

# Interpretation

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# Interpretation

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# The Problem of Religion in Liberalism

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Liberalism, the political theory and practice of equality, liberty, and government by consent of the governed, is far and away the most successful of the political forms of modernity. Its success is the result of its recognition of the limits of the modern project.

Modernity aims at the liberation of man from the bondage of necessity through the rational conquest and control of nature. This involves the conquest and control of human nature. The reformation of politics and government is, then, a crucial element in the modern project. What distinguishes liberalism from the political alternatives available in modernity—for example, Marx's "scientific socialism"—is its recognition of the inherent limits in the effort to master human nature. At some point the necessary means in the modern project—the mastery of human nature—comes into conflict with the end of the modern project—the liberation of man from the bondage of necessity. Human nature cannot be understood to be infinitely plastic or malleable. This means, however, that nature as a whole cannot be understood as finally and completely under the control of man. The success of the modern project requires that men simultaneously struggle against and bow before nature and natural necessity. They must see themselves as both above and within the natural order of things. Nature must be seen as both higher and lower than man. Liberalism's relative success derives from its acceptance of the fundamental ambiguity in the relationship between man and nature inherent in the modern project.

This ambiguity is reflected, among many other places, in liberalism's treatment of religion, in particular in its political system of religious toleration. Religion deals with the ultimate questions of human life, pre-eminently the questions of its beginnings and its ends and purposes. Religion is the means by which, for most men most of the time, these questions are articulated, and are given at least the partial and tentative answers that are indispensably necessary for human existence. Openness to these questions of ultimate meaning is the very essence of man's humanity, and hence of his freedom as a human being. Religion can be transcended only by obviating the important questions that give it life, either by inducing men to stop thinking about them, or by supplying

some final, definitive, and comprehensive answer for them. That is, religion can be transcended by converting man into either a beast or a god. Either way, there is nothing left of humanity, or of human freedom.

This is the irony of the apparently more radical political variants of the modern project with their intransigent atheism. The “freedom” of Marx’s communist man, the omniscient individual who does “one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic,” is a “freedom” that can only exist in absolute indifference to the questions of ultimate purposes.<sup>1</sup> Devoid of moral seriousness, it is indistinguishable from slavery to impulse or passion. Much the same can be said for Nietzsche’s “superman,” who finds his “freedom” in the self-conscious creation of his own values. Genuine freedom presupposes genuine alternatives and is characterized by the moral seriousness that necessarily accompanies the recognition of serious alternatives. Liberalism, which accepts the practical need for religion, does not attempt to transcend or supplant it. This is reflected in liberalism’s system of religious toleration. Religious toleration, taming or civilizing religion without supplanting it, in effect establishes the moral grounds of human freedom.

While religion has an important part to play in liberalism, its place in liberalism is tenuous at best. Modernity, which aims at the conquest and control of nature by man, is in its main thrust antitheological or antireligious. It is not possible for man to make himself master of his world without at the same time displacing its previous ruler. This is the root of the antitheological animus of Machiavelli, who initiated the modern project with his call to mankind to rise up and conquer fortune. Liberalism’s regime of representative government, which was invented by Hobbes, Locke, and others to solve at least certain of the moral and political problems inherent in the modern project, participates in modernity’s fundamental hostility towards religion. It is profoundly secular. Liberalism’s founders understood, however, that religion was an ineradicable part of human nature, rooted in the very realities that, according to them, made necessary the political regime of representative government.

Since religion could not be abolished, it had to be accommodated. It could not be accommodated, however, without being transformed—changed from an expression of divine sovereignty into an instrument of human sovereignty. This is the essential purpose of Hobbes’ and Locke’s now largely forgotten works of biblical exegesis. This is also the purpose behind the liberal philosophers’ recommendations on the legal and political arrangements that should govern religion—Hobbes’ secular absolutism and Locke’s religious toleration. Liberalism’s founders went no further in their thought on religion. Only the later liberal philosopher Tocqueville seems to have recognized that, precisely if religion is not to be abolished in and through the progress of modernity, it must be understood to have a necessary place in the modern project. It has a crucial part

to play in the liberation of man from the bondage of necessity. Religion, which Tocqueville clearly foresaw would flourish under liberalism's legal regime of religious toleration, provides the absolute horizon which gives meaning or substance to man's freedom.

I

Hobbes, liberalism's principal architect, attempts to bring to pass through his new science of politics what Plato's Socrates in the *Republic* argues is the only possible surcease from the evils of political life, the conjunction of philosophy and political power, or the political rule of right reason.<sup>2</sup> He means to fulfill in real political practice the philosopher's longing for rational self-government, or for what the philosopher would call human freedom. Hobbes' rational political order is, of course, a very different thing from the just regime elaborated by Socrates in the *Republic*. For Hobbes, reason rules indirectly, in the system of representative government, rather than directly, as for Socrates, in the person of the philosopher-king. Hobbes' polity presupposes the existence of modern natural science, foreign to Socrates' regime, which reveals what Hobbes conceives as the hitherto unfathomed problems and undreamed-of possibilities of political life. The most important difference between Hobbes' rational political order and Socrates' best regime, however, is that Hobbes' polity is meant to be actualized. It is not a mere pattern laid up in heaven, to which men may look to found a right order in their souls, as Socrates calls his city, but a real political possibility to be achieved in the here and now.<sup>3</sup>

Plato's Socrates teaches that the coincidence of philosophy and political power is an essentially chance circumstance, something to be hoped or prayed for, rather than directly worked for in political practice.<sup>4</sup> This represents Plato's political realism. Plato's realism contrasts with Hobbes' idealism. Hobbes in his political idealism echoes Machiavelli, who initiates the enterprise of modernity with his call to conquer fortune on behalf of man's rational self-government. Machiavelli teaches that chance, like a woman, can be mastered by the right kind of man.<sup>5</sup> The right kind of man possesses what he calls "virtue," a combination of the knowledge both of how to be good and how not to be good, and the flexibility to use either the one or the other according to the needs of the moment (ch. 15, p. 61). To this kind of virtue, traditional religion, with its absolute injunctions and prohibitions, is an impenetrable obstacle. Machiavelli's project for human freedom requires, in the first place, a liberation from the strictures of traditional religion. This, too, is echoed by Hobbes in the treatment of religion, in particular the religion of the Bible, in his new science of politics.

Machiavelli's critique of traditional religion is summed up in his frequently voiced injunction in *The Prince* to trust only in "one's own arms." Those who

trust in their own arms, like the ancient political founders Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus, succeed in their endeavors, while those who rely on the arms of others, like the wouldbe conqueror and uniter of modern Italy, Cesare Borgia, come to ruin (chs. 6–7, pp. 22–24, 26–32). As indicated by the example of Cesare Borgia, whose successes were based on the power of his father, Pope Alexander VI, and whose ruin resulted from the withdrawal of that power on his father's death, the counsel to rely on one's own arms is much more than a recommendation on military organization. It means to reject consciously all outside help, and that means, on the deepest level, to reject willfully all help from above, to free oneself from all divinely inspired restrictions on the rational pursuit of self-interest by freeing oneself from all false hopes or delusions of divine assistance.

