

THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLICANISM: A Free Society in an Unfree World

We are good; they are evil. The sense of this statement is misleading, innocent of all regard for circumstance. It cannot possibly be true in the sense intended by post World War II moralists who discovered collective responsibility. Nor can it be true in the sense of those who ascribe some character to a people as opposed to individuals. Nor, again, can it be merely relatively true, in the sense that the statement is true for all and, hence, only nominally exclusive. Nonetheless, the burden of this essay is to prove that the statement can be true, somehow. For, what hinges on that proof is the proper understanding of a just security policy in a republican regime.

In 1796 French Minister Pierre Adet labeled George Washington a “Machiavelian” on account of Washington’s articulation of a proper foreign policy for the United States in the famous “Farewell” Address.” Adet was concerned that Washington was willing to ignore America’s defense commitment to France for the sake of America’s advantage in the world, thus ignoring higher principles for mere self-interest. Washington, however, believed that a republic needed to enjoy just as much freedom of action in the world as do monarchies and principalities. The issue was not whether the free society could carry out the needs of diplomacy and security policy, but *how* it could do so consistent with the moral principles underlying the regime.

The Rule of Necessity: A Philosopher’s Stone for States

Twenty years ago Harold W. Rood argued that free societies have an obligation to protect the rights of citizens. He appealed to the “traditional obligations” of government, so as to suggest that free societies inherit the obligations common to all states whatever their form. Appealing to the “nature of the world at large,” he saw every society’s duty to defend the weak against the strong as extending into international affairs the grounds of domestic association.¹

It would be difficult to belie this understanding of “justice,” substituting the rule of law for the right of the stronger. But we are entitled to pause upon considering the praise of Henry II, that he caused “ravening wolves” to “dwell harmlessly with the sheep.” The suggestion that Henry II achieved through “fear of the law” what Christian gospel expects from *agape* raises the possibility that the “traditional obligations of government” are an alternative to the prospect of goodness. That is to say, where justice is well enforced by law, there is less necessity to attempt the conquest of hearts with love.

Similarly, the *plus que* Hobbesian version of “do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” whispered into the ear of Queen Elizabeth, “in order not to be struck, strike,” makes the anticipation of evil a prior concern to, and condition for, the desire to be good. In Professor Rood’s terms, no one can freely entertain motivations of charity

¹ Rood, Harold W. *Kingdoms of the blind: how the great democracies have resumed the follies that so early cost them their life* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1980), xv, 294 p.

and justice where they confront the choice of safety or submission. Submission comes at the cost of all the tools of free choice.

Conversely, therefore, a free people sets the horizon of peace, justice, and defense as the protective shadow for the exercise of liberty. It is rather this conclusion, than principles of goodness, which we readily discern “in the nature of politics and of the human condition.” This, I take it, is the key to his theory. It justifies his call for an “instinct” of defense like to the instincts of “justice and right.”

Finally, the foundations of “justice and right,” so far as I can discern them, seem to be the penchants citizens have for the pursuit of their interests. This accounts for the competition between the instincts. Rood, however, argued that the competition is misguided, since citizens should find in defense the grounds for assuring the pursuit of individual interests.

To this point, the argument does not further our search for a meaningful version of the statement, “We are good; they are evil.” It rather suggests that that question is not central to the question of defense. That is the reason the obligations, as the problems, of a free society, seem not to differ from those of any other state or society. I submit, however, that on these grounds one is unable to judge whether to prefer the safety which his own government assures or that which a would-be conqueror must ultimately promise.

We still require, therefore, a means of distinguishing one form of safety from another, as a precondition for the discovery of the conditions of safety for a free society. We need to discover the implicit rule of necessity upon which Rood relied to foreclose the possibility of choosing between states as a viable means of securing the pursuit of individual interests.

Such a philosopher’s stone must be political, insofar as it informs not merely theoretical discussions but the actual grounds of political decision. For that reason, I will employ a practical example, as an illustration of the difficulty. If we rehearse the relationship between the United States and the erstwhile Soviet Union, I think we will find grounds for considering obligations of states beyond those introduced by Rood. The outcome of the struggle between the two super powers suggests that this example is a realistic appraisal of circumstances that affected the United States and Soviet Union.

How the West Won the War

To begin with, war with the Soviets was necessary for the United States, and the American policy that closed the struggle was predicated on that foundation. That fact did not result from the differences between them and us, albeit those differences were grave and irreconcilable. The fact is, arguments based on peoples’ systems of thought cannot invoke the rule of logical contradiction as a principle of natural necessity, for those arguments stand upon the shifting sands of the human propensity to change.

The necessity of which I speak is entirely different, though not unrelated. Our teacher in this is Thucydides, among others. We fought with the Soviet Union not because they were communists, but rather because their power, which they were not free to abandon, was for us the cause, the necessary cause, of a resistance in the form of military preparations they rightly regarded with fear.

The Soviet's power lay less in their tyranny over the Russian and confederated peoples than in their projected or potential ability to rule yet other peoples by their will. The preservation of their power, including the tyranny over their own peoples, depended utterly on their exercise of that will. And that is the same thing as to say that they needed to frustrate and counteract all other ruling forces, including the political, which could diminish the force of their will (ergo the Polish problem). Their empire was so constituted that they had either to spread their power or to die (abstracting from the limit which nature places to their power). Unlike the Romans, who destroyed themselves by destroying (spreading too broadly) Roman citizenship, the Soviets destroyed themselves by developing too narrow a base of Soviet citizenship.

I am not refining the containment theory, though some of its elements are recognizable here. I am saying that Soviet hegemonism, its spread, was the key to preservation of dubiety about Soviet citizenship and, hence, internal questions about a public good which might serve to coalesce opposition to the regime on the basis of a conception of the needs and ideas of a particular people. Gorbachev's emergence and flirtation with domestic grounds of Soviet citizenship (however exiguous the economic necessities were) eroded the stability required to project Soviet power.²

Thus the importance of resistance to Jewish emigration; thus the importance of exiling or disposing of Solzhenitsyns, far-sighted dissidents who aimed to crystallize a view of a Russian if not a Soviet people which did, in fact, become a law to the nation's tyrants (ergo, the end of the tyranny). Until then, there were no Soviet citizens, properly speaking, and by consequence no other citizens anywhere (as far as they were concerned). Testimony: the Berlin Wall.

The spread of Soviet hegemonism was not a strategy, or law of geo-politics. These things must be taken into account (for without them there could have been no Soviets). The hegemonism was a necessity for the defense of the regime. Whether the conquered peoples became communists was secondary; they served the aim of the policy with equal effectiveness when destroyed. What counted was that their fates were decreed as far as possible by Soviet will.

From this it follows that the Soviets could only have survived if they were or became stronger. Otherwise they could not impose their will. No ballot box could substitute for the evidence of Soviet sovereignty (the world-historical *fait accompli*). No lordship could substitute. Mao awoke from his dream only in time to die a desperate

² I have discussed the implications of "citizenship" in detail in a separate essay, "The Truth About Citizenship: An Outline," *Cardozo Journal of International and Comparative Law*, vol. 4 No. 2, Summer 1996, pp. 355-372.

man: There was and is no such thing as a Marxist-Leninist people. Marxist-Leninists must unpeople the world.

