

Interpretation

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Discussion

Antiquing America: Reflections on Rahe's *Republics*

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INTRODUCTION: OUR PERENNIAL SELF-EXAMINATION

What does it mean to be an American? Scholars' responses to this question present an unsettling collection of contraries: America builds on Machiavellian foundations—its founding practically repudiates Machiavellianism; America spurns classical republicanism—it revives the classical republican defense of politics' dignity; America is the capitalistic order par excellence—its founding ratified an anti-capitalistic, communitarian republic; America reconciles revelation with rationally discerned, natural-rights doctrine—its overriding concern with rights undermines revealed religion.

From the persistence and contrariety of inquiry into America's identity, one might infer that part of what it means to be an American is to ask without ceasing what it means to be an American.¹ Doubtless every people at times questions the content and perhaps even the existence of its collective identity. Yet America takes this natural process a step further. Apparently we suffer from what is currently called an identity crisis.

We see this not only in academic but also political discourse. At times we appear so certain of our merit and thus of our identity that we rally round leaders who reflect our view that we occupy a "city on a hill." Then, in the wink of the national eye, we flirt with the proposition that our political life so

Paul A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), xiv + 1,201 pp., \$49.95. The work is now available from the University of North Carolina Press in a revised, three-volume, paperback edition, published in 1994. Volume 1, *The Ancien Régime in Classical Greece*, xxiv + 379 pp., \$22.95; vol. 2, *New Modes and Orders in Early Modern Political Thought*, xxvii + 485 pp., \$24.95; vol. 3, *Inventions of Prudence: Constituting the American Regime*, xxxi + 377 pp., \$19.95.

I wish to thank Matthew J. Franck for his thoughtful critique of an earlier draft of this essay. All errors are mine.

lacks content as to require a national quest for a new “politics of meaning.” But if one element of the answer to the question of the uniqueness of the American soul consists in our perennial penchant for self-examination, this is effectively to say that emptiness is part of who we are. Such a description, while less than satisfying, may also be less than surprising. One wonders whether our inability to paint in all its particulars a self-portrait of American citizenship owes to our being in some measure the product of thinkers who were, in the final count, citizens of no particular country but, rather, of the world.

Yet, from another perspective, we appear more self-aware than our academic and political debates sometimes suggest. Put simply, to be American is to subscribe to the principles of the popularized philosophy undergirding our constitutional order, that is, the self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence.² But these truths, which apply not only to American citizens but to all human beings—perhaps *because* they apply to all human beings—somehow fail to answer fully for us the question of who *we* are. Does conceding that our settled, core principles serve incompletely as the noetic matrix for our self-examination require us likewise to own that a complete appraisal of America’s soul must transcend—and, in this sense, declare insufficient—our officially sanctioned ends of self-preservation, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Might this mean that any evaluation of national purposes from the perspective of the ends constitutive of a completed or perfected life is, in a sense, “un-American”? More precisely, is the very lack of national content that so perplexes us simultaneously indispensable to the way of life on whose basis we trumpet our “exceptionalism”?

The nature of these questions points the would-be reader of the American mind to the need for more than historical erudition. Because the deepest understanding of an epoch requires first our coming to understand it as it understood itself, an accurate account of America must come to grips with its commitment to what the Declaration regards as the transhistorical, self-evident truths by which it justified our revolution to a “candid world.” Investigating what it means to be an American requires an understanding not only of American history but also of the philosophers and philosophy invoked by those who framed the Constitution. While foundings are important for the study of regimes other than America’s, the gravity of our founding is another aspect of our uniqueness. The struggle over the Constitution produced public debate of an order much higher than perhaps has ever been witnessed in political contests. America is, in an important sense, the first “philosophic” polity—the first regime founded explicitly on appeals to truths self-evident to the unassisted reason, and not on the authority of tradition or myth. The founding presents for our scrutiny a group of highly educated men serious about both political philosophy and the practical problems of their day. Reading the records of their debates, one finds philosophic arguments brought to bear on practical questions in a manner and with a directness unparalleled in political history. Perhaps Fisher Ames’s 1788

observation on the founding best states the point: “legislators have at length condescended to speak the language of political philosophy.” As a result, the successful student of the American soul needs to come equipped with both historical and theoretical competence.