This freedom requires a total break from the traditional religious conception of the relationship between man and God, according to which man is the offspring or creation of a loving God, Who placed him in a world stocked with all that he needs for the fulfillment of his being, and Who actively cares for him in his trials and tribulations. Machiavelli's break with the traditional conception is reflected in his argument that "truly it is a very natural and ordinary thing to desire to acquire, and always, when men do it who can, they will be praised or not blamed" (ch. 3, p. 14). This willful break from tradition leads to a radically nontraditional teaching on morality: one should be stingy rather than liberal, giving only of other people's substance; one should strive to be feared instead of loved, using well the cruelty that is necessary and inevitable in human affairs; one should keep faith only when safe to do so, making sure to maintain a reputation for faithfulness (chs. 16–18, pp. 62–71). These rules of conduct, so profoundly contrary to the standards of traditional religion, are for Machiavelli nothing but the nasty prerequisites for man's autoemancipation from the power of chance, and hence for man's self-government and freedom.

Machiavelli's counsel to rely on one's own arms does not lead him to ignore but rather to reinterpret religion. He transforms it into a political instrument. This is the essence of Machiavelli's treatment of the religion of the Romans in the *Discourses*. He concludes from his consideration of Numa Pompilius, the founder of the Roman religion, "who feigned that he held converse with a nymph," that "there never was any remarkable lawgiver amongst any people who did not resort to divine authority, as otherwise his laws would not have been accepted by the people for there are many good laws, the importance of which is known to the sagacious lawgiver, but the reasons for which are not sufficiently evident to enable him to persuade others to submit to them."<sup>6</sup> Those rulers who understand "the natural order of things will seek" to uphold the foundations of the religion of their countries, for then it is "easy to keep their people religious, and consequently well conducted and united." The foundations of religions are the miracles, the exhibitions of superhuman power, that they celebrate (I.12, p. 150).

What the political use of religion means in practice is reflected in Machiavelli's appropriation for his own purposes, in *The Prince*, of the miracles attributed in the Bible to Moses (ch. 26, p. 103). Traditional religion is, according to Machiavelli, an immense obstacle to the achievement of human freedom. As reformed by Machiavelli, however, religion is a useful if not indispensably necessary means to that same end. Either way, it is something very powerful. Machiavelli indicates, by his attempt to transform religion into a political tool, just how potent it is as a force in human affairs. Religion represents the longing for transcendence that, for Machiavelli, culminates in his project for the conquest of chance.

Machiavelli is what might be called a hypothetical atheist. That is, his atheism is at bottom nothing more than a hypothesis of his political project. In reality, Machiavelli is not an atheist at all. He is a rebel, in the name of human freedom, against the rule of God. His rebellion presupposes the existence of God as its necessary object. Machiavelli's political teaching can be conceived as a kind of fulfillment of the will of God, understood as the Creator of man as a rational, and hence potentially free being. Machiavelli understands, however, that there is a problem with God's providence. What God evidently wills for man can only be achieved by man rising up against the government of God. There is more to Machiavelli's appropriation of religion—including his use, or misuse, of the Bible and Roman paganism—than mere political utility. He plays something of the part of Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, whose rebellion against God is a crucial element in God's providence for man (see John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, part 1). This is the warrant for Machiavelli's retelling of the story of David and Goliath, in the central chapter of *The Prince*, according to which David fights to "give a good account of himself," rather than to vindicate the God of Israel, and David, rather than waiting humbly for God to supply him with the arms necessary to kill Goliath, has his own knife to do the job (*Prince*, ch. 13, p. 56; cf. 1 Samuel 17). This is only one example of Machiavelli's many blasphemies. Machiavelli is unquestionably a blasphemer. It should be borne in mind, however, that the sin of blasphemy presumes knowledge of the true God.

Machiavelli's hypothetical atheism is related to the hypothetical natural science that is the theoretical foundation for Hobbes' science of politics. Scientific knowledge, according to Hobbes, is not absolute but conditional: it is "the knowledge of consequences, and dependence of one fact upon another; by which, out of what we can presently do, we know how to do something else when we will" (*Leviathan*, I:5, p. 115). This is essentially Bacon's conception of science. Baconian science is an instrument of human power. Its subject is "the knowledge of Causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human Empire, to the effecting of all things possible." It is a means, perhaps the most effectual means, to Machiavelli's end of the conquest of fortune. Baconian science represents a new path to the understanding of the

world, through the method of controlled experimentation, which attempts to catch nature in the “vexations of art” (*The Great Instauration*, p. 28). It adopts, as its standard of intelligibility for the natural world, human power or utility. Human beings really understand, in Bacon’s science, only what they make. All of this is analogous to the Machiavellian injunction to trust only in one’s own arms.

The premise of Bacon’s science is the denial of the natural intelligibility of the world to man. The natural world is a chaos rather than a cosmos. It becomes a cosmos only through the imposition of order by the human mind. Trusting one’s own arms, in Bacon’s science, means to reject the world given in natural experience, in which man is a mere part within the whole, a form among many forms, and construct in theory a new order of things, a world of bodies in purposeless motion, over which man can make himself the undisputed master. Thinking of things as just more or less complex organizations of undifferentiated matter brings them within the reach of human power. Homogeneous body, which has no purposes of its own, is manipulable by man, while heterogeneous forms, which have their own purposes or ends, are not. This new, and radically artificial, way of thinking about things also removes the moral restraints, related to the heterogeneity of form, on their manipulation. Underlying Bacon’s natural science there is, then, a kind of willful atheism. Bacon’s natural science, with this willful atheism, is crucial to the true science of politics, according to Hobbes, because it reveals the reality of the human condition, the depths of the human problems and the heights of human aspiration.

The lows and highs of the human condition appear, for Hobbes, when man is viewed in the light of the new natural science, that is, the science of bodies in motion. Hobbes begins his teaching on politics with a scientific analysis, while studiously avoiding the use of the word, of the soul and its powers. Soul, according to Hobbes, is nothing but a manifestation of body, its powers nothing but the effects of the interactions of bodies. The first cause of all thought is sense. Sense, however, results from body and its motions. Sensible qualities, he claims, “are in the object that causeth them, but so many several motions of the matter, by which it presseth our organs diversely,” which means that “Neither in us that are pressed, are they anything else, but diverse motions; (for motion produceth nothing but motion.)”<sup>8</sup> Sense percepts are connected together in what Hobbes calls “trayns of thought.” These may be either directed or undirected; those that are directed are “regulated by some desire, and design” (*Leviathan* I:3, p. 95).

Hobbes’ grounding of thought in the motions of the senses leads him to subordinate reason, which is only one mode of the ordering of thought, to the desires or passions. “The Thoughts, are to the Desires,” he claims, “as Scouts and spies, to range abroad, and find the way to the things Desired: All Stediness of the minds motion, and all quickness of the same, proceeding from thence” (*Leviathan* I:8, p. 139). Reason, according to Hobbes, is not an inde-

pendent cause of human action, but only an instrument for the all-powerful, underlying cause of desire (*Leviathan* I:6, pp. 129–30).

Since there is no “*Finis ultimis*” or “*summum Bonum*” for man, there is no natural limit to his desires (*Leviathan* I:11, p. 160). This means, however, that there is no common good for mankind. This in turn implies that there is no natural basis for human association. By nature, men possess rights that they can assert against one another, but no duties that they must observe towards one another. The natural condition for human beings, who are inherently asocial, and who are moved by desires that are essentially limitless, is a “state of warre,” and indeed of “such a Warre, as is of every man, against every man” (*Leviathan*, I:13, p. 185). This is the root cause of the problems of anarchy, oppression, and war in political society. The scientific analysis of human nature is the key to the discovery by Hobbes of the “state of nature,” with its chaos, violence, and terror, as the bedrock reality of the human condition.

That same scientific analysis, for Hobbes, brings to light the real possibilities for solving once and for all the problems of the human condition. This follows from what Hobbes’ scientific analysis implies about the malleability of human nature. Because there is no highest good naturally given to man, he can, within limits fixed by the passions, shape and mold himself to his own ends. Cooperating with the passions, human beings can rationally remake themselves, to remedy the defects of their natural condition. This is to be accomplished in and through the restructuring of the political community, what Hobbes calls an imitation of “that rational and most excellent work of Nature, *Man*” (*Leviathan*, Introduction, p. 81).

