

THE MAN

The principal components of the environment that shaped Al Smith were the foreign-stock neighborhood of the Lower East Side of New York City, the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, and his own family. These elements, operating in conjunction, were the wellsprings of the attitudes and values that marked Smith throughout his career in politics.

The Lower East Side into which Smith was born was not a slum, as many later believed, but a respectable upper-lower class neighborhood. Although Smith himself sometimes described his childhood as one of “poverty,” he insisted that decay had touched only the buildings of his neighborhood and not the people. As a boy Smith, even after his father’s death, always had the necessities of life and did not suffer from neglect. Although his neighborhood, close by the Bowery, was surrounded by vice and unwholesomeness, most observers agree that it was an island of decency. Peopled largely by Irish and Germans, the neighborhood had its own defensive good influences, chiefly the church and the family. During Smith’s childhood it was a rather pleasant port area, perhaps poor in luxuries and “culture” but rich in character and in its population of some eighteen thousand hard-working, respectable souls.¹

The most powerful influence in the neighborhood, outside the family, was the St. James Catholic Church. Not only did it provide religious services, but, with its school and extensive youth program, it dominated the educational and social life of the Catholic community as well. Smith participated faithfully in all these aspects of St. James’s activity and was greatly affected by the church’s presence.²

Smith’s family reflected the diversity of the neighborhood and the influence of the church. Until recently Smith’s paternal line had been something of a mystery. In 1926 the unfriendly Gaelic American charged that Smith’s father was really German, and there also were rumors that the elder Smith was Italian or Jewish. Smith denied the allegation of German ancestry, but he later claimed ignorance of his father’s origin, and an acquaintance said that Smith never spoke of his father. Now, thanks to information provided by Frances Perkins, it is clear that Smith’s father was of Italian and German descent. The maternal line is more easily followed; Smith claimed membership in the Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick because both of his mother’s parents were Irish-born, although it appears that his maternal grandmother was originally an English Protestant.³

¹ New York Times (hereafter NYT), July 8, 1928, October 31, 1928, October 3, 1934, January 26, 1936; Alfred E. Smith, Up to Now (New York, 1929), pp. 3, 6; Henry F. Pringle, Alfred E. Smith: A Critical Study (New York, 1927), pp. 89-90; Matthew and Hannah Josephson, Al Smith: Hero of the Cities (Boston, 1969), pp. 18-20; Norman Hapgood and Henry Moskowitz, Up from the City Streets: Alfred E. Smith (New York, 1927), pp. 3-12; Oscar Handlin, Al Smith and His America (Boston, 1958), pp. 10-11. It was only after the 1890s, following an inundation by thousands of Italian, Russian, and southeastern European immigrants, that Smith’s old Lower East Side neighborhood became a true “slum.” Demos, “The Presidency in 1924?” Forum, LXIX (June, 1923), 1577-1583.

² Smith, Up to Now, pp. 9, 38-42.

³ George B. Ford Memoir, Columbia University Oral History Collection, New York, New York (hereafter CUOHC), pp. 116-117; [Alfred E. Smith], Addresses . . . Delivered at the Meetings of the Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, 1922-1944 ([New York], 1945), p. 81; NYT, October 22, 1926, October 25, 1926; Smith, Up to Now, pp. 3-4; Pringle, Smith, pp. 80-81; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, pp. 9-10. Smith’s paternal grandfather was of Italian descent, and his paternal grandmother was of German lineage. Josephson and Josephson, Smith, pp. 13-16.

Although the records regarding Smith's ancestry are far from complete, there is no doubt that both of Smith's parents were born in the United States. Indeed, Smith correctly maintained that he was not of recent immigrant stock and that his family had long been in this country. (The records indicate that members of his family were already living in America in the early nineteenth century.)⁴ These facts concerning his ancestry were not common knowledge to a public that considered him pure Irish; and to the many who looked with disfavor upon the non-Anglo-Saxon immigrant (and his descendants), this information would not have mattered anyway.

Smith may have seemed so Irish because he was brought up almost entirely by his mother. Her influence was magnified by the death of Smith's father, the fact that he was an only son, and the closeness of the family. Her belief in a strictly controlled, pious upbringing produced a man well-mannered, devout, and respectful of his mother and the traditions with which she had imbued him. Even as a grown man he would kneel to receive her blessing. Although pious and virtuous, however, Smith, in private male company, could be earthy and profane, reflecting his "education" in the city's streets.⁵

Smith was a devout and a dedicated Roman Catholic, but he knew nothing about theology and did not question his faith; his daughter describes his faith as "almost childlike." He could not explain why meat was forbidden on Fridays, and he was dumbfounded by the "encllickycals" that he was called upon to defend in 1927. His knowledge and acceptance of Christianity was as simple and literal as that of any fundamentalist.⁶

Although devoted to his own church, Smith was tolerant of the beliefs of others and would not countenance any Roman Catholic interference with his official duties. To be sure, he believed that the division between church and state was only a theoretical, constitutionally required one – the church, he thought, really aided the state; but his actions in office show that he supported this division. He was sometimes charged with having tried in the 1915 Constitutional Convention to eliminate New York's ban on state aid to denominational schools, but this was actually only a tactical move. As governor he opposed his church's stand on film censorship; he would not interfere with the activities of birth-control advocates, however much he ridiculed their efforts and them personally; and, summoning Frances Perkins as a witness, he lectured a cardinal's agent on his determination to respect his church only in matters of faith and morals. He even resisted the blandishments of his parish priest when he asked Smith to overlook

⁴ Josephson and Josephson, Smith, pp. 18-19.

⁵ Eddie Dowling Memoir, Eleutherian Mills Historical Library, Wilmington, Delaware (hereafter EMHL), unpagued; "What! Al Ritzing N'Yawk?" Patches, I (February 12, 1927), 11; James A. Farley, Behind the Ballots: The Personal History of a Politician (New York, 1938), p. 52; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, pp. 27-28; Robert Moses, A Tribute to Governor Smith (New York, 1962), p. 34.

⁶ Henry Moskowitz (ed.), Progressive Democracy: Addresses and State Papers of Alfred E. Smith (New York, 1928), p. 283; NYT, June 11, 1923, January 17, 1945; "Alfred E. Smith's Presidential Ambitions," World's Work, LI (January, 1926), 234-236; Ray T. Tucker, "The Story of Al Smith," Review of Reviews, LXXVII (February, 1928), 160; Smith, Up to Now, pp. 244-245, 367-368; Emily Smith Warner, The Happy Warrior: A Biography of My Father, Alfred E. Smith (Garden City, New York, 1956), pp. 182-185; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, pp. 359-360. In later years Smith's faith became somewhat more analytical than it had been in the 1920s. Handlin, Smith, pp. 182-183.

fire-code violations at parochial schools; the Governor, instead, responded by helping raise money to effect the necessary repairs.⁷

Raising money for charity was one way Smith found that he could serve his church. He was proud that Catholics cared for their own, and he believed that charitable work was God's work. Even as governor he assisted charities, not all of which were Roman Catholic, and after 1928 he was able to extend his charitable activities.⁸

Smith exhibited many of the puritanical moral attitudes often adopted by the immigrant upper-lower class in its efforts to attain respectability. Despite the fact that he grew up inescapably aware of the baser side of life and of politics, his mother and his church instilled a strong sense of honesty in him. That Smith was an honest man was recognized throughout his career by good-government advocates, political opponents, and determined foes of Smith. Smith's honesty went beyond his refusal to accept a retainer as governor from the United States Trucking Corporation; it also manifested itself in the intellectual integrity that refused to allow a quotation from Alexis deTocqueville to be included in a public document because it would present a false image of sophistication.⁹

Smith had a strong sense of propriety, originating in his religious upbringing and the mores of his society. He was easily angered by the late hours and carousing of fun-loving James J. (Jimmy) Walker and others and sometimes scolded those guilty of what he considered lax moral behavior. Smith, on occasion, delivered "lectures" to wider audiences, as when he reminded his Irish listeners in 1923 that, because of their conspicuousness, they had an obligation to keep out of trouble and to be honest and just. It was his sense of propriety that led Smith to complain about scanty bathing suits at Coney Island and what he considered to be immoral dramatic performances and films. Ida M. Tarbell reported that affronts to public decency angered Smith whereas political issues did not. Smith's very morality conflicted, however, with two competing values to which Smith was committed: civil liberties and majority rule.¹⁰

Although Smith encouraged the public to disapprove of immorality and favored the legal punishment of violators of statutes relating to morality, he did not condone the prior censorship that many of his contemporaries were willing to impose. He insisted that

⁷ Jonah J. Goldstein Memoir, CUOHC, pp. 586-587; [Smith], Addresses, pp. 127-128; NYT, January 11, 1922, November 10, 1925, December 20, 1926, December 9, 1927, January 21, 1945; Smith, Up to Now, pp. 144-145; Moskowitz, Smith, p. 75; Hapgood and Moskowitz, Up from the City Streets, pp. 318-319; Pringle, Smith, pp. 339-342; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, pp. 362-363; William V. Shannon, The American Irish (New York, 1963), p. 167; Paula Eldot, MS. Other charges that Smith allowed the church to influence him are rare. See Benjamin C. Marsh, Lobbyist for the People: A Record of Fifty Years (Washington, D.C., 1953), pp. 20-22; and Joseph P. Lash, Eleanor Roosevelt: A Friend's Memoir (Garden City, New York, 1964), pp. 167-168. See also Margaret Sanger to Editor, Nation, CXXVII (October 31, 1928), 452; and NYT, April 25, 1928.

