both sources, he learned the importance of philosophy as a discipline relevant to the real world. Philosophy taught Croly to look forward and to construct a constant yet renewing standard of ideals and values instead of venerating the past. While Herbert Croly is remembered chiefly for his part in founding the New Republic, a consistent philosophic endeavour, conceived in his early education, revealed in embryonic form in his early articles of cultural and artistic criticism, and brought to full fruition in his books on political philosophy, remains his most profound and original contribution to American intellectual life.

The third of five children, Herbert David Croly was born in New York City, on January 23, 1869. His parents, Jane Cunningham Croly and David Goodman Croly, were both, however, European immigrants. Jane Croly was born in 1829, in Leicestershire England, and immigrated to the United States in 1841. David Croly was born in Clognakilty, County Cork Ireland, forty-one days before his future wife's birth and immigrated to the United States while still a young boy.[3] Historians including David Noble, Eric Goldman and Charles Forcey, have, to varying degrees, attributed Croly's philosophically detached

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3 David W. Levy, Herbert Croly of The New Republic: The Life and Thought of an American Progressive (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), Chapter 1. Herbert Croly's papers only allow for a rather fragmented look at his early life. Few of his papers are extant and what remains is not located in any central depository. These circumstances explain the late appearance of a book-length biography (Levy op. cit.,) and Levy's chapter heading - "The Blank Years, 1888-1909." As a result, I have had to rely on Levy's significant research and, to a lesser extent, Edward Stettner's Shaping Modern Liberalism: Herbert Croly and Progressive Thought (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1993).

perspective on American affairs to his European parentage. In an often quoted passage, Eric Goldman suggests:

> The Croly home had always been a European island in New York, and Herbert Croly's thinking, far more than the ideas of most progressives was heavily influenced by European patterns. . . . These facts tended to make Croly write about American Progressives the way foreign ambassadors often talk about American baseball games. He was there, he wanted to be part of it all, but he remained an outsider who could not help wondering at some of the antics he saw.[4]

While partly valid, this approach obscures the profound interplay of distinctly American forces that shaped Croly's ideas. Herbert Croly's thought did demonstrate an appreciation for the European philosophical tradition, in particular to Immanuel Kant, but the questions he sought to answer were always those concerning America's industrial democracy. Moreover, Croly's detached philosophy was both established and refined at Harvard which had, among American universities, the most illustrious and prodigious philosophy department. Here, Croly coupled his appreciation for Kant with an appreciation for the philosophy of the American scholar Josiah Royce. Herbert's parents, particularly his father who was a disciple of Auguste Comte, were indeed well acquainted with European thought. However, their influence also issued from the breadth of their interests and the inexhaustible energy they brought to their journalistic endeavours. These were traits that would have been remarkable in any context and their coupling of thought and writing taught Herbert that the world could be changed, as Charles Forcey suggests, "by argument and

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4 Eric Goldman, Rendezvous with Destiny: A History of Modern American Reform (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), pgs. 192-193.

effective exhortation."[5]

From the available evidence, it is clear that Jane Croly was less of an influence on her son than was his father. Nonetheless, her interests and achievements must have provided a profound example of the dignity of a life dedicated to social change and concern. Writing under the pseudonym "Jenny June", Jane Croly began her journalistic career in New York, in 1855, with the Sunday Times and Noah's Weekly Messenger. A year later she married David Croly a young reporter for the Herald. Refusing to let marriage thwart her career objectives, Jane Croly continued to issue articles on various topics that were of concern to women. What is remarkable about her output is the wide scope of her interests. Her articles varied from fashion columns in Graham's Magazine to articles on women's suffrage in Demorest's Illustrated Monthly. She wrote on the social dislocations of industrialism and the comparative status of women in England, France and Germany, and she wrote a popular cookbook which went through a number of editions.[6] While her writings were prodigious, they were not necessarily consistent. "Jenny June's" opinions were often ambiguous and, as David Levy has remarked, her only consistency was in articulating a late Victorian gentility which revealed itself in her opposition to the more "radical" reforms of the era and her support for typically genteel causes.[7]

Jane Croly, however, coupled a commitment to both thought and action which set her off from the women of her generation. She was the editor of Demorest's Illustrated Monthly for twenty-two years; she was the creator and

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5 Charles Forcey, The Crossroads of Liberalism (New York: Oxford University Press,1961), pg. 13.

6 Edward Stettner, Shaping Modern Liberalism: Herbert Croly and Progressive Thought (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1993), pg. 10.

7 Levy, op.cit., pg. 10.

owner of Cycle, a young club women's magazine; and she was also an associate editor of both the Messenger and of the Weekly Times. She is generally credited with being the first writer to syndicate columns and between 1869 and 1898 she wrote or compiled nine books. In addition, she was actively involved in the women's club movement and is known today as the "mother of women's clubs." In 1868, she helped found the women's club of New York, Sorosis, which, under her leadership, took the initiative in establishing the General Federation of Women's Clubs and eventually became national in scope.[8] Her devotion to various causes and her life of energetic activity coexisted in tension with the inescapable conventions of domesticity and selfless maternal devotion which were demanded from marriage. Yet, her wideranging mind and her belief that journalism, as more than an outlet for expression, could solve the problems of the day were both distinctive features of the Croly home and helped mould young Herbert's mind. More than the content of her writing the example of her life would no doubt prove to be her most palpable influence on her son.

David Croly was also drawn to journalism and this shared interest led to the young couple's attempt to save a failing Illinois paper called the Rockford Democratic Sentinel. While briefly successful, the endeavour soon failed and the Crolys moved back to New York not having lost any of their enthusiasm. David then worked for the New York World and became its managing editor by 1863. He retained this position for a full decade, after which he joined the Daily Telegraph and acted as editor there until 1878.[9]

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8 Stettner, op. cit., pgs. 11-12.

9 Ibid., pg. 13.

Only when compared to her husband could Jane Croly's broad interests seem rather ordinary. While working for the World, and with the help of a colleague there, David Croly wrote and published a pamphlet called - Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro. Designed to embarrass the Republicans in the election of 1864, the seventy-two page pamphlet argued that "the miscegenation or mixed races are much superior mentally, physically, and morally to those pure and unmixed."[10] This represented an elaborate hoax that was grounded in David Croly's creative appeal to pseudo-scientific jargon. Croly began by defining (and in fact coining) the term miscegenation and followed with dubious conclusions regarding the innate depravity of the Irish, Italian and other races. He then advised: "All that is needed to make us the finest race on earth is to engraft upon our stock the Negro element."[11] Croly mailed copies to abolitionist leaders asking for their opinion on the pamphlet. Responses from abolitionist leaders like Lucretia Mott and the Grimke sisters were highly cautious, but others responded with sufficient praise to prove embarrassing to their cause. The tract was even used in the House of Representatives during a discussion over establishing the Freedmen's Bureau, in an effort to chastise the Republican members.

While also on the staff of the New York World, David Croly helped create the profitable Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide which catered to the growing New York real estate market. His other projects included a book entitled The Truth About Love which, through frank dialogue, argued for more

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10 David Croly quoted in Sidney Kaplan, "The Miscegenation Issue in the Election of 1864," in the Journal of Negro History. 34 (1949): pg. 278.

11 Ibid., pg. 279.

liberated sexual practices, and the creation of a periodical called The Modern Thinker which was intended to provide a forum for the most distinguished "philosophical", "religious" and "scientific" minds of the day. Provocative in a variety of ways, the magazine was printed on coloured paper as Croly was persuaded that the contrast of black ink on white paper was debilitating for human eyesight.[12]

David Croly's ability to generate unorthodox ideas seemed almost limitless, yet his most cherished and consistent intellectual reverence was for the philosophy of Auguste Comte. David directed a great deal of his intellectual energies towards his son and the two sustained a close relationship that mediated between Herbert's respect for and his eventual revolt against the elder's Positivism. Much of Herbert's early education then, was defined by his father's commitment to spreading the ideas of Auguste Comte in the United States and Herbert later wrote that he had been "baptized" into the Comtean "Religion of Humanity."[13] In his memorial tribute Herbert writes: "From my earliest years, it was his endeavour to teach me to understand and believe in the religion of Auguste Comte. . . . There never, indeed, was a time throughout my whole youth, when we were alone together, that he did not return to the same text and impress upon me that a selfish life was no life at all, that 'no man liveth for himself, that no man dieth for himself.'"[14]

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12 Levy, op. cit., pgs. 13-15.

13 Herbert Croly quoted in Ibid., pg. 3. Called the ceremony of Presentation, this "baptism" involved, among other things, a solemn declaration to devote oneself to the service of the human community. Among David's many publications was a book entitled A Positivist Primer (1871). Designed to present the ideas of Comte in a manner both acceptable and accessible to Americans, Croly wrote optimistically about Positivism's main tenets. He suggests: "The only heaven that we recognize is the heaven that can be realized on this earth by intelligent human effort." Quoted in Stettner, op. cit., pg. 15.

14 Ibid., pg. 28.

Auguste Comte's (1798-1857) Cours de Philosophie Positive (1830-1842) sought to elevate science and the scientific method to the level of a philosophy. Through Positivism, Comte could mitigate the increasing fragmentation of knowledge, dominated and exacerbated by the "specialists", by positing a philosophy possessing a character of universality. He began by suggesting that the natural sciences and the social sciences or "social physics" are "all branches of the same trunk." To make this claim, Comte argued that true knowledge issued from both reasoning and the scientific method (observation and experimentation). Thus, the Positive philosophy maintained that "all phenomena [are] subjected to immutable natural laws" and the task of Positivists was to supplement this observation with an analysis of "the circumstances of phenomena, and to connect them by the natural relations of succession and resemblance."[15] The first of these ideas is quite self-explanatory, but the second is quite complex and saves Comte from being a philosophical monist.

Rejecting the search for absolute unity, Comte insisted that knowledge was subject to an evolution that must be understood historically. Hence, knowledge of a certain subject is "relative" by being related to its particular historical evolution which was itself revealed through rigidly empirical and scientific means.[16] The character of universality was contained in his suggestion that while each branch of knowledge progresses at different rates, and in relation to different phenomena, each branch must pass through "three theoretical conditions: the Theological, or fictitious; the Metaphysical, or

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15 Auguste Comte, The Positive Philosophy Translated by Harriet Martineau. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1896), pgs. 1-6.

16 Karl Lowith, Meaning in History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), pg. 67.

abstract; and the Scientific, or positive."[17] As an illustration, Comte used this schema to examine the evolution of his own philosophy. The Positive philosophy essentially came about through three stages: In the Theological Stage (childhood) the human mind searches for first and final causes of phenomena - in other words it seeks absolute knowledge about origins and ends which are inevitably answered with recourse to supernatural causes. In the Second Stage or the Metaphysical State (youth) the mind supplants supernatural beings with abstract forces or "personified abstractions" which nonetheless, seek to answer the same fundamental questions as those asked in stage one. In the Third stage, the Positive State, the mind no longer seeks absolute answers to first and final causes, but seeks to interpret the "circumstances of phenomena" according to a belief in the law of progressive evolution.[18] Comte suggested that his philosophy was to be used in the service of man; in seeking to define and explain relations rather than origins and ends, the positive philosophy could interpret and adapt to human need. Thus, Comte was the founder of the "Religion of Humanity" which sought to regenerate the human race by, most importantly, understanding it through his philosophical system.[19]

Herbert Croly was profoundly affected by his father's intellectual commitment to Positivism. And while he would eventually reject much of what his father had attempted to inculcate, it is clear that Herbert's exposure to the realm of ideas began long before he entered Harvard University. He would later

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17 Comte op. cit., pg. 2.

18 Ibid.

19 Mary Pickering, Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Chapter 1.

recall how his father was "a running brook of ideas on every subject in which a citizen of the world ought to be interested, and he literally poured a part of this flood into my little mental receptacle without noticing or caring how much of it overflowed."[20] Herbert's academic experience, however, provided him with the tools with which he constructed an intellectual revolt against the Positivism of his father.

Herbert's formal education began at J.H. Morse's English, Classical and Mathematical School for Boys, in New York, and continued, in 1886, as a freshman at Harvard. Herbert Croly's enrolment at Harvard could not have come at a more felicitous time. Under the presidency of Charles Eliot, a new and more open elective system cultivated a sense of dynamism and excitement at the university.[21] Coupled with this innovation was the emergence of Harvard as the leading American university for the instruction of philosophy. During Croly's much interrupted stay there, he could claim William James, George Santayana, Josiah Royce and George Herbert Palmer among his professors. Philosophy then, was becoming Harvard's chief glory, and Croly's course selection reveals his fascination for it; close to half of all his courses were in philosophy.[22] More specifically though, it was his courses with Josiah Royce, particularly his Philosophy 13 - "Monism and the Theory of Evolution in Their Relation to the Philosophy of Nature," taken during Herbert's second year, which exercised a most profound impact on his thought.

Herbert's later writings touching upon political, social, economic and cultural themes, issue from a consistent philosophical position which can be

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20 Herbert Croly quoted in Levy, op. cit., pg. 28.

21 Ibid., pgs. 43-47.

21 Forcey, op. cit., pgs. 18-21.

traced back to the influence of Josiah Royce at Harvard. These later works, including The Promise of American Life (1909) and Progressive Democracy (1914) have specific recommendations that reveal the striking influence of Kant's and Royce's thoughts concerning civic life. However, early in his education, Croly was seeking to discover the foundations of his own thought and, as such, he first adopted the shared idealism which stood at the basis of Kant's and Royce's philosophy. In establishing this grounding, Herbert would also break decisively with his father's Positivism. As an idealist, Croly eschewed experience as the arbiter of truth, by suggesting that ideas represented and could create reality. His writings then, are predicated on the assumption that ideas, as both independent of yet related to a social reality, could be made to reveal explanations for proper political behaviour. It was this philosophical idealism associated with Immanuel Kant, and his disciple in America, Josiah Royce, that allowed Croly to write from the premise that philosophical speculation was compatible with concrete and trenchant political commentary.

Josiah Royce was brought to Harvard on the urging of William James. And while the two sustained a strong friendship, it was in spite of their growing philosophical differences. James' empiricism, soon to be more completely incorporated into his pragmatic philosophy, was increasingly at variance with Royce's religiously inspired metaphysics and his absolute idealism. Royce, after all, was much devoted to the idealism and the "epistemological problems bequeathed by Kant."[23] It was under the tutelage of Royce, therefore, that Croly would have been introduced, in a meaningful way, to the philosophy of Kant. And eventually, Kant's philosophical endeavour, as adapted by Royce, became

23 Bruce Kuklick, The Rise of American Philosophy (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1977), pg. XX.

Croly's. As Bruce Kuklick has suggested:

> Kant's influence on Royce was enormous; the young man wrote of him as the "good father," and in *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, which Royce described as belonging to the "wide realm of Post-Kantian Idealism," he announced his debt to Kant "most of all." . . . He [Royce] came to philosophy as a neo-Kantian troubled by the status of the *Ding an sich*. A reaction to the idealistic speculations of the post-Kantians, neo-Kantianism arose in Germany as an epistemological movement grounded in *The Critique of Pure Reason*; philosophy would avoid the excesses of Fichte and Hegel and return to the master. The effect of the first *Kritik*, Royce wrote in 1881, was that "we all now live, philosophically speaking, in a Kantian atmosphere"; the critical philosophy was fundamental and it must be the philosophy of the future.[24]

Kant "bequeathed" a number of epistemological problems and propositions to which Royce dedicated himself. But, it must be mentioned at the outset that the point of juncture, where the thought of Kant, Royce and Croly was congruent, was a determined attempt to explain how we can be morally free in a world in which individuals are increasingly regarded as subject to the rigid laws of nature. Kant's answer was to separate morality from knowledge.[25] God, freedom, immortality and morality were part of the "intelligible" world which was independent of experience. This intelligible world, was independent of knowledge and experience because it was part of metaphysics which transcends experience. Morality has important implications for God, freedom and immortality since, in fact, they cannot be separated from the moral law which reason imposes on us, and Kant partially describes them as "postulates

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24 Ibid., pg. 144.

25 Elie Kedourie, Nationalism (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1960), Chapter 2.

of morality." [26] Part of the genius of Kant's contribution to ethics, then, was his discovery of novel laws for morality, specifically by separating the phenomenal world or the world of experience from the search for them. Moral law, as part of the a priori "intelligible self" that precedes experience, allows us to experience true freedom by being free from the exigencies of nature. It saves us from blindly following our impulses and appetites. Therefore, freedom and morality become a never ending quest for perfection and principle rather than the accommodation to one's social and physical context.

Croly's courses with Royce were taken during a most productive period in the latter's intellectual development. In his second year, when Croly enrolled in Philosophy 13, Royce had just finished his first major work The Religious Aspect of Philosophy (1885). And Croly would later return to Harvard to take courses, again with Royce, when the philosopher was working on The World and the Individual (1899-1901), called "the high-water mark of the idealistic tide."[27]

Josiah Royce approached the great philosophical questions as an absolute idealist, meaning everything in the world can be interpreted in terms of ideas. Everything knowable is an idea because it appears this way to the categories of our minds. Like Kant, Royce was concerned with epistemological problems concerning the nature of ideas and he took from his mentor the idea that not all ideas are of a similar constitution. There are a certain group of ideas that come to us via experience and which afford some practical usefulness. They can predict storms, they can suggest how much weight a bridge can hold,

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26 Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins, A Short History of Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pg. 207.

27 Stettner, op. cit., pg. 25.

but ultimately they cannot be used to uncover the nature of true reality. As such, Royce's philosophy can be read as an attack on the attempt to extrapolate from the natural sciences and experience the ultimate account of the universe, including moral meaning. The essential difference, then, between knowledge derived from the natural sciences and other sources, lies in the categories of our understanding. Space, time, matter, motion, for instance, cannot be conceived of outside of themselves, or a priori, but are dependent on experience to disclose them. Conversely, Royce suggests that through an idealistic philosophy, in which a priori ideas and values are considered a fundamental reality and the most significant dimension of our "intelligible" self, it was possible to discern the ultimate nature of reality. A priori ideas and values cannot be a product of the natural world because they would have to change as natural facts change. In such a schema permanent values are impossible as ideas are hopelessly tied to a contingency.[28]

Royce's absolute, idealistic, and religiously inspired metaphysics was, in obvious ways, at odds with David Croly's Positivism. Building upon Kantian foundations, Royce sought to transcend the limiting influences of experience and the laws of science through which Comte hoped to make human conduct more rational and predictable. Positivism was predicated on the knowledge of the main sciences, and it went a step further by suggesting these should be synthesized into a science of society. As a metaphysician, Royce was drawn to other questions, specifically those concerning origins and ends and suggested that the source of both first and final causes of phenomena can be explained through his supernatural "absolute." Comte would have agreed with David

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28 The Philosophy of Josiah Royce ed. John Roth, (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982), Introduction.

Croly who thought Harvard was behind the times; Royce's philosophy, for instance, was squarely located in the Metaphysical Stage. For Comte, the world was ready for, and in fact needed the emergence of the Positive stage in which meaning arrived through historical continuity and development according to discernible scientific laws. Herbert Croly lived this tension, and his eventual rejection of Positivism is dramatically revealed through his father's part of their detailed correspondence.