Hobbes’ intention in his political science is to refound society and government by teaching how to cooperate with the passions in the organization of political society. Recognition of the horrors of the natural condition leads Hobbes to the discovery of certain prudential rules of behavior, his “laws of nature,” that guide his rational reconstruction of society and government. There is one and only one purpose for which human beings, who “naturally love Liberty, and dominion over other,” can be understood to consent to submit themselves to the artificial bonds of civil society, and that is “the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of Warre, which is necessarily consequent . . . to the natural passions of men, when there is not visible Power to keep them in awe” (*Leviathan*, II:17, p. 223).

For Hobbes, all legitimate government is representative, because it is founded on the consent of the governed, and nonpartisan, because it benefits all its subjects equally by addressing a need that pertains to all of them alike. Nonpartisan government enables men to live in peace by giving them something that they can trust in to protect their lives, liberties, and estates. Hobbes’ government is nonpartisan because it is artificial. An artificial ruler has no selfish interests, nor self-serving opinions, to impose on its subjects. Whatever interests or opinions such a ruler might enforce would be strictly general. It is from

this scientific analysis of human nature that Hobbes learns of both the possibility and the means for creating an artificial man to govern over actual human beings as a method for solving their real world problems.

An important element in Hobbes' scientific refounding of society is the reformation of religion, particularly the religion of the Bible. Religion, Hobbes understands, is not going to disappear with the change of social and political organization. Its roots run much too deep for that. It represents the fear that is, according to Hobbes' analysis, the bedrock reality of the human condition. "This perpetual feare, always accompanying mankind in the ignorance of causes, as it were in the Dark," he argues, "must needs have for object something. And therefore when there is nothing to be seen, there is nothing to accuse, either for their good, or evil fortune, but some *Power*, or Agent Invisible" (*Leviathan*, I:12, pp. 170–71). Religion represents, then, the reality that makes not only necessary but also possible Hobbes' refounding. Representative government, for Hobbes, supplies the necessary prerequisites, left unprovided by God, for man's comfortable self-preservation, to which the most powerful passions implanted by God incline him. It is, then, paradoxically both a rebellion against and a fulfillment of the divinely established order. Hence, religion cannot be excluded from Hobbes' commonwealth.

Traditional religion, in particular traditional Christianity, interferes, however, with the rational reconstruction of society. Insisting on the absolute dominion of God, counselling faith in Him rather than trust in the arm of the flesh, threatening everlasting punishment for human assertiveness, it restrains men from assuming the powers of self-government and establishing the political forms of human sovereignty. Christianity must, then, be transformed, purged of its belief in divine sovereignty. This is the deepest purpose behind Hobbes' extensive treatment of religion in his political writings, culminating in his teaching of secular absolutism. Secular absolutism, according to which the sovereign power for the peace of society fixes the doctrines and practices of religion, is necessary for Hobbes because sovereignty cannot be divided, "between the *Church* and *State* between *Spiritualists* and *Temporalists*; between the *Sword of Justice*, and the *Shield of faith*." The more profound problem is that human beings in their fears cannot be divided "between the *Christian*, and the *Man*" (*Leviathan*, III:39, p. 499). That sovereignty must not be divided is a conclusion that Hobbes draws from his consideration of the state of nature as the fundamental reality of human existence. The real meaning of this teaching is that human beings, moved by the dire necessities of the natural condition, are compelled to assume for themselves the right and power to govern in their own affairs. Hobbes' defense of secular absolutism is at bottom a vindication of the sovereignty of man.

Hobbes in his biblical exegesis, for example in Parts III and IV of *Leviathan*, attempts to transform Christianity from a transcendent faith into a civil theology, cutting out the core of the religion while preserving its rhetorical skin, to give the appearance of divine imprimatur to the authority of the human

sovereign. The political problem of traditional Christianity is that, since the preservation of society depends on the dispensation of justice, and "Justice on the power of Life and Death, and other lesser Rewards and Punishments, residing in them that have the Sovereignty of the Commonwealth," it follows that "it is impossible a Commonwealth should stand, where any other than the Sovereign, hath a power of giving greater rewards than Life; and of inflicting greater punishments, than Death." "Eternall life," however, "is a greater reward, than the *life present*; and *Eternall torment* a greater punishment than the *death of Nature*" (*Leviathan*, III:38, p. 478).

To undermine the sovereignty of the Christian God Hobbes attacks two of the pillars of divine sovereignty: the setting forth of laws (i.e., revelation) and punishing infractions (i.e., damnation or hell). First Hobbes undermines the system of rewards and punishments without which God cannot command obedience. Hobbes criticizes the belief in the afterlife, transforming "heaven" and "hell" into strictly this-worldly concepts, denying eternal punishment in any form. Hell is not only immanentized but also psychologized. It is the punishment of knowing that one has missed a possible reward.

The focus of Hobbes' critique, however, is on the belief in divine revelation. God cannot rule over men if He cannot make His will known to them. A subject cannot be expected to obey laws that he cannot know. Perhaps the most pernicious of all religious doctrines, for Hobbes, is the teaching "*That Faith and Sanctity, are not to be attained by Study and Reason, but by supernaturall Inspiration, or Infusion*, which granted, I see not why any man should render a reason of his Faith; or why every Christian should not be also a Prophet; or why any man should take the Law of his Country, rather than his own Inspiration, for the rule of action" (*Leviathan*, II:29, p. 366).

Hobbes attacks all of the means by which revelation is supposedly made available to man: the immediate revelation of the Holy Spirit, the mediate revelation of the scripture, and the exemplary revelation of Jesus. Revelation cannot be known as such because the marks of revelation, miracles, cannot be known from the past and have ceased in the present (*Leviathan*, III:32, p. 414). Hobbes' argument leaves the political sovereign as the only real mediator between man and God. Christianity, with its Divine Sovereign revealing His laws to man and punishing those who disobey Him, Hobbes transforms doctrinally into a civil religion in the service of the sovereignty of man. This is Hobbes' form of Machiavelli's hypothetical atheism. The secular reformation of Christianity, a Hobbesian manifestation of the Machiavellian counsel to trust in one's own arms, is in Hobbes' version of liberalism the ultimate requirement for man's self-government or freedom.

## II

While agreeing with Hobbes that the exigencies of the human condition make it necessary to enlist religion in the effort to free man from the necessities

that bear down upon him, Locke, in his version of liberalism, differs from Hobbes in his understanding of what can be accomplished through the political use of religion. He is much more tempered in his expectations. He looks for much less from religion, even when appropriately reformed. Locke's relative pessimism on the question of the political use of religion is related to a deeper pessimism, concerning the real possibility of a final political solution to the problem of human existence. Human nature as revealed by Hobbes' scientific analysis is simply too strong and intransigent to be subjugated once and for all by the tool of human reason. Reason itself is driven by subrational desire.

Locke clearly understands that the state of nature persists, if only as an ever-present possibility, even in civil society.<sup>9</sup> This understanding is reflected in Locke's argument for the right of revolution, to be exercised by the citizen body when those entrusted with government authority in effect plunge society into the state of nature by abusing their powers, and in the related argument for limited government. Hobbes, who rejects any right of revolution by categorically denying that subjects may judge the actions of their sovereigns, is radically more optimistic than Locke on the decisive question. Optimism about the saving power of science underlies Hobbes' argument for absolute sovereignty, and with it his argument for secular absolutism. Locke understands, however, that if self-preservation is the end of political society, then absolute subjection to the will of the sovereign is a contradiction in terms, since it reduces the establishment of political society to nothing more than a substitution of the oppression of one with the force of a multitude and the cover of law, for the potential threat from many acting individually and without law (*Two Treatises*, II:2, pp. 316–17). More clearly than Hobbes, Locke respects human nature as the inviolable ground of the modern project of human self-government and freedom.

