

Athens or Jerusalem

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Warner Fite was a professor of philosophy at Indiana University in the early years of this century. He published a book entitled Individualism, based on a series of lectures delivered at the University of Chicago in 1909. The book is an effort to develop a social philosophy based on the reasoned ordering of differences among people in a society. We would probably call it a philosophy of enlightened self-interest, defining the word "enlightened" to take into account longer range and indirect effects of pursuing one's own purposes. The sources of Fite's social philosophy are "classical" -- specifically, the ideas and values of ancient Greece as found in the writings of Plato and Aristotle.

Fite contrasts the classical with what he calls the "oriental" -- that is, the ideas and values derived from ancient Judaism and Christianity. "The ideal of justice is inherited mainly from the Greeks," Fite argued, "from whom, indeed, we have obtained most of the ideas that underlie our modern culture. On the other hand, the ideal of brotherly love has come to us from the Jews, through the Christian Church."

His chapter on "Justice and Brotherly Love" argues that justice arises out of rational accommodations among humans that allow for differences. Those accommodations include economic as well as political adjustments to achieve what we would call fairness. Brotherly love, by contrast, discards all notions of shared obligations and responsibilities. The family provides the model of society. Justice in such a tradition is subordinated to charity, distribution in the form of giving without expectation of return.

Brotherly love is based on a mystical "unity-without-difference," Fite says, rather than on rational unity-with-difference.

Fite's pairing off of the classical and the oriental appears in the familiar scholarly shorthand as the opposition of Athens and Jerusalem. The debate in the past century has also been couched in others terms: Fite spoke of "individualism" as opposed to "socialism." The roots of individualism are to be found in the rational public order of the Greeks; the roots of socialism are to be found in the bonds of family and sharing of the early Christians. (It seems to me that this dichotomy simply overlooks the notion of "righteousness" in Judaism, which unifies the ideas of charity and justice, but that argument must be pursued elsewhere.)

What is important here is that social thought in the United States a century or so ago tended to reflect the division that Fite identifies. I think it still does. Fite is not writing about philanthropy as we are discussing it; his focus is on the larger social issues of society. We are looking at philanthropy in the context of those larger issues. The way we look at the social problems of society is profoundly affected by whether we lean toward individualism or toward socialism. It is very difficult for us to look at either idea without prejudice. Our prejudice doesn't solve the problem, however. In the rational tradition we must think about the problem and discuss it; in the religious tradition we must remain aware that understanding is more than intellectual.

In the first of these lectures I argued that our philanthropic tradition is based on a core of values that might be labeled compassion, acts of mercy to relieve suffering. We derive those values from the religious teachings of the ancient Jews and Christians. The other main stream of our philanthropic tradition comes from classical Greece and Rome and can be captured in a core of values related to community: acts intended to

improve or enhance the quality of life. What we have inherited is a philanthropic agenda that includes both sets of values. In my view -- in my own worldview as well as in my opinion -we are children of both Athens and Jerusalem. For the most part, we act as if we were the children of divorce, and perhaps that is what has happened to us. We can't decide which parent is our true parent; in fact, we act as if we were the product of only one parent. We act as if we have but one home, Athens or Jerusalem. For Fite and for many others of his time, that is what the debate between "individualism" and "socialism" is about -- the tension between the rational and the religious.

Fite's book caught my eye some Months ago when I was reading for the faculty seminar on philanthropy. We began our seminar discussions with the essay known as "The Gospel of Wealth" by Andrew Carnegie, published in June and December of 1889. The essay is considered by the historian Robert Bremner to be "the most famous document in the history of American philanthropy." Because this is the centennial of that essay, and because of other notable events (such as the founding of Hull House in Chicago by Jane Addams) that took place in that same year, I have spent considerable time in conversation with Mr. Carnegie and his admirers and critics. Carnegie, with John D. Rockefeller, is the very symbol of philanthropy on a grand scale. Yet Carnegie is considered to have been interested in religion only as an important social phenomenon, while Rockefeller was devoutly religious. They are both preeminent examples of the new philosophy of individualism, and they share a strong awareness of the responsibilities of wealth.

The annual symposium of the Center on Philanthropy to be held in June takes as its theme "the responsibilities of wealth." There appear to be a large number of Carnegie-like fortunes in contemporary America perhaps the largest number of first-generation, self-made billionaires since

Carnegie's time. We are interested in what the people who control these fortunes think about their responsibilities today, and whether any of them has a "gospel of wealth" to offer our generation as Carnegie offered one to his.

Carnegie's essay is organized in three parts.. The first part is his statement of his political and economic philosophy: what he calls "individualism."

Carnegie was greatly influenced by the English philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer. Spencer gained most of his fame in America by applying the evolutionary principle of survival of the fittest to society. That appealed to Carnegie, who believed it was evident in our democratic society: given equal opportunity, some will prove to have more talent and self-discipline and intelligence and prosper much more than others.