Paul Rahe brings this rare mix of skills. His *Republics Ancient and Modern* escapes the Scylla and Charybdis of unphilosophic history and ahistorical philosophy into which fall many of the major treatments of America. By training first a historian, Rahe understands the ancillary character of historical data in relation to the permanent questions. His gifts are such that he provides the reader careful interpretations of the philosophic texts that address republicanism and then situates these texts in relation to the historical circumstances in which and to which they were offered. Given the magnitude of the task Rahe sets for himself, it is not surprising that *Republics* is a very long book. In support of his ambitious thesis Rahe offers the reader a 782-page body, 346 pages of meticulous notes, and a 70-page index.³ Yet his prose is highly accessible and his narrative powers enviable. No reader of this tome can fail simultaneously to be awed and pleased by Rahe’s massive yet mellifluous exposition.

While his final destination is the American character, arriving there requires Rahe to take his readers on a twenty-five-hundred-year odyssey that begins in ancient Greece. In book 1, “The *Ancien Régime*,” he paints for the reader the always fascinating and sometimes stupefying character of the first experiments with democracy in the Greek *polis*. Here we learn what democracy without rights demands and supplies. Book 2, “New Modes and Orders,” details encyclopedically the resolute break with antiquity ushered in by Machiavelli, Descartes, Bacon, Hobbes, Harrington, Locke, and their followers. Book 3, “Inventions of Prudence,” the work’s denouement, examines America in light of the debate between the ancient city and its modern critics. Here Rahe identifies those elements of republics ancient and modern that he finds “mixed” by America to form what he argues is a novel brand of republicanism.

That *Republics* culminates, literally and figuratively, with America is explained by purposes at once scholarly and political. Rahe detects here and in the other Western democracies a drift toward the “soft, administrative despotism” foretold by Tocqueville (pp. 6–7). He worries that the muscularity required of self-government cannot be maintained in a polity that “effectively relegates all severely contentious political decisions” as well as a growing number of policy questions to a life-tenured, unelected judiciary in tandem with a similarly unaccountable federal bureaucracy. To worsen matters, those who occupy the national legislature—intended by the Framers to be the branch most responsive to popular opinion—have so stacked the electoral deck that today “death and retirement account for nearly all changes in personnel.”⁴ These mutations, added to the virtual death of federalism, lay bare our “decline in democratic vigor” (p. 7).

Is this decline “genetic”—a consequence of our fundamental principles—or

incidental, or the result of some mix of reason and chance? Divining the answer is both obligatory and peculiarly burdensome for us. Our principles of liberty, equality, and consent have been so spectacularly victorious here and abroad that we can today scarcely conceive any objections to their unqualified justice. Our success threatens to rob us of the detachment requisite to self-understanding. That there could be another way for a people to govern—worse still, that justice could consist in a regime in which the people does not govern—is unthinkable for us (p. 8). The intellectual liberation we seek is at once invited and inhibited by what have become—after two hundred years of familiarity- and success-bred nonchalance—innocent prejudices in favor of calculating reason.⁵

Yet to maintain the particular justice offered by liberal democracy, we need to be liberated from our democratic presuppositions. Such liberation, argues Rahe, is enhanced by intense study of both the great alternative to our republican vision, the ancient *polis*, and the modern critique of antiquity. Reflection on ancient civilization and its discontents prepares us to face without blinking the strangeness—the culture-spawned uniqueness—of our own way of life. We return from our inquiry strangers in what was once native land; we scruple to accept at face value principles that further inspection may well show to be only shadows cast on the wall of our culture-cave. Qua strangers, we may glean more fully the uniqueness of America.