⁸ NYT, January 1, 1920, January 26, 1920, January 11, 1922, January 26, 1925.

⁹ Francis R. Stoddard Memoir, CUOHC, p. 110; NYT, November 10, 1922, August 30, 1925; Joseph M. Proskauer, A Segment of My Times (New York, 1950), p. 46; Herbert Mitgang, The Man Who Rode the Tiger: The Life and Times of Judge Samuel Seabury (Philadelphia, 1963), pp. 151-152; Stanley Walker, The Night Club Era (New York, 1933), p. 65; Eldot, MS. Smith did, however, ask Proskauer to put some "high-brow college stuff" in the document referred to in the text. Proskauer, A Segment of My Times, p. 46.

¹⁰ [Smith], Addresses, pp. 53-55; NYT, May 20, 1923; Ida M. Tarbell, "A Woman Looks at Smith," Colliers, LXXXI (May 19, 1928), 8-9, 46-47; Edward J. Flynn, You're the Boss, The Practice of American Politics (New York, 1947), p. 14; Gene Fowler, Beau James: The Life and Times of Jimmy Walker (New York, 1949), pp. 65-66, 118-119, 124-125, 141-144; Eldot, MS.

prosecution for indecency must come after the fact and that the right to speak and write freely must be preserved. Smith denounced censorship as “un-American” and relied instead upon public opinion and the law to reinforce artistic responsibility. He was confident that the impure would be driven from the field.¹¹

Smith, moreover, believed that no minority ought to use the state to impose its own moral standards on the majority. As governor, he signed a bill allowing movies, baseball, and fishing on Sunday because he thought that the majority, particularly the urban proletariat, should have a day of leisure. He also signed a bill legalizing boxing despite his own revulsion at the sport and justified his action, in part, on the grounds that a majority seemed to favor the measure.¹²

Smith reflected his society’s values in more than his moral attitudes. He praised thrift and sought efficiency in government, and he maintained a traditional attitude toward women and their role in society. Reflecting directly the views of his district, he at first opposed women’s suffrage and was late in acknowledging the woman’s place in public life. At no time was he willing to appear at a mixed gathering without his wife. Mrs. Smith, although occasionally active in politics, seemed to share her husband’s attitudes regarding the role of women and presided over her home with grace, dignity, and truly Victorian manners.¹³

Smith was especially devoted to his family and always remained very much a homebody – he was hardly the Broadway nightclubber he was sometimes thought to be. He was unashamed of his affection for his wife and insisted upon remaining near his daughter Emily when she was about to give birth. Smith’s devotion to his mother was unbounded, expressed not only in affection but also in a determination to make good. During his first year as assemblyman, he sent his mother a postcard that read: “Dear Mother: This is a picture of the Governor’s residence. I’m going to work hard and stick to the ideals you taught me and some day – maybe – I’ll occupy this house.”¹⁴

¹¹ Moskowitz (ed.), Progressive Democracy, pp. 282-284; NYT, March 23, 1925, January 7, 1926, February 4, 1927; Smith, Up to Now, p. 266; Pringle, Smith, pp. 339-342; David Burner, The Politics of Provincialism: The Democratic Party in Transition, 1918-1932 (New York, 1968), pp. 189-190; Eldot, MS. In the 1930s Smith deviated somewhat from these views on censorship. See NYT, December 21, 1934, January 3, 1935; and “The New Crusade,” Nation, CXL (January 16, 1935), 62.

¹² NYT, April 20, 1919, May 25, 1920, October 24, 1923; Farley, Behind the Ballots, pp. 44-45; Pringle, Smith, pp. 150-151; Fowler, Beau James, pp. 97-103.

¹³ NYT, November 2, 1922, May 20, 1923, October 16, 1925; Journal of Commerce (New York), June 16, 1924, pp. 1, 3; Parker Lloyd-Smith, “First Lady of New York,” Outlook, CXLVIII (April 25, 1928), 662-663; Tarbell, “A Woman Looks at Smith,” Colliers, LXXXI (May 19, 1928), 8-9, 46-47; Smith, Up to Now, p. 126; Fowler, Beau James, pp. 163-164; Frances Perkins, The Roosevelt I Knew (New York, 1946), p. 51. Smith was willing to subordinate economic orthodoxy to the public welfare. See Martin I. Feldman, “The Political Thought of Alfred E. Smith” (Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 1963), p. 95; and Paula Eldot, “Alfred E. Smith, Reforming Governor” (Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, 1961), pp. 175-181. Smith’s sense of dignity is seen in his annoyance at Jimmy Walker’s use of “Algie” in addressing Smith and in the fact that he was called “Alfred” or “Governor” and not “Al” by his intimate friends and family. Fowler, Beau James, pp. 97-98; and interview with Emily Smith Warner, New York, New York, December 27, 1968.

¹⁴ Editorial, NYT, January 8, 1928; Smith, Up to Now, pp. 64-65; Pringle, Smith, p. 235; Warner, The Happy Warrior, pp. 197-199; Walker, The Night Club Era, p. 65. The depth of Smith’s feeling for family is seen in his relationship with Jimmy Walker. Smith once even withheld an endorsement for Walker to encourage him to maintain a family life like that of Smith. See Proskauer, A Segment of My Times, pp. 47-48; Fowler, Beau James, pp. 124-125, 141-144, 163-164; and Warner, The Happy Warrior, pp. 170-173.

Smith's intense determination, which this postcard reveals, stemmed in part from his desire to prove that a man of his origins could rise to the top and was also an indication of his faith that hard work, service, and devotion to duty would be rewarded by advancement up the ladder of success. Smith frequently commented on his determination to prove that someone like himself could succeed. In 1919 he said, "When I went to Albany I went there with the fixed determination in my mind that never again would anybody be able to raise their [sic] head up in this State and say that the man from lower New York that belonged to Tammany Hall could not run the state." "I came here," he declared a year later, "with one thing on my mind, and that was I would either demonstrate . . . that you can take a plain ordinary Democrat from Park Row, and he can be Governor of this State, or else, by God, I will lay in the gutter." In private Smith said much the same thing.¹⁵

Others recognized the symbolic significance of Smith's success; reportedly even Tammany leader Charles F. Murphy respected and shared Smith's determination sufficiently to give him a relatively free hand as a first-term governor. Some even compared Smith with Abraham Lincoln or Andrew Jackson: what they were for the frontiersman, it was said, Smith was "for the people of the Lower East Side of America."¹⁶

Smith's resolution to succeed was perhaps best revealed in the words of an intimate friend, Robert Moses, who wrote that Smith ". . . never forgot that he was the first product of the lower East Side, the first Roman Catholic, and the first boy wholly without formal education to be elected and re-elected Governor of the Empire State and that he had promised his church, his mother, his wife, and those who sponsored him that they would never regret his elevation to the Governorship and his nomination as a contender for the highest office in the country."¹⁷

Determination made Smith a very hard worker. His diligence quickly became something of a phenomenon in Albany, and his sense of duty caused him to disapprove of those less devoted to the public than he was. He pored over background materials, worked sixteen-hour days, and even took two weeks from the 1928 presidential campaign wholly for state business.¹⁸ If he was to be rewarded by the voters of New York, he was resolved to merit those rewards by his service.

This equation, however, operated in reverse as well: Smith believed that if he worked hard, made a good record, and remained essentially the same person, success would

¹⁵ NYT, February 27, 1920; Henry Moskowitz, Alfred E. Smith: An American Career (New York, 1924), p. 302. See also NYT, March 30, 1919, April 14, 1937; and Smith, Up to Now, pp. 171-172. After Smith's election in 1918, he wrote to a newspaper friend, "I am going to do my level best to prove myself deserving." Smith to Louis Wiley, November 14, 1918, Louis Wiley Papers, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York.

¹⁶ NYT, February 11, 1927; Edwin M. Connor, Sidelights of the Democratic National Convention (pamphlet; n.p., [1920]), pp. 14-15; George William Douglas, "Can a City Man be President?" Commonweal, VIII (June 6, 1928), 123-124; Silas Bent, "Al Smith: Executive," Independent, CXX (June 23, 1928), 590-591; Smith, Up to Now, pp. 281-282; Proskauer, A Segment of My Times, pp. 42-43; Flynn, You're the Boss, pp. 37-39; Oswald Garrison Villard, Prophets True and False (New York, 1928), p. 4; Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963), p. 246.

¹⁷ Robert Moses, Public Works: A Dangerous Trade (New York, 1970), p. 844.

¹⁸ Goldstein Memoir, CUOHC, pp. 18-19; NYT, January 2, 1927, August 30, 1928; Fowler, Beau James, pp. 118-119; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, pp. 1-2.

come almost automatically. This belief was reinforced by everything in his background and career, and it would greatly affect his preparation for the presidency, his pre-conventional activities, and his style of campaigning.