David Croly took a keen interest in his son's education. Herbert later wrote to his fiancee, Louise Emory, that "[I] used to send him packets of thirty or forty pages every other day - which he used to answer with marvellous regularity and unfailing kindness in spite of the fact that he detested letter-writing. My own letters I have destroyed; his I have kept, but I never have the courage to read them."[29] The elder Croly's letters often exhibited typical paternal concern, but many of his letters also included exhortations for Herbert to familiarize himself with the works of Comte. David Croly's reverence for Positivism permeated much of the correspondence he sustained with Herbert during the latter's years at Harvard:

> Hence after you have got through with the older and Middle Age Philosophies I hope you will turn your attention to the Science of Sciences the sum and end of Philosophy - Sociology. . . . So far the foundation of this noblest of Sciences has not been laid. Why not make it the work of your life? . . . Society is an organism controlled by laws of development which when discovered can be modified by man himself.[30]

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29 Herbert Croly quoted in Stettner, op. cit., pg. 16.

30 David Croly quoted in Levy, op. cit., pg. 61.

David's hopes for his son, however, met considerable resistance on a variety of fronts. Harvard's conservative economics department was a concern to David Croly who admitted that "I almost dread your [Herbert's] going through a course of Political Economy at Harvard," since the laissez-faire "theories which prevail there are, I apprehend, a quarter of a century behind the age."[31] In response to this hazard, David itemized the precise reading list his son should follow.

> My dear Boy - You said something about the divergence between my ideas and those of the philosophers you are reading at college. . . . I wish during your college year that you would read: (1) Miss Martineau's translation of Comte's "Positive Philosophy." (2) Mill's Estimate of Comte's Life and Works. (3) [J.H.] Bridges' Reply to Mill. (4) All of Frederic Harrison's writing that you can find. (5) All of Herbert Spencer's works that are not technical. (6) John Fiske's works. (7) The works of the English Positivists, such as Congreve, Bridges, and Beesley.[32]

31 Ibid., pg. 60.

32 Ibid., pg. 58. Frederic Harrison (1831-1923) was an English Comtean who served as president of the English Positivist Committee from 1880 to 1905. Harrison's writings suggested that the perpetuation and persistence of destructive laissez-faire ideas were due to their endorsement and introduction into politics by intellectuals. Harrison was expressing here, an addendum to Comte's own anti-intellectualism. Comte disclosed the limits of the rational in his discussion of the "Metaphysical Stage" which was a critique of excessive speculation. Christopher Kent, Brains and Numbers: Elitism, Comtism, and Democracy in Mid-Victorian England (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), Chapter 9. David's recommendation to read Herbert Spencer and John Fiske, two resolute laissez-faire apologists, was carried out with a specific purpose in mind. David Croly was concerned that, not only was Herbert receiving an education solely devoted to the Manchester school of economics, but that laissez-faire ideas and its attendant Social Darwinist philosophy might be confused with Comtism. Both, after all, promoted the relevance of scientific inquiry for the socio-economic problems of society and both believed in rigid evolutionary process and progress. However, there existed significant differences; specifically those concerning the role of government in society, in which Comte advocated active state intervention. David Croly obviously intended to have his son familiarize himself with both thought-systems in an effort to expose their essential differences. This is revealed in the continuation of David's aforementioned letter which reads: "By noticing the dates I think you will find that Spencer appropriates a great deal from Comte and that he tries to shirk the obligation." Subsequent letters also disclose this purpose. "Do not take stock in all Fiske and Spencer say about Comte," David wrote "[w]hen you study Comte (he died in 1857) you will find that he anticipated nearly all that is valuable in the thinkers who have followed and reviled him." Levy, pg. 59. A discussion of Social Darwinism and Herbert Croly's own opposition to it can be found in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

David's immediate concern then, revolved around his sense that Harvard's curriculum was, in all fields, terribly antiquated. Philosophy was no less outdated and he warned to "[b]eware of metaphysics, my son. We live in a real world and should not be fooled by words."[33] In fact, David was apprehensive enough to write in The Real Estate and Builder's Guide that "[w]hat is known as advanced scientific thought has very little show in any of our colleges, even in Harvard. The professorial chairs represent the creeds of the past, not the living and advanced thought of the present."[34] It was becoming increasingly clear, though, that Josiah Royce was Herbert's favourite teacher, and during his second year, this intellectual affinity was forged at the expense of his father's pleadings. It was in the department of philosophy that David Croly met a successful challenge to his Positivism. David Croly was initially pleased that his son had developed a fondness for one of his teachers and wrote: "[i]t puts a good influence into a young man's life when he is profoundly impressed with the culture and intellect of some teacher with whom he is associated."[35] And, when Professor Royce prepared for a leave of absence, David comforted his son: "I am sorry you have lost Prof. Royce. The danger is that with [Francis E.] Abbott, your antagonism will be aroused and you will not do him justice."[36] Yet, Herbert was clearly accepting Royce's metaphysics and idealism in lieu of his father's Positivism. In the memorial tribute to his father, Herbert testifies to this alienation and to the depth of this intellectual rift between two people so

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33 Ibid., pg. 58.
34 Ibid., pg. 65.
35 Ibid., pg. 65.
36 Ibid., pg. 65.

committed to the realm of ideas.

> While I was at college I was surrounded by other influences, and while retaining everything that was positive and constructive in his teaching, I dropped the negative cloth in which it was shrouded. My change of opinion was a bitter disappointment to him, as several letters which he wrote at the time testify. But intense as was his disappointment, it never took the form of a reproach. This is very remarkable when we consider what an essential part of his character his beliefs constituted. Here was an end, for which he had striven through many years, failing at the very time when it should have been most fruitful. . . . His opinions, crystallized by opposition which they met on every side, were so very much the truth to him that he wished his son to perceive them clearly and cherish them as devoutly as he did. That wish became impossible of fulfillment. Part of his life work had failed.[37]

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37 Herbert Croly quoted in Ibid., pg. 66. Despite the paucity of work devoted to examining Croly's actual writings, there is something of a minor controversy concerning the influence of David Croly's Positivism on his son. Levy is most convinced that Comte's ideas were apparent in Herbert's later works. While he does acknowledge the influence of the other individuals in Herbert's early life, and the (Royce inspired) apostasy Herbert experienced at Harvard, Levy's biography remains the strongest expression of David Croly's lasting intellectual influence on his son. He suggests, for instance, that "the origins of The Promise of American Life are to be found in the social, political, and economic thought of Auguste Comte as that thought was applied to American conditions by David Goodman Croly." (119) This assertion has been supported of late in Gillis Harp's Positivist Republic: Auguste Comte and the Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865-1920 (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), Chapter 7. Two interpretations that differ significantly from Harp and Levy's are David W. Noble's Paradox of Progressive Thought (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1958) and Charles Forcey's The Crossroads of Liberalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961). Both Noble and Forcey are in agreement that Herbert's revolt from Positivism, at Harvard, was a defining moment. For Noble, it signified the growing "Hegelianism" in Herbert's thought which was quite apparent in The Promise, but was later abandoned. For Forcey, Herbert's revolt signalled a lifelong reverence for the pragmatism of William James. Stettner's book and James Kloppenberg's, Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1986) offer yet another approach. Both authors place Croly squarely within the progressive era and, more specifically, the pragmatic redefinition of liberal-democracy that was its legacy. As such, Croly's thought represented a type of eclecticism and blend of often contradictory influences that characterized the theoretical wing of fin-de-siecle reform. While in agreement that Herbert experienced a profound intellectual "revolt" at Harvard, I suggest that the source of this tension - Royce's neo-Kantian idealism - remained as Croly's defining intellectual commitment throughout his life. His works reveal a remarkably consistent articulation of this influence and, as such, the fundamental "philosophy" of his thought actually set him apart from other progressives in appreciable ways.

The confident assertions contained in Croly's writings are remarkable in comparison to his thwarted and intensely shy disposition. Conversations with him tended to be solemn and were often carried on in a whisper. In the confines of a large group he was even more withdrawn and would, as his colleague and friend Francis Hackett remarked, "settle like a stone crab in the middle of lively company."[38] And while Harvard had much to offer a young student with broad interests in philosophy, his inability to communicate with his peers may have been overwhelming. Croly's academic life, devoted to intense and isolating study, often found itself at odds with the active club and social life that many Harvard undergraduates of the era found so compelling. This may explain why Croly left Harvard in 1888, not having completed his studies and served instead as his father's private secretary until his father's death a year later. During this time he inherited an interest in the Real Estate and Builder's Guide to which he not only contributed articles but served as its editor. This endeavour did not last long enough to discern a pattern of thought as he married Louise Emory in May 1892, and decided to return to Harvard.[39]

During the first semester, after his return, he took courses with Royce and Santayana, but a nervous breakdown in January 1893 prevented the completion of this term. Many things must have contributed to this breakdown including his "special student" status at Harvard, a crisis over vocation, and the absence of a steady income. This is a part of Croly's life about which historians know little if anything and, therefore, much is left to conjecture. During his

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38 Francis Hackett quoted in Forcey, op. cit., pg. 7.

39 Stettner, op. cit., pg. 23.

breakdown Croly retreated to Cornish, New Hampshire, a place of placidity and gentle comfort. Eight or nine hours away from New York City, Cornish had attracted a community of artists and intellectuals who wished to escape the pandemonium of urban life. Norman Hapgood, the cultural critic and former classmate of Croly's at Harvard, settled there, as did George Rublee another of Croly's acquaintances from university. The future jurist Learned Hand made Cornish his home and had introduced a colleague, Felix Frankfurter, to Croly there.[40] Herbert seemed to adopt a more gregarious persona while in New Hampshire which may explain why many of his lasting friendships were first realized in Cornish. Returning to Harvard in 1895 and becoming a regular student in 1897, Croly, however, did not manage to satisfy enough course requirements to receive the B.A. by the time he left for good in 1899.[41]

What is known about Croly's thoughts from 1899, when he left Harvard, to 1909, when he published The Promise of American Life, must be gleaned from his writings in the Architectural Record. While mostly concerned with limited architectural and artistic themes, these articles do evidence a political and social philosophy which he fashioned from his earlier education in philosophy. Croly's first article, "Art and Life," written in 1891 during his first

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40 Learned Hand attended Harvard concurrently with Croly. Levy suggests, however, that Croly's inordinate shyness at Harvard and his relative sociability at Cornish, led Hand to believe he had first met Croly at Cornish in 1908 or 1909. Hapgood, Rublee, Hand and Frankfurter were to later become intimately connected with Croly and the New Republic. All contributed in some form to the magazine and all shared the journal's distinct, if not always consistent, brand of liberalism. Most of them supported Theodore Roosevelt's New Nationalism of 1912, and later supported Woodrow Wilson when his New Freedom gave way to his New Liberalism. Frankfurter later served the Wilson administration, most notably as the President's legal advisor at the Paris Peace Conference. It is also interesting to note that while Frankfurter was nominated to the Supreme Court, Hand was forever denied the honour based, in large part, on his reputation as an outspoken "progressive." See, Forcey, op. cit., Chapters VI - VII.

41 Levy, op. cit., pgs. 78-82.

sojourn from Harvard, already betrays a rejection of science as a meaningful way to describe human relations. Commenting upon the way in which political economists, have taken an exceedingly technical and programmatic approach to the "varied phenomena of life", Croly writes that as a consequence they are "very blind and quite inhuman to dress . . . human nature with the stiff knee - breeches of [their] science."[42]

By the time time Croly wrote the article "American Artists and Their Public," in 1901, he had returned to the magazine as a permanent contributor and had refined some of his essential beliefs. Again, Croly reveals both a fascination for and an apprehension about the disunity of American society. He suggests that Americans need to consciously replace the experiences of the marketplace with a nationalized ideal. Comparing modern industrial America with "Periclean Athens," "French Mediaeval communes," and the "north Italian cities of the 15th century," he suggests that America lacks, in part, "moral ideals" which, among these communities, assumed a sense of shared acceptance. Once accepted, the conflicting purposes of the industrialist and the artist could be reconciled under a tradition constituted beyond themselves. "If such an enlarged community can ever get fairly under way," Croly writes, "if its members can ever become closely united by some dominant and guiding tradition, there is no telling what may come of it."[43]

The theme that business affects the creation of good art was a constant preoccupation for Croly. In his article "Art and Life," he made vague

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42 Herbert Croly, "Art and Life," in the Architectural Record 1 (October-December 1891): pgs. 219-227.

43 Herbert Croly, "American Artists and Their Public," in the Architectural Record 3 (January 1901): pgs. 256-262.

observations about the conflicting demands of profit seeking and creativity and continued to refine this theme in his 1902 article "The New World and The New Art." His argument that the values of industrial America including "utility", "profitability" and the primacy of "function" had undermined aesthetic appreciation was not new and he reiterated his now common assertion that "American artists are always tossed on the horns either of one dilemma or another. Either they adapt themselves to business conditions and compromise the integrity of their work or they are forced aside and continue to work conscientiously along their own lines and are 'good but lonely.'"[44] However, he began to define the difference as one stressing the primacy of experience and the other, thought and ideas. Croly then, was refining his idealism by suggesting that in accepting the values of the marketplace, Americans had relinquished any appeal to higher ideals that were not the product of experience but of ideas and thought. It is through the shared acceptance of these intellectual ideals that Americans could foster a well-directed civic-life, more broadly, and a lasting artistic tradition, more specifically. He wrote:

> If the United States continues to be primarily interested in business and does not take anything else very seriously, she will in the end assume very much the same position toward Europe as the Greek colonies in Sicily did toward their native Greece; she will exchange her material products for the art and thought of the motherland. . . . What the United States needs is a nationalization of their [sic] intellectual life comparable to the nationalizing, now under way, of their [sic] industry and politics.[45]

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44 Herbert Croly, "The New World and the New Art," in the Architectural Record 2 (June 1902): pg. 151.

45 Ibid., pg. 153.

This important proposition in Croly's thought receives its fullest expression in his 1903 article, "New York as the American Metropolis." Here, in more explicit fashion, Croly suggests that the laissez-faire approach concerning America's future development must be replaced by a conscious and deliberate attempt to guide it. This "mastery" must be national in scope, and, as the American metropolis, New York must both define and embody its principles. Croly asserts: "The old careless, good-natured confidence that the best way to reach the consummate social condition is to let present evils take care of themselves must be abandoned . . . . [I]t is encouraging to observe that New York is taking the lead in doing it. If New York can maintain that lead it may exercise in the end as dominant and controlling position in the social and intellectual as it does in the financial and industrial life of the United States."[46] The key word in this passage is "intellectual" and Croly uses the term as he did in "The New World and The New Art," to describe an alternative to the uncritical acceptance of marketplace values as normative.

In a passage resembling his future analysis in The Promise of American Life, Croly claims that Americans must reach beyond the "independence" and "adaptability" which characterized those pioneers who conquered the West. What is needed is a new intellectual tradition that is both more communal and more absolute in its implications. For artists, the assignment is a particularly difficult one because they can only maintain a devotion to "disinterested intellectual work" in defiance of the prevailing American ethos. "Their [artists'] work has an ideal and a discipline necessarily different from the ideal and discipline natural to ordinary social action and life," Croly writes; "and the purity

46 Herbert Croly, "New York as the American Metropolis," in the Architectural Record 3 (March 1903): pg. 206.

of that ideal and the severity of that discipline can be maintained only by a certain amount of social exclusiveness and irresponsibility."[47] Not the product of experience, these ideals would have to issue from disinterested thought from which human action would then follow. As a consequence, Croly was seeking a change in ideas that exist prior to and determine behaviour. "The stimulus to great works of the imagination," Croly claims "derives, not so much from the material offered by life, which always possesses dramatic and salient features, as from the mental attitude of certain gifted and trained people toward that material - an attitude that is formed chiefly by the sweep, intensity, coherence and momentum of the ideas which are currently applied to life."[48]

In this article, as in later ones including "The Architect in Recent Fiction" (February 1905), Croly also mentions the influence of the book Unleavened Bread (1900) by Robert Grant (1852-1940), a novelist and lawyer who authored over thirty volumes of novels, short stories and poems generally devoted to extolling traditional manners and principles.[49] Unleavened Bread is a book, much like Croly's articles in the Architectural Record, that is critical of the influence of big business and the acquisition of social success without the moral influence of values and ideas. The hero is Wilbur Littleton, an architect who maintains a commitment to creating works of lasting value. His wife Selma, however, is a committed socialite whose self-concerned ascendancy among the New York "cliques" is a symbol for the decadence and transparent culture that

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47 Ibid., pg. 202.

48 Ibid., pg. 205. It is interesting to note that Croly reveals his admiration for Theodore Roosevelt, as he does in more thoroughgoing fashion in The Promise of American Life, because the former President personifies something suggesting the influence of ideas and disinterested purpose. "It is not an accident that Theodore Roosevelt, who represents, both in what he stands for and what he is, the best form of the national idea." pg. 205.

49 Frank Bergmann, Robert Grant (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), Preface.

characterized modern America. Unleavened Bread tapped into potent themes that would echo in Herbert's writings; New York, architecture, the lack of an accepted civic purpose, "the folly and emptiness of acquiring wealth without moral values, social success without a sense of responsibility,"[50] and most importantly, the disconcerting rejection of the ideal and principle in favour of the immediately serviceable. Croly claims: "She [Selma] stands for the obvious, the practical, the regular and the renumerative thing. . . . It is the old mid-century American point of view of immediate practical achievement at any cost."[51]

Herbert Croly's articles in the Architectural Record did little to establish his reputation as one of the leading minds of progressive reform. They did, however, reveal that the "outdated" philosophies he was taught at Harvard could, in the American context, assume a new identity and a new importance. The philosophies of Josiah Royce and Immanuel Kant would reveal themselves to be palpable influences as Croly began to fashion a thought-system stressing the absolute and idealist nature of ethics and knowledge. In a sense, then, The Promise of American Life, the most acclaimed of Croly's books, was being written during these early years devoted to artistic and cultural criticism when

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50 Robert Grant, Unleavened Bread (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1900), Prologue.

51 Herbert Croly, "The Architect in Recent Fiction," in the Architectural Record 2 (February 1905): pg. 139. In making Selma a negative archetype to be hated and whose lust for power represented the main theme of the book, Grant was articulating a vaguely concealed contempt for the perceived materialistic and frivolous character of the women's movement, including their quest for suffrage. Theodore Roosevelt's own reading of the book supports this; in reply to someone named Amelia Glover he wrote: "I wish you and she would read a novel called *Unleavened Bread*, by Robert Grant. The character of the heroine, Selma . . . is exactly and precisely such a character as produced by the writings and efforts of the women whose newspaper letter you enclose, and whom you follow. This Selma represents her and your ideal of womanhood; and in all the ages there has been no more contemptible ideal." Grant, himself, revealed that "the success of *Unleavened Bread* had left me sensitive, nevertheless, to the imputation of being anti-feminist, if not a woman hater, and I aspired to present a cross-section of the American scene in which woman should figure more admirably." Bergmann, op.cit., pgs. 74-75.

Herbert was establishing the relevance of ideas and thought for the concrete context of everyday life.

Chapter II

Politics as Moral Idea: "The Promise of American Life"

Progressive era reform rested fundamentally on a new conception of ethical thinking. Ethics, a branch of philosophy devoted to describing the moral ends of human behaviour, asks the fundamental questions on which rest the foundations of civic life: What is the nature of moral judgement? How should society be organized to conform to those principles of morality? How should we conduct ourselves as moral individuals? For those who believed that the condition of modern industrial America, including the unequal distribution of society's wealth was the product of a "natural" and immutable process of selection, reform was not an option. However, with among other things, the appearance of muckraking tracts like The Shame of The Cities (1904) and The Jungle (1906), the intellectual bonds that militated against change were visibly crumbling.