Much of Rahe's exposition of America's uniqueness is unlikely to sit well with those currently in charge of academic orthodoxy. While the generality of historians underscores economic and social class as key to understanding the ancient *polis*, Rahe follows Thucydides, Plato, and especially Aristotle, whose descriptions and evaluations of the diverse cities look first and foremost to their differing "regimes." The regime or *politeia* denotes who rules in the city and for what purpose or purposes. Classical regime analysis proceeds from the premise that what constitutes a "people" fully and finally lies in what it loves openly and earnestly. Rahe cites Augustine's compelling language, "'a people is a multitudinous assemblage of rational beings united by concord regarding loved things held in common'" (p. 2).

Aristotelian regime analysis is Rahe's methodological paradigm—a choice that justifies itself repeatedly throughout his tome. Through regime analysis he clarifies historical periods and issues whose essence has been largely obfuscated in the last two centuries by the methodology of modern social science. He challenges the present tendency to deem Athens rather than Sparta antiquity's political touchstone. He also confronts the view that early modern thought is largely consonant with antiquity. Rather, he detects a "decisive break" between ancients and moderns, one somewhat camouflaged by the rhetorical intentions of the latter (p. x). His exhaustive study of the early modern period adds valuable historical evidence to Leo Strauss's interpretation as presented in, for example, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*.⁶

Rahe likewise dissents from the dominant historical schools on the question

of America's character. Today's historians clash over whether America at its founding was "republican or liberal, ancient or modern, or simply confused." For Rahe the founding established a "deliberately contrived mixed regime of sorts—liberal and modern, first of all, but in its insistence that to vindicate human dignity one must demonstrate man's capacity for self-government, republican and classical as well" (p. x). Historically the phrase "mixed regime" has referred to an order whose goodness derives from its ability to mix the city's most powerful elements in such a manner that all are both satisfied with and limited in their political participation. In Aristotle's mixed regime, the rich few and poor many rule better together than either would separately; the defects in each ruling body are mitigated by their mixing. In the England from which most of the early colonists came, power was divided between the Crown and Parliament; the latter was composed of one house representing inherited wealth (Lords) and one, the people (Commons). This mix looked to marry the energy that comes from unitary execution, the wisdom found in the few with high education and good breeding, and the fidelity to the people characteristic of popular institutions. To these traditional usages of "mixed regime" Rahe adds what he purports to discover at our founding: America mixes ancient and modern principles as regards "man's capacity for self-government."

Propelling Rahe's interpretation of America is his conclusion that the debate between ancients and moderns revolves finally around the issue of the status of *logos*—our capacity for speech and reason, by which we deliberate about and seek to persuade others of what constitutes the advantageous, just, and good. Is *logos* capable of liberation from the passions? Or is it finally but the passions' scout and spy? Rahe reads the ancients to argue that man, through proper education (*paideia*), can acquire moral rationality sufficient both to justify and to require his efforts to communicate to and persuade others of the truth of his opinions concerning advantage, justice, and goodness. Such activity is "political" in the highest sense. Freeing reason from passion is antecedent to the ascent from opinion to knowledge of the good. This liberation is also largely coextensive with happiness or human flourishing in its highest natural manifestation.

Education is the means to this nature-fulfilling, humanizing liberation. So understood, education refers to more and less than our current conception. It looks first to form character with regard to the regime's ends. As such, it is the task of the *politeia*. Politics is natural, argues Aristotle, because man's "work" (*ergon*) has a natural basis, and the completion or perfection of this work requires an education that only life in the *polis* can provide. The summum bonum, the highest happiness, consists in the unimpeded activity of that which is highest in man. For this reason, finally, the *polis* exists, that we might not only live but "live well." Hence he who would craft a city must be a crafter of souls, or, to say the same thing, politics is education. As such, it is performed not only by the city on the citizens but also, and equally important, consists in

the very activity whose perfection is the animating aim of political education. Political activity is itself part of the education whose institution is, in turn, the highest purpose of political activity.

This apparent faith in education's power to liberate reason from passion—this justification of political activity—Rahe finds largely rejected by modernity. Political activity is unfruitful at best and fatal to regime health at worst. While reason justifies man's claim to superiority over the beasts, it does so only as the more clever agent of his desires. Because the latter are sovereign, insatiable, and ever-fluctuating in each man's psychic economy, ethical virtue in the classical sense does not and cannot exist. Self-restraint is self-punishment, is unhappiness, because it violates our nature. The happy life is not restrained, is not tranquility in the face of nature's limitations; it is much desiring and much enjoying. Thus the content of happiness varies not only from man to man but also within the same man when swayed by different passions. The idea of a summum bonum is illusory. The "effectual truth" reveals man's life to be a perennial struggle against both other men and miserly nature as he pursues happiness as it appears to the passion currently at his heart's helm.