As Professor Oscar Handlin has pointed out, Smith as a young man quickly learned the ethics of group loyalty. One served the group, protecting and dealing fairly with his fellows and patiently accepting leadership and authority, and this loyalty would be rewarded. Certainly this was the way the machine politics of Smith's neighborhood functioned. This practical lesson in loyalty was reinforced by Smith's Catholicism, a faith that emphasized discipline, obedience to authority, and progress through laborious effort and patient service.¹⁹ Smith's own career, furthermore, illustrated that rewards would naturally result from loyalty.

Smith was also the beneficiary of extraordinarily good fortune. He had been born into the "aristocracy of immigrants" in New York City, the Irish, and he had also been virtually born into Tammany Hall, "the ruling class" of the city; and both of these circumstances facilitated his entry into politics and into the party's leadership.²⁰ Smith was selected to run for the Assembly only after the district leader's first choice rejected the opportunity, and he was easily re-elected to his safe seat while he struggled to learn about state affairs. His first gubernatorial nomination came because upstate Democrats could not settle on a candidate from their own ranks and had to turn to Smith as nearly everyone's second choice. His election in 1918 came in the midst of an influenza epidemic that reduced upstate Republican voters and immediately after a tragic subway accident that hurt the reputation of his opponent, the incumbent governor. As governor, Smith profited from the incredible ineptness and obstructionism of the opposition. Also, his immediate predecessors had attempted or accomplished little, and a multitude of dramatic issues lay ready for him to energize.

Smith's good fortune continued in national politics. Not only did he find the opposition within the Democratic Party eliminated and his own candidacy strengthened by the peculiar circumstances of the party in the 1920s, but he also had an especial appeal for the urban immigrants and their descendants, a population just reaching political maturity during that decade. Their pride in him – their belief that he embodied their aspirations and feelings – made him their champion, and he rode the wave of their support to the New York governor's chair and then to the 1928 presidential nomination. If Smith epitomized the Horatio Alger saga of success, one reason must be that he, too, benefited from the luck that characterized the Alger heroes.²¹

Smith's personal success reaffirmed his belief that America was an open society, relatively free of class prejudices and hatreds. The intelligent man who possessed moral strength, decency, loyalty, sympathy, and the willingness to work hard could raise

¹⁹ "Alfred E. Smith's Presidential Ambitions," *World's Work*, LI (January, 1926), 235-236; Handlin, *Smith*, pp. 19-20; Moses, *A Tribute to Governor Smith*, pp. 39-40; Leona Florence Becker, "Alfred E. Smith: A Personality Study of a Political Leader" (M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1938), pp. 35, 45.

²⁰ Herbert Croly, "Smith of New York," *New Republic*, LIV (February 22, 1928), 9; Arthur Mann, *LaGuardia, A Fighter Against His Times, 1882-1933* (Philadelphia, 1959), p. 230.

²¹ Walter Lippmann, *Men of Destiny* (New York, 1927), pp. 1-9; William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932* (Chicago, 1958), p. 231; Richard Weiss, "Horatio Alger, Jr., and the Response to Industrialism," in Frederick Cople Jaher (ed.), *The Age of Industrialism in America* (New York, 1968), p. 308. The concept of luck in Smith's career represents an expansion of a point made in Becker, "Smith," pp. 70-74.

himself to the top by his own efforts. These qualities, Smith thought, were more often found in children of humble origins than in the offspring of the well-to-do. He admired those – among them many of his personal friends – who had prospered in business after starting at the bottom, and he believed that anyone who would fight – as he had – for success would achieve it. He often referred to his success and that of others as the “survival of the fittest.” Smith stated these views frequently in the 1920s, and they were not, as some supposed, merely the product of the higher social and economic position he eventually attained and the reputed “conservatism” of his later days.²²

These attitudes caused Smith to exemplify what some saw as the arrogance and condescension of the “self-made” man, “the snobbery of poverty.” He emphasized his humble background and subsequent rise in private conversation, and several writers have pointed to this factor as an explanation for his misunderstanding of, and then hostility toward, Franklin D. Roosevelt. Because Smith respected hard-won success, Eleanor Roosevelt remarked, he “tended to look down on a man who had not met and conquered the situations he himself had – a man like Franklin” She also believed that Smith gloried in his ability to surmount difficulties, that he liked to live well, and that he was very materialistic. Frances Perkins corroborates this view of Smith in her interpretation of Emily Smith’s showy wedding, in 1926, as an effort on her father’s part to demonstrate that he could carry off such an event with as much style as anyone else could. Others complained that Smith, by the late 1920s, had gone “high-hat, high-brow and high-life” in his dress, his associates, and his move out of the Lower East Side.²³

Smith denied that he was, or ever would be, condescending or arrogant toward those who had not yet risen. Early in his governorship he pledged,

Should I ever fail or forget the working people of America, should I ever prove untrue to the pledges I have made to the masses, should I ever believe myself to be greater than they are, in my analysis of their needs, I hope should that time ever come, life will pass from me immediately. I have always endeavored to help the workers and whatever years are left to me shall be devoted to the interests of the people of America and especially to the toilers who comprise the great bulk of our American citizenship.

²² Moskowitz (ed.), Progressive Democracy, pp. 28, 59-64; NYT, November 2, 1918, March 30, 1919, February 23, 1920, April 27, 1924, September 12, 1925, January 26, 1936, April 14, 1937, January 17, 1945, January 21, 1945; Alfred E. Smith, “The Forgotten Man,” New Outlook, CLX (October, 1932), 3; Alfred E. Smith, “Calvin Coolidge,” New Outlook, CLXI (February, 1933), 12; Smith, Up to Now, p. 280; Becker, “Smith,” pp. 166-168; Feldman, “The Political Thought of Alfred E. Smith,” pp. 230-239. Smith’s views on the qualities of children of humble origins are contained in an article in Eugenics, reported in NYT, November 2, 1928. Despite Smith’s assertions that America was an open society, as governor he was in actuality a representative of the urban working class. See Eldot, “Smith,” passim. For an example of the assertion that Smith changed his views in the 1930s because of his new status, see U.F. Mueller to Franklin D. Roosevelt, August 28, 1934, Franklin D. Roosevelt Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York (hereafter FDRL). Smith’s interpretation of his life as success in the survival of the fittest shows no appreciation of the role luck played in his career. If Smith recognized his good fortune, he probably accounted for it with his fatalism. See pp. 19ff.

²³ Eleanor Roosevelt, This I Remember (New York, 1949), pp. 48-51; J. David Stern, Memoirs of a Maverick Publisher (New York, 1962), pp. 186-188; Pringle, Smith, p. 89; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, pp. 347-348; Frank Freidel, Franklin D. Roosevelt: The Ordeal (Boston, 1954), pp. 217-218; [Ray Tucker], Mirrors of 1932 (New York, 1931), pp. 33-35; [John Franklin Carter], The New Dealers (New York, 1934), pp. 402-403; Burner, The Politics of Provincialism, pp. 188-189. Eleanor Roosevelt had a somewhat different attitude toward Smith in the 1920s. See her comments in “Why Democrats Favor Smith. II. As a Practical Realist,” North American Review, CCXXIV (November, 1927), 472-475.

Smith did not take such promises lightly. Throughout his career he continued to deny that he had forgotten either the typical citizen of limited means and income or his own origins in the lower class. His fear that class antagonisms, which he thought the New Deal was intensifying, would destroy the cooperative spirit that was vital to America's survival was in reality a reaffirmation of his faith that those in the lower ranks could rise to the top in time. Smith wanted to insure that the opportunity to rise would be available to all; and, although he believed that government could foster equal opportunity and help society's unfortunates in many ways, he feared the implications of the powerful federal government that the New Deal was fashioning.²⁴

Although Smith, beginning in the late 1920s, moved into a new circle of wealth and society, the effect that this had on his attitudes is quite uncertain. There is some evidence, for example, that he was still sensitive to his class origins, that he disdained opulence, and that he remained spiritually a Lower East Sider. Smith also knew well enough the penalties for a politician who took a "high-hat" attitude: his own start in politics in 1903 had resulted from the fact that the incumbent in the Assembly seat had to be replaced because he had lost touch with the people of his district.²⁵

If Smith was not arrogant, he did demonstrate supreme confidence in his own abilities, a confidence that often verged on egotism. Because he had been the family provider, Smith early developed a rather cocky attitude typical of one who had successfully met obstacles and who would not be troubled by new ones. He was self-assertive and sure that his best would be good enough. This assurance was enhanced by a long string of personal political successes and by his domination of New York Democratic affairs (the party was biennially forced practically to beg him to run again). Although Smith was willing to admit an error publicly, there is only occasional evidence in his career that he doubted his abilities or the quality of his performance.²⁶

Smith's exaggerated self-assurance led some of his associates to describe him as egotistical, selfish, and conceited. His public behavior frequently confirmed their opinion. Although he sometimes pleaded modesty – as in August, 1926, when he said that he was not indispensable, that he did not want renomination, and that there was too much talk about him and not enough about the party's achievements – the reverse was more often true. Just two months after his August, 1926, speech Smith accepted renomination for the governorship with a statement that centered on what he had accomplished. He maintained this personal focus on the national level. Speaking before the Democratic National Convention in 1924, Smith provided a long account of

²⁴ NYT, May 17, 1932, January 26, 1936; Vaughn Davis Bornet, Labor Politics in a Democratic Republic: Moderation, Division, and Disruption in the Presidential Election of 1928 (Washington, D.C., 1964), pp. 263-264; Feldman, "The Political Thought of Alfred E. Smith," pp. 230-239.