Herbert Croly's The Promise of American Life contributed to the public discussion on reform. Specifically, Croly was seeking to establish a consistent philosophy or an intellectual context for its direction and perpetuation and, as such, his book necessarily touched upon the requisite ethical foundations. The Promise of American Life approached the problems of America's early twentieth century industrial democracy from the premise that questions of moral judgement, from (and after) which spring the more narrow concerns of political, social and economic significance, issue from a priori ideas rather than the data

gathered from one's social context.[52] This represented a profound difference from the philosophical basis of the progressives' campaign for social amelioration. Achieving its most detailed and comprehensive illustration in the writings of John Dewey, who was also competing for the philosophical soul of progressives, the rudiments of progressive ethics were grounded upon the pragmatic quest to mesh science and morality by suggesting that one's experience in the natural world provides insight into ethical truths. As historian John Patrick Diggins suggests, "he [Dewey] faced the awesome challenge of reconciling science and morality. . . . Indeed, it would not be going too far to say that the approach pragmatists take toward the interrelated problems of authority, truth, and modernity stands or falls on the adequacy of Dewey's ethical theory."[53]

Dewey's approach to ethics was grounded in the notion that concepts of morality, value and truth are not metaphysical constructs, but are found in our affective reaction to our immediate, real-world environment. Value judgements,

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52 In establishing a new set of ethical strictures, Croly wanted fundamentally to understand and contribute to the moral nature of reform which, as he defined it, concerned questions of thought. Moral fervour, issuing in part from Evangelical Protestantism, has been well documented by historians as an integral part of the progressive ethos. See, Arthur Ekirch, Progressivism in America (New York: New Viewpoints Publishers, 1974), Chapter 4. This observation, however, generally describes the psychology of the progressives more than their philosophy. Croly called this moral enthusiasm "politico-moral revivalism"; the shallow attempt by some reformers to invest questions of social amelioration with moral content without a more comprehensive intellectual sense of purpose and direction. It should also be noted that I suggest, in this chapter, that many significant aspects of The Promise of American Life were at variance with Auguste Comte's Positivism, including Croly's teleological (rather than evolutionary) approach to reform, and a belief that disinterested thought could and should transcend the dictates of the environment and historical legacy. Croly did, however, share a certain sympathy for Comte's moral ends contained in the latter's "Religion of Humanity", which became discernible in Progressive Democracy. But to suggest, as David W. Levy does, that Croly's *Promise* was Comte's thought applied to American conditions obscures the aforementioned differences as well as the fact that Croly conceived of reform as a philosophical problem more than a sociological one.

53 John Patrick Diggins, The Promise of Pragmatism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pg. 240.

then, are a class of practical judgements that must correspond to one's immediate setting. This was Dewey's pragmatic appeal: ethical thinking must be based on seeking accommodation and compromise with one's proximate requirements (the effectiveness of which experience will make clear); it should not have to harmonize itself with unchanging and ultimate ends. "[T]he object of thinking is not to effect some wholesale and 'Absolute' reconciliation of meaning and existence," Dewey writes, "but to make a specific adjustment of things to our purposes and of our purposes to things at just the crucial point of the crisis."[54]

Here Dewey tried to reconcile science and morality; morality should become more scientific insofar as it must seek empirical relations and connections with other environmental factors, rather than attempting to uncover the "inherent quality" of something. Therefore, science itself, for Dewey, is an outgrowth of man's moral endeavour. Dewey takes truth away from its metaphysical heights contained in the idea, and puts it squarely in our continuing attempts to expand significant experience. As such, morals, ethics, values and truth itself, have no antecedent status; they do not exist prior to and therefore independent of experience, but are, in fact, revealed through this experience in the natural world. The "ends" of human action become the means. "Truth" Dewey claims "is a just name for an experienced relation among the things of experience: that sort of relation in which intents are retrospectively viewed from the standpoint of the fulfilment which they secure through their own

54 John Dewey, "The Intellectualist Criterion for Truth," (1908) in The Middle Works 1899-1924, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, (Carbondale, Illinois: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1983), vol. IV, pg. 64.

natural operation or incitement."[55]

An insensitivity to the philosophic idealism of Croly's thought has proven to be the chief obstacle in trying to arrive at a complete understanding of his books. Like other progressives Croly sought social change, however, his absolutist, metaphysical philosophy was at variance with those, including John Dewey, whose "revolt against formalism" explicitly tried to overturn those vestiges of nineteenth century thought.[56] Therefore, to understand Croly's "Promise" it is necessary to understand his own particular philosophical premises which lie somewhere outside the appellations used to characterize fin-de-siecle reform thought. While Croly did articulate a philosophical idealism derived from both Kant and Royce he also appropriated more specific aspects of their ethics: from Royce's Kantian foundations he adopted the concept of freedom as described in the Categorical Imperative, and from Royce's own writings, he adopted the idea that loyalty to a collective and absolute purpose, constituted outside the individual, was both a moral construct and a necessary ideal. Croly's contribution in the Promise of American Life was to suggest why and how these two principles should be brought about in the American context.

The Promise of American Life is essentially (albeit not formally) divided into two distinct sections. After an opening chapter that attempts to define the

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55 John Dewey, "The Experimental Theory of Knowledge," (1906) in The Middle Works 1899-1924, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, (Carbondale, Illinois: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1983), vol. III, pg. 126.

56 I am using Morton White's apt phrase from his Social Thought in America: The Revolt Against Formalism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), to denote the "revolt" progressive thinkers sustained against the formalist philosophies contained in theological and metaphysical creeds. Influenced by Dewey's instrumentalist philosophy, in which, White says, " ideas are plans of action, and not mirrors of reality" (pg. 7), these reform minded intellectuals eschewed the logic, deduction, abstraction, metaphysics, and idealism which had nourished the eighteenth and nineteenth century mind, and which was deemed unsatisfactory to explain the "rich, moving, living current of social life." (pg. 11)

"Promise", Croly launches into a detailed examination of America's past from its founding to the end of the Civil War. The succeeding chapters are then devoted to explaining the nature and direction of reform that Americans should adopt if their political and economic divisions are to be healed. While the strictly historical sections of The Promise of American Life only account for three of the thirteen chapters, much of what has been extrapolated from this work has issued from Croly's "irreverent" look at America's past. In fact, the often quoted phrase "I shall not disguise the fact that, on the whole, my own preferences are on the side of Hamilton rather than of Jefferson," has come to define The Promise of American Life and, as a consequence, much of Croly's intellectual legacy. Considerable acclaim followed the publication of his book, including reviews in the Political Science Quarterly, the Nation and the North American Review. Each devoted proportionally large passages over to an assessment of Croly's exploration of American history. This is not entirely unjustified. The conclusions Croly reaches here inform the larger conclusions he uncovers in the book and much of what is destructive about America's contemporary culture can be traced back to the inheritance of this "Pioneer" period.

However, Croly's conclusions concerning American history, including his preference for Hamilton over Jefferson, his criticism of Andrew Jackson and his praise for Abraham Lincoln were not, in fact, that irreverent. Reviewers were equally mindful of this fact. Commenting on Croly's illustration of the aristocratic nature of the Constitution, Royal Meeker of the Political Science Quarterly stated, " most reformers and many standpatters now recognize the true character of the Constitution as the palladium of vested interests. Reformers still speak of restoring to the people their inherent, inalienable rights guaranteed by

the Constitution; but they know better."[57] A reviewer in the Nation also suggested, "There is little that is novel in this review of our past political history. . . . But Mr. Croly handles his case with power."[58]

In these explicitly historical chapters, embedded in Croly's tortuous prose, is a vivid illustration of how the author was both intellectually a part and yet essentially distanced from his contemporaries. Croly wanted nothing less then the abandonment of the laissez-faire canon in favour of active intervention in the "natural" course of events. As such, he was very much involved in the ongoing debate among historians, economists and other intellectuals who were beginning to articulate the primacy of "mastery" over indifference within their various fields of academic inquiry. History played host to this change in thought, and it is reflected in certain interpretations including the revival of Hamilton over Jefferson. Croly shared many of these progressive conclusions, but he approached American history from a very different perspective, that of an absolute idealist. Consequently, Croly unearthed many different lessons from the past, and he proposed many different reformist "ends" for the contemporary situation, all of which were a reflection of this difference.

To understand this "ongoing debate" it is important to note that early progressive historiography was caught in what Richard Hofstadter calls the "dualistic interpretation of American political thought."[59] Embodied to varying degrees in the works of J. Allen Smith, Charles A. Beard, James Harvey Robinson and others, progressive historians allowed the context of the laissez-

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57 Political Science Quarterly, 25 (December 1910): pg. 693.

58 Nation, 90 (March 3, 1910): pg. 210.

59 Richard Hofstadter, The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publishers, 1968), pg. 192.

faire controversy to influence their writing of American history. The modernization of rural America was seen as a battle between the agrarian sympathy for a laissez-faire vision of American democracy against the need for modern industrial America's need for informed "mastery". Within this approach Jefferson often became the symbol for the outdated laissez-faire approach, while Alexander Hamilton represented the modern attempt to consciously direct the natural order.[60]

Croly's positive assessment of Alexander Hamilton bore some of the hallmarks of this debate. While Jefferson still occupied a somewhat sanctified place in American memory, clearly an intellectual contest was being waged during the progressive years, among historians, novelists, politicians and others in which neither side could claim victory. As historian Merrill Peterson asserts, "not until the appearance in 1925 of Claude Bowers's 'Jefferson and Hamilton: The Struggle for Democracy in America', could it be said that American scholarship had at last been converted to Jefferson."[61] While unconventional, Croly's praise for Hamilton was certainly not unprecedented and it followed hard on the heels of books including Henry Adams' History of the United States During the Administrations of Jefferson and Hamilton", (1884-1891) and the novelist Gertrude Atherton's historical romance The Conqueror (1902) which were among those contributing to the Hamilton revival that issued from the progressive call for "strenuous statesmanship."[62]

Croly's lengthy eulogy entitled "Lincoln as more than an American," was

60 Ernst A. Breisach, American Progressive History: An Experiment in Modernization (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pg. 104.
61 Merrill D. Peterson, Lincoln in American Memory (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pg. 280.
62 Ibid., Chapters 6-7.

equally congruent with progressive historical interpretation. According to those of the immediate post-Civil War generation, Lincoln's political genius expressed itself in the most constructively national of terms. For progressive historians especially, Abraham Lincoln represented the perfect example of the statesman who could rise above debilitating conflict and seek a unifying compromise. Within the "dualistic" paradigm of historical interpretation, Lincoln reflected the appropriate balance between Jeffersonian demagoguery and Hamiltonian aristocracy. Ida Tarbell, was one of these early writers whose homage to Lincoln entitled "Life of Abraham Lincoln" (1900) portrayed him as the embodiment of democracy and brotherhood. Another such work was penned by Alonzo Rothschild entitled "Lincoln, Man of Men" (1906), which described Lincoln as a "political genius" to whose example contemporary statesmen should look for counsel.[63]

Even Croly's suggestion that the Constitution may be at the root of America's stagnant political culture was part of this ongoing debate that was beginning to gather force in the years surrounding the publication of The Promise of American Life. Charles Beard's famous treatise on the same topic entitled An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution appeared in 1913; however, it was presaged by books like J. Allen Smith's The Spirit of American Government (1907) which, while not developing a conclusive report on the document's economic implications, did suggest that it "represented . . . the wealthy and conservative classes, and had for the most part, but little sympathy with the popular theory of government. . . ."[64] Charles Beard's earlier works, the

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63 Peterson, Merrill, The Jeffersonian Image in the American Mind (New York: Oxford University Press,1960), Chapter 6.

64 J. Allen Smith quoted in Hofstadter, op. cit., pg. 192.

writings of Henry Adams, Carl Becker and Gustavus Meyers all contributed to the suggestions that the Constitution yielded to the power of business interests, and was inherently opposed to active democratic change.[65]

Fidelity for the pragmatic approach to problems of social, political and economic significance also allowed these progressive historians to obviate any distinctions between interests and ideals. In 1904, at the Congress of Arts and Science at the St. Louis World's Fair, American historians were asked - "What does your science contribute to the practical progress of mankind?"[66] Influenced to a great extent by the writings of John Dewey, historians were beginning to join with others in the social sciences in the "revolt against formalism." These historians, then, filling the void left by the old absolutes, were beginning to see the world of ceaseless change and experience as a foundation for progress. The "open landscape" of historical inquiry defined only by human interest and experience would move forward and progress without reference to some "end." Ernst Breisach writes:

> . . . they [historians] felt as full-fledged participants in the pragmatic revolt, with its enthusiasm for change and its hostility to fixity of all kinds. That revolt was part of a crucial development in western thought, which, in the absence of any reality transcending the empirical range of life, immersed all truth finding into life. When historians on both sides of the Atlantic had to cope with this situation, the Progressive historians turned to pragmatism. One pragmatic philosopher, John Dewey, rendered considerable help at that point. Robinson, Beard, and, in part, Becker, although enamoured by William James's open universe. . . always remained closer to John Dewey's pragmatism (instrumentalism), which spoke of scholarly work as a relentlessly experimental and forever open

65 Breisach, op. cit., pg. 90.

66 Ibid., pg. 33.

> inquiry that changed life in the process. . . . Hence, the immersion of the historian and of historical reason into the flow of life. . . .[67]

It is at this juncture that the philosophical grounding of Croly's examination of American history reveals its essential difference with progressive historiography. American historians were beginning to adopt a scientific and pragmatic approach that was, in fact, revolutionizing the entire spectrum of the social sciences. This marked the acceptance of pragmatism as a philosophy which could both direct and sustain their own historical analyses.

The purpose of Croly's historical investigation and, indeed, his entire book, could have scarcely been more incongruous in comparison with that of the progressive historians. As he proclaims in the opening paragraph of his second chapter, the judgements he seeks to articulate will originate from a preexisting ideal, independent of experience: " I am not seeking to justify a political and economic theory by an appeal to historical facts. I am seeking, on the contrary, to place some kind of an estimate and interpretation upon American political ideas and achievements; and this estimate and interpretation is determined chiefly by a preconceived ideal."[68] It is important to understand that, for Croly, America's problems could be reduced to a predicament of ideas and, therefore, in seeking intellectual solutions for essentially intellectual problems, Croly was trying to reconstitute those sources of ambition that lay behind human actions and appetites. His criticism of Thomas Jefferson then, is not essentially centered on the commitment to a selfish individualism, but on the

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67 Ibid., pg. 55.

68 Herbert Croly, The Promise of American Life (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), pg. 27.

Jeffersonian philosophy that underpinned this commitment. This represents the same source of criticism used to describe Andrew Jackson, praise for Abraham Lincoln and his commentary on the Constitution.

Croly's interpretation of America's historical legacy, was predicated on the idea that empirical knowledge and morality were distinct. For example, Croly lamented the nature of Jefferson's beliefs which, far from being the product of disinterested thought, had made the natural process of individual acquisition a source for moral value and the centerpiece of the American democratic ideal. Croly asserts.

> . . .they [Jefferson and his followers] have shown an instinctive and an implacable distrust of intellectual and moral independence. . . . [T]heir good intentions did not prevent them from actively or passively opposing positive intellectual and moral achievement, directed either towards social or individual ends. The effect of their whole state of mind was negative and fatalistic. They approved in general of everything approvable, but the things of which they actively approved were the things which everybody in general was doing.[69]

What everybody was doing was pursuing individual ends and Jefferson's endorsement of the immediately expedient was achieved by raising experience to the level of a virtue or a creed. Jefferson also provided for his future popularity by not construing the American purpose as a struggle, rather he legislated an ethic everyone was already content with. He suggested that governmental interference in the natural state of affairs was wrong and the "limitations of their [the people's] own economic experience and of their

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69 Ibid., pgs. 44- 45.

practical needs confirmed them in this belief."[70] At variance with Jefferson's intellectually narrow perception of social polity, Alexander Hamilton had the intellectual and moral courage to see and strive beyond immediate experience and conditions. Croly claims: "Hamilton's policy was one of energetic assertion of the natural good. He knew that the only method whereby the good could prevail either in individual or social life was by persistently willing that it should prevail and by the adoption of intelligent means to that end. . . . Hamilton was not afraid to exhibit in his own life moral and intellectual independence."[71]

Hamilton's courage to discover, in thought, ways of creating a more moral form of associated life for Americans, led him to conclude that intervention in the natural state of affairs was necessary. If Jefferson had allowed the phenomenal world to dictate the terms of American democratic value, Hamilton found that intervention via the government, when buttressed by disinterested and rigorous thought, could be the source for an ideal promise. As such, Croly offers an intellectual and philosophical critique of Jeffersonianism that issues fundamentally from his strict idealism. Jefferson's laissez-faire ideas and Hamilton's ideas of intervention actually have similar implications. The difference centered on Jefferson accepting experience in the natural world as definitive and Hamilton appealing to thought and ideas. "The practice of non-interference" Croly writes, "is just as selective in its effects as the practice of state interference. It means merely that the nation is willing to accept the results of natural selection instead of preferring to substitute the results of artificial selection. . . . If a selective policy is pursued in good faith and with sufficient

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70 Ibid., pg. 56.

71 Ibid., pg. 45.

intelligence, the nation will at least be learning from its mistakes."[72]

Herbert Croly's appreciation of Andrew Jackson and the Jacksonian democrats is founded upon the same premise. Jackson, much like Jefferson, was incapable of conceiving of things beyond the bounds of his own experience. As a result, he let the natural world determine his ideas. This was the sign of intellectual turpitude; Jackson's ideas could not grasp the complexity and change that existed either outside his own context or in the future. American society, then, was bound to serve its immediate needs heedless of the implications its policies may occasion later on.

> . . .the Jacksonian Democrat undoubtedly believed, when he introduced the [spoils] system into the Federal civil service, that he was carrying out a desirable reform along strictly democratic lines. He was betrayed into such an error by the narrowness of his own experience and of his intellectual outlook. His experience had been chiefly that of frontier life, in which the utmost freedom of economic and social movement was necessary; and he attempted to apply the results of this limited experience to the government of a complicated social organism whose different parts had very different needs.[73]

In contrast to Jackson, Croly claimed that Abraham Lincoln was the ultimate statesman who appealed beyond experience, practice and policies designed to "flatter", in favour of a constructive and farsighted ideal.

> Lincoln, on the other hand, was in his whole moral and intellectual make-up a living protest against the aggressive, irresponsible, and merely practical Americanism of his day; while at the same time in the greatness of his love and understanding he never allowed his distinction to divide him from his fellow-countrymen. His was the unconscious and

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72 Ibid., pgs. 190-191.

73 Ibid., pg. 60.

> constructive heresy which looked in the direction of national intellectual independence and national moral union and good faith.[74]

Implicit in The Promise of American Life is the assertion that the basis for authority in society and politics should fundamentally include a priori ideas. "Back of it all is the underlying assumption . . . in the power of the idea to create its own object. . . ."[75] Americans could no longer avoid their philosophic responsibility to examine their inherited ideas, established codes, and accepted practices, especially when these were obviously incompatible with economic changes that had taken place since the Civil War. Therefore, at the heart of any intellectual context for reform, stands an appreciation for the power of reflective thought. As an idealist, Croly's frequent references in The Promise in American Life to engage in intellectual effort represented calls for action through disinterested thought. Croly was, in fact, trying to establish something quite quixotic; he was suggesting that only when thought is separated from experience could it have any relevance for people's lives. This emancipated form of reasoning is particularly important for Americans whose national fabric has been founded upon the primacy of experience as both a source for moral value and for ideas.