Yet, the Soviet Union's bid for superior strength was ever in jeopardy. It needed to be maintained at all costs, but it was resisted at every turn, whether openly or covertly, whether by natural forces or political intentions. I leave the natural forces to the side (along with the human propensity to change ideas). Is it not manifest, in the end, that resistance in the form of political intentions reposed on the strength and ubiquity of a United States whose own presence on earth had and has still consequences as far-reaching as those of the Soviet Union?

Now consider America. Had it no concern for its own preservation? The answer is clear. What options did it have to express this concern? Here was the rub! It became clearer day by day that the United States had been reduced to its last card, or nearly so. And that was military might. What that meant is that American efforts (like those of the Soviets) aimed by means of superior force to make the American will the arbiter of other peoples' existences. That is, it aimed directly to frustrate the one thing most needful to Soviet survival.

There are differences: the American will did not require to supplant indigenous principles and interests in order to achieve its end. It is therefore hugely ironic that American policy makers have become squeamish about developments in Afghanistan after the Soviets have been expelled. In fact, so long as there were independent, particular peoples in the areas of critical importance to Soviet expansion, the United States succeeded in frustrating Soviet plans and necessities. In this, the Soviets stood at a tactical disadvantage, for they needed literally to bring to bear on each situation force superior not only to that of the target state but also to that of the United States. In the end, the Soviet Union could not sustain such superiority.

The United States repaired the breaches in its defenses, knowing that a successful defense of the United States meant defeat for the Soviet Union! Often, policy makers curried favor with democratic opinion by pretending that US military moves were only counsels of general prudence and had no particular target, no enemy. The Soviets saw the American efforts for what they were. Once American resolve became clear, they had to fear for their very existence. Necessity required that they choose either war or surrender. In the end, they gave in, or perhaps one should say, caved in under the pressure. They did not so much conclude, "Better westernized than atomized." Rather, they lost the gamble through which they aimed to reinvigorate themselves to realize the goal of their ambition.

Why the West Fought the War

The Americans were not less ruled by necessity. I do not emphasize ideological struggle. It has its significance (exclusively as a consequence of the nature of our regime). But human nature and not ideology is that which submits men to the rule of necessity. Human beings are not free to reject war, the proof of which is the ubiquity of

politics. Politics is the very expression of the necessity that humans have something to fight for and do so. No, I'm not among those who imagine that, without war, politics would have no end. To them, men having no reason to fear attack, they would never band together. Whether we employ "war" or "conflict of interest,"—foreign war or civil war—the reasoning is the same.

It may in fact be the case that no men are ever without war or the need to prepare for war. But might there not be, even in the presence of war, a reason for politics independent of war? Thucydides seemed to think so, for he took great notice of the different ways people live and the different aims they have for themselves regarding a way of life. That, I think, is the great necessity. Humans cannot retire from the task of seeking the human way of life. For that, they have no means other than politics. Politics—the city—means being a particular people, distinct from another. The very existence of another highlights the importance of the task itself and defines, not the necessity of war but, the condition under which the necessity of war emerges.

Applying Thucydides' rule of necessity to our example, then, we must conclude that, with respect to the United States, the rule said nothing about the Soviet Union or even communism, in particular. That struggle resulted from historical accident—a different kind of necessity. It is well, therefore, to remember that the names of other states and systems would have replaced these in changed circumstances.

Circumstances, perhaps, contribute far more to the selection of an enemy than do differences in political systems. For the United States, war with Britain was no less likely than war with the Soviet Union, if we consult only differences in political systems. But circumstances teach us much, and I've tried to adduce such examples above. Also instructive is the fact that, long before there were Soviets or even communists, no geopolitical prophecy was more common in the 19th century than the emergence of Russia and North America as the great rivals of the future.

Such prophecies arose at a time when the two great military engines, Britain and France, were contesting the lordship of virtually the whole globe—France having been then such a power as the Soviet Union was in the twentieth century. Still, prophecies of a vastly different future were possible. Fisher Ames opened the century with such a prophecy. Tocqueville gave it its finest expression before mid-century. And Mahan closed the century with poignant reminders. The Bolshevik revolution came in 1918. What made such prophecies possible prior to the emergence of the ideological difference, it seems to me, is that these commentators consulted Thucydides' rule of necessity, and it appears they did so correctly. I submit that the deliberations of any free society must depart from the same grounds.

Why War: A Thucydidean Basis of Statecraft

What, then, does Thucydides mean by the rule of necessity? At one point he offers an interesting hint: men resent injustice more than violence. The one appears to them as rapine, because coming from an equal, the other but necessity, as coming from one

stronger.³ According to Thucydides, in other words, men accept the rule of the stronger as necessary and independent of questions of right. We see, then, that questions of right, justice, and injustice take place within the horizon of necessity.

The leading example of necessity in the Peloponnesian War was the true cause of the war, which Thucydides declared to be Sparta's fear of Athens' growing power. Once this fear took hold, Sparta could not avoid opening the war, although it suspected its own injustice in doing so. Men may resent injustice more than violence, but they seem to prefer doing injustice to suffering violence. The question, therefore, is whether this is indeed a choice which humans face, of necessity? (Cf., II, 63).

An alternative expression of the opposition between doing injustice or suffering violence is acting in accord with one's will. Doing injustice is preferable to suffering violence, then, in the case in which doing injustice is the only means of acting in accord with one's will. The other circumstance in which men act in accord with their will, peace, is when men are "better minded," for they act by choice rather than under necessity (III, 82). The choice in the latter case, clearly, is choice that involves the possibility of consulting the good, the preferred deed rather than the necessary deed. One does not the less choose between doing injustice and suffering violence, but he is said to act under necessity when he is not at liberty to choose with reference to distant as opposed to "present occasions." When all alternatives properly lie within the range of one's will, only then does he truly choose. This is true of cities as of men.

We find the classic statement of the rule of necessity in the Melian dialogue (VI, 84-116). For reasons internal to this essay, however, it were well rather to glance at the speech of Diodotus, which led the Athenians to spare the lives of their revolted satellites, the Mytileneans. Diodotus maintained two points. First, the Athenians were not under a necessity to exact revenge from the Mytileneans, but were rather at liberty to consult their best interests. Secondly, he urged that they regard not the present but the future. The city's deliberation, in short, affirmed that every alternative it faced in the case could accord with its will. Thus, its will, being undetermined had to be enlightened by a true view of its interest.

Diodotus explained necessity as the power, nay the violence, of passion in reference to hope or hopelessness. What men desire, and either hope to have at modest cost or have no hope of living without having, moves them with all the power of necessity. So, too, with cities. Thus, crimes can be deterred neither by too mild nor by too stringent punishments. Moderation of the punishment is a means of playing the motivations, fear and profit, off one another, in order to assure one's own both profit and safety. This gambit, Diodotus suggests, is open to them that are free to respect profit as well as fear.