²⁵ Lindsay Rogers Memoir, CUOHC, pp. 88-89; NYT, July 5, 1925; Warner, The Happy Warrior, p. 46. Even Smith's move uptown, probably the most frequently cited piece of evidence that he had "outgrown" his past, had a very plausible explanation. See NYT, April 6, 1932; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, pp. 345-346; and R.L. Duffus, Lillian Wald: Neighbor and Crusader (New York, 1938), p. 276.

²⁶ Smith, Up to Now, pp. 355-356; Proskauer, A Segment of My Times, pp. 49-50; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, pp. 46, 52; Villard, Prophets True and False, pp. 5-6; William Allen White, Masks in a Pageant (New York, 1928), p. 463; [Tucker], Mirrors of 1932, pp. 39-40; Becker, "Smith," pp. 33-41. Although Smith was defeated in 1920, the outcome was a personal triumph because he ran so far ahead of his party.

his own achievements and boasted of his domination of the New York party.²⁷ Smith's egotism was also very much in evidence in the 1928 campaign and in his later political appearances.

Looking back to his start in politics, Smith told an interviewer in 1938, "Politics is the survival of the fittest. I was the ablest young man in the district and so I was selected by the organization to run. That's all."²⁸ Although it may be that egotism leads one to enter politics and to succeed at it, it remains true that Smith viewed his entire career as he did his entry into politics and accepted continued political success as merely the expected reward for his superior qualities.

Smith's vanity made him particularly jealous of his record and reputation. Though Smith, according to Moses and others, rarely lost his temper, he apparently was known for his sensitivity to criticism, and on several notable occasions before 1928 he was stirred to angry and impassioned retaliation by what he regarded as unjustified personal criticism.²⁹

In 1919, for example, Smith responded to vicious attacks on his integrity by William Randolph Hearst's newspapers with a highly charged, invective-filled speech that undermined the public's respect for the newspaper publisher. In 1926, Smith was so angered by a critical story in the New York Sun that he profanely demanded a retraction and threatened to have the paper's presses removed to the sidewalks the next day.³⁰

On another occasion in 1926 – some believe it was because he was under pressure and fearful of losing the upcoming election – Smith misrepresented a remark made by his opponent, Ogden L. Mills, as a comment on his marital relationship. Mills had merely said, "There is no truth in him, and men who cannot tell the truth are not to be trusted either in public or private life." Portraying himself as the insulted husband, Smith answered with a defense of his devotion to his wife so emotional that it disconcerted even some of those who were close to Smith.³¹

Confidence, egotism, vanity – these are qualities that usually mark the ambitious man. Yet, there is an anomaly in Smith's temperament, for, although he was determined to be successful and was ambitious to a point, he approached politics with a fatalism that was part of his general attitude toward life. Smith seems to have had a fatalistic conception of history and of economics, and his religion also encouraged a fatalistic outlook. "I've been defeated for the Presidency," he said of his 1928 defeat. "If I had been elected, it would have been because God, in His wisdom, thought that I should serve. But I've been defeated, which means that God, in His wisdom, had found someone more suitable for the place." Franklin D. Roosevelt referred in 1928 to Smith's "somewhat

²⁷ James W. Gerard Memoir, CUOHC, p. 78; Herbert C. Pell Memoir, CUOHC, pp. 310-318; NYT, July 10, 1924, August 15, 1926, October 9, 1926; Becker, "Smith," pp. 171-182. Both Gerard and Pell, it should be said, were not always friendly to Smith.

²⁸ Becker, "Smith," pp. 165-168.

²⁹ NYT, January 21, 1945; Croly, "Smith of New York," New Republic, LIV (February 22, 1928), 11; Ben Gross, I Looked and I Listened (New York, 1954), pp. 224-225; Moskowitz, Smith, p. 286.

³⁰ Dowling Memoir, EMHL, unpagged; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, pp. 250-251; Moskowitz, Smith, pp. 286-305.

³¹ NYT, October 28, 1926; Pringle, Smith, pp. 104-106; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, p. 337; Moses, A Tribute to Governor Smith, p. 45.

fatalistic point of view that if he is nominated, it will come through no direct bid on his part.” Ray Tucker also wrote in the same year that “Smith’s whole career . . . has been one of waiting for the breaks” The two persons closest to Smith, his wife and Belle L. Moskowitz, were apparently also fatalists.³²

Some observers have concluded that Smith was aggressively ambitious from the time (indeed, even before) he entered politics. Henry F. Pringle wrote in 1927 that Smith “had long been angling for the nomination to the State legislature,” and others have contended that his behavior in the Assembly showed a subtle pattern of ambition. Also, he had, reportedly, “for years . . . aspired to the Governorship” and after his 1920 defeat had set his sights upon a triumphant return to Albany in 1922.³³

Smith was at times directly active in the advancement of his political career. He was certainly willing to be nominated for office, and, in 1918 and 1922 at least, he even directed the quiet enlistment of the state’s Democratic leaders in behalf of his nomination. These incidents were, however, exceptions and not the rule. Smith’s nominations for his first two offices, in 1903 and in 1915, were surprises to him and were not products of his own initiative. He seemed content, moreover, with each successive advancement; his autobiography and statements that he made indicate his belief that each position would mark the “zenith” of his career.³⁴

As governor, Smith’s passivity is seen in his repeated reluctance to stand for re-election. In 1920 his friends said privately that he probably would not run for a second term. In 1921, after his defeat, Smith said publicly that he was happy in his new business career and that he did not want to be elected or appointed to office. He later wrote in his memoirs that he had seen his political career at an end in 1922 and that he had had no intention of returning to Albany. Ultimately, he submitted to another campaign for office, desiring to stop Hearst and to push state reorganization.³⁵

The same pattern was apparent in 1924. In January Smith said that 1924 would be his last year in Albany. Many, including intimate political friends and his daughter, reported that Smith was indeed reluctant to run again and that he was unenthusiastic when John

³² Alfred E. Smith column for the McNaught newspaper syndicate for April 12, 1931, Alfred E. Smith Papers, New York State Library, Albany, New York (hereafter NYSL); Roosevelt to W.T. Anderson, April 17, 1928, Roosevelt Papers, FDRL; Moskowitz (ed.), Progressive Democracy, p. 58; NYT, May 14, 1924; Tucker, “The Story of Al Smith,” Review of Reviews, LXXVII (February, 1928), 155; Smith, Up to Now, p. 406; Julius Henry Cohen, They Built Better Than They Knew (New York, 1946), p. 126; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, p. 413; J. Joseph Huthmacher, “Urban Liberalism and the Age of Reform,” Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIX (September, 1962), 236; Becker, “Smith,” p. 170.

³³ Pringle, Smith, p. 136; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, pp. 154, 189-191, 263, 266; Richard O’Connor, The First Hurrah: A Biography of Alfred E. Smith (New York, 1970), pp. 44, 58.

³⁴ Gustavus Rogers to Winfield S. Huppuch, November 13, 1922, and Huppuch to Rogers, November 14, 1922, Gustavus Rogers Papers, FDRL; NYT, May 3, 1918, June 24, 1918, September 27, 1918; Smith, Up to Now, pp. 65-66, 124; Farley, Behind the Ballots, pp. 30-37; Warner, The Happy Warrior, pp. 46-47, 87; Hapgood and Moskowitz, Up from the City Streets, p. 131; Alfred B. Rollins, Jr., “The Political Education of Franklin Roosevelt: His Career in New York Politics, 1909-1928” (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1953), pp. 619, 624-627. Norman Hapgood’s report that Smith drove out to Murphy’s estate at Good Ground and demanded the 1918 nomination as a legitimate reward for his service is probably apocryphal. See Norman Hapgood, “Why ‘Al’ Smith is Great,” Nation, CXXIV (February 16, 1927), 164-165.

³⁵ NYT, October 19, 1922; Connor, Sidelights of the Democratic National Convention, p. 26; Smith, Up to Now, pp. 228-233; Moskowitz, Smith, p. 170. It must be granted that Smith may have struck a posture of reluctance to run for re-election in order to increase his strength within the party.

W. Davis appealed to him to make the race. Smith insisted in public that he wanted to retire, make money, and establish a business for his children. He did all that he could to avoid running again, he later contended, but he changed his mind out of a sense of duty to his party.³⁶

The familiar story was repeated in 1926: Smith's reported reluctance to run; his stated desire to be a business success; and his ultimate decision to heed the party's call and to accept an unwanted nomination. Smith's decision to run again in 1926 is important in considering his assumed presidential ambitions, and it will be re-examined in that context later; but from the perspective of state affairs, Smith most likely saw the campaign as necessary for the successful implementation of administrative reorganization (the backbone of his state program), which was to go into effect in 1927. National considerations, if they existed at all, were secondary.³⁷

In summary, Smith approached political life with a rather fatalistic viewpoint, a sometimes naïve willingness to let events take shape by themselves, a refusal to advance his political fortunes by conscious effort, and a confidence in his abilities and in the widespread recognition of those abilities. Passivity and reliance upon his record, circumstances, and fate proved to be a successful policy for Al Smith on the state level, and his attitude toward the presidency would be conditioned by this experience.