The problem with Hobbes' treatment of religion, from Locke's point of view, is that he underestimates the strength of religious belief, or rather the strength of the passions that account for belief. This is implicit in Hobbes' own argument. Religion originates in the fears of man, who "looks too far before him, in the care of future time," and consequently "hath his heart all the day long, gnawed on by feare of death, poverty, or other calamity; and has no repose, nor pause of his anxiety, but in sleep" (*Leviathan*, I:12, p. 169). It is a consolation for these horrors, revealing their transcendent purposes, promising supernatural protection from them, and explaining what human beings must do to avail themselves of divine salvation. The starkness of these terrors, inherent in the human condition, accounts for the strength of the religious passions. This is perhaps what Locke has in mind when he argues that "The imagination is always restless and suggests variety of thoughts, and the will, reason being laid aside, is ready for every extravagant project; and in this State, he that goes farthest out of the way, is thought fittest to lead, and is sure of most followers: And when Fashion hath once Established, what Folly or craft began, Custom

makes it Sacred, and 'twill be thought impudence or madness, to contradict or question." At any rate this is the origin of much in the "Governments, Religions, and Manners" of the nations of the earth.<sup>10</sup> These fears are the root of what Locke with heavy irony calls the "burning zeal for God, for the church, and for the salvation of souls."<sup>11</sup>

Hobbes' secular absolutism, however, presupposes a coolness of the religious sentiments, an enlightened cynicism about religious belief, sufficient to allow for the imposition of religious forms by the sovereign for the sake of this-worldly peace. What he presumes as necessary for the proper organization of civil society he appears to contradict in his scientific analysis of man, which culminates in the theoretical recovery of the horrific state of nature. His defense of secular absolutism is based on an abstraction from the state of nature as a spiritual or psychological phenomenon. Hobbes' secular absolutism in practice is more likely to excite than allay conflict, by impinging on matters that individuals cannot help but hold to be of the highest importance. It is, then, in practice rather a threat to than a support for man's self-government.

Recognition of the immutability of the state of nature as the essential reality of the human condition leads Locke in his thought on religion from secular absolutism, to which he adheres in his earliest writings on the subject, to religious toleration.<sup>12</sup> In the *Letter Concerning Toleration* Locke argues for his new approach to the problem of religion on both political and religious grounds. The political argument is a straightforward application of the scientific political theory of the *Second Treatise*. Since the ends of political society are limited to the "civil interests" of "life, liberty, health, and indolency of body" and the "possession of outward things," it has nothing to do with the saving of men's souls. The "civil magistrate" is to concern himself only with securing to his subjects the enjoyment of the goods of this world, "by the impartial execution of equal laws" (*Letter*, p. 17). Salvation is entirely the business of the church, "a voluntary society of men, joining themselves together of their own accord to the public worshipping of God in such manner as they judge acceptable to Him, and effectual to the salvation of their souls" (*Letter*, p. 20). The church has nothing to do with "the possession of civil and worldly goods" (*Letter*, p. 23). Church and state occupy entirely distinct spheres. Mutual toleration is, then, the only sensible policy.

The separation between church and state, however, turns out in the end to be not quite so clear and clean as Locke at first paints it. Actions prohibited by law because they are injurious to the legitimate interests of society are not made legal by incorporation in the worship of some religion. Even of opinions, only those that are entirely speculative must be tolerated without exception. Religious opinions that have practical implications, by touching on "the will and manners" of society, are subject to regulation. Locke allows for the outright suppression of some religious beliefs: those that are contrary "to those moral rules which are necessary to the preservation of civil society"; those by which

some “men arrogate to themselves and to their own sect some peculiar prerogative”; and those by which citizens “*ipso facto* deliver themselves up to the protection and service of another prince.” He also countenances the suppression of atheism (*Letter*, pp. 45, 50–52). Locke’s retractions from the hard-and-fast separation of church and state point to the underlying secular purpose of the system of religious toleration.

Apropos the social and political situation in which he finds himself, Locke addresses his religious argument for toleration to Christian believers. The religious argument is essentially rhetorical. It is necessary to make such a rhetorical argument because, from the point of view of Christian belief, the political argument, based on the scientific analysis of the human condition, simply begs the crucial question pertaining to the ends and proper organization of civil society, i.e., the question of the truthfulness of the Christian revelation. The political argument is valid only if government is limited to the purposes of Locke’s “civil interests.” The limitation of government to the security of life, liberty, and property presupposes the doctrine of the state of nature and what it teaches about the ends of human existence.

The Christian revelation, however, opens for the believer the vision of man’s transcendent purposes. This can be understood to imply a rather more expansive role for government than is admitted by Locke, perhaps including the care of men’s souls. Locke avoids the decisive question and instead seeks to prove that the Christian revelation prohibits enforcement by state power of religious beliefs and practices. He argues that “the Gospel frequently declares that the true disciples of Christ must suffer persecution; but that the church of Christ should persecute others, and force others by fire and sword to embrace her faith and doctrine, I could never yet find in any of the books of the New Testament” (*Letter*, p. 22). Examples from the Old Testament he dismisses as irrelevant to those who are under the new law of Christianity. For his own part, Locke esteems “toleration to be the chief characteristic mark of the true church” (*Letter*, p. 13). This is the premise of his reading of the Christian gospel. He can present his own version of Christianity, according to which the chief obligation of anyone who “pretends to be a successor of the apostles” is to teach “the duties of peace and goodwill toward all men,” because on the deepest level all religious belief is radically subjective (*Letter*, p. 28). Religions exist only as opinions of their believers. In the unpublished “Fourth Letter on Toleration” Locke clearly distinguishes between knowledge and opinion, and unambiguously assigns religion to the sphere of opinion.<sup>13</sup>

Locke does not restrict his effort at the reconstruction of Christian theism, reconciling it to what his political science teaches about the beginnings and the ends of human life, to the *Letter Concerning Toleration*. The general purpose behind all of his explicitly religious writings is to fit Christianity within the politically legitimate sphere of religion. Locke narrows the essentials of Christian belief from the strenuous creeds of Catholic and Protestant orthodoxy to

the one necessary and sufficient article of faith, that “Jesus is the Messiah.”<sup>14</sup> He arrives at this “low church” version of Christianity by denying the significance for Christian theology of any portion of the Bible except the words of the Savior. The Old Testament is superseded by the revelation of God in Christ, and the epistolary writings of the New Testament, since they are addressed to individuals who are already Christians, are inadvertently silent about the beliefs necessary for being a Christian in the first place (*Reasonableness*, pp. 186–91).

Furthermore, according to Locke, Jesus’ office as the Messiah is that of moral teacher. The word “Messiah” means “ruler” or “king.” If Jesus is a ruler, then his teachings are laws. His kingdom is not of this world, however, and so his laws are but rules of right conduct or behavior, backed up only by the force of moral suasion. Christians are individuals who accept the simple moral homilies of Jesus, for example the Golden Rule. This is the meaning that Locke extracts from Jesus’ call to “repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand” (*Reasonableness*, pp. 124–36). Christianity for Locke is a purely moralistic religion, a collection of simple homilies fit even for the common lot of mankind, represented by the illiterate and credulous men chosen by Jesus as his apostles. Locke very carefully avoids the argument that divine revelation is necessary for the elaboration of the true morality. He does admit that the assertion of revelation is necessary in order to teach the true morality to the “vulgar and mass of mankind” (*Reasonableness*, pp. 101ff., 170–75ff.).