Carnegie's words should be read and heard in the context of a debate; the other voice I will use is that of Walter Rauschenbusch. Rauschenbusch was a Baptist pastor and theologian in Rochester, New York who is regarded as one of the most eloquent spokesmen of the so-called social gospel movement. It is happy coincidence for me that he first expressed his ideas at the National Baptist Congress in 1889. According to a recent biography, Rauschenbusch

(He) stated that there are two main objectives of Christianity, one widely recognized and the other not. Christians agree that the church must seek to change individuals. 'But I claim, (Rauschenbusch said) that that is only one-half of the object of Christianity, that the other half is to bring in the Kingdom of God, and that the efforts of the Christian Church ought to be directed in a like measure to that last object....' The church must now launch a direct attack upon 'the wrongs of human society and the unjust laws of the community to bring about righteousness.'

Carnegie wrote a book entitled Triumphant Democracy in 1885 before he published his essay on philanthropy. It was largely grateful praise from someone who left a monarchy to become the son of a republic. It was also Carnegie's attempt to inform his foreign friends, as well as most of his fellow-citizens in the United States, of the wonderful progress that had been made here. Even in the chapter on "Pauperism and Crime" he contrasted conditions here and in Europe. The most important statistic he gives is that there were but 250,000 paupers on relief in the United States, or five per thousand. In England, by contrast, there were 33 paupers per thousand.

Thus America exhibits not only the least poverty, but also the best system of alleviating it. More than half the distressed within her borders are relieved by voluntary charity; and this is ever encroaching on the fields of State charity. It is a decided gain to the world when compulsory charity, such as annually forces ten million pounds sterling from the pockets of the British taxpayer, is replaced by the charity which blesses equally him who gives and him who takes; and this is a change which is rapidly taking place in America. It may safely be predicted that with the growing self-dependence which republican institutions foster, State charities will be substantially restricted to such as have reached beggary through gross misconduct. (171)

Rauschenbusch's best-known book, Christianity and the Social Crisis (from which the title of these lectures is derived) was published in 1907. The chapter in that book on "The Present Crisis," looking at the same world but with a different vision, presented an America that was failing rather than realizing its promise. Rauschenbusch wrote of alienation of the worker from the land. He dwelt on the overcrowded conditions of the cities to which farmers had fled and where they joined large groups of immigrants from abroad. The cities were seen as unhealthy and unsafe

and, paradoxically, uncivilized. In such a setting people were left without "the simple hard work" that would permit them to sustain themselves with dignity. Unemployment, low wages, long hours, unsafe working conditions, exploitation of women and children at work. The results, Rauschenbusch said, were evident everywhere: alcoholism, despair, pauperization.

Rauschenbusch was convinced that politics was dominated by economics and that economic life was dominated by people of inordinate wealth. A class which is economically strong will have the necessary influence to secure and enforce laws which protect its economic interests. In turn, a class which controls legislation will shape it for its own enrichment. Politics is embroidered with patriotic sentiment and phrases, but at bottom, the economic interests dominate it always.

The charitable service that Carnegie applauded was also a matter of concern to Rauschenbusch. In the latter's view, there was evident maltreatment of charity patients in hospitals. "Our social machinery is almost as blindly cruel as our steel machinery," he said. And new initiatives, such as the neighborhood settlement movement which began in the United States at Hull House, were considered admirable but not enough to offset "the dominant facts of life which are wedging entire classes apart."

Yet Rauschenbusch shared Carnegie's enthusiasm for America. In Christianity and the Social Crisis Rauschenbusch is careful to explain that "Personally, I am not a despiser of my age and its achievements. There is no other age in which I would have preferred to have lived. The very fact that we can feel our social wrongs so keenly and discuss them calmly and without fear of social hatred, is one of the highest tributes to be paid to our

age." Some years earlier, returning to the United States after a prolonged stay in Germany, Rauschenbusch wrote:

Outwardly New York cannot compare with Berlin.
(Carnegie said it could.) Our streets are dirty and ill-paved, our tenements squalid, and the opportunities for easy and pleasant recreation and for the enjoyment of music are much fewer. Yet it seems that there is something in New York life that makes it more attractive than Berlin. I know of no other cause than the greater freedom. [Carnegie would agree.]

Both Carnegie and Rauschenbusch saw voluntary charity and public charity as some form of public-private cooperation. For Carnegie, the hope was that public charity would soon be limited to helping those who would not help themselves -- people who did not deserve voluntary charity. For Rauschenbusch the most progress was to be found in public action -- universal elementary education, for example, "guarding the intellectual rights of the child even against its parents by some measure of compulsion." Public education was thus seen as philanthropy not only funded by the state but enforced by it. Rauschenbusch attributed the progress of society not to philanthropy or even to voluntary action but to what he called "the humane sentiment" described in an essay on "The Ideals of Social Reformers," published in 1896). It is the humane sentiment in government which gives us the public schools. The humane sentiment also "has provided night schools, free lectures, free libraries and museums, and many aids even to secure a higher education for those who desire it." It is the humane sentiment that "has compelled the state, in the face of traditional political economy, to assume a certain guardianship over women and children and to limit their exploitation in industry." (It will appear ironic today that a committed liberal like Rauschenbusch could

go on to say that the humane sentiment "has granted woman very nearly all that she really has been serious in asking.")