Smith's background not only accounts for his attitudes and values but also helps to explain his pragmatic outlook on life and his empirical approach to the problems that he faced. Because Smith's philosophy of government was founded upon these essentially non-ideological elements, it defies simple analysis.

Although Smith had an uncommonly fine mind, it was oriented toward the practical. He could not generalize easily, and he lacked the fruitful imagination of the theorist. Abstractions, theories, and hypothetical analysis did not interest him as much as the need to find an effective solution to a large, complex, practical problem; hence, he enjoyed the tasks of completely reorganizing the state's administration and of "breaking the world's worst traffic jam" by leading the fight for a comprehensive regional port authority. He was wary of individuals whom he thought vague and unrealistic and who seemed to find the solutions to problems by relying solely upon precedents or abstract moral or intellectual principles; Smith based his solutions on facts, feasibility, and popular acceptance.³⁸

³⁶ NYT, January 3, 1924, July 15, 1924, August 1, 1924, August 28, 1924, September 11, 1924, September 27, 1924, August 27, 1925; Smith, Up to Now, pp. 291-292; Warner, The Happy Warrior, p. 163. One of the pressures applied to get Smith to run again for governor in 1924 was the argument that Smith could not turn down his party's call in 1924 and expect to remain in party politics. One leader explicitly mentioned the implications Smith's refusal to run would have if he expected to seek the presidential nomination in 1928. NYT, September 12, 1924.

³⁷ NYT, January 15, 1926, June 7, 1926, August 15, 1926; Bruce Bliven, "Al Smith, New Yorker," New Republic, XLVI (March 10, 1926), 67-71; Smith, Up to Now, pp. 355-356; Warner interview.

³⁸ Alfred E. Smith, "Breaking the World's Worst Traffic Jam," Outlook, CXXX (March 22, 1922), 468-471; R.L. Duffus, "Al Smith – An East Side Portrait," Harpers, CLII (February, 1926), 321-325; James Kerney, "A Personal Portrait of Governor Al Smith," Scribner's Magazine, LXXX (September, 1926), 243-250; Croly, "Smith of New York," New Republic, LIV (February 22, 1928), 10-12; R.G. Tugwell, "Platforms and Candidates," New Republic, LV (May 30, 1928), 44-45; Smith, Up to Now, p. 213; Felix Frankfurter, Felix Frankfurter Reminisces, recorded in talks with Harland B. Phillips (New York, 1960), p. 199; Moskowitz, Smith, p. 78; Hapgood and Moskowitz, Up from the City Streets, pp. 91, 145-146; Handlin, Smith, pp. 33-37, 52-60. Smith said that he derived pleasure from solving problems. See NYT, October 6, 1929. Two projects in Smith's private life, the reorganization of the

Undoubtedly some of the explanation for Smith's pragmatic outlook lies in his unique temperament, but an education that discouraged speculative thinking and first-hand experience with the practical problems that dominated the life of the lower-class were probably more significant. Smith's Tammany association, moreover, gave him experience in seeking practical solutions to these practical problems, for this – and not political theorizing – was the basis of the machine's existence. It lived to serve, and it served – in utilitarian ways – to live. A job, a favor, a basket of food: these were the needs of the machine's constituents, not promises and doctrines.³⁹

Tammany put Smith into the Assembly as a function of its service role: he was sent to protect and be useful to the people he represented, not to articulate a philosophy of government. In the Assembly Smith learned that legislative politics is the art of the possible and that resplendent principles mean less than practical compromises and meaningful results. Even when his membership on the Factory Investigating Commission (1911-1915) obliged him to study the problems of industrial society, he was forced to focus on the human meaning of those problems and not on their abstract nature because the commission toured New York observing conditions of employment and because its staff of experts emphasized facts, not theories.⁴⁰

Long before he became governor, Smith had thus acquired the pragmatic outlook that characterized his governorship. As the state's chief executive, he emphasized the tangible benefits of his program to the voters, and opponents found this appeal difficult to counter with abstract principles. As Smith remarked late in his career, "I was brought up in a tough political school where facts counted for more than theories. My training has been to distinguish between high-sounding principles and actual results. My experience has taught me not to ask 'Has it a lofty purpose?' but to demand an answer to the question, 'Does it work?'"⁴¹

In dealing with specific issues, Smith first reduced the problem before him to its simplest level and then began a thorough quest for an adequate solution. He acquired all the information that he could, chiefly by listening to whoever had something to say on the subject, and then selected from what he had learned whatever seemed useful for his purposes. Although Smith suspected the abstract solutions of theorists, he like to have such people around. As he explained, "I like to hear them talk. They often give you an idea. It may not be usable in the way they put it, but it sets you thinking and you work it out." He believed that this problem-solving process produced solutions that were effectual and, above all, sound.⁴²

troubled United States Trucking Corporation and the erection of the Empire State Building in record time, probably afforded him a good deal of pleasure.

³⁹ NYT, July 8, 1928; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, pp. 33-40.

⁴⁰ Handlin, Smith, pp. 33-37, 52-60; Perkins, The Roosevelt I Knew, p. 22; Huthmacher, "Urban Liberalism," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIX (September, 1962), 235-238. Typically, during the Factory Investigating Commission discussions, Smith justified a minimum wage board not because of its compatibility with economic laws but because of its usefulness for the health and well-being of people. See Smith, Up to Now, pp. 97-98.

⁴¹ NYT, October 2, 1939; David M. Ellis et al., A History of New York State (revised edition; Ithaca, New York, 1967), pp. 395-396.

⁴² NYT, November 2, 1928, October 6, 1929; Kerney, "A Personal Portrait of Governor Al Smith," Scribner's Magazine, LXXX (September, 1926), 243-250; Alfred E. Smith, "Water Power and Its Social Uses," Survey, LVII (January 1, 1927), 425; Felix Frankfurter, "Why I Am for Smith," New Republic, LVI (October 31, 1928), 292-295; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, pp. 102, 136-137, 139; Hapgood and Moskowitz, Up from the City Streets, pp.

By the mid-1920s Smith's pragmatism had earned him a reputation as a social engineer who thrived on tackling problems and who excelled at proposing specific and decisive remedies for them. He was recognized, also, as a public servant who got things done; despite apathy and obstructionist political opposition, he had transformed into realities in New York many of the hopes long held by reformers.⁴³

Smith's readiness to employ almost any useful expedient to achieve his goals explains in part his willingness to allow a larger role for government. As he saw it, in the face of a very real problem – like inferior housing – the competing theories of government's role mattered less than solving the problem; hence, when the choice was between deleterious inaction or state action that could improve the situation, Smith frequently accepted the latter. He often arrived at positions taken by advocates of the positive state, but he arrived at them through the logic of necessity, not the logic of ideology.⁴⁴

Smith justified governmental intervention and regulation in both negative and positive terms. If government failed to respond to needs, the consequences would be a waste of human and natural resources and a general deterioration of society. Furthermore, the betterment of conditions would forestall discontent and the danger of a radical solution. Smith's own actions were designed to reconcile class and ethnic discord, and he denounced both inflammatory demagogues and blind reactionaries. Although he would accept proposals that were also supported by radicals, he described his solutions as being "along sane, sensible, progressive lines."⁴⁵

More positively, Smith insisted that government is not merely a machine but an institution that exists for the benefit of the people. Law, he said, is meant to do "the most good for the greatest number" and "to relieve and to protect and care for the great

112, 117, 338-339; Ellis et al., New York State, pp. 395-396; Feldman, "The Political Thought of Alfred E. Smith," pp. 50-55. See also Alfred E. Smith, "Labor Law Enforcement," American Labor Legislative Review, XX (June, 1930), 155-156.

⁴³ Open letter to social workers, undated, 1928, Detroit Urban League Papers, Michigan Historical Collections, Ann Arbor, Michigan (hereafter MHC) [courtesy of David Katzman]; NYT, January 2, 1927; Walter Lippmann, "Tammany Hall and Al Smith," Outlook, CXLVIII (February 1, 1928), 165; Tugwell, "Platforms and Candidates," New Republic, LV (May 30, 1928), 44-45; Parker Lloyd-Smith, "Al Smith and the Young Men," Atlantic Monthly, CXLII (July, 1928), 104-108; R.G. Tugwell, "The Liberal Choice," New Republic, LVI (September 5, 1928), 74-75; "Agitation Through Action," New Republic, LVI (September 12, 1928), 84-86; "Hoover: Conservative," New Republic, LVI (October 31, 1928), 287-289; Frankfurter, "Why I am for Smith," New Republic, LVI (October 31, 1928), 292-295; Walter Lippmann, "The Reconstruction of the Democratic Party," Yale Review, XVIII (Autumn, 1928), 22-25; Hapgood and Moskowitz, Up from the City Streets, p. 95; Feldman, "The Political Thought of Alfred E. Smith," pp. 50-55.