The theoretical justification for Locke’s political interpretation of revelation is his critique of its epistemological claims in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. He argues that there is really only one proof of the truthfulness of revelation, and that is the performance of miracles by those who claim revelatory authority for their words. This alleged proof of revelation, however, is self-canceling. There have been many founders of religions, claiming the authority of revelation for their divergent teachings, who have substantiated their claims with miracles. More important is the problem that miracles cannot really be known as such without a complete understanding of the powers of nature. The proof of revelation requires plenary knowledge of the whole of which man is a part. The possession of such knowledge, however, would make revelation supererogatory.<sup>15</sup>

Locke in his treatment of religion seeks not so much a way to use religion as a way to tame or domesticate it. Religion is too much a part of human nature for it to be simply appropriated by man as a tool for his use. Taming religion is the underlying purpose of Locke’s system of religious toleration. Religious toleration civilizes the religious passions by dignifying them as an essential element in the proper ordering of society. It legitimates them politically, giving them something of a place, admittedly a limited and carefully defined one, in political society. More importantly, it gives them a significant part to play in the functioning of society. The system of religious toleration turns the religious passions to the useful purpose of limiting government to its appropriate sphere,

at least in matters pertaining to religion. Locke's arguments against the intrusion of government into religious affairs have the effect of arming the religious passions for this very important purpose. Locke excites the religious passions while redirecting them, away from the "burning zeal" for other men's souls, to the defense of limited government.

At the same time, religious toleration domesticates the religious passions by turning them against themselves. Locke's arguments concerning the absolute disjunction between religion and politics are intended to enlist the religious passions in the resistance to the intrusion of the church in secular affairs. The mingling of church and state, "which are in their original, end, business, and in everything perfectly distinct and infinitely different from each other," is an offense not only against political order but also against religious faith, amounting to the jumbling of "heaven and earth" (*Letter*, p. 27). The system of religious toleration transforms, however indirectly and gently, religion as the "burning zeal" for other men's souls into the "war" of every man "upon his own lusts and vices" (*Letter*, p. 13). The internal transformation of religion will inevitably influence the political behavior of believers. Instead of demanding political power for themselves, they will be on the lookout to resist demands for political power by others. Churches will police each other to insure that none becomes too influential in the affairs of state. "All the several separate congregations," Locke argues, "like so many guardians of the public peace, will watch one another, that nothing may be innovated or changed in the form of the government, because they can hope for nothing better than what they already enjoy—that is, an equal condition with their fellow subjects under a just and moderate government" (*Letter*, p. 55).

Locke's treatment of religion points to what is new and different in his version of liberalism. Locke recognizes much more distinctly than Hobbes that, precisely if liberalism's scientific analysis of human nature is valid, then human freedom and self-government are ultimately to be attained only in and through the rational balancing of the primordial forces at work in man, rather than in reason's absolute rule over those forces.

### III

What has been usefully termed the second phase of modernity, i.e., the generative phase of classical liberal theory, culminated in the overt and covert hostility to religion that is evident in Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke and a host of others.<sup>16</sup> Such a strident conclusion with respect to an abiding human commitment, however, was not the sort of advice that prudent statesmen could follow. Those with actual responsibilities of governance could recognize immediately that hostility to what the common man holds sacred was not a way of winning or holding his allegiance. More pointedly, thoughtful liberals knew very well

the enduring human realities to which religious belief speaks as well as the patent deficiencies of militant atheism as an answer to such questions.<sup>17</sup>

These lessons were not lost on the American founding generation. The American founding was an activity of both the theory and practice of liberalism. In a sense it was a practical activity of the highest sort, which is to say a practice governed by a theory about the highest of human things. In its decisive respects the American founding was a fully modern event, governed by the essential themes of modernity. But this fully modern character also reflected the tension concerning religion that is coeval with modernity itself.<sup>18</sup>

As architects of a democratic regime founded on a primeval quest for liberty that even they saw as divinely grounded (“to which the laws of nature and nature’s god entitle them”), the American founders knew that a regime dedicated to liberty must find a space for the very transcendence of nature that liberty requires and religion articulates.

The tension between the necessity of accommodation and the danger of religious passion which is endemic in liberalism underlies the deep ambiguity regarding religion in the American founding. Though in practice none of the founders wished to establish a specific church in America, they were profoundly uncertain about the ends of toleration and disestablishment and were, therefore, silent about most of the practical questions that have so bedeviled later generations of Americans. As a practical matter they were obviously prepared to tolerate the manifold array of relationships between church and state and among the various churches that were present in the states in the founding era. In theory, however, the founders were open to a number of widely differing solutions to the seemingly intractable tension between religious commitment and political liberty.

With the possible exception of Madison, the founders agreed in varying ways that some variant of religion was, in practice, an important instrument for supporting both public morality and private virtue. This was an enlightenment commonplace, largely under the influence of Locke.<sup>19</sup> It received its most eloquent expression in the founding period in Washington’s “Farewell Address,” but it was such a commonly accepted belief that its most pertinent practical expression, the Northwest Ordinance, was passed twice: once under the Confederation and again by the first Congress.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover even those like Madison, whose first concern was religious toleration, understood the need to accommodate the religious sentiments of the citizenry. A careful reading of Madison’s most important contribution, the “Memorial and Remonstrance,” shows that it was closely written to appeal to independent, i.e., nonanglican, religious adherents. The argument advanced therein seeks to demonstrate how religious neutrality on the part of the state can benefit religion itself. In this respect the conclusion is surely Lockean (i.e., nearly absolute toleration), but the argument plainly goes beyond Locke in its assertion that religion itself will flourish best in a regime of toleration.<sup>21</sup>

Madison's Memorial sits astride the tensions over religion in the founding in a manner that belies its overt indebtedness to Locke. The claim that disestablishment will redound to the benefit of religion suggests at least a friendliness to religion that is not found in this manner in Locke's defense of toleration. While Madison's primary interest in toleration is evident in his theory as well as his practice, his concern for the nefarious effects of sectarian religious passion did not transform itself into hostility to religion as such.<sup>22</sup>

Madison's Memorial reflects the complex themes of the founding with regard to religion. One of the most fashionable of these themes is the concern for religious zealotry and the concomitant need to tame divisive religious passions. This theme received its most penetrating expression in the thought of Jefferson, who among the founders most deeply reflected the Lockean teaching on the matter of religion.

Practically speaking, Jefferson regarded religious toleration as an essential element of liberty and his actions to secure it as one of his greatest achievements. This toleration was not, however, universal. Religions that were intolerant could be suppressed, since they refused to play by the rules of toleration themselves.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Jefferson admitted that some religious opinions might be inimical to public peace and that open expression of such opinions might be forbidden. Significantly, the one opinion that he expressly notes in this regard is the claim that "a foreign prince has power in this commonwealth." Though superficially directed at Catholic allegiance to the pope, the principle itself constitutes a far more ominous assault on the central Christian claim of allegiance to a Divine prince ("Notes on Religion").

In this regard the supposedly overt neutrality of the state in religious matters transforms itself into hostility to the essential religious belief of many of its citizens. Jefferson, however, was not hostile to some forms of religion, broadly conceived, only to religious belief that could not be squared with his conception of liberalism. Properly trimmed of its explicit adherence to foreign powers, religion can be a powerful source of support for public morality. Like his patron Locke, Jefferson never claimed that there was a necessary connection between religion and morality. He was, however, convinced that, in practice, such a connection was extremely useful.