> Jefferson offered them [Pioneer Americans] a seductive example of triumphant intellectual dishonesty, and of the sacrifice of theory to practice, whenever such a sacrifice was convenient. . . . The way to escape similar trouble in the future is to go on preaching ideality. . . . We can continue to celebrate our "noble national theory" and preserve our perfect

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74 Ibid., pg. 427.

75 Ibid., pg. 401.

> democratic system until the end of time without making any of the individual sacrifices or taking any of the collective risks, inseparable from a *systematic* attempt to make our words good.[76] [italics mine]

Thought, exercised as a form of philosophical speculation, was to be the starting point for any "regeneration". And for Croly, the culmination of this disinterested introspection would reveal itself in an ideal. "In this country the solution of the social problem demands the substitution of a conscious social ideal for the earlier instinctive homogeneity of the American nation."[77] Experience was too limiting; it could only provide insight into truth during its unfolding or in retrospect, it could not accommodate a goal or "ideal" towards which human activity could be directed. Only reason, divorced from the circumstances of the phenomenal world, could project an ideal which social, economic and political structures should approximate.

Central to this American ideal, according to Croly, would necessarily have to be a new conception of individual freedom. Croly's examination of American history revealed that individual freedom had been inextricably linked to an ethos of selfish acquisition. But Croly also knew individual freedom properly redefined according to moral ends, could also be redeemed. Consequently, Croly was rejecting past intellectual habits; Americans would need to reconsider a number of their fundamental social and political convictions.

His ideas for reform and the necessary reevaluation of America's accepted creeds are informed by a deep commitment to Kant and Royce.

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[76] Ibid., pg. 419.

[77] Ibid., pg. 139.

Specifically, his reconception of individual freedom bears remarkable parallels to Immanuel Kant's reflections on the same topic. Separating the phenomenal world or the world of experience from the search for moral laws led Kant to find in the "Categorical Imperative" a way to morally constitute the world. The use of the word categorical is suggestive here because Kant argued that some concepts are not the product of experience but precede experience and are a priori - these are part of the basic rules of the mind and Kant calls them "categories." The Categorical Imperative both exists apart from experience and is at the heart of Kant's conception of freedom because it explains that morality is the outcome of one's obedience to a law which is found within ourselves, not in the world of experience. This is part of our "intelligible" self, through which we have the capacity to be free from the dictates of the phenomenal world. People can distance themselves from the mandates of experience in the natural world because we can regulate behaviour in accordance with our own law - the moral law.[78] According to Kant: "[I]n the case of this categorical imperative, or law of morality, the reason for the difficulty (of discerning its possibility) is quite serious. The categorical imperative is an a priori synthetic practical proposition. . . ."[79]

Conversely, Dewey's ethics in being defined and redefined according to our changing experiences, were explicitly non-categorical. Dewey's ethics were also based on science in which the method of experimental inquiry was the foundation of understanding. Therefore, questions of morality should issue from what was empirical and testable. Duty, obligation and responsibility were of no

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78 Susan Meld Shell, The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation and Community (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), Chapter 9.

79 Immanuel Kant "Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals," in Immanuel Kant :Ethical Philosophy ed. Warner Wick, (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), pg. 29.

importance for Dewey who believed that statements of fact were indeed statements of value.[80] As such, he rejected the existence of any external source of authority for deciding questions of value and ethics. Most notably he was referring to a priori ideas, which Kant suggested, through reason, should be brought to bear authoritarian-like on human conduct. For Dewey, society must harvest the facts of human nature to demonstrate how ethical knowledge was itself bound by or was an annex to the sciences. Dewey writes:

> From this point of view there is no separate body of moral rules; no separate system of motive powers; no separate subject-matter of moral knowledge, and hence no such thing as an isolated ethical science. If the business of morals is not to speculate upon man's final end, and upon the ultimate standard of right, it is to utilize physiology, anthropology and psychology to discover all that can be discovered of man, his organic powers and propensities.[81]

In contrast, Kant links the Categorical Imperative to freedom by suggesting that a person who is governed by morality and not by one's impulses and appetites is free. As a consequence, the Categorical Imperative suggests that the moral will is the autonomous will.[82] It is important to note that following one's moral law or the Categorical Imperative was congruent with freedom precisely because it was removed from material rewards by being associated with the "intelligible" self.

Dewey valued the progress driven by results. Conversely, the effects or consequences of one's actions, according to the Categorical Imperative, were

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80 Diggins, op. cit., pg. 371.

81 John Dewey, "Intelligence and Morals," (1908) in The Middle Works 1899-1924, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, (Carbondale, Illinois: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1983), vol. IV, pg. 45.

82 Kedourie, op. cit., pg. 16.

inconsequential to the moral law; it is primarily the motive of the individual that counts. Moreover, the Categorical Imperative does not command: Do this to derive happiness; it extols duty for duty's sake on the basis of a priori principle. The Categorical Imperative then, is an ideal which is not fully realizable, but provides direction and guidance. Freedom and morality become the quest for perfection and principle, rather than the "process" of Dewey's philosophy which prized an individual's continuing accommodation to his or her social and physical context.

This represented a profound disclosure in the realm of American political thought; politics as the realization of moral behaviour through the coupling of individual freedom and a socialized ideal, became a struggle for principle and perfection, rather then the arena for compromise. Croly was interested in politics primarily as a moral endeavour, but his thought was grounded in the notion that the natural world could not be the source of moral value. His fondness for philosophy, however, led him to discover in individual freedom and collective purpose, a basis for moral behaviour. Politics then, would be the domain in which human action could create a synthesis between moral behaviour and the world of actual experience. As such, Croly was searching for moral strictures that existed prior to and behind political behaviour. Political structures could not bring about these changes, but could only be a reflection of proper moral conduct.

> The sort of institutional and economic reorganization suggested in the preceding chapters is not, consequently to be conceived merely as a more or less dubious proposal to improve human nature by laws. It is to be conceived as possibly the next step in the realization of a necessary collective purpose. Its deeper significance does not consist

> in the results which it may accomplish by way of immediate improvement. . . . [F]ar more important than any practical benefits would be the indication it afforded of national good faith.[83]

Moreover, this recognition that America needed a fundamental change in thought, which would then manifest itself in more concrete reforms, was quite distant from the ideas espoused by many of Croly's progressive contemporaries. Progressive change was often founded on opposite premises, hoping that immediate measures including the referendum, recall, initiative and direct primary would themselves encourage people to think and relate to government in different ways.

For Croly, as for Kant, the struggle to establish and assert the primacy of the intelligible self was profoundly important. This quest for change was linked directly to an intellectual awakening, but it was (thanks to Kant's influence) also determined by individual action, and The Promise of American Life is full of calls for intellectual and individual liberation. "American moral and intellectual emancipation," Croly counsels, "can be achieved only by a victory over the ideas, the conditions, and the standards which make Americanism tantamount to collective irresponsibility and to the moral and intellectual subordination of the individual to a commonplace political average."[84] The Promise of American Life proposes this introspection as an attempt to invest individual freedom with a moral dimension. Individual action should be separated from the world of knowledge or experience (i.e., from pecuniary gain or reward), and it should be bound to a principle. Motive, therefore, becomes the defining feature of individual accomplishment.

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83 Herbert Croly, op. cit., pg. 405.

84 Ibid., pg. 426.

> The truth is that individuality cannot be disassociated from the pursuit of a disinterested object. It is a moral and intellectual quality, and it must be realized by moral and intellectual means. A man achieves individual distinction, not by the enterprise and vigour with which he accumulates money, but by the zeal and the skill with which he pursues an exclusive interest - an interest usually, but not necessarily, connected with his means of livelihood. . . . He may have been in appearance just as selfish as a man who spends most of his time in making money, but if his work has been thoroughly well done, he will, in making himself an individual, have made an essential contribution to national fulfilment.[85]

Individual freedom figures prominently in Croly's political philosophy. The expression of individuality is an essential component of morality, but Croly makes clear that true individual freedom is underpinned by a moral ideal that was itself the product of disinterested thought and not the decree of governmental law. Individuality, secured by means of law, and without the requisite intellectual awakening, was exemplified in the doctrine of equal rights. Equal rights, enshrined by Thomas Jefferson, was a baleful attempt to democratize the American political system because it actually hindered true individual expression. Through equal rights, individual distinction and individuality itself were stymied by homogenizing individual expression toward a commonplace average.

> The principle of equal rights has always appealed to its more patriotic and sensible adherents as essentially an impartial rule of political action - one that held a perfectly fair balance between the individual and society, and between different and hostile individual and class interests. . . . In practice it has proved to be inimical to individual liberty, efficiency and distinction. An insistent demand for equality, even in the form of a demand for equal rights, inevitably has a negative and limiting effect upon the free and able exercise of

85 Ibid., pgs. 411- 412.

> individual opportunities. From the Jefferson point of view democracy would incur a graver danger from a violation of equality than it would profit from a triumphant assertion of individual liberty.[86]

A true reconstructive policy according to Croly would then be subject to the principles and ideas that are the wellsprings of moral action, and that lie behind and before any programmatic political proposals. Like Kant, Croly accepts the premise that moral action is the product of an "intelligible" self - or a product of our rational capacity which imposes itself over and above any experiential data. A political culture that prizes individual distinction and a communitarian ethic will necessarily reflect this origin. He writes:

> Democrats have always tended to claim some such superiority for their methods and purposes, but in case democracy is to be considered merely as a piece of political machinery, or a partial political idea, the claim has no validity. Its superiority must be based upon the fact that democracy is the best possible translation into political and social terms of an authoritative and comprehensive moral idea; and, provided a democratic state honestly seeks to make its organization and policy contribute to a better quality of individuality and a higher level of associated life, it can within certain limits claim the allegiance of mankind on rational moral grounds.[87]

Croly's interpretive framework throughout The Promise of American Life, maintains the very Kantian conception of the intimate connection of morality and individual freedom. Croly is very critical, for instance, of European political systems in which individuality and social cohesion could not be made congruent. In part, rigid class differences did not allow Europeans to associate on the level of their own individuality. Furthermore, these Europeans were

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86 Ibid., pgs. 185-186.

87 Ibid., pg. 208.

misguided by making tradition (a tradition gathered from experience in the phenomenal world) their source for value and by cementing their national cohesion and fashioning their political institutions as direct reflections of it. While effective for a time, the lack of a moral ideal or principle as a guide for constructive action meant that Europeans could not escape the rigid legacy of their history or "the pressure of historical events."[88] They could not escape the past by appealing to a set of absolute ideals that existed beyond the process of history and beyond their own particular historical anchorage. "Restricted as they were by the facts of national history, they lacked," according to Croly, "the ultimate moral significance of the democratic ideal, which permits the transformation of patriotic fidelity into devotion to the highest and most comprehensive interests of humanity and civilization."[89]

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88 Ibid., pg. 227.

89 Ibid., pg. 266. Some scholars have found in Croly's emphasis on nationalism and nationalization a distinct Hegelian influence. One such historian is David W. Noble whose Paradox of Progressive Thought (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), is perhaps the best articulation of this connection. While in agreement with his assumption that one must look to philosophy to uncover the true nature of Croly's thought in The Promise of American Life, I differ on the sources of influence. Noble suggests: "There is something of a very real parallel between the central points of Croly's political theory and those connected with Hegelian conservatism: (1) The unformed individual comes as inferior to an already established group of social institutions. (2) This unformed individual is not capable of acting on a civilized or cooperative plane by himself; he can reach such a plane only through the mediation of the state. (3) The individual can perceive the pattern of development which had resulted in the creation of the national state and thus can form an absolute code of ethics, but he cannot go outside the historical pattern; he can look only to the past, not to the future. (4) Finally, the education of men, given these other principles, must be a training that will bring them to respect authority, for only through such subordination to the existing social condition can man's spiritual self escape from the eternal conflict with the selfish, physical self." pg. 65. The connection thus articulated ignores the fundamental importance Croly accorded the individual. Individual freedom and distinction, as a moral phenomenon, not as something actualized through the state, was absolutely central to Croly's definition of national cohesion. Furthermore, Croly was searching for a metaphysical and moral condition or context for reform that lay beyond the power of political and institutional structures to affect. As such, one should view the nation-state as the yield of this "awakening" not as its initiator; and, therefore, Croly was suggesting precisely that Americans escape history and appeal to the a priori in an attempt to criticize existing institutions, practices and conventions.

It is no surprise then, that Croly refers to the program of American reconstruction as "equivalent to a new Declaration of Independence."[90] Americans could look neither to their own history, nor to the experience of the Europeans, in the quest for a new promise. "[T]here comes a time in the history of every nation, when its independence of spirit vanishes, unless it emancipates itself in some measure from its traditional illusions; and that time is fast approaching for the American people. They must either seize the chance of a better future, or else become a nation which is satisfied in spirit merely to repeat indefinitely the monotonous measures of its own past."[91]

Croly was expressing here a profoundly different philosophy than that of Auguste Comte. For Comte, events, ideas and other phenomena are subject to a historical evolution which is essentially marked by a sense of continuity and progress. Thus, Comte could argue for the relative nature of all phenomena because, while all phenomena share a historical sense of progress, all phenomena do so at different rates and without reference to some common "end." Here one finds his stages of historical development which express an almost dogmatic belief in the progressive historical evolution of all affairs. In contrast, the entire purpose of Croly's book was based on the fact that America could, and should, escape the confines of history which, in fact, did not exhibit a sense of ineluctable progress. Americans then, could defy historical continuity by voluntarily positing some independent end, goal or ideal as the guide for future action and progress.

Kant's emphasis on individual freedom and self determination as the

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90 Ibid., pg. 278.

91 Ibid., pg. 279.

necessary elements in the demands of our conscience is curiously anathema to Croly's whole endeavour in The Promise of American Life. Croly was, after all, seeking a substitute for the Jeffersonian view of man as a self-sufficient individual. Yet, at this juncture, Croly drew upon Royce's influence in an effort to have the individual strive toward an ideal purpose that was constituted outside himself. Furthermore, Royce's thought also helped galvanise and redefine Croly's conception of politics as part of the larger societal fulfilment of an ideal. Royce's thought was palpable in Croly's conception of this ideal as absolute. Politics, in which movement towards this absolute becomes a defining function, should reflect this commitment to a humane goal or ideal.

The conflict between the community and the individual acutely distressed Royce, and much of his philosophy issued from his desire to free the individual from his fragmentary and isolated individuality. Much like Kant, Royce found a solution within morality, specifically the moral meaning derived from the concept of community. It is only through the realization that they are members of a community can individuals realize a supra-personal unity that exists beyond themselves. Individuals, then, lose their individual purpose and identify themselves with others as a social community. And only as part of the social community can an individual function morally. It is important to understand, though, that individuals are to compose a community not on the basis of shared individuality, but through loyalty to an absolute. Royce suggests, "This loyalty no longer knows anything about the old circular conflicts of self-will and of conformity. The self, at such moments, looks indeed outwards for its plan of life."[92] This absolute was the mediating point between the individual and the

92 Josiah Royce, "The Philosophy of Loyalty," in ed. John Roth, The Philosophy of Josiah Royce (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982), pg. 288.

community. Moral individuality then, was predicated on a thoroughgoing socialization and it is only through the aforementioned loyalty to an absolute that the fragmentary experiences of life are brought into a coherently constituted personality. The absolute was the medium through which Royce could reconcile freedom and order. Furthermore, as the product of the "intelligible" self and moral purpose, Royce's absolute was an ideal that was removed from the contingencies of the natural world.[93]

The central virtue of loyalty was the action by which an individual expressed the purpose of realizing the absolute. Loyalty transforms an "intelligible" self into the active self by binding individuals to others in a system defined by the larger aims of an absolute ideal. For Royce, the community, often described as a divine precept, is the ideal in which the individual can be redeemed, therefore, no individual can grasp the absolute in isolation. The community and the loyalty to this ideal were moral precisely because they represented a struggle with no material reward. Social unity, through unity of consciousness, was a moral struggle that existed beyond the selfish interests of individuals. As such, Royce's critique of individualism was metaphysical and not strictly political.[94]

Croly was fully aware that a humane polity, grounded only in individual expression, was potentially unworkable in the American context. Influenced by his mentor, Josiah Royce, and explicitly at variance with the ideas of Auguste Comte, Croly suggests that democracy and nationality should be subsumed into a uniquely American principle or ideal freed from its historical moorings. "The

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93 R. Jackson Wilson, In Quest of Community: Social Philosophy in the United States 1860-1920 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1968), pg. 146.

94 Ibid., Chapter 6.

American democracy can trust its interest to the national interest, because American national cohesion is dependent, not only upon certain forms of historical association, but upon fidelity to a democratic principle."[95] Croly did not suggest that collective action had been non-existent in American history. In fact, a certain loyalty to shared purposes created the atmosphere of agreement in which the Constitution was signed and helped secure a measure of fidelity for the document among the people. "They [the Fathers] were all by way of being property-owners, and they all expected to benefit by freedom from interference in the acquisition of wealth. It was this community of interest and point of view which prepared the way, not only for the adoption of the Constitution, but for the loyalty it subsequently inspired in the average American."[96] Now, however, a new communitarian ideal had to be created and more importantly, it would have to be national in its scope. Croly called this "nationalization", a process in which democracy and nationality (or the national interest) become linked:

> [D]emocracy is to be realized by means of an intensification of their national life, just as the ultimate moral purpose of an individual is to be realized by the affirmation and intensification of its own better individuality. . . . An American, on the other hand, has it quite within his power to accept a conception of democracy which provides for the substantial integrity of his country, not only as a nation with an exclusively democratic mission, but as a democracy with an essentially national career.[97]

The role of the individual which Croly attempted to redefine in terms of

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95 Herbert Croly, op. cit., pg. 267.

96 Ibid., pg. 32.

97 Ibid., pgs. 271-272.

freedom and moral action, had a curious role within the national promise. Individual freedom or self-determination is important as the moral arbiter in individual life, but for Croly, individual will and the collective will were not going to mesh ineluctably through individual moral action. This can be explained because Croly adopted the absolute idealism of Royce, in which the communitarian ideal or purpose, as construed outside the individual, must be willed purposively. This collective purpose was an ideal that existed outside one's individual experiences and interests, and must therefore be deliberately brought into being. "Individuals can be 'uplifted' without 'uplifting' the nation," Croly wrote "because the nation has an individuality of its own, which cannot be increased without the consciousness of collective responsibilities and the collective official attempt to redeem them."[98] Moreover, through this collective purpose individuals will experience a certain freedom as they strive toward a moral ideal that is removed from their more prosaic interests, desires and appetites. "It is none the less true that any success in the achievement of the national purpose" Croly noted "will contribute positively to the liberation of the individual, both by diminishing his temptations . . . and by enveloping him in an invigorating rather than an enervating moral and intellectual atmosphere."[99]

Croly's prescription for a new economic policy is an extension of his political program. Traditional economic policy was undirected and accepted the results of natural selection by acknowledging existing economic advantages as inherently agreeable. The legacy of this individualism created significant obstacles for future competition and therefore, effective individual and corporate

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98 Ibid., pg. 407.