Finally, Diodotus counsels the city that the specific means of pursuing profit, as contrasted with the condition of doing so, is through deliberation upon the just and the unjust. The city which limits itself to dealing with other cities by means of violence, the

³ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, I, 77.

right of the stronger, loses the capacity to favor justice and win gratitude. Because all cities comprise diverse interests and men differently affected toward their antagonists, however the subject city may act, their citizens are always men deserving of different treatment because doing, some justice and others injustice.

When “guilty and innocent alike” suffer the same fate, all become equally the enemies of the antagonist. Indeed, Diodotus argues, even the unjust, as men, who are otherwise friendly to the antagonist city, deserve to be encouraged in their friendship so as to further the profit of the accusers. Not cities but men are guilty or not guilty. Necessity requires that cities be dealt with strictly in terms of profit. That could require that one city, free to do so, voluntarily suffer the injustices of men when doing so conduces to its profit. It is within a city’s right and in favor of its honor to destroy another city injuring it, and that means just and unjust men alike. But it is not to a city’s profit to do so, when necessity does not compel it. (III, 41-48).

Diodotus, then, defines the rule of necessity as the consistent pursuit of the city’s true interest, from which no city is free to defalcate however certain it be that doing so will lead it either to suffer or impose violence on other cities. This true interest differs from the interests of individuals. It raises the possibility that the interests of individuals point toward a preference for something more than the safe quest of enjoyment, thus foreclosing the possibility for individuals merely to consult prospects for their own safety. Otherwise, the rule of necessity would lose its force.

Still, because any city may deal with every other city as if its citizens need only consult their safety, or the opinion that they are safe, there is the further implication that the city which succeeds in foreclosing to its citizen the reflex of merely consulting their individual safety establishes itself as good beyond all other possibilities. Necessity, the rule of necessity, is bound up in the discovery that one city, our city, is good, while others are evil. What remains is to learn how men arrive at that conclusion from a beginning that emphasizes interests, indeed, self-interest.

The American Founding and National Security

The *Federalist Papers* describes the manner in which the idea of necessity comes to be distinguishable though not separate from interest.⁴ Their account closely resembles the results of Thucydides’ catalog of the allied forces in the Syracusan War, in which he distinguished motives for entering the war on grounds of compulsion and voluntary choice (“as profit or necessity severally chanced them,” VII, 57-58). The *Federalist* urge that the first line of necessity is for government itself (#2). From that (the existence of particular cities) there follows the possibility of “causes of war” in proportion to the number of states (#3). Thus, the American states, poised between becoming separate nations or a single nation, are admonished to consult the second line of necessity by form-

⁴ Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers* (numerous editions available, but the numbers used herein corresponding to the Cooke edition, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961).

ing a single entity in which all are at peace with one another rather by design than by chance.⁵

The *Federalist* maintain that a principal cause of war is desire for profit, and that free states are as liable to the push of that motivation as are unfree states. All states, therefore, “regard with uneasiness” the existence of any state in a position to obtain through strength the objects of its desires. The “uniform course of human events” shows nations disposed to employ war as policy above the call for defense. Among infinitely many motivations to war, some move collective bodies: “Of this description are the love of power or the desire of preeminence and dominion—the jealousy of power, or the desire of quality and safety” (#s 4 & 5). The unjust and just alike, acting on what Thucydides called pretexts (which can only be grounded in their understanding of the opportunities or necessities of their circumstances), pose the specter of war as essential to the landscape of politics (#6).

While “true interest” would counsel a “benevolent and philosophic spirit” in all nations, the operations of ordinary interests bar its reign (#6). The very factor which makes government necessary exposes the city itself to the rule of necessity. Men place their safety even above their liberty. “To be more safe they, at length, become willing to run the risk of being less free.” Still, they do not express the ardor for safety in anything other than the attempt to preserve their society, if not their government (#8).

Following this introduction, the *Federalist Papers* demonstrate the architecture of the regime based squarely if not wholly on self-interest (#9). The argument is familiar, though curiously enough its conclusion is less so: The design aimed explicitly to make the interests into which the society would be sundered amenable to a constitutional order that would make the United States above all “one nation in respect to all other nations” (#42).

The significance of this turn is that the individual interests, in one respect free, had to be innocuous, impotent in their influence on the operations of government. Thus, the Constitution which liberated the pursuit of self-interest chained that pursuit to the protective umbrella of the Constitution itself. The interests were not permitted the liberty to retain their protection while simultaneously remaining open to every conceivable seduction.

. . . nations pay little regard to rules and maxims calculated in their very nature to run counter to the necessities of society. Wise politicians will be cautious about fettering the government with restrictions, that cannot be observed . . . every

⁵ This argument is presented in detail in Part II, “The Constitutionalism of *The Federalist Papers*,” in *The Federalist Papers: A Commentary “The Baton Rouge Lectures”* by W. B. Allen (with Kevin A. Cloonan), Peter Lang, Inc., New York, 2000. (Hereafter, *Commentary*.)

breach of the fundamental laws . . . forms a precedent for other breaches, where the same plea of necessity does not exist . . . (#25).

Full provision against foreign danger required confiding “to the federal councils” requisite power; that power prevailed over the society as over prospective enemies.

With what colour of propriety could the force necessary for defense, be limited by those who cannot limit the force of offense? If a Federal Constitution could chain the ambitions or set bounds to the exertions of all other nations; then indeed might it prudently chain the discretion of its own government, and set bounds to the exertions for its own safety . . . The means of security can only be regulated by the means and danger of attack. They will in fact be ever determined by these rules . . . (#41).

Internally, however, the Constitution does precisely this: It chains the ambitions and sets bounds to the exertions of all interests. This is how the Constitution succeeds in limiting its forces for offense, while it cannot limit the force for defense.

The constitutional design intends a marriage or union of diverse interests in the pursuits of peace but one nonetheless capable of strong defense. Thus does it define the free society, as the defense of the “republican guaranty” reveals (#43). The interests, that is, the citizens, have had foreclosed all possibility to pursue alternative forms of safety – short of exercising the right of revolution.

This absolute freedom for defense, based on the marriage of interests and presupposing the rule of necessity, is sometimes regarded as Machiavellian, because it does not extend internal constitutional guarantees to other nations. Noam Chomsky frequently offers such a charge, based on the notion that the free society is just like any other. A typical case:

Typically, the ‘defense of the national interest’ policy is disguised with high-sounding rhetoric, which we dismiss with contempt when the official enemy ‘defends freedom and socialism’ by sending tanks to Berlin, Budapest, Prague or Kabul, while solemnly reciting it when our own state acts in a similar way.⁶

I have shown above the manner in which Chomsky is correct, that all cities are in the same boat as to the rule of necessity. He failed to see, however, that the rule of necessity is not a justification, per se. Thus, he misses the distinction so carefully drawn in the *Federalist* between the free society and others. He does not understand how it is true that we are good, while they are evil.

⁶ *Wall Street Journal*, 24 June 1981, p.11.