Thus "moral reason" is fatally flawed, finally impotent, and trust in it by rulers and ruled has contributed to much of the world's misery. A regime grounded in the effectual truth will not sacrifice the good that can be achieved in this world, lower though such goodness may be compared to that inculcated in republics whose foundings lie only in imagination. Rather, it will ground itself in the surer support of self-interest—in the virtually universal desire for comfortable self-preservation. The catholicity and strength of this desire can be depended on to bring men to agree at least on the goodness of a republic that lowers its purpose from nurturing happiness understood as virtuous activity to maintaining the conditions of happiness, vulgarly understood. Not happiness but the pursuit of happiness becomes the new end for the new republic, which shall not seek vainly to snuff but rather to channel and therewith regulate passion's power in soul and city.

To give birth to the new order requires more than persuading rulers and ruled of the truth of the new understanding of human nature. It entails also a natural science liberated from past contentment with nature's and nature's God's provision for man. The new science will increase geometrically human power for material acquisition. To the extent that science makes this life more comfortable and secure, men will tend to ponder less passionately the afterlife and its requirements. Their spiritedness thus diluted, they will be less prone to clash violently over what appear to be—from the standpoint of calculating reason—"frivolous and fanciful distinctions."

In the enlightened commercial republic, acquisitiveness and science join forces to combat the penury in which nature has left man. Through technology and trade, compacts and constitutions, man looks to ascend from victim to master of his destiny—captain of a fate whose dispensation formerly had been

relegated to the hands of God or gods. Man understood no longer as the political but rather as the tool-making animal is the more solid foundation bracing the new republican edifice. Commerce replaces politics; labor, war; technology, providence. Icarus redirected is resurrected: modern man ascends successfully to good government because his is the flight from politics.

These are the general terms of the debate between antiquity and modernity according to Rahe. Where and how does America fit in this dichotomy? First and foremost, argues Rahe, the Founders acknowledged the force of the modern critique of moral reason and hence of political activity. They likewise conceded republicanism's heavy dependence on passion-managing institutions. But they did not reckon institutional controls as merely the means to glean moderate consequences from the clash of immoderate desires. Just as important, they found in their institutions a vehicle by which to educate men in the capacities requisite to reason's freedom. While primarily modern and liberal, then, Rahe's America retains at its founding at least a vestige of the core of ancient republicanism.

LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY—WITHOUT RIGHTS

"The *Ancien Régime*," book 1 of Rahe's tome, unearths the simultaneously mesmerizing and stupefying character of the *polis*. With bold strokes Rahe paints the portrait of the first republics, regimes so distant from ours in orientation and purpose that most today would deem them democratic in name only. In fact, many would pronounce them nothing less than monstrosities. It may not be surprising that such should be the verdict of contemporary intellectuals, for whom generally even modern democracy—more precisely, modern democracy that *is*—is found wanting in light of this or that abstract standard of justice and equality. But no less a mind than Hamilton's also voiced contempt for the ancient cities. In *Federalist* 9 he grants their "bright talents and exalted endowments," but finds it "impossible to read the history of the petty republics of Greece and Italy without feeling sensations of horror and disgust at the . . . rapid succession of revolutions by which they were kept in a state of perpetual vibration between the extremes of tyranny and anarchy." What sort of cities were these that produced "justly celebrated" endowments, on the one hand, and "tyranny and anarchy," on the other?

The Greek republics were dominated by politics. Political activity was oriented first and foremost to preparation for and prosecution of battle. Not to appreciate the importance, indeed, the omnipresence of war and its threat to the Greek cities is not to understand ancient republicanism. To be a citizen of the ancient *polis* one had first to be a soldier, and to own land one had first to be a

citizen. Nearly all honors and privileges were associated with or sprang directly from speech and deeds aimed at enhancing the city's martial virtue (*polemike*) (p. 31).