99 Ibid., pg. 409.

achievement. The question Croly was particularly concerned with, was how to create economic policy that secured individual opportunity, promoted a national purpose, and diffused these "benefits over a larger social area."[100] The answer uncovered in The Promise in American Life was to actively interfere in the economic system so as to reorient it toward a national ideal or purpose. Again, this would allow a humane distribution of wealth, and allow opportunity for individual freedom and distinction. Croly claimed:

> An economic organization framed in the national interest would conform to the same principles as a political organization framed in the national interest. It would stimulate the peculiarly efficient individual. . . . It would grant him these opportunities under conditions which would tend to bring about their responsible use. And it would seek to make the results promote the general economic welfare.[101]

Central to Croly's economic suggestions is the importance of defining individual achievement not in terms of rewards - but through motive. Croly's illustration of individuality is metaphysical and intellectual - only through the individual's emancipation from pecuniary reward can both true individual achievement and collective purpose emerge. Croly asserts, "Even pecuniary independence is usually purchased at the price of moral and intellectual bondage."[102] Croly's solution, however, was not to abandon the existing system but to "not accept human nature as it is" and appeal beyond rewards toward a shared ideal. Individual accomplishment, social cohesion, and the political and economic structure in which these actions become a defining commitment, will

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100 Ibid., pg. 368.
101 Ibid., pg. 368.
102 Ibid., pg. 412.

reflect this quest for principle and perfection. The absoluteness of this principle or ideal is justified because it cannot vacillate according to the vagaries of experience, and is therefore ultimately moral. "For better or worse, democracy cannot be disentangled from an aspiration toward human perfectibility, and hence from the adoption of measures looking in the direction of realizing such an aspiration."[103]

Croly, the non-conformist progressive, managed to articulate a philosophy anchored in the idealism of absolute knowledge and ethics. John Dewey, who contributed more dramatically to progressive thought, valued a relativism grounded in the contingency of a changing environment. For progressives caught in the seeming contradiction of the two philosophies, Croly's *Promise* offered enough programmatic political proposals of interest without necessarily forcing these progressive intellectuals to confront, question or compromise their emerging beliefs. With Progressive Democracy, however, this was impossible. Twentieth century American political theory was moving in a very different direction than Croly's. Science, pragmatism, instrumentalism and relativism were revolutionizing both the content and the nature of political philosophy in American intellectual circles. Moral value was becoming increasingly irrelevant to political discussion. Yet, Croly, in 1914, undertook the task of updating the political and social ideas he penned in The Promise of American Life. Instead of reflecting the trends toward scientific circumspection, value neutral analysis, and the emphasis on the practicable and immediately obtainable, Croly's analysis in Progressive Democracy, was even more speculative, idealist and moralist. Far from the "Americanization" of Croly's

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103 Ibid., pg. 454.

thought, his second book reflected an alienation from native intellectual currents precisely when these currents could boast a palpable level of acceptance and maturity.

Chapter III

"Progressive Democracy" and the Metaphysics of Progressivism

It has often been remarked as strange that the same critics and reformers who enthusiastically embraced The Promise of American Life's clarion call for a new reform spirit, never assigned the same importance to Herbert Croly's Progressive Democracy (1914). How could Croly's second book, published only five years after his first, and which he claims "carries the argument somewhat further than it was carried in The Promise of American Life, but it remains in my mind only a supplement thereto," occasion such a cool reception?[104] There is something of a parallel between these two works in organization, analysis and conclusion. What accounts, then, for Progressive Democracy's equivocal reception were the prevailing intellectual currents including Reformed Darwinism, Pragmatism, and a relativism grounded in scientific inquiry which sentenced Croly's absolutist idealism to "sterility." Since The Promise of American Life, Croly's ideas had become more than unfashionable; they offered fundamentally dissimilar visions for the second decade's progressive call to action.

The progressive era, that broad and ambiguously defined period devoted to social and political change, is most often used to define the years extending from 1900 to 1917. Historians have characterized progressivism under such a

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[104] David W. Levy, Herbert Croly of the New Republic: The Life and Thought of an American Progressive (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), pg. 1.

panoply of diverse and often contradictory labels that Peter Filene, in an article entitled "An Obituary for the 'Progressive Movement,'" (1970) has suggested that the lack of consensus over the basic facts of this period of social and political ferment, is evidence of the term's dubious authority as a meaningful label for the period. The historiographical confusion over this period in American history is significant insofar as it reveals the fin-de-siecle to be a period of striking speculative activity. Herbert Croly's book Progressive Democracy was certainly a consequence of this turbulent period. Yet, while Croly has been referred to as one of the intellectual progenitors of progressivism - a close evaluation of both the era's intellectual "style" and the substance of Croly's book reveal that the two could only co-exist in tension.

It was the philosophical form in which the questions of progressivism presented themselves to the mind of the sensitive Croly which marks the point of difference. By 1914, Pragmatism and a Darwinian inspired relativism had sustained a certain common acceptance and was being made to suit the needs of those pursuing active reform. As historian Arthur Mann suggests, "By the 1910's a consensus for reform defined the goals for many areas of American life. That decade was the high noon of the progressive era."[105] Palpable evidence of this consensus is revealed in the passage of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Amendments, in 1913, of the once sacred Constitution.[106] Croly was aware of this intellectual current and his observations are supported by the reviews of his book Progressive Democracy. Nonetheless, Croly assiduously

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105 Arthur Mann, "Introduction," in The Progressive Era ed. Arthur Mann (Hinsdale, Illinois: The Dryden Press, 1975), pg. 2.

106 Thomas McCraw, "The Progressive Legacy," in The Progressive Era ed. Lewis Gould (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1974), pg. 181.

refined and elaborated his metaphysical and a priori approach to political, social and economic problems that other progressives probed in scientific and pragmatic form. Ultimately Croly believed that reality could be authentically represented in the "idea" and that we need to know not merely what the state is, but what it ought to be.

"There is a lack of concreteness in his [Croly's] proposals, he sets forth ideals, but when it comes to the matter of finding ways and means of realizing them the discussion barely escapes sinking into verbalism and futility."[107] This passage from a review of Progressive Democracy by Henry J. Ford in the American Political Science Review reflects the general perception held by reviewers and reformers that Croly's intellectual commitment to an absolute idealism was now outdated and ineffective for meeting the exigencies of the early twentieth century. Progressive Democracy, Croly's second treatise on political philosophy and published from his Godkin Lectures at Harvard, was troubling to many who could not escape the limitating implications of his frequent references to the need for "faith" and his vaguely defined ideals. A review in The New York Times, criticized Croly's work as "extremely abstract . . . a little abstruse and often seems needlessly dry. . . ."[108]

While all the reviewers examined articulated in depth analyses of Croly's programmatic proposals for further legislation, amending the Constitution, and achieving direct democracy, they invariably made reference to the inconcreteness and a priori rationalization that undergirded his guides for human action. One such review appeared in the Nation. Here, the reviewer

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107 American Political Science Review, 9 (1915): pgs. 409-410.

108 New York Times Book Review, November 22, 1914.

perceptively acknowledged Croly's references to the need for an "independent authority" of faith to supplement the progress of democracy. Suggesting that the faith is tied to Croly's conception of the "morality of self-expression" the reviewer asserts: "All you have to do is embrace the faith vigorously and the rest is easy. One might adopt Luther's famous motto, *pecca fortiter sed fide fortius*; it matters not what mistakes are made, if the faith holds out."[109] Ultimately, this reviewer also found Croly's speculative philosophy and idealism unpalatable, and indicated that the book's vagueness undermined the entire endeavour of his work. "But carefully wrought as is the book, it strikes one as essentially a piece of 'closet philosophy' built up a priori, within four walls, detached and abstract in character rather then actual, concrete, and inductive. . . . Its kinship is with the visions of utopia that intoxicated men's minds a hundred or more years ago."[110]

These observations represented a profound difference from the critical acclaim that accompanied his first book. The Promise of American Life , while selling only 7500 copies, which was meagre even by the standards of the day, was widely praised by a broad spectrum of journals, magazines and newspapers. Reviewers were particularly impressed by the detailed and concrete commentary, specifically his appeal to a thoroughly nationalized state that could solve the problems occasioned by the concentration of wealth and power that were the legacy of a reverence for Jeffersonian ideas. It was the critics here, who reflect the accepted influence of the new intellectual "style" that set in relief the century's second decade, and indeed progressivism, from the preceding years. Reviewers of Croly's The Promise of American Life , by

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109 Nation, 100 (April 29, 1915): pgs. 469-470.
110 Ibid.

ignoring his obvious appeal to the ultimate emancipatory nature of one's devotion to a moral and absolute ideal, were revealing the lingering effects of a nineteenth century thought system in which an appeal to absolutes was common and not sufficient cause for admonition. With the notable exception of Theodore Roosevelt, even Croly's friends and colleagues were more equivocal in their reception of his second work. The attitude of Willard Straight, Croly's source of financial and intellectual support in later establishing the New Republic, is suggestive here. His reception of both books reflects the change in prevailing intellectual influences which helped condemn Progressive Democracy to obscurity. He suggested that "The Promise was specific. You mentioned names. Your vocabulary was familiar. In this work [Progressive Democracy] you go to fundamentals and talk the philosophy of it all."[111]

Straight's critique of Progressive Democracy is equally applicable to Croly's The Promise of American Life. But, by 1914, Croly's reverence for a guiding metaphysical faith and a commitment to a transcendent absolute goal, was incompatible with the growing pragmatic - progressive approach to social and political commentary which approached the nation's ills with answers that were deemed correct because they accommodated themselves to the brute fact revealed by science. Despite the differences in public perception, however, Progressive Democracy was, in obvious ways, "a supplement" to the The Promise of American Life. Croly maintains a philosophic consistency in attempting to harmonize individual freedom with an absolute and metaphysical goal. In The Promise of American Life this goal or ideal was represented by a socialized nationalism; in Progressive Democracy it referred to a progressive

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111 Willard Straight, quoted in Levy, op. cit., pg. 174.

democratic state. As well, Croly began both works with a candid and involved historical exploration that was similar both in form and content. In both passages his conclusions concerning specific issues like the nature of further political development, the consequences of the closing of the frontier, and the effect of American economic development programs, were remarkably similar. More importantly, these sections of both books revolved around his more general premise that a conflict existed in American historical thought which needed to be transcended before further material, political, cultural or social progress could be realized. In The Promise of American Life, the source of tension emanated from loyalties to the conflicting political philosophies of Hamilton and Jefferson; and in Progressive Democracy , the problem centered around the incompatible American commitment to individual fulfilment within a system of political (i.e., Constitutional) restraint. It was this need to propose an intellectual context for reform and his loyalty to a priori ideals as solutions, that link Croly's books beyond the differences in the specifics of foreign policy, labour reform and tools for the more direct expression of democratic will (i.e., the recall, referendum, initiative and direct primary).

Croly's philosophy of politics, then, was explicit in its reluctance to establish concrete and easily definable programs for national regeneration. It was this crucial thesis - whether Americans could reach their destiny - which was more important than any practical or mechanistic proposal to achieve it. As he claimed in Progressive Democracy - "The goal is sacred. The program is fluid." Therefore, Croly was more interested in the ways in which an absolute or transcendent ideal could not only shape the context of prevailing reformist discussion, but, coupled with a faith in its promise, could guide people toward

individual and social regeneration without the retributive dictates of its imposition by law. He suggested, "The really permanent element in the life of the community will be derived not from the accepted aspects of the program, but from the progressive democratic faith and ideal. The community will be united not by any specific formulation of the law, but by the sincerity and the extent of its devotion to a liberal and humane purpose."[112]

Croly's emphasis on the regenerative possibilities of this faith in the ideal reveals the influence of Immanuel Kant, in that he saw the metaphysical ideal as known independently of sensory experience and brought to light by the knower. As such, Croly was unconcerned with providing a concrete definition of the progressive democratic ideal since its fruition would be the yield of people's faith not its cause. Nonetheless, Croly ends Progressive Democracy with a provocative attempt to define this goal. He stated that:

> If the prevailing legalism and a repressive moral code are associated with the rule of live-and-let-live, the progressive democratic faith finds its consummation rather in the rule of live-and-help-live. The underlying assumption of live-and-help-live is an ultimate collectivism, which conceives different human beings as part of the same conscious material, and which makes individual fulfilment depend upon the fulfilment of other lives and upon that of society as a whole. . . . Thus the progressive democratic faith, like the faith of St. Paul, finds its consummation in a love which is partly expressed in sympathetic feeling, but which is at bottom a spiritual expression of the mystical unity of human nature.[113]

The goal or ideal then, is the ultimate reconciliation of individual freedom and

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[112] Herbert Croly, Progressive Democracy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915), pg. 358.
[113] Ibid., pgs. 426-427.

social cohesion which is the consummation of this progressive democratic faith. Here was Josiah Royce's loyalty to an absolute coupled with Immanuel Kant's notion of the community actualizing itself through the individual.

It is here in Progressive Democracy's illustration of the "mystical unity of human nature," that Croly expresses a sympathy for the moral ends of Auguste Comte's "Religion of Humanity." Comte defined this creed as a somewhat transcendent belief that humanity could achieve a certain eternal social unity based on a sentimentalized "humanhood." Comte formally codified a catechism, a system of sacraments and other details of this religious utopia in a manner consistent with tendency a to dogmatism. For David Croly, and for Herbert, however, this "Religion of Humanity" expressed itself as a quality of feeling, rather than a formal substitution for existing religions.

Croly asserted that the freedom of individuals, which allows for their pursuit of the faith in a progressive democratic ideal, was essential, and while the ultimate goal is communitarian, it depends fundamentally on its potential to be created by individuals who freely choose to realize it. Croly termed this "faith in the power of faith." Therefore, this ideal, through the aggregate of individual faith, has this universal identity and character of necessity through which it becomes meaningful and true. Programmatic concerns like amending the Constitution must be subject to a criterion of this truth, i.e., would certain amendments reflect (or help engender) a faith in a progressive and communitarian democratic ideal?

Croly's belief that social regeneration was possible through faith in an a priori and abstract principle was profoundly different from the scientific relativism and pragmatism of progressive thought, which, as a product of the

broadening of evolutionary thought, manifested itself in an opposition to permanent values. The historian Henry May sees the year 1912 as a watershed in the manifestation of this intellectual climate and has used the term "Victorian" to describe the years before this turnabout. Inextricably linked to the Victorian mind-set, was an idealism which suggested that reality is that which is known, and since knowing is dependent on the mind, reality is found in the idea. Then as May suggests, "in the middle of the century, evolutionary science had raised a new set of spectres."[114] What Charles Darwin and his followers did, was to undermine this Victorian method of knowing by positing a naturalistic, evolutionary and mechanistic explanatory model for the world, including human development. The pre-war progressive intellectuals, nourished on this toxic responsibility to context and fact, rebelled and triumphed against the absolute, static, and moralistic Victorian intellectual commitments. It is precisely this ontological point of conflict within the progressive era, which most essentially differentiated the pre-war progressives from the Victorians.[115] Through the understanding of this intellectual shift, one can better understand how Croly's speculative, metaphysical philosophy, as the basis from which he launched into political and social criticism, could have located him squarely against the

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114 Henry May, The End of American Innocence (London: Johnathan Cape Publishers, 1959), pg. 10.

115 Ibid. May is arguing against the historical understanding of progressivism which suggests that a strictly political approach can explain all its complexity - an approach exemplified by Eric Goldman's Rendezvous with Destiny: A History of Modern American Reform (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963). By suggesting that a profound shift in intellectual "style" occurred before the First World War (of which Croly was most essentially not a part), I am implicitly accepting May's assertion that progressivism, and indeed the decade and a half leading up to the war, are better evaluated and understood by acknowledging the cultural shift in general attitudes and beliefs. For an informative summary of May's approach to progressivism see: Paul Bourke, "The Social Critics and the End of American Innocence: 1907-1921," in The Journal of American Studies 3-4 (1969-1970): pgs. 57-72.

intellectual "style" (and the intellectual tastes of book reviewers) of the era in which, "philosophy had become an elegant pastime instead of a guide to life."[116]

This reorientation in thought came not by the route of philosophy, but science. It is no surprise then, that at the juncture of conflict between the two modes of explaining the world, one finds the influence of Charles Darwin. In his works On the Origin of Species (1859) and Descent of Man (1871), Darwin illustrated how individuals, within their given species, exhibited a range of variation and survival patterns that related to their environment. He asserted: "natural selection acts only by the accumulation of slight modifications of structure or instinct, each profitable to the individual under its conditions of life."[117] Contained within this hypothesis is the assertion that all species are inherently unstable and that none could be considered to be fixed or unchanging. Thought, no less than life itself, was seen as evolutionary and experiential. The mind was a function of this science of life and as a result, Darwin corroded the claims of man's uniqueness based on the ability to conceive of things in the abstract, act morally and exhibit emotions. Darwin's work allowed the social and natural sciences to gain a large measure of freedom from the imposed and fixed classifications of Victorian thought.[118]

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116 Ibid., pg. 11.

117 Charles Darwin, On the Origin of Species (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964 edition), pg. 233.

118 Carl Degler, In Search of Human Nature - The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pg. 9. Darwin's ideas have had a profound impact on the very term "human nature", and figure prominently in historical studies (like Degler's) which attempt to examine, on historical grounds, that phrase as a meaningful yet malleable appellation in thinking and referring to ourselves. For another example of this endeavour see: Merle Curti, Human Nature in American Thought (Columbia, Missouri: The University of Missouri Press, 1968).

Darwin deliberately sought to locate man's moral and intellectual consciousness in relation to the environment. Yet, curiously, while he had limited man's freedom, his scientific accounts of the process of natural selection actually freed a whole spectrum of social science disciplines from what historian Eric Goldman has called conservatism's "steel chain of ideas." These ideas manifested themselves in various forms including the perception of democracy as founded on "self-evident" or "natural" rights, with the most important of these rights being "liberty", including the liberty to acquire property without the interference of government. The source of these beliefs issued from certain perceptions about human nature including the idea that the "mind and emotions were assumed to be fixed structures, ready-made in the womb, which functioned regardless of the environment. Some people were born to success and goodness, others to squalor and sin, and 'you can't change human nature.'"[119] The authority, as Goldman suggested, "came from God Himself. Two doctrines drawn from the Christian tradition were especially emphasised: the concept of the individual as free moral agent, and the doctrine that God has determined the success or failure of each of His children."[120] A number of progressive scholars, influenced by Darwin, made his concepts relevant to all fields of social inquiry and allowed "heredity" and "environment" to explain human action, which replaced the very Victorian idea of individuals rationally determining their own conduct.[121]

The variety of interpretive possibilities reveal the powerful influence of

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119 Eric Goldman, Rendezvous with Destiny: A History of Modern American Reform (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), pgs. 86-87.

120 Ibid.

121 H. Stuart Hughes, Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), pg. 38.

Darwin's scientific naturalism and evolutionary relativism. Social Darwinists, taking as their motto Herbert Spencer's dictum "the survival of the fittest", and building upon the scientific determinism implicit in Darwin's work, justified laissez-faire, social indifference, the individual accumulation of wealth, and other tenets associated with the "steel chain" as natural. Yet, while Social Darwinism found favour on American soil, the progressive mind was characterized by an ascendant philosophy which offered a critique of, and a corrective to, Spencer's interpretation. Eric Goldman has termed this philosophy "Reformed Darwinism", and it claimed to offer a more authentic addendum to Darwin's thoroughgoing evolutionism while it heralded the death of the Victorian classifications of thought.