And Justice for All: Washington's Guiding Policy

To understand that latter, alone, relieves the recognition of the rule of necessity from the charge of Machiavellianism. There is, however, but one full and fully conscientious response to that charge, at least in American experience. It is Washington's "Farewell Address." It requires patient analysis to discover the response, which is proved by the fact that the "Farewell" itself has not infrequently been charged with Machiavellianism:

. . . a piece extolling ingratitude, showing it as a virtue necessary to the happiness of states, presenting interest as the only counsel which governments ought to follow in the course of their negotiations, putting aside honor and glory.⁷

Washington, on the other hand, understood himself to have defended principles of "justice and humanity." It would be worthwhile to consider the case of this disparity in detail.

The most significant commentary on the "'Farewell" Address" was published by Samuel Flagg Bemis in 1934.⁸ Bemis demonstrated how, in the midst of belligerent, overpowering states, the newly established, free republic of the United States wended a course designed to secure its liberty. He read the "Farewell" as an expression of Washington's strategic conception, given the circumstances. As he argued, "to comprehend Washington's point of view and feel the weight of his advice, it is necessary to consider the historical setting . . ."

The point is well taken. A strong case can be made for taking the "Farewell" in context. It would be a mistake, however, to read the context too narrowly, as did Bemis. Bemis himself pointed out the striking fact that "the orthodox phrase Federal Union" occurs not once in the document. Washington preferred the more daring "National Union," suggested in the critical essays of the Federalists.⁹ This is sufficient to suggest that the "immortal document" aimed beyond the immediate era of the 1790s, in which "federal union" were not only more natural but in some respects counseled by prudence.

As companion to Bemis' narrow view, then, I suggest a further approach, regarding the "Farewell" in its own terms. This reading explains the posture required of any

⁷ *Correspondence of the French Ministers to the United States, 1791-1797*, Frederick Jackson Turner, ed., Annual Report, American Historical Association, 1903, p. 954. I have provided a full explanation of the counter-Machiavellian tendency of the American founding, or at least Washington's founding, in "Machiavelli and Modernity," in *The Prince by Niccolò Machiavelli*, translated and edited by Angelo Codevilla (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

⁸ Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Washington's farewell address: a foreign policy of independence* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1934), p. 250-268; reprinted from, *The American historical review*, vol. 39, no. 2, January 1934. Includes bibliographical references. A recent commentary significantly advances Bemis's work, and particularly expands upon the fundamental principles underlying the politics of the "Farewell" address: Matthew Spalding and Patrick J. Garrity, *A sacred union of citizens: George Washington's farewell address and the American character* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), xviii, 216 p. Includes bibliographical references and index.

⁹ Cf., W. B. Allen, Part I, *Commentary*.

free society, under any circumstances, in an unfree world (the French Minister, Adet, was that far correct). The address, however, is distinguished by Washington's conviction of the possibility of an honorable policy. A theoretical consideration, as opposed to one simply historical, will respond to the charge of Machiavellianism, and also answer the question, how might a free society make consciousness of its goodness the instrument of its defense?

The Foreign Policy of Republicanism

The "Farewell Address" sets forth a complete account of the work of founding a free society and the conditions of its preservation in a world that offers no sinecure for freedom. It was meant to be a complete account. Not only did it undergo manifold and massive preparations and alterations for a period of some thirteen or fourteen months over the space of four years, with the assistance of two of the nation's finest minds, but it also provides specific indications of its completeness.

In paragraph five Washington invokes his first inaugural address, in which he sets forth the ends of the government. And in paragraph seven he invokes his 1783 "Circular Letter to the Governors Upon the Disbanding of the Troops," in which he urges the consummation of the modern revolution within the United States. In this manner, Washington makes those two crucial documents a part of the "Farewell." Together, they give a complete account of the regime then being instituted in America.

The importance of giving so complete an account in the "Farewell" may be learned from the claim that the free society required building. The principles of its architecture alone could provide the basis for judging the uses and practices to which it would be put. In this essay it is not required so completely to analyze the founding of a free society. We are rather concerned with the conditions of its preservation. Thus, we will recur to the first inaugural and the Circular Letter only to a limited extent. But before undertaking the account of Washington's version of the rule of necessity, it would be well to notice two aspects of significance in the discussion of the founding itself.

First, in his first inaugural address, setting forth the ends of the government, Washington makes perhaps the most puzzling remark of his career. Referring to the "great assemblage of communities and interests" represented in the institution of the government, he discerned a pledge that the foundations of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality; and the pre-eminence of a free government be exemplified by all the attributes which can win the affection of its citizens and command the respect of the world.

When this rare, this daring repose on "private morality" is joined, as Washington joined it, to the call for a "national morality," one experiences the full force of the paradox. If the *foundations* are "private morality," what is the place of "national morality"? Can Washington expect to give to "national morality" the full force of "private morality"?

In the same address Washington described the hand of God as “that Invisible Hand” which authors “every public and private good.” To merit the “propitious smiles” of the “Invisible Hand,” however, the nation must show regard for the “rules of order and right.” These rules establish a strict relationship, “in the economy and course of nature,” between “virtue and happiness” or “duty and advantage” and between “the genuine maxim of an honest and magnanimous policy and the solid rewards of public prosperity and felicity.”

Washington, in other words, regards the public good as the reward of “private morality,” as opposed to considering virtue a means to the end of the public good. The question becomes, what is the nature of the reward? One might recall Bernard Mandeville’s seventeenth century “private vices, public benefits.” Washington’s “private virtues, public benefit” is treated by him as a reward for private interests. How is it that “private morality” acquires this reward? It creates the conditions for a form of government which need not aim at virtue, which need not restrain individual interests by principles of command. That is the thrust of the remark in the “Farewell” that “public happiness” occasions virtue. The pre-eminence of free government stems from its immunity to resort to principles of command.

What, then, has this government to do? And whence arises “national morality,” if not from principles of command? These questions lead to the second significant aspect of the discussion of the founding, as Washington saw it, and demonstrate the difference between “private morality” and “national morality.”

The order of the paragraphs in the “Farewell” Address constitutes ascending and descending scales that pivot on the central notion of the representatives bound by the Constitution. Twenty-five ascending paragraphs primarily describe limits on and dangers to the people’s power. While the limits and dangers are found in the nature of things, they correspond with an emphasis on the enormous influence and power of the founder in building the republic. The people’s initial impotence, a reflection of their own proclivities besides, parallels Washington’s initial power.

Twenty-five descending paragraphs, while culminating in the praise of Washington’s deeds, primarily described the conditions of preserving the republic, given the enormous and growing power of the people. Not only does the motion toward the founder’s withdrawal symbolize the eclipsing of his power by the people. These paragraphs also correspond to the actual emergence of the people as ruler.

When Washington declared that the people need a national morality, he began the chain of arguments that show the effect of their love of being one people. The very first condition, an artificial rule of necessity, for the preservation of the republic, is that the people preserve within themselves an equivalent to the founder’s prudent reason. Washington ultimately calls it “enlightened opinion” but initially, national morality. National morality is the means whereby a powerful people secure the pursuit of private morality. But national morality is less a code of conduct or principle of command than an habitual attitude toward the real rule of necessity. The people’s growing power parallels a dimi-

nution in the influence of Washington's prudent reason, because they, as he once had, became capable of following duty over inclination.