From the primacy of foreign policy arose the distinction between those who by nature merit freedom and those who by nature merit slavery. Rahe finds the Greek ethos expressed succinctly by Heraclitus, who, "to support his claim that 'war is the father of all and the king over all,'" observed that warfare "'made some men slaves and some men free'" (p. 33). Likewise, the natural right of might lies at the core of Athens' notorious defense of its impending sack of Melos. Accordingly, in practice, "the ordinary slave was a barbarian taken in war, kidnapped by pirates, or sold by his kin." That a man would accept slavery imposed by force—rather than resist and therewith bring on himself either liberty or death—was proof of his inferiority and hence of the naturalness and justice of his enslavement. Slaves were lovers of mere life; as such, the Greeks judged them "little better than the beasts of the field." Throughout Hellas it was agreed: to lack martial courage was to be less than human (p. 34).

The omnipresence of war and concomitant preeminence of martial virtue elevated maleness and demoted femaleness. The household and its concerns generally were deemed inferior to the conduct of politics and war. Because of their physical weakness relative to men as well their child-bearing role, women were not soldiers and thus were not citizens. They, along with slaves and small children, were relegated to the household, to the handling of private matters. The status of the private realm, like that of those assigned to it, Rahe shows is suggested by the fact that our word "idiot" derives from the Greek term describing one inclined more to "private pleasure" than to "public endeavor" (p. 31). Such is required by the equation of virtue and *polemike*. This equation, in turn, owed to a worldview in which "one community's freedom was understood to entail another's subjection" (p. 59).

The political freedom for which the Greek cities fought, and which they valued highest among all goods, was not, argues Rahe, freedom as we conceive it. It was not a status valued first as an instrument to securing and maintaining life, civil liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and property rights. The ancient citizen valued life, liberty, and property not as ends in themselves but for the sake of political freedom. To be politically free meant to participate in the exclusively human activity of applying *logos* to the questions of the advantageous, just, and good. Rahe cites Aristotle, whom he reads to argue that, for nearly all men nearly always, "the fully human life is a life of *praxis* [cooperative action] conducted in accord with the dictates of *logos*" (p. 36). In political activity lay the chance to "be brilliant, to shine." On erecting rule by the *demos*, the ancient city democratized the aspiration to "immortalize" through noble service to the city (pp. 44–45). In so doing, it removed the institutional barriers that had before impeded the few best among the fighting men from taking their just place in the "middle ground"—the political arena—where they might cultivate and display their public virtue (p. 42).

But in the very charm of this opportunity lay what so filled Hamilton with “horror.” *Logos*, writes Rahe, is a “double-edged sword” (p. 55). Our capacity for rational speech includes the power to dispute what constitutes the advantageous, just, and good. Natural diversity of opinion, coupled with the Greeks’ native longing for glory, accounted for much of the “perpetual vibration between . . . tyranny and anarchy” lamented by Hamilton. Competition for glory produced conflict not only between cities but also, and often much more dangerously, among each city’s denizens themselves. Yet a city at war or under threat of war is most in need of domestic harmony. To this dilemma Greek legislators devoted considerable attention. Analysis of Greek legislation shows the lawmakers’ preeminent concern was to maintain domestic “solidarity” (*homonoia*).

With the view to strengthening solidarity, Greek cities sought to do what Madison in *Federalist* 10 would later deem “impracticable”—homogenize “opinions,” “passions,” and “interests.” The citizens of the ancient *polis* were bound together by a moral purpose their full devotion to which would be undermined by weighty differences in ways of life or thought. Commercial men were excluded from the city, for commercialism could not but help to spawn a solidarity-threatening diversity of interests (p. 60). Men whose primary connection consists in buying and selling from each other cannot be depended on to fight and die for each other. But it was less that such men *made* money than *how* they made it that worried the Greeks. Because their wealth was “invisible,” merchants and craftsmen were judged less likely to defend the city than farmers and miners, whose wealth lay largely in the land itself (pp. 60–63). Should the city fall, a farmer would lose, in addition to his land, all his slaves, crops, animals, etc. With so much at stake, he would be more likely to fight to the last to save the city. But commercial men were threatened only if the enemy burrowed to the urban center. Even then, should the city fall, it would be far easier for them to ply their trades abroad than would be the case for those with immovable wealth.