The culmination of Jefferson's attempt to resolve the tension between the utility of religion itself and the dangerous character of many of its traditional expressions may be seen in his own liberal unitarianism, a religion that Jefferson confidently hoped would soon dominate America.<sup>24</sup> This religious teaching may be seen eloquently in his attempt to distill the fundamental core of Jesus' message from the pages of the New Testament, a distillation made necessary because of the manner in which Christianity had been corrupted by the priests and doctors of the Church. The result is the Jesus of Locke: a moral teacher, nothing more. This was the sort of religion that Jefferson thought would be helpful to the success of popular government. Properly covered over with pious

homage to the greatness of Jesus, it might succeed in focusing the attention of men on those moral convictions on which they might all agree and away from divisive claims of an absolute path to salvation.<sup>25</sup>

Jefferson's taming of religion nonetheless points to an enduring reality in the same way that Machiavelli's militant functionalism does. If religion were as essentially dangerous as some of Jefferson's most impolitic rhetoric suggests, it would be absurd for a prudent statesman to employ it for the noble ends to which Jefferson ultimately sought to put it, i.e., as the foundation of virtuous behavior. In short, his own practice with respect to religion belies the one-sided concern for the effects of religious faction with which he is usually saddled.

Even more so does the practice of the founding generation belie attempts to saddle it with Jefferson's thought and practice with respect to religion, either in part or in whole. From Jefferson's invocation of the God of creation in the Declaration, to Washington's Farewell Address, to the piety of Hamilton and Adams, the founders employed religious rhetoric, invoked religious piety, and manifested a properly religious sentiment with respect to Divine Providence that is quite overwhelming to those whose understanding of the founders on this matter has largely been limited to one phrase from Jefferson. The founders were, for the most part, not particularly orthodox in their theological opinions. But they would never have confused heterodoxy with impiety.<sup>26</sup>

The founders also may have thought more of "nature's God" than of the special revelation entrusted to one ancient people in Palestine. But this very rhetoric suggests an attentiveness to religious conviction and an acknowledgement of the ends of which it speaks. Furthermore, in some respects nature's God was a more expansive and demanding Lord than that of biblical theism. His commands were visible to man as such. Being thus visible, he could require universal obedience thereto. The God of nature may have been a theism more attractive to the egalitarian spirit of democratic ages, but it was not thereby atheism of any sort.<sup>27</sup>

Having embarked on a momentous and, in decisive respects, new undertaking, the founders were evidently unsure of the exact character of the practices that would result. This uncertainty is seen plainly in the founding debates over the one wholly new feature of the American religious settlement: the disestablishment of religion. Its critics viewed it as a covert means of supporting irreligion, while its supporters thought it a means to free religion from politics that religion itself might flourish. For Americans of the founding generation this uncertainty about practical matters was not synonymous with uncertainty about or revulsion towards religion itself. That the polity was to be unchurched did not mean that the regime was to be irreligious. Even the manner in which religion was universally presumed to be a support for virtue implies an acknowledgement that the ends of the human soul can be most properly nurtured by religious conviction.<sup>28</sup>

The complex character of the founders' attitudes toward religion is reflected

in the thought and practice of later generations of Americans. The founders understood well that religion was a powerful force in human community: in modern parlance it had a social "function." The nature of this function and its relation to the ends of politics were, however, deeply uncertain. This uncertainty was transferred to later generations of Americans who have themselves been deeply divided over the place of religion in the public life of America.<sup>29</sup>

One who understood this uncertainty with the most penetrating insight was the greatest student of the actual practice of democratic regimes, Tocqueville. He understood the obvious fact that religion has a "function" in political regimes. But this observation is so general that it says nothing of any importance. Significance begins to emerge when the query is rephrased. Granted that religion has function, what is it? Put differently, functions do not just appear, they appear as pointing toward some end for which religion is said to be "functionally" necessary or at least extremely useful.<sup>30</sup>

At this point the difference between Tocqueville and the traditions of Hobbesian and Lockean thought could not be more fundamental. On virtually every point, insofar as religion is concerned, he is a much more subtle and sympathetic analyst than any of the "first founders" of liberalism. Insofar as the origin and end or purpose of religion are concerned, Tocqueville's disagreements with Hobbes are fundamental. Hobbes, for example, located the universal phenomenon of religion in one of the basest of human passions: fear of the unknown. From thence he concluded that, though religion itself could not be suppressed (this fear itself cannot be overcome and in one form leads directly to the Hobbesian state), its denominational manifestations could be refounded as a political artifact. Religion, in other words, could be understood completely in terms of its political function (*Leviathan*, I:9).

For Tocqueville the problem of religion emerges in exactly the opposite manner. Religion is natural to man not because his lowest passions demand to be numbed or quelled. Rather religion is natural because man's highest aspirations seek fulfillment and grounding in the transcendent. Tocqueville never disparages a belief in the human soul and its relation to God, nor did he consider such beliefs of merely political utility. These beliefs spring from a universal human source, the striving for perfection that is the often silent wellspring of human activity itself: "Nothing can prevent such ideas from being the spring from which all else originates."<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the core of religion, God and His relation to the human soul, is natural to man precisely because of our striving for virtue and our desire to grasp the ultimate foundations of human existence and human destiny. Religion gives voice and substance, often in mythic ways, to that which is highest in human nature, that which positively distinguishes human beings from the material and sensual world of animate and inanimate objects which they inhabit.

As such, the problem of religion for liberalism is in crucial ways precisely the opposite of that found in Hobbes. Since religion articulates the highest of

human aspirations, the problem is not, as in Hobbes, finding relief from fear in human society. Rather it is how to create a space for the noble in a regime that is admittedly dedicated to giving the widest possible freedom for the base desires of material acquisition and progress. How can the high be contained in a regime of the low? Democratic equality seems to breed contempt for the very distinction between the noble and the base, and the reliance on public opinion and observation which dominates the thought of the common man seems to render the truths of religion deeply troubling in democratic regimes in any sense other than the purely functional.

The key at this point is to recognize that Tocqueville refuses to make the sharp and entirely modern distinction between a purely functional understanding of religion and a view of it as pointing to fundamental truth about man's transcendent destiny, a distinction that he has been frequently charged with.<sup>32</sup> To be brief, he seeks to reformulate liberalism, not religion, because the fundamental religious aspiration is not only useful, but noble on its own terms and rooted so deep in human nature that it cannot be suppressed in a manner consistent with democratic liberalism.

Since human nature ultimately aspires to transcendence, this striving can only be fulfilled in two ways: by religious conviction in a divine end for man or in a commitment to earthly salvation in a political kingdom. Man either has faith in God or in God's earthly lieutenant or vice-regent. The alternative to widespread religious conviction is not secularism but tyranny. For Tocqueville, democratic secularization, the ideal of enlightenment intellectuals, was a contradiction in terms (*Democracy in America*, II:1:5, II:2:7).

Tocqueville's rejection of the Hobbesian and Lockean solution to the problem of religion implies a rejection of their formulations of liberalism itself. The soulless materialism that lies at the core of their thought implies the hostility they display to religious faith and the need to contain and tame religion insofar as politically possible. But if religion speaks to the nobility of man, a nobility without which liberalism cannot be sustained, then liberal regimes themselves must be constituted in such a manner that the legitimate desire for peace between sects and denominations does not transform itself into hostility to religion as such. The great end of democratic statesmanship in this regard will be to preserve the respect for diversity while sustaining the religious sentiment of the people itself.