Bearing these aspects of the founding in mind, it becomes expeditious to analyze the "Farewell" in terms of the circumstances affecting a free society in an unfree world.

The people are unable to read the rule of necessity. Nevertheless, their society is subject to it. In order to attain the needed degree of political dexterity, recommended by Diodotus and Washington, they must employ rules of intercourse derived from and consistent with the principles by which they rule.

The transcendent interest, the product of these principles, sets the tone of those rules of intercourse. It preserves the people's liberty by setting limits to and authorizing the actions of representatives. It also preserves the nation's liberty, which is nothing but as great a degree of freedom of action as necessity allows, by dis-allowing principles of supra-national fidelity.

The people's independence of ties of fidelity is not rooted in Machiavellianism, or the ready will to do what serves one's momentary interest. This is so because the transcendent interest is not allowed to be transient. Their independence, then, becomes an expression of the permanent quest for justice. It regards justice as incompatible with the subordination of the transcendent interest, and hence of the nation, to any other interest whatsoever. Reason, parties, and foreign interests are treated in identical terms: wills competing with the "will of the society."

The will of the society comes to mean nothing more than a free people's interest in self-preservation as a people. Similarly, the term, "nation's will" comes to light as a purely technical term; it suggests that providing for a free people's interest which is achieved *by means* of regularized governmental operations.

The free society deals with the rule of necessity by means of foreclosing to itself the option of redefining its interests. Its policy of strict impartiality is by definition non-imperial. It is not free to consider advancing its interest by means of permanent alliances or unions with others, since that raises the specter of redefining the transcendent interest and altering the "assemblage of communities and interests" on grounds incompatible with the "foundation of national policy." In that respect, the French, who were wrong to criticize Washington in 1796, are quite justified in criticizing American policy at the World Forum for Democracy held in Poland in 2000. In doing so they echo the policy of Washington in 1793, enunciated in the "Proclamation of Neutrality," which denied or canceled American obligations to France under the Treaty of Defense entered into during the Revolutionary War. Given the revolutions in France and importance of defending American interests, Washington was justified. Similarly, if French fears of the course of American hegemony are reasonable, then the French are justified to resist improvident pressures toward global democracy.

The free society's pursuit of its interest, guided by justice, is dependent upon the assurance of its safety. *That means assuring the freedom to choose peace or war.* To do so, the free society must become the agent of necessity vis-à-vis others, rather than being forced to suffer it (as in the Melian dialogue). Washington implies that the tragedy of political life (which inheres in foreclosing supra-national fidelity) may be resolved, insofar as the choice that is required is compatible with the end in view. But this requires a political dexterity which democracy may not command—or does it? The problem is to avoid unnecessary claims on public faith; it arises from the fact that the claims, which a Machiavellian policy could dispense with easily, are enforced in a free society by the requirements of the regime itself (which mainly means through the agency of public opinion). A free people, therefore, is not capable of the treachery of Alcibiades.¹⁰

A free people must preserve their Constitution above all. Necessity, however, is no respecter of constitutions. This is the reason it is necessary to surmount necessity as far as possible. The avoidance of regime changes under necessity is not less important than avoiding speculative regime changes. Those imposed by necessity, however, are evitable only to the degree the rule of necessity does not turn itself against the free society. The Spartans endured the worst of ills, change of regime, by reason of the necessity which made it Athens' enemy. The war closed with Sparta in command of an empire its regime could not sustain without change. It changed.

The life of a people, therefore, is a life of cares, dangers, and labors. They traverse the snares of an unfree world—where all comes at cost—by means of right, duty, and interest. Washington's symmetries can be mesmerizing.

A free people require, and may consult, their right. For it is manifest in the impotence of other states to deny their claims. They require to follow duty, which is to savor peace and to defend their just claims wherever they may be threatened. And they require to pursue interest, which is above all the preservation of the free society.

The care expended on this goal will reconcile particular interests to the interest of free society. The labor required for its successful completion will be determined both by the rule of necessity and the Constitution of the regime.

The people will have every chance to keep their Constitution, if they once receive it whole through the initial dangers. Otherwise, they can never be quite certain of the goodness of their way of life. The fate of Carthage is perhaps the best example of a people who lacked any cause to identify their interests with the goodness of their way of life.

Before Carthage was effaced from the face of the earth, the Carthaginians had occasion to reflect on the value of the city to their respective lives. Montesquieu considered the Washingtonesque but doomed efforts of Hannibal to give them a whole constitution.¹¹ How could that city have preserved itself? he asked. Hannibal, the praetor, sought to stop the magistrates pillaging the republic. And what did they do? They went to arraign

¹⁰ Cf., Thucydides, V, 45-46.

¹¹ Charles de Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois*, III, 3.

him before the Romans. “Unfortunate ones, who wanted to be citizens without that there might be a city!”

In sum, the rule prior to the rule of necessity identified by Rood is a people’s recognition of its own way as good, and deserving defense against all dangers. That, in turn, leads to insistence upon the rule of law in security policy (and fosters even oxymorons, such as the “international community”). Where a people’s way admits no transcending interest, the course of policy is plain. It is founded not upon deliberating distinctions of good and evil but upon distinguishing forms of safety necessary to the free society. George Washington made this implicit rule explicit, and in doing so he provided enduring guidance for the foreign policy of a republican regime.

Appendices

For the sake of convenience, I attach two appendices. The first is a resume of the “Farewell” Address, keyed to the actual paragraphs of the Addendum, substituting sentences for each of Washington’s fifty-one paragraphs. Some few sentences will be more cumbersome than I could have desired, but faithful to the argument. That is followed by a second appendix, a brief commentary designed to clarify the terms of Washington’s argument. These may serve as references for the interpretation provided in the text.

* * *

A:

Washington’s “Farewell”: A Resume

The period for a new election to the presidency is drawing near, and Washington chooses to further the public’s deliberation by declaring his unavailability. (1)

Having carefully considered every implication, he judges this the path of duty as well as inclination (2)

Heretofore duty has always compelled inclination, as in the case when the critical posture of “our affairs with foreign nations” prevented his retirement in 1792. (3)

At this juncture, the people’s “external and internal” concerns are compatible with releasing him. (4)

He had explained in his first inaugural address the end that he had in view and now retires thinking that he has succeeded. (5)

He is grateful for the success of “your” efforts and wishes that “your union” and “brotherly affection” may be perpetual; so that the free constitution which is the work of “your hands” may be sacredly maintained; and so that “the happiness of the people of these States, under the auspices of liberty,” may be made complete by “so prudent a use of this blessing.” (6)

He should stop on this note, save that, desiring “the permanency” of “your happiness as a people,” he offers some disinterested advice similar to that he urged when disbanding the army in 1783. (7)

Liberty is secure in the hearts of the people and does not require his encouragement. (8)

Further, the “unity of government which constitutes you one people” now “is dear to you,” but while, mainly, securing the promise of the preamble, it is also the point most vulnerable to the attacks of enemies, foreign and domestic; thus, a correct estimate of the value of “national union” is fundamental to private and public happiness, to be considered the sacred cause of “your political safety and prosperity,” ever to be defended. (9)