Promotion of a destabilizing diversity of interests was not the only threat posed by commerce. By allowing and sometimes requiring international trade, commerce opened the city not only to foreign goods but also to foreign ideas (pp. 72–74).⁷ Openness to the foreign threatens patriotism in a martial republic. Isolation best ensures the like-mindedness on which the *polis* depends. Further, *homonoia* is upset not only by commerce-attendant interference from the “outside,” but also because trade inures citizens to haggling and quibbling with each other (p. 75).

It may not go too far to say that the ancient Greeks judged commerce inimical to republican health precisely due to the success with which it satisfies material needs. Commercial life both demands and supplies “self-interest,” “caution,” and “distrust.” Beneath the businessman’s restless activity and apparent civility lies a “more fundamental” passion, one shared by the slave—“the love of mere life.” In wealth men seek a “hedge against death.” Hence it is

not remarkable that modern liberalism, grounded in the primacy of the desire for self-preservation, should take exactly the opposite view of the rank of commerce (pp. 75–76). Trade mollifies men, turns spiritedness (*thumos*) toward acquisition and away from violent conquest, and hence undermines both strong hates and strong loves. Trade makes for industrious, timid, calculating men. Such are not the stuff of a martial republic.

The indispensability of *homonoia* led antiquity to take a dim view also of innovations in the technical arts. As was the case with commerce, the very success of the enterprise was the chief reason for its censure. Technical innovation, by providing goods that soften somewhat life's natural hardness, threatens likewise to soften men. It was accordingly associated with extravagance, frivolity, and deficient *polemike* (pp. 83–85). Moreover, it was feared that changes in the arts would lead to changes in the laws, whose power to compel obedience rests to a significant extent on foundations that are less than simply rational. While the arts proceed and succeed by dint of *logos* alone, laws are obeyed not simply due to the rational self-evidentness of their rectitude, but largely because they are all the citizenry has ever known. Laws whose origins are so ancient as to be shrouded in myth and mystery are for this very reason more likely to evoke in men the respect, the awe, requisite to obedience. Frequent overturning of fundamental laws undermines popular reverence for the very idea of the rule of law itself. On just such reverence republicanism depends.⁸

This singular devotion to *homonoia*, with its attendant hostility to commerce and technology—indeed, to work and profit generally—resulted from more than the need for military cooperation (pp. 89–94). Appealing again to Aristotle, Rahe finds that while self-preservation may explain the origin of the *polis*, nothing less than justice and piety illuminate its full purposes. The ancient Greeks saw themselves bound not merely by a rational contract with other, equally egoistic, “selves.” Rather, the gods themselves bequeathed them their land and people. These gods also gave the city the laws by which it defined itself and in which it educated its children. The very terms (much less the concept of “separation of”) “church” and “state” did not exist. Piety was patriotism and patriotism, piety; and here lay the root of the ancient citizen's public-spiritedness (pp. 115–19). Aristotle deems spiritedness (*thumos*) “the power by which we love” (*Politics* 1327b40–41). Extrapolating from this, one can infer that spiritedness is in the service of what we love. Paraphrasing from another tradition: where a man's treasure is, there will his spiritedness be also. Public-spiritedness, then, is the power by which we love and serve the city. Civic devotion—which, even in the best of cases, exists perpetually in tension with the private side of our nature—is animated fully and finally by the view that in fulfilling civic duty one most pleases, and hence comes closest to, the divine sources of the city's being and justice. The highest happiness, the greatest nobility, awaits only those willing and able to lay down their all in defense

of the temples of their city's gods. In the life of the committed citizen man finds the fulfillment of the longing manifested by love and served by *thumos*. By the same reasoning, to fail to do one's duty to the city was not only treasonous but impious (p. 116).