As the law of competition was becoming increasingly unable to deal with the social and political upheaval of the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, a more proactive and cooperative paradigm for social organization based on the conceptual categories of Reformed Darwinism, was being espoused. As Richard Hofstadter suggests, in Social Darwinism in American Thought : "What ever the human potentialities of this apparatus, for good or evil, the ideals of a cohesive and centralized society became increasingly triumphant over those of the heyday of individualism."[122] It was with the theory of practice called pragmatism that Reformed Darwinism became the prevailing thought system of those seeking social and political change. The generation that had claimed "Grant as its hero, and Spencer as its thinker," were ceding their place to a generation nourished on John Dewey and William

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122 Richard Hofstadter, Social Darwinism in American Thought (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), pg. 122.

James.[123] It was with these two scholars, particularly Dewey, that changes in the traditional concepts of knowledge were fully realized, and with them, evolutionary relativism had evolved into a formidable weapon of social and political criticism.[124]

Like Spencer, Dewey expressed a profound environmentalism based on the contextual foundation of all knowledge. He differed from Spencer, however, in his assertion (which then becomes the defining tenet of Reformed Darwinism) that the environment was not a fixed or static principle, but could be wilfully manipulated by the organism seeking adjustment. Pragmatism, issuing from this belief, was to tear itself from the body of orthodox evolutionary thought and move toward an experimental study of the uses of knowledge - called instrumentalism. Dewey here explicitly rejected the influence of a priori categories that were so much a part of metaphysics and theological speculation. Pragmatism, then, in asserting that human agents had the ability to manipulate the environment in order to seek better adjustment to it, appealed to progressive reformers who thought that the social and economic problems of the fin-de-siecle could only be effectively solved with active governmental interference (e.g., anti-monopoly legislation), and more thoroughly socialized intervention (e.g., settlement houses).

How utterly inadequate were the old ideas and the absolutist character that defined them; here was the call to the experimental method for testing

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123 Ibid., pg. 34.

124 Paul Carter, Revolt Against Destiny - An Intellectual History of the United States (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pg. 138. For a brief account of the consequences of evolutionary thought on philosophy see John Dewey's "The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy," (1908) in The Middle Works 1899-1924, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, (Carbondale, Illinois: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1983), vol. IV, pgs. 1-14.

ideas on the stage of social issues. The meaning of ideas and knowledge itself was wholly dependent on its applicability in maintaining one's equilibrium relative to one's environment - in other words, it was relative. Moreover, the perennial dualities between the real and the ideal, the particular and the general, which stood on familiar terms within the confines of speculative philosophy were now fully cleaved. Pragmatism, in making the fact absolute, was really, as Italian philosopher Giovanni Papini remarked, "less a philosophy than a method of doing without one."[125]

In Progressive Democracy, Croly acknowledged this triumphant pragmatic-progressive context by admitting that it was "the dominant formative influence in American political life."[126] In fact, by the time Progressive Democracy was published, Congress had already passed an income tax, anti-trust legislation, and set up the Interstate Commerce Commission; and state legislatures were regulating the work conditions of men, women and children by setting minimum wages and providing unemployment insurance.[127] Even if the courts were declaring much of this activity unconstitutional, the ethos of involvement suggests that Reformed Darwinism had found itself in the centers of power. Yet throughout his book, Croly seems to transcend the limitations of the progressive intellectual environment by ultimately articulating a faith in the possibility of reconciling individual freedom with a progressive democratic ideal. This represents the guiding philosophy of the book and must be understood before one can fully understand Croly's purpose in evaluating the

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125 Giovanni Papini quoted in Goldman, op.cit., pg. 159.

126 Herbert Croly, op.cit., pg. 2.

127 Clyde Barrow, "Charles Beard's Social Democracy: A Critique of the Populist-Progressive Style in American Political Thought," in Polity 21 (1988-1989): pg. 273.

effectiveness (or lack thereof) of various political mediums for reform, including the recall, the referendum, the Constitution, and state legislatures.

Against the prevailing relativism and contextualism of his era, Croly found the need to impose the absolute or ideal as the guide for human regeneration. Whereas Dewey's followers looked to the social and cultural space around them to find evidence of the incremental and evolutionary adjustment to the environment, Croly looked toward a fixed teleological goal ("live-and-help-live"). This was the ultimate idealist's position insofar as he not only diagnosed the ills of the system, but proposed what it ought to become. As such, Croly made frequent reference to the misguided critics who valued merely functional knowledge (instrumentalism) and immediate goals as ends in themselves. For these social critics, their fetish for instant, proximate and naturalistic solutions created its own bondage of short sightedness. Describing the effort to rationalize the political structure as a journey of "pilgrims", Croly claims:

> [I]t [social constraint] constituted none the less a perversion of the faith, for once again it attached the faith to a specific program and made of it a torch carried by a few rather than the star which not only binds the pilgrims together, but tends to equalize the bond. The faith can only reach its final ascendancy and its true dignity, in case it is disengaged from the coercive aspect of social construction. . . .[128]

Like Immanuel Kant, Croly seeks to show how both the a priori or intuitive, and the a posteriori or empirical facts which come to us via the senses, are distinct ways of understanding the world. What constituted morals and

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128 Herbert Croly, op.cit., pg. 193.

spirituality for both Kant and Croly was not necessarily part of our experience but intuitive and a priori. Kant, in the Critique of Pure Reason was in fact revealing the impurity of knowledge derived from the senses. Pure reason is that which does not come to us through the senses but is there a priori, independent and absolute as inherent in the structure of the mind. Kantian metaphysics managed to appropriate the scientific and the absolute by suggesting the two were different - one did not take the place of the other. One was essentially part of our experience, the other, a part of the a priori truth that is moral context, knowledge and spirituality. Kant did not subvert faith by isolating it from science, he incorporated it by suggesting its essential nature was more than experience.[129] The social scientists, building upon the naturalistic foundations of Dewey, and asserting the primacy of factual, empirical knowledge, and the importance of physical causation as barometers of change, were suggesting all we need to know comes from experience. Croly lamented the fact that in this schema the reality behind experience was nonexistent: "The analysis of the situation [the process of socialization] was completely dominated by the illusion of physical individuality, and by the consequent necessity of merely inferring the existence of other individuals from the testimony of certain physical symptoms."[130] Croly, then, did not attempt to subvert the physical causes and instrumental uses of knowledge, but incorporated it (as Kant had done) by suggesting it was distinct from, yet supplemental to an instinctual knowledge.

The pilgrims in the course of their adventurous and dangerous

[129] Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy (New York: Washington Square Press, 1953), pg. 265.
[130] Herbert Croly, op.cit., pg. 193.

> journey towards the holy city are acquiring two kinds of knowledge. They are acquiring a practical knowledge of the road, which assumes the form of temporary and only-semi authoritative itineraries; and they are acquiring a still more evasive and difficult moral and social insight. It sometimes seems as if these two classes of knowledge were mutually independent or perhaps even mutually hostile. . . . In truth, however, they are really supplementary. . . . [N]o matter how useful the torch of practical knowledge may be, the journey will have to be discontinued unless its progress is accompanied by a completer mutual understanding among the pilgrims.[131]

It should be noted that Croly was an authentic idealist in the manner in which he described his political utopia. It was not a mystical goal, as Edward Stettner has described it, or a goal that is disclosed on the basis of, as David W. Levy suggests, "obscure, blurred, [or] mysterious" precepts.[132] Rather, since the ideal and the real were very concrete categories of knowledge, the progressive democratic ideal was a very real and concrete attainable goal. While it was expressed in very esoteric terms it represented a viable solution to the nation's difficulties. It is this concept of the ideal and its relation to knowledge itself which informs his reluctance to accept mechanistic solutions. Knowledge, coupled with the vision of a final goal, was active and could be marshalled in the cause of reform in a very practical way. This is quite different from instrumentalism. Dewey and his followers had suggested that knowledge acquires its truth from experimental evidence of its effectiveness in a wide spectrum of functions. For Croly, the ultimate truth in knowledge was given or implicit in knowledge itself, and acquired its function only in relation to a final ideal or faith. "The ability to

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131 Ibid., pgs. 193-194.

132 Levy, op. cit., pg. 170.

live by and in the progressive democratic faith is the source of the really illuminating social knowledge - of a knowledge which is not merely useful but binding and regenerating."[133] The very contextualism and evolutionary relativism in Dewey was anathema to Croly for two reasons: Firstly, knowledge coming from "separate" and "distinct" sensations are too disunited to form a coherent and certain base of knowledge, secondly, experience can reveal what something is, but it cannot, as idealists are wont to assert, reveal what it should be.

If Croly could only reluctantly accept the formative influence of "Reformed Darwinism's" mechanistic social knowledge, what was the process by which one actually moved toward progressive democracy? Clearly, it was articulated by those interchangeable and omnipresent terms - "faith" and "will." Croly used faith and will in Progressive Democracy as he had used the concept of "loyalty" to the nationalized ideal in The Promise of American Life. A strong connection between faith and action is consistently articulated in his latter book in which he claimed, "faith is necessary and constructive, precisely because the situation demands both risks and sacrifices."[134] Again, Croly made no attempt to conceal where he stood on current trends concerning the perceptions of knowledge. While he tried to reconcile both the intuitive and the mechanistic, he left no doubt that the ideal and faith were the most profoundly and consistently true sources of knowledge. "The acceptance of the progressive democratic faith, consequently, is based on a critical attitude towards certain popular attempts to formulate social knowledge. . . . A loyal progressive democracy is emancipated

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133 Herbert Croly, op.cit., pg. 184.

134 Ibid., pg. 170.

not merely from the authority of a legal formulation of social righteousness, but from bondage to a mechanical conception of social causation."[135] In suggesting that an ideal society could be achieved beyond the bounds of the real world, Croly rejected not only instrumentalist and contextual sources of knowledge, but also the inhibiting influence of the Constitution and its unyielding interpretation by the courts which he termed, "a legal formulation of social righteousness."[136] Croly, then, joins the critical progressive chorus against the Constitution from an intellectual justification that differs entirely from that of the progressives themselves.

The similarity of Croly's thought with that of the progressives does not end here however. What precludes Croly from being classified "Victorian", as Henry May has defined it, was that he actively sought to manipulate the environment to seek change. In this respect his ideas resemble those of Dewey more than Spencer. No "Social Darwinist", Croly, like Walter Lippmann and others, saw the destructive influences of a policy of "drift" and agitated for change in existing structures to achieve certain goals. This was decidedly different not only from the laissez-faire ethos of the "Social Darwinists", but also from the fixed religious teleology of the "Victorians." Concerning the Constitution, for instance, Croly criticised its crippling division of powers, a restrictive Bill of Rights, and its inhibiting influence on the exercise of popular political authority; he writes: "The Federal Constitution is in many other respects besides its amending clause a most unsatisfactory instrument for a courageous and thoroughgoing democracy. In the not very remote future it will have to be

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135 Ibid., pgs. 173-174.

136 Ibid., pgs. 173-174.

modified in certain essential matters - both by amendment and by interpretation."[137]

It is also important to note that Croly was not an anti-modernist; he thought the early twentieth century represented the first time in American history when it would be possible to realize an unalloyed democratic ideal. In Progressive Democracy, he makes clear that up until the beginning of the twentieth century, the ever expanding frontier had given an outlet to those seeking profit and expansion. Its closing therefore, had actually ended the prosperous harmony between individual greed and social progress.[138] As such, social progress had always been tainted by this tendency toward selfish acquisition which was exacerbated by the disproportionately large amount of resources relative to the demand. It was only in the early twentieth century that the opportunity existed to realize social progress on communitarian terms.[139]

In a chapter entitled "The Individual and Society", Croly elaborates on this notion that freedom and conformity to a communitarian ideal, as it had been in traditional philosophy, was reconcilable and, in fact, represented mutually dependent realities. Croly claims:

> Genuine individuality is also essentially an ideal which does not become of great value to men and women except in a society which has already begun to abstract and to cherish a social ideal. The sacred individual and the sacred community were born of a similar process of abstraction and grow in response to a similar sentiment of loyalty to ideal values. . . . [A] relation of interdependence can be established between the two, which does not involve the sacrifice either of the individual

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137 Ibid., pg. 245.

138 Levy, op. cit., pg. 165.

139 Herbert Croly, op. cit., pgs. 96-97.

to society or of society to the individual.[140]

Dewey's evolutionist precepts, in claiming that the environment determined to a great degree behaviour, were naturally anathema to Croly's conception of individual freedom - determinism in any form was misleading and destructive. Individuals must have the freedom to appeal beyond the confines of their environment to the ideal goal. It is with this set of strictures that Croly evaluated the strength and weaknesses of the tools of democracy including the recall, the referendum, reformist economic policy and various other temporary expedients.

Important in the realm of progressive social and political criticism, was the nature of the Constitution. The Constitution, as an absolute body of law, was inevitably bound to cause acute discomfort for the evolutionary mind, and progressive critics were undermining the fixity of the Constitution and its rigid interpretation by the courts. Many of those who asserted that the context under which the Framers drafted the Constitution did not reflect the exigencies of the early twentieth century environment would have agreed with Oliver Wendell Holmes' claim that "the life of the law has not been its logic, it has been experience."[141] Charles A. Beard's An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution (1913) was one of these ground breaking works that uncovered the undemocratic nature of the Constitution. Part of the problem was the strict, absolute and final judicial interpretation of the document which explicitly denied the relative nature of truth. As such, the Constitution was precluded from

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[140] Ibid., pg. 198-199.

[141] Oliver Wendell Holmes, quoted in Arthur Ekirch, Progressivism in America (New York: New Viewpoints Publishers, 1974), pg. 29.

adaptation to prevailing needs by an insulating set of "myths." Beard's central concern, then, was not exclusively to demonstrate that the Founding Fathers were an interested class of property owners; it was also to exercise an intellectual responsibility in the field of history, to reveal that the context could determine the political values of a certain people. Progressive historians, like Beard, were freeing the people from the bondage of absolute and inherited artificialities. Beard, for instance, was arguing against the metaphysics of history as articulated by historians like George Bancroft, whose work offered absolute defenses of the omnipotence of God and God's power to shape individual destiny and the direction of progress and human action.[142]

Croly's approach to Constitutional criticism in Progressive Democracy, while reflecting his interest in progressive politics, also reveals his profound philosophic differences with other progressive social and political critics. Progressive evaluations of the Constitution, like Charles Beard's, used the insights handed down from evolutionary science to suggest that the real intent of the document reflected the context of its writing. The Fathers, as part of society's wealthy elite, were intent on maintaining their aristocratic status by thwarting the development of popular democracy, and the Constitution naturally reflected these aims. Croly, however, proposed that the problem with the Constitution is not its aristocratic nature, but its reflection of a philosophy that could not conceptualise the mutual coexistence of individual will (democracy) and the communitarian ideal.

> The Fathers were entirely justified in believing that the devotion of the people to the ideal of social righteousness could not be

[142] David Noble, Historians Against History (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), pg. 21.

> taken for granted. . . . They did not pretend that the people could not go wrong; but they conceived democracy as an air-ship with an automatic balancing and stabilising mechanism. . . . This conception of democracy, precisely because it fails to associate democracy with the conscious realization of a social ideal, always assumed a negative emphasis.[143]

As such, the source of the Constitution's problems was not contextual or a reflection of the exclusive interests of those who drafted it; rather, it was philosophical. "That philosophy furnished them [the Framers] with the conception of a constitutive social reason which could be embodied in law, but it furnished them with no conception of a positively socialized will."[144] As he had suggested in Progressive Democracy, the lack of vision that is goal oriented is often the result of excessive concern with immediate results and instant solutions. The Framers, lacking this idealized vision that could mesh democracy and a socialized purpose, created a Constitution that could not offer a future guide to proper political development, and as a result, it could be (and was) interpreted to yield sanction for an administration's more prosaic and immediate political needs. Thomas Jefferson, for instance, was able to exploit this Constitutional impotence by making it subject to the whims of popular desire. By nullifying the differences in principle that separated the Federalists and the Republicans, Jefferson merged the Constitution with the Democracy, and instead of building upon its example, created a political stagnancy that was the product of inordinate concern for immediate political expediency. "The practical fusion of Federalism and Republicanism which occurred soon after the

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143 Herbert Croly, op. cit., pg. 213.

144 Ibid., pg. 53.

election of Thomas Jefferson to the Presidency," Croly wrote "was the inevitable consequence of an alliance between the Constitution and the Democracy. . . . The underlying traits of the American Democracy suddenly came to the surface - its lack of positive conviction, its preference for immediate results, its complacency and its disposition to leave well enough alone."[145] For Croly, it was "statesmen of Federalist tendency", who, in putting "We the People" into the Constitution, had provided an example of socialized national purpose that was meant to ripen.

Unlike many progressives who found little that was redeemable in the Constitution, Croly thought the document provided an effective initiation into a more cohesive national fabric. It is important to note that Croly criticized the Constitution for not being able to provide for future political development, but he also suggested that the document articulated (and provided an example of) the aspirations of those Framers who sought to transcend their immediate interests. Croly claims: "It [the Constitution] helped socialize the American people by preparing them for a higher, more intimate, more diversified and more responsible form of associated life."[146] In other words, it provided a taste of the live-and-help-live ideal that was the goal of progressive democracy.

In marked contrast to many progressive constitutional critics who avowed that the difficult amending process was an obstruction to potential democratic change, Croly found that it represented the document's source of stability. "The modern democrat should also recognize that the least democratic article in the Constitution contributed effectively to the desirable stability of the early

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[145] Ibid., pg. 59.
[146] Ibid., pg. 61.

American political system. The machinery of amendment provided by the Constitution did more than anything else to emancipate that instrument from popular control."[147] Croly then, praised the fact that the Constitution provided an early example of stability. What was lamentable was the fact that succeeding generations used the document as a stagnant source of mythologizing instead of as a leaven for further development. Characteristically, Croly makes clear that political development will have to be based upon "the only possible substitute for knowledge - which is faith"[148] It was in explicit defiance of instrumentalism that Croly promoted the necessity of faith. In lieu of an ascendant philosophy that valued knowledge on the basis of results, he thought the progressive democratic ideal needed an "uncompromising" albeit unpopular alternative. "We have a right to be skeptical of any attempt to reduce political theory to a science of cause and effects. The success of a thoroughgoing democracy is not to be prophesied. It is to be created; and in the process of creation an uncompromising faith in the moral value of democracy is the essential thing. . . ." [149]

One month after Progressive Democracy was published the first issue of the New Republic appeared. As founding editor, Croly found himself in an unusual position; he was now offered the opportunity to engage in the evangelization of his ideas, in a manner that put him in constant and almost direct contact with the people and the influential minds of the era who had entirely different conceptions of what constituted the appropriate programme for social and political reconstruction. Croly's books, after all, were strangely

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147 Ibid., pg. 130.
148 Ibid., pg. 168.
149 Ibid., pgs. 173-174.

distant from the intellectual ethos of the pragmatic-progressive tradition, and from the currents of optimism and disillusionment that influenced the scholarly discourse of the era. Nonetheless, events across the Atlantic, culminating in World War One, were going to shatter the dreams of national regeneration that he shared with the other reform-minded progressives. And his position at the New Republic has led many commentators to place him at the leading edge of conventional progressive-liberal reform. To fuse Croly together with the other New Republic members, however, would be to misunderstand his thought. As the works of the other founding editors; Walter Weyl and Walter Lippmann reveal, the New Republic triumvirate did not constitute an intellectually homogeneous group.