“Sympathy and interest” should move the people to this, as their common country ought to “concentrate your affections,” elevating America beyond ordinary appellations. (10)

Considerations of interest alone, however, are still more compelling. (11)

One regime feeds and saps at the prosperity of another, wedded in “an indissoluble community of interests as one nation.” (12)

Assembled thus, all find greater safety from foreign dangers while simultaneously minimizing the need for dangerous military establishments. (13)

By itself the benefit from the prospect of union should authorize the experiment in governing “so large a sphere” by means of free government. (14)

Sectionalism, a tool of destruction serving the interests of party, can undermine this collective strength, making aliens “of those who ought to be bound by fraternal affection.” (15)

Your union requires an effective government, chosen by you, upon due deliberation and on principles of liberty; it is erected on the strength of the people’s right to make and alter their constitutions, “the fundamental maxim of liberty,” which claims from the people’s respect for the authority of government and obedience to its laws. (16)

Political undertakings which interfere with the “regular deliberation and action” of this government destroy its fundamental principle and provide artificial scope and energy for the influence of faction, effectively substituting the independent “will of a party” for the settled “will of the nation.” (17)

Such parties may occasionally amplify the public choice, but will ultimately serve the “unprincipled” in overthrowing the people. (18)

Just as individual happiness requires the Union, and the permanency of the Union requires an effective government, so, too, the preservation of government calls for resistance to “irregular oppositions” to its authority and for rejection of specious amendments. (Governments, like other human institutions, build their character through time and habit, and the people must not hazard that vigor which provides a “perfect security of liberty.”) (19)

“Liberty itself will find in such a government, with powers properly distributed and adjusted, its surest guardian. It is, indeed, little else than a name, where government is too feeble to withstand the enterprises of faction, to confine each member of the society within the limits prescribed by the laws, and to maintain all in the secure and tranquil enjoyment of the rights of person and property.” (20)

Apart from the danger of sectionalism, there is a broader threat in factionalism. (21)

The spirit of faction cannot be excised, as it springs from the profoundest “passions of the human mind,” and it assumes its worst form, and opposes its worst threat to human happiness, in popular government. (22)

Government by means of alternating recriminatory intolerances produces horrors of despotism which are ameliorated only by the ascent of a permanent, absolute despotism. (23)

These are the extremes which are visible in the embryos of party strife. (24)

Such strife introduces impurities into public councils, subjecting the “policy and will” of the country to the independent “policy and will” of some members only or of a foreign power. (25)

The prevailing idea that parties “keep alive the spirit of liberty” in free countries is true to the very degree constitutions incline more toward unfree forms; whereas in popular government the spirit of party is too apt to prevail and ought to be restrained. (26)

Similarly, officers of government ought to be restrained to constitutionally defined paths of endeavor, to which they will be held when the people’s habits of thinking require it; officers ought to endure even incapacity or imbecility in office rather than effect any change by other than prescribed modes. (27)

Lastly, the people, who must guard the sanctity of their constitution, ought to provide themselves with the religious and moral habits necessary to sustain a “national morality,” and thus to rule the conditions of public service, or the tie between “public and private felicity” will perish. (28)

It is true “substantially,” that virtue or morality is a “necessary spring of popular government.” (29)

Public opinion, therefore, insofar as “the structure of government gives force” to it, ought to be “enlightened;” knowledge should be generally diffused and institutions promoted for the purpose. (30)

Public opinion, reconciled to the necessities of civil order and future peace, must sustain the power of government to preserve public credit, spare debt to future generations, and supply revenue sufficient to the purposes of government. (31)

Our virtue, occasioned by our public happiness, constitutes the ground of just relations with other states—an experiment “to give to mankind the magnanimous and too novel example of a people always guided by an exalted justice and benevolence”—in which, free, enlightened, and (“at no distant period”) great, we follow “every sentiment which ennobles human nature” while hoping that its vices won’t discountenance the experiment. (32)

Key to a policy based on this principle is the aversion to all “habitual hatred” or “habitual fondness” for any other nation, which should remove slight causes of conflict. (33)

As antipathies compel policies, so, too, do “passionate attachments” create “the illusion of an imaginary common interest in cases where no real common interest exists;” it gives rise to unequal treatment of similarly situated states; and it allows the corrupt at home to betray their nation under the cover of popularity. (34)

These are but so many avenues to foreign intrigue, which alarm the “enlightened and independent patriot.” (35)

“History and experience prove that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of republican government” and counsel popular jealousy against foreign insidation—an impartial jealousy, unaffected for one or another and itself proof against foreign wills. (36)

The great rule of our conduct in foreign relations is extensive commercial connections and contracted political connections. (37)

Europe’s primary interests only concern us at this juncture; her frequent wars are foreign to our interests and we must not become implicated in them. (38)

Our geopolitical situation authorizes us “to pursue a definite course;” building our might as a united people, we might ultimately “defy material injury from external annoyance,” when we may “choose peace or war, as our interests, guided by justice, shall counsel.” (30)

Why should we lose this prospect, only to “entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition?” (40)

“Honesty is the best policy,” but let us hold to an absolute minimum the number of cases in which foreign states may exercise any claim to our fidelity. (41)

Let us provide adequate defenses, and temporary alliances will serve our needs in “extraordinary emergencies.” (42)

“Policy, humanity, and interest” all conspire to urge “harmony” and “liberal intercourse” with all nations: harmony cannot be commanded so much as induced by means of careful regard to advance the aims of an even-handed policy, even a commercial policy; for “disinterested favors” exceed the powers of nations—no error is greater than “to calculate upon real favors from nation to nation.” (43)

In offering these counsels “I dare not hope” that “they will prevent our nation from running the course which has hitherto marked the destiny of nations;” it suffices for Washington to “moderate” the ills which the nation would otherwise experience in their full force. (44)

The deeds of Washington’s public service will serve to measure his adherence to these principles, but he attests that he fully intended to follow them. (45)

The cornerstone of his view is manifest in the 1793 Proclamation of Neutrality. (46)

He found that right, duty, and interest combined to justify the Proclamation, therefore he maintained it with fortitude. (47)

In the place of describing, urging the right, it were sufficient to note that the belligerents conceded it. (48)

The duty may be deduced from the requirement of “justice and humanity” that, necessity permitting, each nation should “maintain inviolate the relations of peace and amity toward other nations.” (49)

The people, he thought, would recollect best how their interests justified his course, but he nursed the design of assuring the country’s ultimate capacity to rule its own fate, to pursue its interests without let or hindrance. (50)

Washington’s errors were unintended, and he would have God vouchsafe their insignificance, while the people indulge them as obscured by the light of his service. Thus he retires, to enjoy in the company of his fellow-citizens the “benign influence of good laws under a free government, his favored aim and the fit reward of “our mutual cares, labors, and dangers.” (51)

