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What Is It?

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America's founding fathers talked a lot about virtue. Freedom requires it; there can be no liberty without virtue, they said.

"Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious People," insisted John Adams. "It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

"No government can continue good but under the people's control," Thomas Jefferson explained, declaring that the citizens' must "be informed by education what is right and wrong; to be encouraged in virtuous habits and deterred from vice."

These were not isolated sentiments. But what did they mean?

It's time to renew discussion, as rioting expands from Paris to Milan to . . . all over Europe. Here is one notion of a virtuous people: folks who, when they protest injustice or folly do not themselves foolishly commit injustice.

Virtuous people do not run riot, wreak havoc, commit mayhem . . . just because they have grievances.

If they have complaints about farming regulation, or school funding, they do not burn down shops.

Or the Louvre.

Whatever "social justice" is, it too requires a virtuous population.

The fact that there is increased political violence suggests that some folks are not virtuous.

There's this notion that in France, at least, violent protests are just a part of French culture. A culture warped by the disastrous French Revolution centuries ago? My bet is that, if we inquired deeper, we'd discover that this is not exactly so. That certain groups push violent protest every now and then for reasons of political goals that are not about either social justice or liberty.

We in America, who have been blessed with the freest society on the planet, are not quite as prone as Europeans to the vice of *violent* protest. But we are not immune, and we must start taking virtue — responsible self-government — seriously. Again.

Make America Responsible Again.

This is Common Sense. I'm Paul Jacob.