⁴⁴ Moskowitz (ed.), Progressive Democracy, pp. xi-xiii; Alfred E. Smith, "Goals of Democracy," Survey, XLIX (January 1, 1923), 419-420; "'Paternalism' – or Slums?" New Republic, XLV (January 20, 1926), 230-231; Duffus, "Al Smith," Harpers, CLII (September, 1926), 321-325; "Hoover: Conservative," New Republic, LVI (October 31, 1928), 287-289; Alfred E. Smith, The Citizen and His Government (New York, 1935), pp. 145-146; Hapgood and Moskowitz, Up from the City Streets, pp. 239, 243-246; Eldot, "Smith," p. 253. Certainly, Smith welcomed and encouraged non-public efforts to cope with society's problems, but these were seldom forthcoming or sufficient. In lieu of private action, Smith did not hesitate to employ state action. See Hapgood and Moskowitz, Up from the City Streets, pp. 243-246.

⁴⁵ Moskowitz (ed.), Progressive Democracy, pp. 188-193; Alfred E. Smith, Campaign Addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith (Washington, D.C., 1929), pp. 23-24, 217-218; NYT, October 21, 1918, April 13, 1919, January 3, 1924; Alfred E. Smith, "Recollections of My Boyhood Days," Recreation, XXXIII (December, 1939), 512; Walter White, A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White (New York, 1948), pp. 99-101; Moskowitz, Smith, pp. 280-281, 296; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, p. 353; Feldman, "The Political Thought of Alfred E. Smith," pp. 98-99, 230-239; Eldot, "Smith," pp. 379-381.

mass of the people who, after all, make up the country.” He believed that government is obligated, particularly when other options are unavailable, to perform efficiently the “errand[s] of mercy” that are so badly needed. He summarized his position with regard to government as follows:

It need not sound too paternal if we say that under the term of social legislation we list laws and regulations made by the government of the people and for the people’s own good. Because there are still many classes in our social system incapable of helping themselves to attain decent working and living conditions, or even good health without the assistance of the governmental agencies, the police power of the government is used either to prevent these people from making their lives miserable, or difficult, or to prevent others from exploiting them or subjecting them to inhuman or unfair working, living, or sanitary conditions The government must look to the betterment of people who have no other resource or methods of helping themselves, save to turn to the government.

Even these statements, which are as close as Smith ever came to justifying governmental intervention in theoretical terms, reveal Smith’s concentration on the utilitarian, practical aspects of that intervention.⁴⁶ Without perhaps fully understanding the significance of his words, he sometimes approached the position of those who argued from a theoretical base for the positive state.

Yet Smith also perceived the risks inherent in big government, especially the threat to personal liberties and the danger of a dependent paternalism. He jealously respected individual rights and vigorously denied that his program was paternalistic; government’s indirect actions to improve institutions resulted not in favoritism but in eventual benefits to everyone.⁴⁷

Smith’s long apprenticeship in machine politics reinforced his willingness to accept the state as an instrument to achieve desirable results. Coincidental with his years in the Assembly, Tammany Hall began to support some of the social-welfare and regulatory measures, such as workman’s compensation, that attracted so much attention during the Progressive Era. This support represented both an astute adjustment to political necessity and a sincere conversion, and it was an expression of the machine’s basic need to satisfy its constituents in order to retain power.⁴⁸

A series of disasters in the legislature and at the polls necessitated a new Tammany image and leadership, and Tammany quickly learned that social reforms made good politics. In 1913 Murphy commented that he would give the people what they wanted, and he obviously believed that they wanted the social-welfare measures that Smith and

⁴⁶ Moskowitz (ed.), Progressive Democracy, pp. 162-165, 188-193, 246, 249; Smith, Campaign Addresses, pp. 1-3; NYT, March 27, 1920, October 12, 1920, October 22, 1922, January 3, 1924; Smith, “Goals of Government,” Survey, XLIX (January 1, 1923), 419-420; Smith, The Citizen and His Government, pp. 145-146; Moskowitz, Smith, pp. 118-120; Feldman, “The Political Thought of Alfred E. Smith,” pp. 65-68; Eldot, “Smith,” p. 253. Smith’s comment that government is “in the business of selling service to its citizens in return for their tax money” demonstrates graphically his utilitarian attitude toward government. Smith, The Citizen and His Government, pp. 203-204.

⁴⁷ Moskowitz (ed.), Progressive Democracy, pp. 188-193; NYT, October 12, 1920, October 16, 1920; Journal of Commerce (New York), XLIX (January 1, 1923), 419-420; Eldot, MS.

⁴⁸ Editorial, NYT, July 5, 1928; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933 (Boston, 1957), pp. 95-97.

others supported. There are conflicting opinions regarding the depth of Murphy's personal sympathy for these social reforms, but, at the least, he did not try to interfere with their enactment. Tammany even accepted some of the strictly political reforms, like the direct primary, that machines usually opposed.⁴⁹

Tammany's new position of reform was more than a matter of mere expediency. Finding its own resources and its particular brand of welfarism inadequate now to cope with a problem such as poor working conditions, Tammany gradually concluded that the way to deal with matters of this nature was by supporting social legislation of the bread-and-butter sort. As Professor J. Joseph Huthmacher has pointed out, the representatives of the urban lower class were naturally sensitive to the needs of that class and understandably endorsed reforms that would improve its living and working conditions. The result was a "new Tammany" – Smith was its principal exemplifier – that attracted considerable notice during the twenty-odd years that Smith held public office.⁵⁰

Although political expediency may have played a part in Smith's acceptance of the positive state – surely he was not unaware that measures like factory reform were popular in his working-class district and, later, in the state at large – his instinctive and sincere desire to aid people was the major reason for his acceptance of social-welfare legislation. He asserted time and again throughout his career that his interest in social legislation derived from his life among the hard-working and helpless, and certainly his own family circumstances engendered a sympathetic understanding of his fellow New Yorkers who remained in adversity. Smith introduced some measures to ameliorate the

⁴⁹ Frederick M. Davenport, "Human Nature in Politics: Al Smith and the Human Side of Tammany," Outlook, CXIX (July 31, 1918), 522-524; Smith, Up to Now, pp. 121-122; Flynn, You're the Boss, pp. 37-39; Handlin, Smith, pp. 39-42; Perkins, The Roosevelt I Knew, pp. 24-25; J. Joseph Huthmacher, Senator Robert F. Wagner and the Rise of Urban Liberalism (New York, 1968), pp. 33-37; Nancy Joan Weiss, Charles Francis Murphy, 1858-1924: Respectability and Responsibility in Tammany Politics (Northampton, Massachusetts, 1968), pp. 75-77, 89; Burner, The Politics of Provincialism, pp. 24-27; J. Joseph Huthmacher, "Charles Evans Hughes and Charles Francis Murphy," New York History, XLVI (January, 1965), 29-35; J. Joseph Huthmacher, "Robert F. Wagner and the Rise of Urban Liberalism," American Jewish Historical Quarterly, LVIII (March, 1969), 336-339; Alex Diskint, "Alfred E. Smith, His Contribution as a Legislator to Administration" (M.F.A. thesis, New York University, 1949), pp. 20-67 passim; Louis D. Silveri, "The Political Education of Alfred E. Smith: The Assembly Years, 1904-1915" (Ph.D. thesis, St. John's University, 1963), pp. 56-71, 122-123.

⁵⁰ Davenport, "Human Nature in Politics," Outlook, CXIX (July 31, 1918), 522-524; Smith, Up to Now, pp. 121-122; Flynn, You're the Boss, p. 39; Hapgood and Moskowitz, Up from the City Streets, pp. 82, 93-95; Huthmacher, Wagner, pp. 24-31; Weiss, Murphy, pp. 75-77, 89; Burner, The Politics of Provincialism, pp. 24-27; Schlesinger, Crisis of the Old Order, pp. 95-97; Huthmacher, "Urban Liberalism," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIX (September, 1962), 234-240; John D. Bunker, "Progressivism in Practice: New York State and the Federal Income Tax Amendment," New-York Historical Quarterly, LII (April, 1968), 152-160; Huthmacher, "Robert F. Wagner," American Jewish Historical Quarterly, LVIII (March, 1969), 338-339; Diskint, "Smith," pp. 65-67; Feldman, "The Political Thought of Alfred E. Smith," pp. 16-18, 33-36. Ironically, Tammany encouraged state welfarism that would ultimately vitiate the powers of the machine and of the boss. See James T. Crown, "The Development of Democratic Government in the State of New York Through the Growth of the Power of the Executive Since 1920" (Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 1955), p. 134. Some, like Charles H. Parkhurst, continued to insist that Tammany had not changed and that, although Smith was an honorable man, his machine remained a corrupt exploiter. NYT, September 3, 1928. Whether real or apparent, there is no doubt that a "new Tammany" emerged while Smith held public office. See Editorial, NYT, August 18, 1927, Editorial, July 5, 1928, Editorial, April 26, 1929; Davenport, "Human Nature in Politics," Outlook, CXIX (July 3, 1918), 522-524; "Pretty Pussy!" Colliers, LXXXI (June 30, 1928), 40; Handlin, Smith, pp. 39-42; Franklin D. Roosevelt, The Happy Warrior, Alfred E. Smith: A Study of a Public Servant (Boston, 1928), pp. 3-6; Frank Freidel, Franklin D. Roosevelt: The Apprenticeship (Boston, 1952), p. 120; Huthmacher, Wagner, pp. 33-37; William H. Allen, Al Smith's Tammany Hall (New York, 1928), pp. v-viii; and Schlesinger, Crisis of the Old Order, pp. 95-97.