* * *

B:
Commentary

- (1) Washington's opening paragraph acknowledges his consciousness of the pre-emptive role he played in the political life of the founding—contrasting strongly with his self-deprecatory acceptance of the initial election mandate. Public deliberation, the essence of free government, will not proceed freely for so long as any chance of his own ruling remains.
- (2) On the same grounds, he assures the people that his action is thoughtful, reflecting the counsel of duty as well as inclination.
- (3) This is the first time in the founding when such agreement has reigned; the first time Washington was free was when he could declare his people free.
- (4) The people are free not only in formal terms but by a happy concatenation of their affairs,
- (5) conducing to ends which Washington had specifically set forth upon his first inauguration.
- (6) The people's freedom can only be understood as the result of their own efforts, raising a question as to Washington's specific contribution. To disentangle his own responsibility from that of the people seems to involve disentangling the free constitution from the conditions for its preservation.
- (7) Else, he would have no further need to speak. Now, however, as he had in 1783, he judges the people in some danger with respect to which they do not seem especially alert.
- (8) Washington is not responsible for the people's love of liberty,
- (9) but has contributed to their love of being one people. The former is the foundation of the free society, but the latter is the means of preserving the free society against foreign and domestic assault. He goes further: the love of being one people is above all the cause the people's "political safety and prosperity."
- (10) The people must vaunt their particularism, the love of the American, to give assurance to individual liberty. Forces of "sympathy and interest" suggest this course.
- (11) Interest in itself, however, rational self-interest, suffices to justify this course.

- (12) The diverse interests of Americans from differing regions and occupations prosper most when nurtured in the national community.
- (13) Thus united, they can provide greater safety from foreign danger, while also controlling the need to resort to defensive forces vis-à-vis one another. Without the national community, in other words, not only are they prey to outsiders, but those self-same interests serve to divide them. The power of rational self-interest changes with changing political circumstances.
- (14) The benefits of wresting concord from interests subject to discord—heightened prosperity and safety—authorize the experiment of free government on a large scale. Whose experiment is it, the people’s or the founders’?
- (15) The people’s liability to emphasize their interests as principles of difference rather than community hints that they are not wholly aware of the nature of the experiment. The founders, responsible for forging *e pluribus unum*, own this experiment of defeating alienation among the citizens and denying to party this “tool of destruction.”
- (16) The people require, the experiment requires, a government compatible at once with the people’s responsibility and that of Washington. While the government must provide assurance to liberty, it must also be constructed on principles of liberty, on the people’s right of revolution. The government will exercise only such power as the people condescend to suffer; they owe it to themselves to suffer it gladly.
- (17) The right of revolution, “a fundamental maxim of liberty,” has its full influence only when the operations of government are regularized, follow channels. Otherwise, given irregular patterns or exercising of political power, it can never be certain against what, or whom, the right of revolution may be exercised. Parties or factions external to the branches of government compete with the nation’s will.
- (18) The public opinion which might sometimes be expressed by means of external parties receives no guarantee of regular, faithful expression by this mechanism. They may become instruments of oppression or subversion.
- (19) With this argument Washington has created the basis for a political definition of liberty. Liberty is expressed by means of the very operations of government, when they are regular and based on habitual expectations rooted in the people’s love of liberty. The character which government will acquire through time is nothing less than development of the power to, and the expectation that it will, confine individuals to the pursuit of rational self interest, “enjoyment of the rights of person and property.” The developed character of the government resists the impulse to apply the right of revolution, to refound,

and hence substitutes the rule of law, the nation's will, for the rule of raw interest.

- (20) The government itself is threatened by interested partisanship, as the community of interest is.
- (21) The "spirit of faction"—Washington still means an emphasis on interests as differentiating rather than uniting—is native to the "human mind." The love of one's own, the particular, does not merely, nor even primitively refer to the city or country. In fact, the struggle to make the city everyone's own, the founder's aim, almost seems a mismatch. For the greater scope which popular government affords to the expression of one's loves but heightens the prospect of interests conflicting with the community of interests which sustain the government. To Washington, what undermines popular government undermines human happiness.
- (22) The alternative to popular government—to the love of the community of interests—is that men and their parties take turns using one another for their own ends.
- (23) The differences among parties always reflect at least the germ of these extremes; or, what makes parties in fact parties is that their aims, like their interests, are by definition mutually exclusive.
- (24) But no community can recognize interests mutually exclusive within itself without thereby diluting, poisoning, its wholeness. It can have no will; its voice will always speak the will of another, whether a mere part of the community or some power external to it. It is possible neither to love, nor to defend a city which has no voice, which is only a city in name.
- (25) Washington's argument begins to become clear as it approaches its center in the twenty-sixth paragraph. He chose to speak of the people's power, their responsibility, as a means of continuing the practical task of defining the republic and carving out its space in the world. The crucial definition is not, as we might expect, the Constitution; it is rather that transcendent sense of difference, distinguishing one city from another, which serves to obscure if not eliminate the very real differences among men within the city. The particular city seems to be as far as mankind are able to go in the work of eliminating the power of *interest* as an obstacle to human happiness, even when one's efforts are based on universal principles and the counsels of interest. While parties may "keep alive the spirit of liberty," their power to do so is inversely proportional to the degree of liberty that the constitution supports. In that sense, the people's liberty is better defined in terms of political opportunities than in terms of an obstinate insistence upon rights.
- (26) Restraint of parties, as obstacles to a community of interests, goes hand in hand with restraint of governing officials. Their respect for constitutional de-

marcations is, in fact, but a concession to the ruling force of public opinion and to the opportunity which the people exercise jointly to determine the form of political power even at the expense of substance.

- (27) The people enjoy this opportunity not as a result of their liberty, for which they are responsible, but as a result of their “national morality,” for which the founders are responsible in the first instance. On the strength of this transcendent expression of interest they are able to marry “public and private felicity.”
- (28) “Virtue or morality” does not tell the whole story of the motive principle of republican government. It does in large measure serve to provide its necessary motion, however.
- (29) While the aim of this government is human happiness, the public opinion which its structure enthrones conduces to the end only when it is nurtured in principles of decency based on the transcendent expression of interest.
- (30) Stated in practical terms: civil order and future peace are subject to necessities to which public opinion must be reconciled, else government will lack such ordinary powers, even, as that of raising sufficient revenues.
- (31) This might suggest an instrumental account of virtue. That virtue, however, only becomes possible in the presence of “public happiness,” or the consummation, before heralded, of a transcendent expression of interests. Thus, the virtue which preserves the power of government is at the same time the expression of principles of humanity and civilization as the basis of the people’s relationships with all other peoples. The consummation of a transcendent expression of interests makes it possible for America to deal with others, not on considerations of mere interest, but on the basis of sentiments “which ennoble human nature.” This must work as follows: the people, whose opinion must rule but will do so only insofar as they repress the sense of interests as differentiating, will in turn regard other peoples not in light of their lesser interests but rather in light of their transcendent interests. Their mutual relations will not be as parties within a whole, but rather as distinct, self-sufficient wholes. This will be the case, at least, if the power of human nature, with respect to its vices (the sense of interests as differentiating, alienating) do not overwhelm the perspective of transcendent interest when it operates outside of the protective shadow of constitutional habit.
- (32) The foreign policy which would be consistent with this outlook would deny that there are ever grounds for “habitual hatred” or “habitual fondness” between this nation and others, since the lesser human interests do not determine that policy.
- (33) A nation, above all, a free people, is not free to treat another nation as its own, a thing which, if it could happen, would create obstacles to public happiness as great as those which private interests pose to private happiness. To

imagine that another city can be one's own, as one's fellow citizen is, creates an "imaginary common interest" where "no real common interest exists." It introduces injustice in foreign relations, but, still more, threatens the true transcendent interest of one's own city. For, the imaginary common interest, to be secured, would impose the necessity of obscuring the interest of one's own city.