Chapter IV

The Improbable Triumvirate: Herbert Croly, Walter Weyl and Walter Lippmann

The founding of the New Republic in 1914 occurred at a time when expressions of progressive purpose were in abundance. In the years immediately preceding its creation, the three founding editors, Walter Weyl, Walter Lippmann and Herbert Croly, had each made significant contributions in the realm of political philosophy that, to a great degree, informed the public and academic discussion on reform. And yet, while they later joined in publishing a journal devoted to agreed ends, they should not be considered as representing a group with congruent perspectives. The broad hypotheses used to describe both the character of the New Republic and of progressivism in general have obscured the fact that Croly's thought was palpably distinct from the other members of the New Republic triumvirate, who were both Reformed Darwinists of the first order.[150] An examination of their books, including Croly's The Promise of American Life and Progressive Democracy, Weyl's The New Democracy (1912), and Walter Lippmann's A Preface to Politics (1912) and Drift and Mastery (1914) will reveal the fundamental dissimilarity between Croly's works and those of the other members of the triumvirate whose social and cultural criticism issued from prevailing intellectual currents, namely scientific

150 I am using Eric Goldman's term "Reformed Darwinism" here, because it offers the most appropriate label to categorize those progressive intellectuals who used the same Darwinian roots of the Social Darwinists to overturn, among other things, the latter's devotion to the laissez-faire canon.

relativism and a dedication to evolutionary change.

The progressive era was an intense period of social and civil agitation. Problems that were latent or incubating during the nineteenth century, hardened into significant injustices by the twentieth century. Questions concerning business consolidation reached an apex as mergers created monopolistic concentrations of economic power and wealth - including International Harvester, Standard Oil, and U.S. Steel. By 1910, - one percent of American companies were producing 45 percent of the nation's manufactured goods. The progressive crusaders for social justice were also aware that concentration of wealth created inequality of condition. While five percent of Americans owned half of the property in the United States, nearly one third of Americans in 1900 subsisted below the poverty line. This condition became glaringly evident in the burgeoning cities. The urban centers were ill equipped to sustain both the rural and foreign influx. From 1880 to 1910 the number of Americans living in the cities rose from fifteen to forty five million, and by 1920, for the first time in American History, there were more people living in the urban centers than in the country. [151]

In response to these pressures, the progressive mind wanted no less than to remake and reorganize society and alter the very course of American democracy. John Dewey appealed to men like Lippmann here, whose book title Drift and Mastery (1914) highlighted the need to actively direct the course of political and social affairs. Lippmann appealed for mastery, manipulating the environment through precise factual and statistical knowledge. While Dewey's concepts had relevance for those in economics, law, education and sociology, it

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[151] Lewis Gould, "The Progressive Era," in The Progressive Era ed. Lewis Gould (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1974), pg. 3.

is in politics and the writing of the social critics that one finds the most palpable evidence of this intellectual shift. It stands to reason that for those seeking intervention in, and manipulation of, the socio-economic edifice, the most effective recourse would be to confront the political structure. And, as Henry May has suggested, politics was the form in which most American cultural change has been recorded. Through political and social criticism, progressives canvassed the dangers of corporate influence on political decision making, and the undemocratic and corrupt urban political political bosses who manipulated the ethnic vote in the cities. [152]

The shift in general ideas articulated itself in political and social theory, then, because progressivism channelled it in that direction. In fact, some of the most palpable evidence of this intellectual shift can be seen in the very writings of the political and social theorists of the era including John Dewey, Charles Beard, Walter Lippmann, Walter Weyl and Van Wyck Brooks. Not content to sequester themselves in the newly compartmentalized social science disciplines, these intellectuals actually made their specialized knowledge relevant for all fields of social and political inquiry, which often articulated itself in strong proposals to democratize the existing political structure.[153] In the

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152 Andrew Feffer, The Chicago Pragmatists and American Progressivism (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), Chapter 8.

153 Paul Bourke, "The Social Critics and the End of American Innocence: 1907-1921," in The Journal of American Studies Vol 3-4, 1969-1970, pgs. 65-72. Christopher Lasch in The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The Intellectual as Social Type (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965)has proposed that the social concern of these new theorists like Walter Lippmann, as compared to the relative complacency of older scholars like William James and Lester Ward, stems from their self-consciousness as an intellectual coterie whose function increasingly became the assessing of the culture as a whole. These intellectuals eventually shared a group consciousness and a public identity as critics whose social role determined their intellectual style, which essentially consisted of "synthesizing" the disparate knowledge of the social sciences and applying it to a broad spectrum of problems.

aggregate there existed a fundamental agreement in the conception of knowledge as active and as part of the solution to the crises of the early twentieth century.

Drawing on the latest currents in scientific and European thought, intellectuals like Lippmann and Weyl attempted to address the dislocations of industrialism, including the class divisions, unequal distribution of wealth, and the increasing power of irresponsible industrial leaders and labour leaders. Borrowing heavily from the Reformed Darwinist philosophy, Lippmann and Weyl approached ideas and solutions from the pragmatic-instrumentalist approach that tested their truthfulness or relevance on the basis of results, not sources. Like Croly, however, they saw that in lieu of a laissez-faire approach, an ethic of conscious control should be substituted. Yet, unlike Croly, mastery would have to come via science. It is at this point that the distinction between Croly on one side, and Lippmann and Weyl on the other, becomes clear. A certain congruence is often drawn among the editors because all of them wanted to transcend the limitations of a strictly pragmatic philosophy which suggested that the truth of ideas lay solely in their practice or experiment. Croly believed transcendence from the limitations of experience could only be found in ideas themselves, for Weyl and Lippmann, however, transcendence would be the product of scientific analysis which could uncover not only the construct of existing social relationships but explain the more esoteric causes of human motivation. For Weyl, the scientific approach articulated itself in his solution of "industrial democracy", which managed to incorporate human will by suggesting that the will to succeed could be realized and incorporated into a larger framework of general prosperity. While for Lippmann, in A Preface to

Politics, more insightful and sensitive human observation began with a scientific approach to personality via the insights of Freud and ended with an appeal to science itself . He continued, in Drift and Mastery, to refine his programme by developing the American identity as that of a consumer. Ultimately then, while Lippmann and Weyl attempted to offer more nuanced social and political analysis with reference to human desire and motivation, they were Reformed Darwinists insofar as they had made the source of values man centered, which was profoundly different from Croly's idea centered values.[154]

Walter Weyl was deeply concerned with the dislocations caused by industrialism. Published in 1912, his book The New Democracy exhibits all the buoyancy and optimism of the pre-war liberals. Yet, while it reflected the self-confident belief in progress that distinguished these liberals, it is also a sober manifesto, laden with statistical analysis, that clinically itemizes the corruption of American industrial democracy. Educated at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, Weyl was on familiar terms with rigorous statistical analysis. Most of his courses at Wharton, were devoted to the science of economics, while only one concerned philosophy. His Ph.D dissertation, taken up after an academic sojourn in Europe, reflected this academic pedigree with a statistical analysis of how reductions in passenger rates would affect the overall

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154 The difference thus described is somewhat akin to the differenceone finds in philosophical discussion between the two main types of Monists: idealists, who believe everything is ultimately mental, and materialists, who think everything is ultimately physical or material. It is interesting to note that Dualists, those who make a substantive distinction between mind and body or what is mental and what is physical, and idealists have been in steady retreat among certain academics and others who believe that these thought-systems are not consistent with the discoveries revealed by science. For an informative review of these categories and the recent advances in the philosophy of the mind, see John R. Searle's "The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory," in New York Review of Books, (March 6, 1997): pgs. 43-49.

passenger traffic of the American railway system.[155]

After his schooling, Weyl associated himself with John Mitchell the leader of the United Mine Workers Union, and was profoundly moved by the Anthracite Coal Mine Strike of 1902, in Pennsylvania, with which both men were involved. He particularly appreciated Mitchell's lack of fanaticism and his pragmatic approach to union negotiation which suggested a "willingness to limit his efforts to the immediately obtainable."[156] The strike afforded Weyl a first-hand look at the dynamics of union negotiation and the bitter opposition of economic interests which his academic training could not provide. The event, including Mitchell's effective negotiation tactics, defined Weyl's commitment to mastery, the idea that active and effective intervention in the structure of the economy was both necessary and possible. This proactive philosophy, coupled with his strong background in statistical analysis, led his colleague Walter Lippmann to assert that Weyl was "by far the best trained economist in the progressive movement."[157]

While Weyl wrote numerous articles in such magazines as The Atlantic Monthly, Review of Reviews and The Saturday Evening Post, his book The New Democracy demonstrated that he could sustain a trenchant analysis of contemporary political and economic affairs. Like Walter Lippmann, Weyl, in

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155 Charles Forcey, The Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly, Weyl, Lippmann, and the Progressive Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), Chapter 2. Weyl returned from Europe profoundly impressed by France for reasons entirely congruent with his passion for political economy. France had, he considered, rationalized the distribution of its resources in relation to its population. He claims: "She [France] has the choice of being populous or democratic, and she is choosing the latter. . . . France, growing wealthier daily and dispersing its wealth over larger and larger millions, represents a financial democracy." Forcey, pg. 60.

156 Ibid., pg. 190.

157 David W. Levy, Herbert Croly of The New Republic: The Life and Thought of an American Progressive (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), pg. 190.

The New Democracy, thought that political democracy had been achieved but had yet to be supplemented with economic and social democracy. The problem was caused by the fact that individualism which issued from economic greed (a product of the outworn but persistent laissez-faire myth) was corrupting the political system to the extent that it was beginning to render political democracy impotent.

> Wealth invades politics to gain new wealth and to safeguard that already won. . . .Our political corrupters are animated by a specious, self-justifying philosophy of business, and their actions are condoned by thousands of beneficiaries, who, though good and patriotic (as goodness and patriotism go), desire above all to conserve material and moral interests, believed to be endangered by the "uncontrolled" representatives of the people. . . . The organizing skill of the business magnate in systematizing political corruption has changed it from a local though chronic phenomenon to one which is organic and nation-wide.[158]

In contrast to Croly, who saw the problem of democracy in the United states as essentially one of ideas, Weyl thought economic exigencies were to blame. To counteract the individualist ethos, Americans would have to create an industrial democracy predicated on accepting man's essential nature within capitalism, which was that of a consumer.[159]

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158 Walter Weyl, The New Democracy (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1912), pgs. 97 - 99.

159 Weyl was expressing here, a new source of identification that was espoused by numerous other Americans and that David P. Thelen has documented in his book; The New Citizenship: Origins of Progressivism in Wisconsin (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1972). Thelen has found that Wisconsin progressives, similar to Weyl, developed a spirit of reform based on a common identity as consumers, rather than one rooted in Marxist classifications of producer-worker antagonism or an identification with one's particular class or status group.

> In America to-day the unifying economic force, about which a majority, hostile to the plutocracy, is forming, is the common interest of the citizen as a consumer of wealth. . . . The consumer . . . is undifferentiated. All men, women and children who buy shoes (except only the shoe manufacturer) are interested in cheap good shoes.The consumers of most articles are overwhelmingly superior in numbers to the producers.[160]

Like Croly, then, Weyl sought to transcend the pragmatic devotion to explaining the immediate or "what is" in favour of finding a unity that lies behind human motivation. Yet he came to this position from a profoundly different route, and as a result he articulated very different solutions. As a Reform Darwinist liberal, Weyl appealed to the consumer identity and made the source of democratic value human centered. Whereas Croly's faith in an ideal reflected a belief in the absolute value of ideas that would, in themselves, provide the locus for change. Croly thought consumerism, much like all pragmatic pursuits, created a myopic lack of vision that would prevent people from accepting, on faith, the idealized nature of a true socialized democracy.

Weyl's appreciation of the experimental, pragmatic approach to problems of economic significance is no surprise when one realizes that his industrial democracy was conceived in opposition to the fixed dialectic of Marxism, and its conception of the lower classes as the locus of change. Criticizing what he calls an "absolute socialism", Weyl specifically attacks its absolutist nature and rejection of evolutionary and experimentally driven solutions like those advocated by trade unionist movements (the experience of the 1902 coal mine strike is palpable here).

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160 Weyl, op.cit., pg. 250.

> This socialism, which I shall call "absolute socialism," . . . was a dogmatic and uncompromising, and revolutionary philosophy. It was a system of absolutes, of right and wrong, of things necessary and unescapable; not of relatives, of more or less. . . . It did not strive, like trade-unionism, gradually to whittle away the employer's power, gradually weaken his position, while recognizing it in trade agreements. Absolute socialism claimed for the workingman the full product of labour. Anything less, however little less, was exploitation.[161]

Weyl's criticism of Marxism and its dialectic based on an absolute teleology, in which victory for the working classes through a class war was an ineluctable goal, was almost equally applicable to Croly's ideas. In fact, one could replace "absolute socialism" with "progressive democratic ideal" and not alter the nature of Weyl's commentary. Weyl claims: "The unifying nature of such a philosophy and its strong emotional appeal . . . enormously aided conviction, and the doctrine soon became a cult and almost a religion. For buttressed though it was by reasonings from science, absolute socialism remained in its appeal

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161 Ibid., pg. 171. It is interesting to contrast Weyl's reaction to the 1902 strike, to that of Marcus Alonzo Hanna, as recounted in Herbert Croly's biography of the wealthy industrialist: Marcus Alonzo Hanna- His Life and Work (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912) As president of the National Civic Federation, Hanna, along with his vice-president Samuel Gompers, sought to encourage friendly relations between labour and capital. Croly suggested that Hanna's earnest if naive belief that labour and capital could be brought together peacefully under existing underdeveloped structures and based solely on persuasive exhortation was, in the end, little altered by his experience in Pennsylvania. The strike, in fact, was one of many episodes that revealed the financier's outdated "pioneer" outlook. Croly's discussion of Hanna, then, meshes with his historical interpretations in The Promise of American Life. Yet Croly's illustration of Hanna is laudatory insofar as Hanna reflected the humane values which "received only occasional expression in the lives of the pioneers" (478). Croly refrained from articulating any sustained criticism in the book even thought it is made vaguely clear in the "Conclusion" that Hanna's outlook was antiquated by 1912, for familiar reasons. "The limitations of his ideas were the result, not of the rigidity of his mind, but of the limitations of his experience. That experience was exclusively practical and was restricted by the desire for immediate results" (477).

essentially religious."[162]

What democracy "should be" was Croly's greatest concern. Weyl, however, was very much a part of the Reformed Darwinist tradition and had a statistician's affection for explaining future developments on the basis of present trends or circumstances. He found, then, contrary to Marx's predictions, that no gradually increasing impoverishment of the working classes actually existed. Instead, with an impressive recourse to statistics, he suggested that working class wages had, in fact, increased beyond indexation levels. Society was progressing in evolutionary fashion toward a more sensible distribution of wealth based on expanded productivity and increasing consumption. Moreover, working conditions were also becoming more humane at a rapid rate. Weyl asserts that "The workers have become, not poorer, but richer. . . . Wages during the last half century have risen faster than prices, hours of labour have been reduced, and factory conditions have been improved. . . . Large sections of the working class are successively raised above the level of the unskilled, and fresh demands are constantly made by new industries for new grades of skill."[163] Weyl's scientific dissection of Marx's absolutes here, is very suggestive and encapsulates the Reformed Darwinist destruction of nineteenth century Victorian absolutes. The New Democracy, while often neglected by historians

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[162] Ibid., pg. 173.

[163] Ibid., pgs. 174-175. In the light of more contemporary research on the working class during the progressive era, Weyl's thesis is essentially sound. There was no gradual impoverishment of the working classes. However, a number of important caveats exist. While wages did rise substantially in the late nineteenth century, the working class's share of the total wealth did not increase. Moreover, many workers experienced unemployment in the form of sporadic layoffs; in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries between twenty three and thirty percent of the work force was out of work for some period every year. Finally, one finds the dogged persistence of dangerous working conditions and wide differences in income due to race, region or sex. Nell Irvin Painter, Standing at Armageddon: The United States 1877-1919 (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987), pgs. X-XXI.

when discussing the canon of progressive intellectuals, is actually a very representative book and merits a more prominent place in the literature.

Rather than change occurring simply at the hands of a degraded working class, Weyl saw evolutionary growth and democratic regeneration as issuing from prosperity.

> Opposed to the theory that democracy is to be attained through a class war is the theory that the attainment of democracy will result from a national adjustment. Opposed to the theory of democratic progress through impoverishment is the theory of progress through prosperity. It is the increasing wealth of America, not the growing poverty of any class, upon which the hope of a full democracy must be based. It is this wealth which makes democracy possible and solvent, for democracy, like civilisation, costs money.[164]

While the American economy was moving inexorably toward a more prosperous and more rationalized state, it would have to harness the increasing power of the working classes, by including them through the unions, in an effort to promote a truly inclusive political democracy. Allowing the unions to bargain on equal terms with employers, and allowing them to participate in decisions that have import concerning the structure of the American political economy, would be based on the influence and unity they share with other members of the democracy as consumers. This would not suggest that competition would be circumvented, but that "progress through prosperity" culminating in an industrial democracy, would incorporate the working class in an attempt to achieve healthy socialized competition and consumption. "In actual fact," Weyl

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164 Ibid., pg. 191.

writes "socialization, in so far as it involves the actual intervention of the state, is used largely to supplement or correct competition. It is where competition is atrophied, as in the case of monopolies, or where it appears in a pathological form, as in child labour, industrial parasitism, etc., that the intervention of the state is most needed."[165]

There is something of a very real difference between this industrial democracy and Croly's promise of a progressive democratic ideal. As Croly's early writings indicate, he thought consumerism and its accompanying material culture were anathema to the promotion of creative and disinterested thought as well as for the creation of a socialized national culture. In his early articles in the Architectural Record Croly often lamented the fact that a shared American culture, the barometer of which could be found in the works of artists, was stymied by an ethos defined by narrow economic concerns. Croly was concerned that the business culture including its urge to consume, was myopic in nature and could not conceive of itself beyond the bounds of a certain self-satisfying ethic. While not entirely mutually exclusive, the excessive concentration on immediate experience could never engender the development of a nationalized culture.

There is a more fundamental philosophic difference, however, in Croly's lack of commitment to any set of specific programmatic proposals. His "mysticism" or "vagueness", which historians have found in all his works, was necessitated by his ontological responsibility to the ideal and to the a priori nature of truth. As such, regeneration of American democracy, including all the necessary programmatic changes, would occur after the prior experience of a

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[165] Ibid., pg. 282.

faith - the ability to accept the a priori truth embraced in the ideal. Only through general acceptance of the faith could reform possibly begin. Therefore, the significance of change for Croly, would be its evidence of the acceptance of this faith. In short, change would arise once people had become something other than themselves. For Croly, art and politics that are practiced on any recognizably enlightened level are similar (with consumerism destroying both) because both require the imposition of higher standards and is to be the yield, not the source, of this faith in absolute truth.[166]

Weyl's thought, exhibiting the profound influence of science and the evolutionary naturalism explicit in Reformed Darwinism, accepts man's essential nature as a consumer, and suggests that the science of economics will reveal exactly how best to use this shared and unalterable identity as consumers to fashion a cooperative ethos. There is little abstraction in The New Democracy, but Weyl makes clear that one can wrest value (in relativist fashion) from the liberal democratic environment without appealing to the human capacity for transcendence.