Carnegie and Rauschenbusch shared the deep worries about foreigners, especially those who were desperately poor. Their concerns are not far from those being expressed with increasing frequency in the United States today. In Triumphant Democracy Carnegie is at some pains to prove that most of the paupers on relief in the United State were recent arrivals from Europe. Carnegie looked upon the immigrants not as a source of cheap labor but as a burden on public relief and the taxpayer. Rauschenbusch was worried that the fertility of the swarms of immigrants was a threat because marriage and parenthood were on the decline among those in the mainstream of society. "The shiftless will breed most freely," he said, while our intellectual capacity requires that the best and the brightest reproduce themselves: "The intellectual standard of humanity can be raised only by the propagation of the capable."

Carnegie and Rauschenbusch seem to agree about the virtues of freedom in America and the American opportunity to be a model for modern democracies. They are of special interest to me because they seem to offer fundamentally different ways of thinking about philanthropy. Carnegie's individualism is rational; Rauschenbusch's socialism is perhaps meta-rational (Fite would say mystical). Fite traces rationality to the Greeks; Rauschenbusch draws his arguments from Christianity. Carnegie's worldview was shaped by the rational scientific arguments of Herbert Spencer. His philanthropic agenda was almost entirely philanthropic in the narrow sense: the list of priorities in "The Gospel of Wealth" give no significant weight to charity in any form. The essay denounces almsgiving in all its forms as destructive of human character. To the extent that anyone needs to be concerned about those in hard-core poverty, the responsibility belongs to the state.

Rauschenbusch argued that we should redesign society to reflect the radical political Christianity that he found in the message of Jesus. He found socialism rather than individualism there. His view of human nature as optimistic: given the right circumstances, people would work together rather than struggle in an endless war of competition. Carnegie said that without competition, 'without struggle, there would be no society worth living in -- for anyone.

On the one hand there is abundant confidence in science and competition and voluntary action; on the other hand there is sublime optimism about the effects of faith and cooperation and the rightful claims of community. Both points of view have flourished at different times in the intervening decades. Rauschenbusch looked to the state for charity; Carnegie looked to the individual for justice.

The differences drawn between the social philosophies of Carnegie and Rauschenbusch bring out values that illuminate the recent debates about conservatism and liberalism. My own sense is that the modern debate has been won by the rationalists in both camps. The changing character of modern philanthropy minimizes charitable and religious values and reduces all philanthropy to values that are ultimately political and economic rather than religious.

We have, in other words, chosen Athens over Jerusalem, even in philanthropy.

These are some of the trends that lead to such a conclusion, with my opinions about them:

1. The adoption by philanthropic organizations of the economic values as well as the organizational techniques of modern management. The values of cost-benefit analysis and the Good Samaritan no longer co-exist. Good Samaritan values have been discarded.

2. The legal constraints on voluntary action pull at the sleeve of any Good Samaritan about to cross the road to help the victim. Fear of litigation has made moral cowards out of most professionals who might otherwise be expected to act -- "at some risk to themselves" -- in behalf of others in need. (Putting this opinion in the context of the first trend: every good organization has a good lawyer to protect its interests.)

3. Progress in measured quantitatively. In philanthropy, that means in terms of dollars. Dollars are a wonderful discipline but they are an empty goal. The definition of successful philanthropy in terms of the amounts of money raised gives economic values the highest priority.

4. Popular psychology is based on assumptions of narrow human self-interest as the only effective motivator. Philanthropic organizations increasingly appeal to the self-interest of donors -- sometimes exclusively so -- in enlisting support for their cause. (The recent plague of direct mail lottery scams as fund raising devices is an illustration of the problem.)

5. Economic values of the marketplace have made it difficult to distinguish between not-for-profit and for-profit organizations. Organizational and political values have made it increasingly difficult to distinguish between some philanthropic organizations and some government agencies.

6. The 20th century has seen the rise of the new professionalism, just emerging in the era of Carnegie and Rauschenbusch. Those men could

hardly have conceived of the scope of professionalism in society and the extent to which the concept has narrowed in its aspirations. The 19th century, as some scholars have argued, produced a high-minded professional aspiration that could be faulted for also being racist, sexist, and economically exclusionist. We now have professionalism that is open to all races, both (or several) sexes, and to economic minorities striving to scale the economic ladder. It is also a professionalism based on self-interest and with no aspirations to a higher vocation at all.

7. Finally (for the moment and for this list, at any rate), the educated elites have worked very hard to drive religion out of American life. The effort to rationalize philanthropy and to supplant charity with an austere and impartial justice as the highest goal is a reflection of this anti-religious sentiment. The educated secular elites have supplanted the educated religious elites of a century ago. Principled individualists and socialists like Carnegie and Rauschenbusch would object, as I do.