Tocqueville would have understood perfectly the religious motivation behind and aspirations of Martin Luther King's public activities, even the deeply religious cadence of his speech. Nor would he have been ashamed or embarrassed by it. What he would have regarded as shameful is the manner in which the religious character of King's public life and thought embarrasses contemporary Americans to the point that they studiously ignore it. In short, Tocqueville would have understood perfectly the distinction between the promotion of a sectarian creed and friendliness to religion as such, a distinction that was a

commonplace among the American founders but which has been lost two centuries later.

Quite obviously this represents a fundamental reformulation of the task of liberal statesmanship with respect to religion, even from the admittedly less hostile version set forth in Locke. But it is also a refounding of religion itself, or at least religion insofar as it has political aspirations. This is best seen with respect to the policy of toleration. Locke's program of toleration was irreligious to the core and was founded upon a rejection of the essential claims of religion itself.<sup>33</sup> Tocqueville too thought that toleration was required in liberalism for what is essentially the opposite reason. Religion itself flourishes best when it is left free of entangling alliances with the regime. Tocqueville never claims that toleration is demanded because religion, though useful, is a fraud. It is the noble aspirations of religion that require independence to flourish, not in order to be tamed. When religion lies down with the regime, it suffers the same fate as the regime. This was a fate that he saw plainly in the case of his own Catholic communion in postrevolutionary France. In deposing the regime religion itself is deposed.

Tocqueville saw a religious life in America that was at once more vibrant and more varied than anything in his homeland. It was also more concerned with what might be called the core of religion and less concerned with formality and ritual than anything seen elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> This too was attributable to the activist and egalitarian spirit of democratic times that sought answers to the most fundamental of human questions but which was impatient with empty ritual and suspicious of inequalitarian ecclesiastical forms and hierarchies. In democratic regimes religion which taught of a transcendent God and the equal relationship of all human beings before this God would flourish to the good of democratic souls and the benefit of democratic regimes. Religions which failed to speak to the deepest needs of democratic citizens, as both men and citizens, would wither. (*Democracy in America*, II:1:6, I:2:9).

Tocqueville saw the robust character of American religious life and sought to provide a means for nourishing it in democratic republics. To do so, however, requires reformulating both the nature of liberalism and the case for toleration therein. Liberalism was more than a collection of rational contractors pursuing their own acquisitive desires and finding the liberal regime as the most convenient means of so doing. Properly thought-out free liberal societies could achieve a plentiful measure of human greatness, a nobility born out of individual commitment to the ideals of liberty and dignity inherent in a liberalism that refuses to reduce itself to a vehicle for material acquisition.<sup>35</sup> Such a liberalism will nurture religious conviction precisely because of its ability to tame our basest desires and give substance to the highest of human aspirations. It will recognize at the heart of religion not credulous believers and superstitious rituals but "things of the very highest concernment" about the dignity and destiny of the human soul. That religion can become corrupted is no more than an

eternal observation about all things of which human beings partake, politics as well as religion. At its best, however, religion articulates the very nobility that distinguishes man from his fellow creatures, a difference on which humane political order rests and which liberalism forgets at its peril.

Tocqueville himself was not sanguine concerning the success of such a liberalism. He understood full well the powerful forces of commercial acquisition unleashed by liberalism, especially in large republics such as America. But this only underscores the fragility of such a liberalism as he envisioned. Large republics such as America must inevitably foster the lowest of human ends and the most minimal of communal ties. But only large republics of sufficient wealth and size may be able to defend themselves successfully from despotic enemies both foreign and domestic. Insofar as this is true, liberalism may ultimately be incoherent at its deepest level. It cannot defend itself without an enormity of size. But that very size and wealth diverts its citizens from the very commitments that might make liberalism worth defending.

What Tocqueville saw in America before the Civil War was a democratic republic inevitably rooted in local ties and institutions and suffused with religious, specifically Christian, belief that public institutions did nothing to discourage. He saw full well the forces that gave that republic a tenuous hold on American life, but he also saw the primordial human impulses that made it necessary if liberalism itself was to thrive in ages to come.

#### NOTES

1. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, ed. Lewis Feuer (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1959), p. 254.

2. Plato, *Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 473d, p. 153.

3. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1976), Introduction.

4. Consider in this regard the manner in which Socrates may be said to rule over the people of Athens in the *Apology*. This ruling was largely due to a chance union of the philosopher and the opportunities provided by the trial.

5. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey Mansfield, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), ch. 25, pp. 98, 101.

6. Machiavelli, *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius*, trans. Christian Detmold, in *The Prince and the Discourses*, ed. Max Lerner (New York: Modern Library), I:11, p. 147.

Machiavelli's animus toward traditional Christianity is well known. The best sources for understanding the depths of his thought on these topics are: Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), and Harvey Mansfield, Jr., *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders: A Study of the Discourses* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979). The reading offered in J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) fails completely to come to grips with the depths of Machiavelli's rejection of the ancients and therefore mistakes the surface of his use of language similar to that found in the ancients with the substance below the surface.

7. Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis*, in *The Great Instauration and the New Atlantis*, ed. J. Weinberger (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1980), p. 80.

8. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, I:1, p. 86. One of us has already written at greater length on Hobbes' teaching regarding religion. See Richard Sherlock, "The Theology of Leviathan: Hobbes on Reli-

gion," *Interpretation* 10(1982), 43–60, and Richard Sherlock, "The Politics of the Netherworld: Leviathan, Part IV," in Klaus Kodalle, ed., *Hobbes on Religion* (Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic Publications, 1990). The literature on Hobbes' teaching on religion is now reasonably extensive but of very uneven quality. Cf. F.C. Hood, *The Divine Politics of Thomas Hobbes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); Howard Warrender, *The Political Theory of Hobbes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957); Ronald Hepburn, "Hobbes on the Knowledge of God," in R. Peters and M. Cranston, eds., *Hobbes and Rousseau: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972), pp. 85–108; Willis Glover, "God and Thomas Hobbes," in K. Brown, ed., *Hobbes Studies* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1965), pp. 141–68; Stewart Sutherland, "God and Religion in Leviathan," *Journal of Theological Studies* 25(1974), 373–80; Patricia Springborg, "Leviathan: The Christian Commonwealth, Inc.," *Political Studies* 24(1976), 171–83; D.H.J. Warner, "Hobbes' Interpretation of the Trinity," *Journal of Religious History* 5(1969), 299–313; Shirley Letwin, "Hobbes and Christianity," *Daedalus* 105(1976), 1–21; J.G.A. Pocock, "Time, History and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes," in *Politics Language and Time* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), pp. 141–202; David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Leo Strauss, "On the Basis of Hobbes' Philosophy," in *What Is Political Philosophy* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1959), pp. 71–96. With exception of Johnston and Strauss the sources listed above are severely deficient because they completely fail to see beneath the superficial rhetoric of Hobbes' treatment of religion to the deeply irreligious core of his thought. As such the interpretations they offer of Hobbes' texts render him to be such a confused writer that one wonders why anyone should consider him worth studying.