If, for Weyl, the authority of science could promote insight into how one could rationalize democratic purpose, for Walter Lippmann, science was first made to reveal the complexities and vagaries of an individual's thought and action. Only twenty three years old when his first book A Preface to Politics was published, Lippmann's prose, in contrast to Croly's byzantine-like obfuscation, was lucid and facile. His flowing style accommodated his wide-ranging mind which expressed itself in sweeping cultural, political and social commentary. Lippmann's early academic training was similar to that of Croly's and may

166 Paul Bourke, "The Status of Politics 1909-1919: The New Republic, Randolph Bourne and Van Wyck Brooks," in Journal of American Studies 8 (1974), pg. 179.

explain their shared ethos for comprehensive social and political analysis. Lippmann entered Harvard in 1906, and, as had Croly twenty years earlier, took advantage of the school's first-rate philosophy department. He was most influenced by George Santayana and William James there, but it was James' radical empiricism which was more of an influence and more evident in his early works than Santayana's detached philosophy of "essences."[167]

It was also at Harvard and later as an assistant to the muckraker Lincoln Steffens that one finds in Lippmann early attempts to define the role of the intellectual in society and which determined the nature of his work in profound ways. Lippmann was very responsive to the most recent intellectual trends and he applied this knowledge in ways that were applicable to a broad spectrum of problems. As Arthur Schlesinger has remarked, he chose early on "the role of helping produce public sense in the community rather than pursuing private truth in individual solitude."[168] At Harvard, Lippmann helped found the Harvard Socialist Club and wrote for numerous college magazines. He also muckraked at the university, criticizing the administrators for not paying their servants living wages.[169]

Lippmann was acutely aware early on, then, that social and economic

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167 Forcey, op.cit., Chapter 3. Interpretations of Lippmann's early intellectual influences are varied and sometimes contradictory. Concerning the sources used here, Forcey suggests that William James was more of an influence than Santayana, while Schlesinger claims the opposite was the case. It seems this lack of consensus is brought about by changes in Lippamnn's thought over time. Over the course of his long career he migrated from the empiricism of scientific thought to a concern about what esoteric sources lie behind human rationality. Since Forcey's *Crossroads* only touches upon his early works, James is naturally thought to have played a larger role in Lippmann's intellectual development. While Lippmann's later "mysticism" caused Schlesinger to find in Santayana, a more compelling source of inspiration.

168 Arthur Schlesinger, "Walter Lippmann: The Intellectual v. Politics," in ed. Marquis Childs and James Reston, Walter Lippmann and His Times (New York: Harcourt, Brace Publishers, 1959), pg. 191.

169 Forcey, op.cit., Chapter 3.

problems needed "mastery" or deliberate intervention in order to resolve them. He also acknowledged that mastery needed to be predicated on novel and imaginative solutions which outside intellectuals, like himself, could exclusively provide. While an assistant to Schenectady mayor George R. Lunn, Lippmann wrote that the "petty vexations" and "distracting details" of governing had created an impotent and uncreative political culture in which "the mere problem of exercising power . . . [crowded] out speculation about what to do with it."[170] So, while he later abandoned his Fabian socialism, his early radicalism revealed itself to be the "New Radicalism" described by Christopher Lasch, in which intellectuals began to define self-consciously, their role as creatively offering direct insight into the decay of American democracy. As Lasch suggests: "Lippmann could appeal to Freud in the same paragraph in which he spoke of the Boy Scouts - an organization which, he thought, had made boys' gangs 'valuable to civilisation' - as 'a really constructive reform.'"[171] Making the new discoveries in the social sciences applicable to all fields of social, political and cultural inquiry, these intellectuals were (or were under the impression they were) pragmatically directing the resources of those in power no less than if they were in power themselves. It seems this is an important key to understanding the limits of Lippmann's use for speculative philosophy, and his use of intellectual sources, in general, as foci for reform. He was concerned with the fact that the stress on what is immediately useful or the "petty vexations" that accompany social knowledge was harmful in the aggregate. Yet, his attempt to transcend this in order to find a broader, yet inclusive consciousness around

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170 Ibid., pg. 105.

171 Lasch, op.cit., pg. 145.

which society could reinvent itself, was coupled rather ironically with the self-conscious knowledge that he needed to make his insight concrete, and practical (or "instrumental") since it had the potential to directly affect human conduct and structures.

Forsaking philosophy, Lippmann found in science something that could direct and sustain broad cultural and political analysis. In A Preface to Politics, Lippmann asserted the need to shape political theory and activity around insights on human nature revealed by modern scientific psychology. The pioneering work in psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud provided the foundation of his discussion, but his book is laden with references to other European thinkers including George Sorel and Henri Bergson. Lippmann was convinced that the servants of conventional democratic theory; the "routineers", were ineffectual as leaders because they were absolutely ignorant about human nature and motivation. Thanks to Freud's discoveries, which he described as "the greatest advance ever made towards the understanding of human character," a whole panoply of unconscious, irrational and instinctive impulses were revealed to exist prior to thought and even experience.[172] Thought itself, including the cognitive processes by which one formulates political opinions, was therefore grounded in this non-rational nexus.

Using these insights, Lippmann wanted to redefine the "routineer" administrative ethos which implied that people were to accommodate themselves to a mechanistic and deterministic bureaucracy. Quite clearly, the modern age needed a new culture of governing whose defining commitment

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[172] Walter Lippmann, A Preface to Politics (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1913), pg. 69.

was an accommodation to human nature.[173] As Lippmann suggests: "This is the heart of a political revolution. When we recognize that the focus of politics is shifting from a mechanical to a human center we shall have reached what is, I believe, the most essential idea in modern politics. The new effort proposes to fit creeds and institutions to the wants of men, to satisfy their impulses as fully and beneficially as possible."[174] More importantly though, Lippmann wanted to expunge the root of this mechanistic political philosophy which was the routineer's view of human nature as static and immutable. This perception, following hard on the heels of the inherited Victorian absolutes, and now proven to be erroneous thanks to Freud's illustration of a fluid and dynamic human persona, was the cause of America's political stagnancy. Lippmann acknowledged that:

> These times require a different order of thinking. We cannot expect to meet our problems with a few inherited ideas, uncriticised assumptions, a foggy vocabulary and a machine philosophy. Our political thinking needs the infusion of contemporary insights. the enormous vitality that regenerating other interests can be brought into the service of politics. Our primary care must be to keep the habits of mind flexible and adapted to the movement of real life.[175]

In A Preface to Politics then, modern scientific psychology was made suitable to the American reform context through the use of personality types; namely the "routineers" and the "inventors" who made (or should make) the

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173 While the influence of Max Weber seems discernible here, Lippmann did not cite the social theorist as he had done with the other European thinkers who exerted such a profound influence on his thought.

174 Ibid., pgs. 67-68.

175 Ibid., pg. 29.

dynamic and often irrational human mind the center of politics. As such, the problems of American democracy were not going to be solved with recourse to any programmatic changes. Lippmann recognized that the tools of direct democracy, for instance, were no panacea and the broad questions he asked in his introduction reveal his impression that larger cultural and structural changes were in order. "If men find statecraft uninteresting, may it not be that statecraft is uninteresting?"[176] Yet, while Croly thought an idealistic, absolute philosophy could speak to this sense of drift, Lippmann thought these Victorian classifications of thought were the cause of democratic passivity. "If only men can keep their minds freed from formalism, idol worship, fixed ideas and exalted abstractions. . . . For with the removal of distracting idols, man's experience becomes the center of thought. . . . [By] hold[ing] only their experience sacred, we shall find our sanction obvious and unchallenged."[177]

Much like Weyl, Lippmann did not seek to transcend human nature, but wanted instead to make it the center of political thinking through the insights of science. In A Preface to Politics this nature was determined by impulses that occurred prior to thought. It is important to note that these semi-conscious desires or drives could not be determined or directed from a source outside itself.[178] Croly asserted that an outside metaphysical teleology could define human conduct, whereas Lippmann said political structures should accommodate themselves to these semi-conscious drives precisely because they are not alien but most essentially human. The goal of politics was to

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176 Ibid., pg. 3.

177 Ibid., pg. 153.

178 John Patrick Diggins, The Promise of Pragmatism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pg. 316.

understand and reflect this human self-expression. And only the rationality of science could reveal the irrationality of man.

In Drift and Mastery, Lippmann was more interested in making conscious control or "mastery" a function of human impulse. But in this, his second book, he looked to the discipline of science itself as representing freedom from the oppressive ether of tradition and absolute thought. Lippmann asserts that:

> Rightly understood science is the culture under which people can live forward in the midst of complexity and treat life not as something given but as something to be shaped. . . .There is nothing accidental then in the fact that democracy in politics is the twin brother of scientific thinking. They had to come together. As absolutism falls, science arises. It *is* self-government.[179]

Lippmann makes clear, in Reformed Darwinist fashion, that science acquires its enthusiasm from what is "possible" and as a consequence people will use scientific fact to build only "chastened" and "honest" dreams. The scientific spirit had made the absolute idealism (of thinkers like Croly) obsolete by robbing "absolutism of its excuse."[180]

Similar to Croly and Weyl, however, Lippmann strove to go beyond the pragmatic loyalty for what is immediately expedient. He abandoned the commitment to a political culture based on the plurality of human impulses, and in reading Drift and Mastery one gets the impression that this earlier endeavour had uncovered terribly differentiated human motives that could not be reconciled with the need for democratic consensus. Like Weyl, Lippmann found

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179 Walter Lippmann, Drift and Mastery (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1914), pg. 275.
180 Ibid., pg. 206.

unity in diversity by setting in relief the distinctly American source of consciousness, that of a consumer. And it is through this identity that one's democratic will is expressed. Lippmann acknowledges that "Politics is becoming the chief method by which the consumer enforces his interests upon the industrial system." He goes on to claim that in this industrial age "consumers'-consciousness is growing very much faster. . . . I have no doubt . . . that consumers are going to dominate the government. . . ." In fact, the shared consumer ethos of seeking the maximum of quality at the minimum of cost was the manner in which "the consumer is trying to redeem his helplessness in the complexity of the newly organized industrial world."[181]

Again, Lippmann does not attempt to define the democratic purpose outside its human subject, but, in the Reformed Darwinist tradition, seeks to encompass it within a democratic culture he describes as "industrial citizenship." While similar to Weyl's "industrial democracy" insofar as it provides a foundation under which all programmatic changes must conform, it also implies an aesthetic sense of "civilizing" one's drive to consume. "For some industries," Lippmann writes "you may have to use public ownership, for others the cooperative society may be more effective, for others the regulating commission. . . . And back of all these methods, there is the need for industrial citizenship, for creating in the consumer a knowledge of what he wants, and of the different ways there are of getting it."[182] In Lippmann one observes the ultimate expression of Reformed Darwinist thinking. In explicit opposition to the Social Darwinists, like William Graham Sumner, who saw the environment as a

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[181] Ibid., pgs. 71-75.

[182] Ibid., pg. 168.

static principle to which humans must conform, Lippmann claimed that human nature (in its multifaceted manifestations) is itself an unalterable principle to which the environment should conform.

It should be noted that in Drift and Mastery Lippmann considered the traditional, absolute pieties dead, and he clearly defined his role as cultural critic as helping to create stability in a contingent world. Drift and Mastery, then, is often considered to be a vivid expression of this "New Radicalism" which expresses itself in the quest to find a concrete and prosaic source of commonality in consumerism. "It is the business of critics to understand these beginnings," Lippmann claimed "for they are already a great practical force. They [critics] enable men to share their hopes with strangers, to travel about and talk to people of widely different professions and origin, yet to find the assurance that they are part of a great undertaking ."[183] Starting out with evolutionary science, Lippmann ended up with a pragmatic humanism.

It is no surprise to find that the language used in the opening editorial of the New Republic reveals a curious juxtaposition of idealized abstraction and faith, coupled with the commitment to pragmatic experimentation.[184] "The New Republic is frankly an experiment. . . . [I]f The New Republic could bring sufficient enlightenment to the problems of the nation and sufficient sympathy for its complexities, it would serve all those who feel the challenge of our time. .

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183 Ibid., pg. 288.

184 Some historians have been harshly critical of the New Republic's ambivalent editorials concerning a range of issues; including America's entry into the First World War. Among these is David W. Noble's The Paradox of Progressive Thought, which points out the incongruence between the editors' call for "mastery" and their editorial "drift" regarding the position America should adopt in the War. While the complexity of the events themselves were partly to blame, I think the aforementioned differences in thought among the triumvirate offer insight into this paradox. All three editors agreed mastery was necessary in the modern context, but they differed profoundly on the ways in which it should manifest itself.

. . [B]ut if we are unable to achieve that success under the conditions essential to disinterested thinking, we shall discontinue our experiment. . . . [M]eanwhile, we set out with faith."[185] It is also no surprise that pragmatic liberals, like Amos Pinchot, who followed the strictures of Reformed Darwinism to think in frankly experiential and programmatic ways, were confused by the journal's partial commitment to speculative inquiry. "There are some things that puzzle me about the *New Republic*," Pinchot admits "[t]hey [the editors] reject being classified as having any particular purpose and prefer to represent an unfettered naked truth, bathing itself in an aloof and leisurely manner in the cool water of the Pierian spring."[186] The ambiguity of the New Republic editorial policy significantly reveals the difference of Croly's thought and its uneasy marriage with that of the other editors.

Croly's distinct thought system also found itself at variance with Willard Straight's ideas about the direction of this journal of opinion, and highlights his alienation from prevailing intellectual trends and those who made these trends a source for their identity. Willard Straight and his wife Dorothy approached Croly about starting a "journal" on the basis of having read The Promise of American Life. For the Straights, the difference between Croly's call for a robust nationalism and his shy and reflective demeanour must have caused some surprise. It seems that Willard actually misread the book so that it yielded, for him, a whole set of concrete proposals for action. And during negotiations concerning the birth of the New Republic, Croly remarked in frustration that Willard had little concern for "speculative or critical thinking whose relationship

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185 Iris Dorreboom, "The Challenge of Our Time": Woodrow Wilson, Herbert Croly, Randolph Bourne and the Making of Modern America (Atlanta, Georgia: Rodopi Press, 1991), pg. 145 - 146.
186 Bourke, op.cit., pg. 181.

to practical affairs was not immediate and direct."[187]

It was during these same negotiations that Croly argued against Willard's attempt to get him to abandon his abstractions by emphatically stating that his "disinterested and somewhat detached thinking" represented his defining intellectual commitment. In response to Willard's plea that "FACT is what the people will want. FACT is what they have been unable to get in the old publications and FACT is what we are setting out to supply If we make a fight for any one thing we expect to base our faith on FACT. . . .We want to tell FACTS, not stories."[188] Croly replied that the journal's:

> primary purpose will not be to record facts but to give certain ideals and opinions a higher value in American public opinion. If these ideas and opinions were accepted as facts it would be unnecessary to start the paper. The whole point is that we are trying to impose views on a blind or reluctant people.[189]

Croly's choice of Walter Weyl and Walter Lippmann as co-editors is quite intelligible. Croly was deeply impressed by both Weyl's and Lippmann's work whose lucid prose was of obvious benefit to a journal. But Croly was also aware of Willard's opposition to his abstractness and offers to Weyl and Lippmann were perfect concessions to the benefactor insofar as he found in both writers, pragmatists whose approach to social, political and cultural criticism would be congruent with the intellectual "style" of their readers. The rather confused editorial policy on which the journal was launched, underscoring faith in

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187 David Seideman, The New Republic: A Voice of Modern Liberalism (New York: Praeger Press, 1986), pg. 11.

188 Ibid., pg. 13.

189 Ibid., pg. 14.

disinterested thought and experimentation, was a product of this improbable union.

Conclusion

It is difficult to imagine a more incongruous language for progressive reform than Croly's resolute appeal to the nonmaterial. Yet writing in the 1920's when the pace of reform was less precipitate and after World War One had rendered, for many, progressivism impotent, Croly maintained his commitment to the ideals that distinguished him from his contemporaries. "It is essential to the promised future of the American commonwealth," Croly wrote in his autobiographical fragment "that its citizens should now and always keep up the search for an ideal synthesis which is both national and democratic."[190] Croly's thought invested political, economic, and cultural issues with vivid philosophical significance. By expressing these often esoteric themes, Croly was able to sharpen the context of concrete human experience. Human freedom, for instance, was fundamentally based on its ability to transcend the environment. It is from such essential (albeit simplified) philosophical premises that issue his more programmatic political proposals for which he is known today.

With the publications of The Promise of American Life and Progressive Democracy Croly stood as the deviate, if enthusiastic, progressive. His philosophic search for social and political change bore little relation to John Dewey's own search for an anti-formalist alternative to the status quo. Dewey expressed a pragmatic search for truth and ethics, meaning that knowledge and

190 Herbert Croly quoted in David W. Levy, Herbert Croly of The New Republic: The Life and Thought of an American Progressive (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), pg. 306.

morals could not be abstracted from experience but were defined by it. Here contingency replaced certainty. Conversely, Croly embraced the a priori nature of truth contained in the ideal. Eschewing proximate results and evolutionary change, Croly appealed to ultimate goals and transcendence from the appetites and desires dictated by one's environment. Croly's ideas, then, did not suggest the influence of John Dewey, William James, or other thinkers who helped define representative progressive thought, as have asserted Charles Forcey and James T. Kloppenberg. Nor did they reflect David W. Noble's "Americanization" since his works constituted a consistent philosophic endeavour that owes its intellectual debt to Harvard and Josiah Royce. To overlook Croly's "mysticism" as Edward Stettner has done, is also to misunderstand him. Croly firmly believed that ideas, while not merely plans of action, should, if properly conceived, become instruments of action.

When Walter Lippmann and Walter Weyl were celebrating science and the power of the scientific fact as absolute, Croly appealed to faith. Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative and Josiah Royce's absolute idealism were of considerable help here. They contributed fundamentally to Croly's perceptions about idealism as a rational capacity to uncover ultimate truth and a method by which the "intelligible" self could escape the process of history. As such, Croly also did not endorse the philosophic structure of Positivism as David W. Levy has suggested. Croly thought individuals could and should escape the process of history and only ideals could guide them. If Croly's "live and help live" resembled the "Religion of Humanity", his metaphysics and tendency to intellectualize would have been located squarely in Comte's desultory Second Stage.

Herbert Croly's father wrote to him in 1886: "My dear son, I shall die happy if I know that you are an earnest student of philosophic themes. Do cultivate all the religious emotions, reverence, awe and aspiration, if for no better reason than as a means of self-culture. Educate, train every side of your mental and emotional nature. Read poetry and learn the secret of tears and ecstacy."[191] While rejecting Positivism, Croly's works bore all the hallmarks of his father's advice here. In his autobiographical fragment, Herbert even tentatively turned to religion for answers where others were looking to the social and cultural space around them. This should come as no surprise. Croly's philosophy had little in common with those of the progressives, influenced by Darwin, who argued against Biblical and a priori absolutes. Croly's quest for the ideal synthesis ended, at the hands of a stroke, in 1930. Yet, even in these, the latest remnants of his thoughts, he sustained both the awe and aspiration which expressed themselves as the celebration of human responsibility and ingenuity.

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191 Ibid., pg. 58.

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