The Thomas Jefferson Center for Studies in Political Economy and Social Philosophy

General Aims

There is to be established at the University of Virginia an intellectual center that will promote a discussion of the basic ideals of Western civilization and of the solution to modern social problems most in accord with those ideals. This center is to be called The Thomas Jefferson Center for Studies in Political Economy and Social Philosophy.

The Center will serve, first, as a community of scholars who wish to preserve a social order built on individual liberty, and, second, as an educational undertaking in which students will be encouraged to view the organisational problems of society as a fusion of technical and philosophical issues. The Center will not be narrowly tied to any particular one of the several social science disciplines, although initially the focus will be on the area of study traditionally known as political economy.

Why does this sort of Center need to be established?

The social science disciplines are rapidly becoming more and more specialized and compartmentalized. As a result, young scholars, both as graduate students and beyond, are encouraged to devote most of their intellectual activity to narrow and limited subject matter and methodological fields. Great emphasis is placed upon the mastery of technical tools. Breadth in scholarship is largely eliminated by this emphasis, and the student remains ignorant of contributions in the related social science disciplines and in social philosophy. But the major problems of the social order can only be discussed
rationally from a point of view considerably more inclusive than that represented by any one discipline. Few young scholars can afford to make the investment of time and effort required to study current issues properly. Academic advancement and promotion standards tend to reward the scholar who produces the orthodox product, which is now the demonstration of technical proficiency. There simply are no social philosophers now being produced; those who do arise are more or less accidental. How can our free society expect to survive unless it produces a continuing line of new thinkers who understand, appreciate, and can implement the philosophy of the free society in this rapidly changing world. To start in a small way to provide an encouragement to this type of thinking is an eminently legitimate endeavor.

Why should the Center be established at the University of Virginia?

The establishment of the Center at the University of Virginia has much to recommend it. First of all, Virginia stands in the great Jeffersonian tradition of liberalism in the real sense, liberalism that implies an emphasis on the role of the rights of the individual, and not the perverted form that suggests an increasing role of government in all forms of economic and social life. Secondly, through its heritage and tradition, Virginia is admirably equipped for this task. But the main argument for the establishment of the Center at the University of Virginia is that there is now in the faculty and the administration of the university a group which is actively interested in promoting the type of scholarship which the Center represents. The primary motivation comes from members of the Department of Economics, but the ideas represented in the
Center are strongly supported by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the President of the University. It is hoped that, once it is established, substantial support and cooperation will come also from the related social science disciplines, notably political science, history, and philosophy.

Who should participate in the Center's program?

The Center should be made up of scholars who start from the philosophical premise that the free society is worth maintaining, and who sense the dangers to the free society brought about by the ever-increasing role of government, especially highly centralized authority. Scholars assuming two separate philosophical positions would qualify: First, the old-fashioned libertarians or "Manchester" liberals who emphasize individual freedom as the central feature of the good society, and second, the Western conservatives who emphasize the importance of Western traditions in preserving the good social order.

What should the Center undertake to accomplish?

The specific activities of the Center may be divided into four parts.

First, departments cooperating with the Center will modify the graduate curricula in such a way that the emphasis is shifted toward encouraging the type of scholarship which the Center embodies. This does not suggest any weakening in the currently established programs. The changes can be achieved by the addition of a few broader and more fundamental courses, the channeling of research effort into social policy areas, and by a modification of faculty emphasis.
But the real incentive for scholarship stems from providing the proper atmosphere within which actual and potential scholars may work. This involves the association and cooperation of scholars with a common purpose, not narrowly in agreement on the basic issues, but broadly accepting a common set of values. Unless this common agreement on values is present, real communication among scholars ceases to exist, and the scholar finds himself intellectually isolated. Many libertarians have found themselves in essentially this position in some of the outstanding academic centers in the United States and Europe during the recent years. The Center as proposed will serve to establish an intellectual home for those who share the basic libertarian or individualistic philosophy.