9. See John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (New York: Mentor Books, 1965), II:3 p. 321.

10. Locke, *Two Treatises* II:6, p. 219. Locke's writing on religion is the subject of an increasing body of interpretive work, most of it subject to the same deficiencies as in the case of Hobbes. Most writers believe that Locke's religious writing can be understood as a sincere statement of his own religious convictions. But this starting point immediately makes Locke an utterly confused thinker. There is no possible way in which the overt teaching of the religious writing can be made to cohere with the explicit teaching of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* on the foundations of knowledge and belief. Either Locke's protestations of religious belief, indeed of an "infallible" source of religious knowledge, are not to be taken at face value or the whole epistemological foundation of Locke's teaching must be seen as erroneous or itself a kind of rhetorical fraud. For representative secondary sources see: Richard Aaron, *John Locke* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); Richard Ashcraft, "Faith and Knowledge in Locke," in John Yolton, ed., *John Locke: Problems and Prospects* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969); John Biddle, "Locke on Reasonable Christianity," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37(1976), 139–60; William Bluhm, "Locke's Ideas of God," *Journal of Politics* 42(1980), 414–38; John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Eldon Eisenach, *Two Worlds of Liberalism: Religion and Politics in Hobbes, Locke and Mill* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Paul Helm, "Locke on Faith and Knowledge," *Philosophical Quarterly*, 23(1973), 52–66; J.T. Moore, "Locke on the Moral Need for Christianity," *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 11(1980), 61–68; S.C. Pearson, "The Religion of John Locke and the Character of His Thought," *Journal of Religion* 59(1978), 244–62; Fred Vaughan, *The Tradition of Political Hedonism From Hobbes to Mill* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1975).

11. John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Patrick Romanell (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1955), p. 13.

12. The early works defending suppression of religious dissent are found in John Locke, *Two Tracts on Government*, ed. Phillip Abrams (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967); also see Robert Kraynak, "John Locke: From Absolutism to Toleration," *American Political Science Review* 74(1980), 66–68.

13. See, for example, Locke, "The Fourth Letter on Toleration," in *The Works of John Locke* (London, 1823), vol. 8, pp. 558–59.

14. John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, ed. George Ewing (Chicago: Regnery, 1965), pp. 16 ff.

15. This critique is in two parts that are almost hidden from each other in Locke's corpus. In the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke sets forth an understanding of the supposed relationship between reason and revelation and the tests that must be passed if any assertion of revelation is to be properly accepted as such. Later, in the posthumously published "Discourse on Miracles" it becomes clear that no revelatory assertion can possibly pass the test; in fact the test is designed to be impassable.

16. Leo Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, ed. Thomas Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

17. In this respect we point in the first instance to the dichotomy evident in the thought of Hume. Hume's *Dialogue* has been seen largely as an attack on prevalent eighteenth-century versions of theism such as "natural religion," and his *Natural History of Religion* is a trenchant updating of Hobbes' thesis about the origin of religion. But in his most important work concerned with political practice, the mammoth *History of England*, little of this bitter hostility to religion as such is to be found.

18. The secondary literature on the problem of religion in the American founding is vast. Only a few of the most important recent titles can be noted here. See especially Thomas Curry, *The First Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Leonard Levy, *The Establishment Clause* (New York: Macmillan, 1986); Thomas Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Walter Burns, *The First Amendment and the Future of American Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1974); Chester Antieau, et al., *Freedom from Federal Establishment: Formation and Early History of the First Amendment's Religion Clauses* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1964); Gary Glenn, "Forgotten Purposes of the First Amendment Religion Clauses," *Review of Politics* 49(1988), 340-67; Patricia Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion and Politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Ralph Hancock, "Religion and the Limits of Limited Government," *Review of Politics* 50(1988), 682-703.

19. This view was extensively represented in eighteenth-century thought, and versions of it can be found in Locke, Kant, and Rousseau. More relevant for the intellectual foundation of the colonists was probably its extensive representation in British, often Scottish, moralists of the Enlightenment. See especially D.D. Raphael, ed., *British Moralists*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). This argument was also a backbone of antifederalist thought and can be seen in numerous selections in Herbert Storing, ed., *The Complete Anti-Federalist*, 7 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), especially selections 4.24, 3.6, 4.6, 6.14, 2.8.

20. See especially Linda Depauw, *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress*, 3 vols. to date (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977-), 3:114, 137; Washington's "Farewell Address" in the version drafted by Hamilton is in Morton Frisch, ed., *The Political Writings of Alexander Hamilton* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1984), pp. 431-47.

21. James Madison, "Memorial and Remonstrance," in M. Meyers, ed., *The Mind of the Founder: Sources of the Political Thought of James Madison* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1981), pp. 5-12.

22. Madison's language is often vigorous in his concern for the evils that religious strife can bring upon a community, such as his claim that "Torrents of blood have been spilt" in Europe in attempts to enforce religious uniformity. Also see Madison to William Bradford, Jan. 24, 1774, in Meyers, pp. 2-5; *Memorial*, par. 5.

23. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), Query 17; Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on Religion," in Edward Dumbauld, ed., *The Political Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: New American Library, 1955), pp. 937-46; Jefferson to Timothy Pickering, Feb. 27, 1821; Jefferson to Miles King, Sept. 26, 1814; Jefferson to Charles Thomson, Jan. 29, 1817.

24. Jefferson to Jared Sparks, Nov. 4, 1820; Jefferson to James Smith, Dec. 8, 1822; Jefferson's own religious views are described extensively in Charles Sanford, *The Religious Life of Thomas Jefferson* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1984); also see Jefferson to John Adams, May 5, 1817.

25. Thomas Jefferson, *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, in O.I.A. Roche, ed., *The*

*Jefferson Bible* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1964); also Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, Apr. 21, 1803; Jefferson to Edward Dowse, Apr. 19, 1803; Jefferson to George Logan, Nov. 12, 1816; Jefferson to Francis van der Kemp, April 25, 1816; Jefferson to Timothy Pickering, Feb. 27, 1821.

26. We would especially call attention to the evident piety, especially with regard to Divine Providence, that pervades the public rhetoric of Washington. The Farewell Address is not unique in its invocation of religious themes. Washington's various messages to the colonies during the war are loaded with such references. See also Adams to Jefferson, Dec. 8, 1818, and Apr. 19, 1817, in Lester Cappon, ed., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959).

27. The concept of "natural religion," while extremely common and historically crucial, is an elusive phenomenon. For some attempts to comprehend it see especially Margaret Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981); Frank Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), and Robert Sullivan, *John Toland and the Deist Controversy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

28. The most penetrating analysis of the meaning of establishment at the time of the founding is in Curry; Glenn gives the best analysis of the divided sentiment of the founding regarding the specific purposes of the first-amendment religion clauses.

29. On the current dilemma faced by trying find a place for religion in American public life, see especially Richard Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984).

30. On the problem of religion in Tocqueville one can compare the variously flawed accounts of Doris Goldstein, *Trial of Faith: Religion and Politics in Tocqueville's Thought* (New York: Elsevier, 1975) and Marvin Zetterbaum, *Tocqueville and the Problem of Democracy* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1967). Zetterbaum's account attributes to Tocqueville too much of Machiavelli's political functionalism, while Goldstein fails to penetrate to the deepest tensions in his thought on religion. We are indebted here to serious insights contained in an as yet unpublished paper by Ralph Hancock, "The Uses and Hazards of Christianity in Tocqueville's Attempt to Save Democratic Souls."

31. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Max Lerner and George Lawrence (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), II:1:5.

32. This is the point that Zetterbaum overstates with his focus on Tocqueville's functional account of the political utility of religion.

33. This irreligious core of the practical effect of toleration is seen most clearly in the *Fourth Letter* but is implicit in the original *Letter* itself.

34. *Democracy in America*, I:2:9. Tocqueville's account of the place of religion in the American regime is perceptively treated in Catherine Zuckert, "Not by Preaching: Tocqueville: On the Role of Religion in American Democracy," *Review of Politics* 43(1981), 259-80.

35. On Tocqueville's reformulation of liberalism in general the superior account is Pierre Manent, *Tocqueville et la Nature de la Democratie* (Paris: Julliard, 1982).