- (34) It is clear, therefore, that such an illusion does no more than create an opportunity for those who are not comprehended by one's own city to undermine its transcendent interest and hence weaken its authority over lesser interests.
- (35) Washington resorts to those ubiquitous teachers, "history and experience," for the only time in the essay, as if to underscore the universal force of this account of particularism. What all may say and do, saith Aristotle, is true. To Washington, impartiality towards all foreign cities is the obverse of the consistent preference for one's own.
- (36) A foreign policy of impartiality towards foreign cities—not to be confused with mere neutrality—one based on an equal readiness to harm or benefit any other state as circumstances require, is a thing unheard of. What kind of policy would it produce? One based on interests, Washington answers: extensive commercial connections and the narrowest political connections. That is,
- (37) a foreign policy based on secondary interests, since "Europe's primary interests" concern America but remotely at the close of the eighteenth century.
- (38) How might "Europe's primary interests" ever concern America? Only as necessity, the threat to America's existence, might make a political connection the means of defense. But the absence of such necessity at the close of the eighteenth century creates a necessity of its own: that America may so strengthen herself as to be ever independent of political connections for her defense. That eventuality would make permanent the aim of pursuing the course of humanity in foreign relations; that is, America could pursue her own interests, "guided by justice." The nation is at liberty to make justice its guide in choosing "peace or war" to the degree that it suffers no compulsion in regard to the safety of its citizens.
- (39) Then is the morality required for its preservation not a burden upon its shoulders.
- (40) It is preferable that public faith, honesty, never be sacrificed to expediency. But the nature of political life is such that sacrifice is avoidable only to the degree a city is parsimonious in pledging its faith.
- (41) It must do so only under the rule of necessity, relying primarily on the adequacy of its own defenses to assure its liberty in a world which offers no political guarantees for a city's liberty.

- (42) “Disinterested favors,” or which is the same, a common interest among states, exceed the powers of nations. Washington offers a political definition of self-sufficiency for the city.
- (43) Having completed the account of America’s place in the world, Washington disclaims the sin of utopianism. No nation may be permanently exempted from the rule of necessity. Its counsels, however, prudent counsels, may aim to place it in the best position to submit to that rule with hope of profiting by the result. Necessity has no respect for constitutions. The chief ill it occasions is the loss of a constitution, and thereby the express hope of assuring human happiness. If he can succeed in moderating the ills necessity imposes, whatever else befalls the city, it would presumably preserve its free constitution.
- (44) Washington appealed to his deeds in closing, as he appealed to his speeches in opening the address, as serving to affirm the degree of his success in pursuing these principles. But pursue them he did, in speech and deed. The relation between the two is that only the latter, vitiated by chance and the very necessity he sought to manage, will demonstrate how the end inheres in the principles.
- (45) He indicates the 1793 Proclamation of Neutrality as his central deed. In that, he refused to come to the aid of France against Britain, though a plausible reading of the 1778 Treaty of Alliance seemed to require it. According to Washington, that treaty served its purpose in the Revolutionary War; without it American may have died aborning. But the refusal to apply it in France’s hour of need in 1793 also served its purpose; it both preserved the fragile, infant republic from ravages of war which may have been fatal to it and preserved to it British commerce which was vital for it. The breaking, as the plighting of faith preserved the transcendent interest of the United States.
- (46) Washington *justified* this deed by evoking the evidence of “right, duty, and interest.”
- (47) As to right, however, he claimed that, since the belligerents acknowledges it, he need not develop it. That seems to mean that they recognized the standards of their own deeds in the Proclamation, whatever the unique character of a free constitution might require. The duty was nothing less than the teaching of peace, deducible from “justice and humanity.” This teaching urges “relations of peace and amity” with every state, whatever their circumstances, for as long a necessity allows. In fact, then, Washington derived the duty from the fact that necessity either did not compel the United States to fight, as he might say, or rather compelled the United States not to fight.
- (48)

- (49) As to interest, Washington indulges the sole, intentional ambiguity of the essay. One might imagine that interest is nothing other than the pedestrian name for duty, as that has just been described. But Washington means something yet different, and also different from right. First, he tells the people that they would best remember the interests which justified his courses. The implication is that it satisfied their interests. British commerce was already implied. It had the obverse of American navigation and agriculture, among other things. There was West Indian trade as well, and the vital navigation of the Mississippi at stake (which Washington especially considered before deciding, not whether to uphold the treaty, but whether to join with Britain against France or remain neutral), and other discrete, lesser interests. In all this, what is striking is that it seems unlikely that he expects the people to remember the transcendent interest, which his address labors to develop. By allowing the people, as opposed to himself, to supply a view of ordinary interests as justifying his course, Washington does not claim responsibility for the appeal to that justification. By doing so, he reminds us of the earlier need to disentangle the people's responsibility for the free constitution from Washington's responsibility for their "love of being one people." Then, he described the need to wrest concord from interests subject to discord. The particular interests to which the people might appeal to justify his Proclamation were just the sort as were subject to discord, and certainly not all agreed in finding their profit from British trade. It is also true, that, at the time of the Proclamation, Washington was responding to substantial public fervor on behalf of the French "Republic." That was the error of the rise of the pro-French, democratic societies. The people, then, knew their particular interests and, as yet, but dimly perceived their transcendent interest which would have counseled impartiality. The people were not wholly aware of the nature of their experiment in free government. Washington was so. Thus, he offers a different justification, in light of interest, for his Proclamation of Neutrality. He had a design, he admitted, to assure the country's capacity to rule its own fate, pursue its own interest. That design depended on two things. The country needed time to build strength sufficient to pursue its interests freely. But secondly, it also needed to discover the interest it had as a country, its transcendent interest. The ambiguity in Washington's account stems from the fact that the interest which justified his course, to him, was not altogether compatible with the interest which justified it to the people. The latter, however, did contribute to the justification, inasmuch as they provided the necessary condition for Washington's pursuit of the former.
- (50) Having admitted so much, Washington closes the address boldly. He reminds the people of his customary self-deprecation. He must have committed some errors, but he prays to God that they be held to little consequence. In any case, however, he would have the people, as distinct from God, regard them as insignificant compared to his successes.

- (51) It is on a self-congratulatory note that he retires: His people are happy, and so is he. The experiment was complete, affording Washington the opportunity to enjoy the reward of his, and his people's "mutual cares, labors, and dangers." Mutual cares, labors, and dangers are appropriate only in the circumstances of a common interest—a transcendent interest.