The primary specific task of the Center, therefore, will be that of providing a means whereby the proper persons may be brought to the University of Virginia. This can take place in four ways. First, permanent additions can be made to the teaching and research faculty. Second, outstanding individuals can be brought to the Center for short periods of time. To this end, it is proposed that one aspect of the program be the establishment of a rotating visiting professorship under which a distinguished visitor can be invited to the university each year. Such men should have distinguished academic reputations and they should be drawn from all over the world and from any of the relevant disciplines. From among the economists men such as Frank Knight and F. A. Hayek come to mind; from the philosophers, Karl Popper; from the scientists, Michael Polanyi. The list could be extended. But the primary emphasis of the Center will be on bringing young scholars to Virginia and
encouraging them to work. A limited number of post-doctoral fellowships is proposed. Under this program, the young scholar who has completed normal graduate training at an accredited institution would be brought to Virginia and given free rein to work on problems of his own choosing. Care will be taken in the selection of such scholars to insure that encouragement be given to those individuals interested in broad social problems, not in technical expertise.

As a single example, the individual who desires to pursue the philosophical implications of progressive taxation should be chosen in preference to the student who desires to work in linear programming. These fellows will be expected to participate actively in the intellectual activity of the Center although they will have no direct educational responsibilities. They might be expected to participate in the lecture series which the Center will sponsor, along with such visiting lecturers as the Center may invite to Virginia for single lectures.

A third, but no less important part, of the Center's program will be that of encouraging the scholarship of those students and permanent faculty members who are already at Virginia. A limited number of pre-doctoral fellowships will be established for able students, who after their first year of graduate work, indicate an interest in and demonstrate a competence for, the sort of scholarship which the Center seeks to promote. Similarly, a limited number of first year graduate scholarships will be established in order to encourage young scholars to undertake graduate work in the area of the Center's interest. Also the members of the permanent staff of the university will be encouraged to undertake research
activity in the direction of the Center's program. Some provision for released time from teaching duties will be made for those faculty members who have demonstrated competence and ability to carry out research in the problems of social policy in the broadest sense.

A fourth, and important, part of the Center's activity will call for the setting up of plans for publication of essays and books which result from the work done directly at the Center. This aspect of the program cannot be fully anticipated since it must depend on the results. But the inauguration of an essay series or a journal should be anticipated as the eventual outcome of the Center's program.

What type of problems would be studied at the Center?

Scholarship at the Center will not be limited to any narrow problem area of subject field. Emphasis will be placed on the study of problems having some relevance for the functioning of the free society. The following are listed only as examples:

1. The division of power between the central and subordinate units of government. Federalism in political and economic matters.
2. The ethics of income redistribution and other related problems of egalitarianism.
3. The tax structure and collective choice.
4. The social security system and individual initiative.
5. The psychology of big government.
6. The concentration of economic power.
7. The meaning of freedom and order.
8. Democracy and competition, the philosophical and historical relationship.
9. The philosophy of the welfare state.
10. The controlled economy and economic progress.
11. The nature of collective choice.
12. The meaning of the "public interest."

What type of scholarly works should the Center produce?

This question can only be answered in terms of some ideal standards. But it should be hoped that scholars of the Center might be encouraged to produce works comparable with the following illustrative examples:

1. F. H. Knight, *Freedom and Reform*.
2. __________, *The Ethics of Competition*.
4. F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*.
7. Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*.
10. F. Graham, *Social Goals and Economic Institutions*.

These examples represent a few of the modern works that have articulated the general social philosophy which the Center will seek to support and to encourage.
What will be the educational emphasis of the Center?

The student will be exposed to the type of thinking listed in the examples above, but the primary aim will be to provide the student with the general educational background needed to understand the issues involved in social philosophy and political economy. This requires, first of all, a thorough grounding in relevant works on social philosophy and in classical political economy. Nothing in the program can serve as a substitute for a full understanding of the way in which the free price system functions and the distinction between this system as a social norm and as a descriptive fact. This understanding can only be gained by a thorough education in neo-classical economics. The interweaving of this economics training with the appreciation of a general philosophical outlook will be the unique feature of the Center's educational efforts. The student will be encouraged to develop a thoroughly critical outlook with respect to all of the apparently easy routes to social reform.

How rapidly will the Center grow and develop?

It must be recognized that any program of the sort represented by the Center must be established gradually. Accordingly the planning and development period must be of long term. If successful, the Center will grow at its own pace and with its own momentum. But during its formative years, it must be allowed to expand gradually and slowly. Great miracles cannot be expected overnight for a project which represents a substantial departure from orthodox educational programs, and whose purpose is that of intellectual stimulation.