

On Hemingway's Politics
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From the book *By Force of Will: The Life and Art of Ernest Hemingway* by Scott Donaldson (New York: Viking Press, 1977):

In both public and private writings, Hemingway increasingly reasserted his cynical distaste for all politicians, re-emphasized his abiding lack of faith in governmental solutions to social problems, and reaffirmed his personal and artistic independence from all political parties and ideologies.

No one would call Hemingway a sophisticated political thinker, but [novelist] Dos Passos was wrong to conclude that he had “no consistent political ideas.” From adolescence to old age, his ideas were remarkably consistent. . . . These ideas stemmed from the main currents of American political thought—principally from the libertarian tradition of Jefferson and Emerson, salted by the philosophical pessimism of Hamilton and Henry Adams. With the Transcendentalists, Hemingway thought that government could provide no panaceas for social ills. What was needed was a whole man, uncompartmentalized, unspecialized, a modern Thinking Man—a god to drive the half-gods out of the political arena as the great bullfighter would drive the fake messiahs from the bull ring.

Power, Hemingway agreed with Adams, was poison.

Like Jefferson, he could welcome the idea of integration into a small group or family or village with still expounding the virtues of as little government as possible. Ideally, the individual man, like the individual family, should be left alone to confront his destiny.

At the root of his support for individual liberty lay a longing for a golden, mythical past in which each man (for Hemingway as for Jefferson, the self-sufficient man) lived free, unencumbered, and in harmony with nature.

This ideal closely approximates the one that Hemingway's heroes in his fiction seek, and do not find, in the complicated modern

universe. . . . restraints forever impinge, and can only be escaped at the moment of death, when the heart beat to the sway of the Gulf Stream or against the pine-needed floor of the Spanish forest stops.