lot of the unfortunate early in his Assembly career, and his willingness to utilize state power for beneficial social ends increased as time went on. His experience on the Factory Investigating Commission probably did the most to broaden his vision to include the interests of the entire state and not just the narrow needs of his own district.⁵¹

Despite allegations to the contrary, Smith's commitment to the positive state was not the result of his encirclement by wise and influential advisers. Because he was impressionable and easily absorbed and assimilated information and ideas from people around him, he has been labeled the intellectual prisoner of advisers, especially Belle Moskowitz, who were more committed to the philosophy of the welfare state than he was.⁵² Smith, however, did not merely reflect the stronger ideological commitments of his advisers, nor did he act simply as a vehicle for their objectives. He was an accomplished brain-picker, and he pragmatically fashioned his ideas and programs by combining his practical understanding of problems and politics and their formal and informed knowledge. His advisers did not dominate him, nor did they attempt to do so. Smith greatly respected the intelligence and training of people like Belle Moskowitz, Robert Moses, and Joseph Proskauer, but he did not accept their views unquestioningly. He was clearly in command, and it was he in the final analysis who molded the program of reform that he carried to the people. Smith's advisers only reinforced an inclination to accept the positive state that he had manifested as early as 1915, in the New York Constitutional Convention, before these advisers became part of his circle. Smith was grateful to society for his own success, and he sought to repay society by effecting good through a career of public service. He had what Norman Hapgood called "the noblesse oblige of poverty."⁵³

⁵¹ NYT, October 22, 1922, October 21, 1926; Smith, Up to Now, p. 129; Alfred E. Smith, introduction to Louis H. Pink, The New Day in Housing (New York, 1928), pp. vii-x; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, p. 126; O'Connor, The First Hurrah, p. 73; Handlin, Smith, pp. 33-37, 52-60; Perkins, The Roosevelt I Knew, p. 17; Eldot, "Smith," chapter 9 passim; Silveri, "The Political Education of Alfred E. Smith," pp. 50-71.

⁵² NYT, November 2, 1928; Oswald Garrison Villard, "Al Smith – Latest Phase," American Mercury, XXXIV (February, 1935), 145; "Al Smith's Speech," New Republic, LXXXV (February 5, 1936), 353; E. Roosevelt, This I Remember, pp. 48-51; Proskauer, A Segment of My Times, pp. 44-45; Lela Stiles, The Man Behind Roosevelt: The Story of Louis McHenry Howe (Cleveland, 1954), p. 107; Perkins, The Roosevelt I Knew, pp. 50-51; Becker, "Smith," pp. 134, 144, 163-164; Feldman, "The Political Thought of Alfred E. Smith," pp. 176-180. Even Smith's friend Robert F. Wagner later claimed that Smith had never had an idea of his own. See Harold L. Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The First Thousand Days (New York, 1953), p. 687. For a good summary of the Smith-Belle Moskowitz relationship, see Pringle, Smith, pp. 61-73. The charge that Smith merely reflected the views of his close associates reappeared in the 1930s; then, however, Smith was accused of moving to the "right" because he associated with people who held conservative views.

⁵³ NYT, January 26, 1936; Hapgood, "Why 'Al' Smith is Great," Nation, CXXIV (February 16, 1927), 164-165; Dorothy Dunbar Bromley, "Alfred E. Smith – Has an Idol Fallen?" Scribner's Magazine, XCV (February, 1934), 115; Villard, "Al Smith," American Mercury, XXIV (February, 1935), 145; Smith, Up to Now, p. 424; Robert St. John, This Was My World (Garden City, New York, 1953), pp. 257-258; Hapgood and Moskowitz, Up from the City Streets, p. 65; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, pp. 197, 369-370; Handlin, Smith, pp. 74-78; Moskowitz, Smith, p. 29; Villard, Prophets True and False, pp. 6, 13-14; William C. Karg, "A Short Life of Mrs. Henry Moskowitz and Her Influence upon Governor Alfred E. Smith" (M.A. thesis, St. Bonaventure University, 1960), pp. 35-36; Eldot, "Smith," pp. 10-11, chapter 9 passim; Silveri, "The Political Education of Alfred E. Smith," pp. 137-142; Diskint, "Smith," pp. 72-74. Smith first thought of serving society as a fireman. His autobiography suggests that the local prestige of a public position and an income that exceeded that of his manual job were factors that attracted Smith to politics. Obviously, Smith greatly enjoyed politics, too, but his most important motivation for entering and remaining in public life seems to have been his sincere desire to serve society. See Smith, Up to Now, pp. 11, 26, 136.

Smith's willingness to expand the function of government as well as many of his other actions and statements as governor account for his reputation as a liberal or a progressive. Smith's evident faith in democracy and the people, his defense of civil and personal liberties (e.g., his vetoes of the restrictive Lusk Bills and his antagonism toward prohibition), his defense of unpopular minorities (e.g., several expelled Socialist legislators), his moderation during the Red Scare era, his denunciation of overly severe immigration restriction, his repudiation of the Ku Klux Klan, his fairness toward labor, his opposition to excessive bureaucracy and to a too-powerful federal government, and his willingness to assert strong executive leadership – all of these, added to his support of state welfare measures, have led many observers to conclude, sometimes with reservations, that Smith was a liberal or a progressive. This was the opinion of such contemporary observers as Felix Frankfurter, Heywood Broun, and Rexford G. Tugwell and the liberal magazines the New Republic and the Nation. Many would endorse Smith in 1928 because they viewed him as a progressive, and this interpretation of Smith's position has continued to have its adherents to this day.⁵⁴

Smith's actions and statements can also be used, however, to support the argument that Smith was essentially a conservative. He believed that progress should be reasonably paced, and the reforms that he championed were evolutionary in character and thoroughly respectable. Smith assumed that the majority would welcome corrective changes, and he saw his function as identifying and developing "the safest, the surest, and the quickest way." His reforms, consequently, dealt mainly with the symptoms of society's problems; they were piecemeal, remedial measures that did not attack basic causes but rather were addressed to "the nearest difficulty." Smith opposed excessive regulation of business and did not question property rights, capitalism, material success, or the other accepted values of the established order. On the contrary, he defended these values, believing that the system was essentially sound. Smith, who was very nostalgic about the past, was always prepared to support needed reforms, but he would not initiate change for the sake of change. The purpose of change and reform, as he

⁵⁴ Moskowitz (ed.), Progressive Democracy, pp. 65-70, 249; [Smith], Addresses, pp. 53-55; NYT, January 10, 1926, July 6, 1926; Journal of Commerce (New York), June 16, 1924, pp. 1, 3; "The Problem of the Smith Candidacy," New Republic, XXXVIII (March 19, 1924), 87-88; Editorial, Nation, CXIX (October 8, 1924), 347; "A Catholic President?" New Republic, L (March 23, 1927), 128-131; Heywood Broun, "It Seems to Heywood Broun," Nation, CXXVII (September 5, 1928), 217; "Why Progressives Should Vote for Smith," New Republic, LVI (September 5, 1928), 58-60; Tugwell, "The Liberal Choice," New Republic, LVI (September 5, 1928), 74-75; "Agitation Through Action," New Republic, LVI (September 12, 1928), 84-86; "Should Liberals Vote for Smith?" Nation, CXXVII (September 26, 1928), 284-285; Frankfurter, "Why I Am for Smith," New Republic, LVI (October 31, 1928), 292-295; "Progressives and Socialists," New Republic, LVI (November 8, 1928), 315-317; Hapgood and Moskowitz, Up from the City Streets, pp. 112, 338-339; Eldot, "Smith," passim; Eldot, MS. For some examples of endorsements of Smith as a liberal or progressive in 1928, see NYT, October 20, 1928 (for John Dewey); Mary Kingsbury Simkovich, "Al Smith – Able, Honest, Liberal," Nation, CXXVII (July 4, 1928), 10; "Governor Smith Qualifies," People's Business, III (October, 1928), n.p.; and the list in "How They Will Vote," New Republic, LVI (October 17, 1928), 245-246. For some examples of later interpretations of Smith as a liberal or progressive, see Proskauer, A Segment of My Times, pp. 43-44; Handlin, Smith, p. 179; Lawrence W. Levine, Defender of the Faith, William Jennings Bryan: The Last Decade, 1915-1925 (New York, 1965), pp. 179-180; Dwight Lowell Dumond, America in Our Time, 1896-1946 (New York, 1947), pp. 278, 382; Robert S. Maxwell, "The Progressive Bridge: Reform Sentiment in the United States Between the New Freedom and the New Deal," Indiana Magazine of History, LXIII (June, 1967), 94-95; Eldot, "Smith," passim; and Feldman, "The Political Thought of Alfred E. Smith," pp. 230-239. The relatively large Socialist vote for Smith his gubernatorial elections would seem to support this interpretation. See Hapgood and Moskowitz, Up from the City Streets, p. 149. Smith occasionally viewed himself as at least a progressive. See Smith, Campaign Addresses, pp. 1-3, 217-218, 237; Moskowitz (ed.), Progressive Democracy, p. 257; and Smith, Up to Now, p. 136.

saw it, was to preserve the existing order by improving it.⁵⁵ These beliefs and actions have led some observers to conclude that Smith, while he was a humanitarian and occasionally supported liberal or progressive measures, was a conservative. This was the judgment of such contemporary observers as Preston W. Slosson, Walter Lippmann, and Herbert Croly and of the editors of World's Work and Outlook. If Smith was endorsed by some for his liberalism in 1928, Herbert Hoover at the same time drew support from others who regarded him as being at least as liberal as Smith was, and still others saw both men as conservatives. The conservative interpretation of Smith, like the liberal interpretation, continues to have its adherents.⁵⁶

There were, as a matter of fact, elements of both liberalism and conservatism in the reforms that Smith supported. His attempts to achieve efficiency in government and to reorganize the state's administrative structure certainly partake of this dual nature. Smith demanded "economy" and constantly spoke of the need to run the state like a business, but he nevertheless desired to have not merely a smoothly running machine but government that would be truly responsible to its people and that, because it was compact and businesslike, could act effectively in their behalf. Removing the influence of politics from the state's routine operations, selecting capable administrators, adopting the executive budget, reorganizing the administrative structure, and introducing economies wherever possible would make the state efficient but would also provide funds for increased services. True economy, as Smith sensed, was value received for money spent, but human welfare was more important to him than economy. If Smith's

⁵⁵ Moskowitz (ed.), Progressive Democracy, pp. 162-165; Smith, Campaign Addresses, pp. 1, 17; NYT, March 27, 1920, April 2, 1920, July 6, 1926; "Reconstruction in State Politics," Nation, CVIII (January 11, 1919), 38; "The Case for 'Al' Smith," Nation, CXVIII (June 4, 1924), 628; Lloyd-Smith, "Al Smith and the Young Men," Atlantic Monthly, CXLII (July, 1928), 104-108; Ida M. Tarbell, "Why Smith Gets My Vote," Colliers, LXXXI (September 15, 1928), 8-9, 48; "Progressives and Socialists," New Republic, LVI (November 8, 1928), 315-317; Bromley, "Al Smith," Scribner's Magazine, XCV (February, 1934), 115; Smith, "Recollections of My Boyhood Days," Recreation, XXXIII (December, 1939), 512; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, p. 371; Lippmann, Men of Destiny, pp. 4-7; Burner, The Politics of Provincialism, pp. 187-190; Leuchtenburg, The Perils of Prosperity, p. 231; Schlesinger, Crisis of the Old Order, p. 97; Jordan Schwarz, "Al Smith in the Thirties," New York History, XLV (October, 1964), 327-328; Samuel B. Hand, "Al Smith, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal: Some Comments on Perspective," Historian, XXVII (May, 1965), 367-368; Eldot, "Smith," pp. 379-381; Becker, "Smith," pp. 103-106. Smith's concentration on remedial measures was noted by one observer, who said, "he will do his best to make his part of the world a tolerable place to live in." "Reconstruction in State Politics," Nation, CXIII (January 11, 1919), 38. Nostalgia permeates Smith's later writings.

⁵⁶ "Presidential Ambitions," World's Work, LI (January, 1926), 235; "Do the Issues Burn?" Outlook, CXLIX (July 11, 1928), 411; Herbert Croly, "The Progressive Voter: He Wants to Know," New Republic, LV (July 25, 1928), 242-247; Preston W. Slosson to Editor, Nation, CXXVII (October 31, 1928), 454; Lippmann, Men of Destiny, pp. 4-7. For evidence that Hoover was supported as a progressive in 1928 see Clarke A. Chambers, Seedtime of Reform: American Social Service and Social Action, 1918-1933 (Minneapolis, 1963), pp. 139-143; Kent Michael Schofield, "The Figure of Herbert Hoover in the 1928 Campaign" (Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Riverside, 1966), passim; and the list in "How They Will Vote," New Republic, LVI (October 17, 1928), 245-246. For later interpretations of Smith as a conservative, see Robert Moses, "Al Smith's America," Atlantic Monthly, CCI (April, 1958), 72-74; Moses, A Tribute to Governor Smith, pp. 39-40; [Carter], The New Dealers, pp. 402-403; Bruce Minton and John Stuart, The Fat Years and the Lean (New York, 1940), pp. 205-208; Burner, The Politics of Provincialism, pp. 187-190; Leuchtenburg, The Perils of Prosperity, p. 231; George H. Mayer, The Republican Party, 1854-1964 (New York, 1964), pp. 405-409; and George Wolfskill and John A. Hudson, All But the People: Franklin D. Roosevelt and His Critics, 1933-39 (New York, 1969), pp. 133-134. John J. Raskob, Smith's friend and the Democratic National Chairman in 1928, was among those who called Smith a conservative. NYT, August 21, 1928.

business analogies do not seem consistent with a reform approach, it must be noted that reformers and progressives used the same analogies.⁵⁷

The truth is that Smith was a moderate who, in the spirit of the Progressive Movement (and the New Deal), followed the middle road of moderate reform and welfarism and believed in the moderate extension of state powers. That most commentators were forced to hedge their analyses of Smith's position testifies to the fact that he stood in the middle of the road; Henry F. Pringle, for example, described Smith as "a conservative with a liberal mind."⁵⁸

Perhaps the soundest interpretation is that Smith was neither a conservative nor a liberal, for he arrived at his positions pragmatically; a rational and conscious philosophy of government was foreign to his nature. As one contemporary proposed, Smith probably would have laughed at the suggestion that he had a political philosophy and would probably have said that he tried only to serve the people. He took such action as seemed to be needed and was unconcerned about the ideological inconsistency of his actions. Smith achieved reforms without being either a crusader or a reformer, and he may not even have realized how advanced some of his positions were. It is misleading to categorize him too precisely and unwise to fit him into a terminological or philosophical straitjacket, all the more so because the terms employed are vague and their meaning has changed over the years. Smith was thought rather more liberal in the 1920s than he is today because of the greater importance of state governments in the 1920s, the "conservatism" of the era that seemed in contrast to his policies, the enormous change in the nature of the issues and in perspective that followed the Depression and the New Deal, and Smith's reputation as a conservative critic of the New Deal.⁵⁹

In the 1920s Smith's personal qualities, his open-mindedness, the social issues with which he was associated, and the lack of alternative figures attracted frustrated progressives. As Norman Thomas expressed it, "It is a sad commentary on the lack of faith among the alleged progressives that they are so willing to accept the Governor's record for administrative ability and his somewhat spotted liberalism as sufficient qualifications for a leader. The truth of the matter is that men love or hate Al Smith

⁵⁷ NYT, October 20, 1926, August 7, 1927, October 10, 1928; Journal of Commerce (New York), June 16, 1924, pp. 1, 3; Smith, "Goals of Government," Survey, XLIX (January 1, 1923), 419-420; "Al Smith's Valedictory as Governor," New Republic, LIII (January 11, 1928), 208-209; Smith, The Citizen and His Government, pp. 228-229; Handlin, Smith, pp. 96-98; Hapgood and Moskowitz, Up from the City Streets, p. 218; Leuchtenburg, The Perils of Prosperity, p. 231; Burner, The Politics of Provincialism, pp. 187-190; Eldot, "Smith," pp. 130-131, 175-181, chapter 2 passim; Feldman, "The Political Thought of Alfred E. Smith," pp. 69-70, 73, 75-79, 95, 98-99, 230-239; Crown, "The Development of Democratic Government in the State of New York," pp. 158-160, 178-181. See also Leslie Lipson, The American Governor from Figurehead to Leader (Chicago, 1939), pp. 104-105, 116-119.

⁵⁸ Josephson and Josephson, Smith, pp. 224, 446-449; Pringle, Smith, p. 237.

⁵⁹ NYT, July 8, 1928; "The Case for 'Al' Smith," Nation, CXVIII (June 4, 1924), 628; Croly, "Smith of New York," New Republic, LIV (February 22, 1928), 10; Lloyd-Smith, "Al Smith and the Young Men," Atlantic Monthly, CXLII (July, 1928), 104-108; Josephson and Josephson, Smith, pp. 446-449; Villard, Prophets True and False, pp. 9-11; Ellis et al., New York State, p. 393; Daniel R. Fusfeld, The Economic Thought of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Origins of the New Deal (New York, 1956), pp. 50-55; Feldman, "The Political Thought of Alfred E. Smith," pp. 50-55.

without much reference to his stand on economic matters because of the interest they feel in the three R's of present-day American politics – rum, race, and religion.”⁶⁰

But a “leader” Al Smith became, and his following was a varied one. Because he advocated both social and structural reforms,⁶¹ Smith was able to attract support from virtually all groups and classes. Just as machine politicians, ethnic leaders, and idealistic reformers met comfortably in his presence, so his program gained the adherence of the diverse groups of people they represented.

⁶⁰ Norman Thomas to Editor, Nation, CXXV (December 21, 1927), 712; Lloyd-Smith, “Al Smith and the Young Men,” Atlantic Monthly, CXLII (July, 1928), 104-108; J. Joseph Huthmacher, Massachusetts People and Politics, 1919-1933 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1959), p. 153. Norman Thomas in his later years contrarily judged Smith as more progressive than he had during the 1920s. See Norman Thomas Memoir, CUOHC, III, 22; and NYT, October 26, 1928. See also Handlin, Smith, pp. 82-83, 110.

⁶¹ Ultimately, Smith endorsed the initiative and referendum, the short ballot, and a corrupt-practices act – all traditionally advocated by middle- and upper-class reformers. Handlin, Smith, p. 108.