For the bulk of the citizens, then, the glue binding them to the performance of their duties, especially during wartime, consisted of the twin fears of punishment by gods and shame before one's fellows. In the marriage of piety and patriotism Rahe finds the core of the *paideia* by which the ancient republican virtues were inculcated in the citizenry. As Nietzsche recognizes, these were "hard" virtues, pursued and prized precisely for their hardness. For the Greeks "toil" (*ponos*) was father to "reverence," and without reverence there could be but little of the manly courage that was for them virtue entire (pp. 123–28).

If the chief aims of ancient education were to avoid strife at home and prepare for battle abroad, no *polis* so distinguished itself as Lacedaemon. More than any other citizen body, the Spartans "shared a common way of life." Their success at making many into one was owing primarily to the shared fear of an uprising by the subject helot class, which greatly outnumbered the citizenry and on whose forced labor the Spartans' leisure for political participation depended (pp. 140–42). Given the extraordinary and permanent danger of its situation, Sparta enacted a regimen that demanded equally extraordinary efforts on behalf of the city. At the root of the Spartan soul lay a piety that can be appraised "exaggerated" even on ancient terms (p. 145). While Greek cities generally employed "music" (poetry set to music) as an important means of "civilizing *thumos*"—of inspiring love for the city and hence of turning *thumos* in a political direction—music took center stage in the Spartan *paideia* (pp. 125–26, 144ff.) The poetry of Tyrtaeus bolstered the self-forgetting reverence indispensable to Spartan life. Spartan poetry sang its paeans not to the man lusty after immortal glory for himself but to the selfless hoplite who labored solely for his city.

Added to Sparta's singular music education in civil courage was an equally ambitious project to remove men from—and then to provide them a suitable substitute for—the pleasures offered by the private realm. Pleasures pursued in private seduced men into slighting their civic duty. Accordingly, Spartan legislation sought to "eliminat[e] to the greatest degree possible the last refuge of privacy—the family" (p. 155). Rahe cites Montesquieu's observation that in ancient Greek "'marriage only friendship could be found,'" whereas "'love took a form which one dare not mention'" (p. 16). The aggressiveness with which the Spartans pursued the latter served as another gauge by which they distinguished themselves from the cities of their day (pp. 154–55). With this Sparta sought to homogenize passion more thoroughly than had ever before been effected. This effort to forge wholly public beings erred in attempting simply to eradicate that which cannot be eradicated simply. This was most evident in the Spartans' practice of secretly hoarding gold and silver. Neverthe-

less, Rahe, alert to Sparta's excesses, judges her unmatched by the regimes of her day—and any other's—at “promoting civil courage” (pp. 161–62).

No less devoted to success at war was Periclean Athens, which Rahe shows was considerably less liberal than is generally granted by current classical scholarship, some elements of which have gone so far as to present Athens as the “primitive, premodern prototype of a working-class democracy.” Rahe finds Athens “no exception” to Tocqueville's description of all the ancient democracies as, in the final count, “‘aristocracies of masters’” (p. 192). Like the other cities of its day, Athens' democracy lived off and alongside its dominion over a vast number of slaves. While she might appear more “modern” by virtue of her laxity in morals relative to other Greek cities, this impression needs to be balanced against the fact that, like Sparta, she judged her citizens by the standards of “[m]anliness and courage, public-spiritedness and piety” (p. 194). And, like the other Greek cities, Athens restricted women, wealth, and technological innovation (pp. 198–217). Further, she pursued war in the name of empire and was intolerant of religious infractions. Far from a model for modern democracy, Athens exhibited all the “fanatical particularity” by which the ancient Greek republics were distinguished and from which they drew their virtue and cruelty.

This unavoidably brief summary of book 1 fails to do justice to Rahe's close, exhaustive analysis. In the endnotes he wages sustained battle with the giants of classical scholarship. Against the Weberian and Marxist approaches to ancient history practiced by Moses Finley and G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, respectively, Rahe offers Aristotle's regime analysis, in the light of which the fragmentary states of both modern idealism and materialism appear. Economic, “social,” demographic, and geographic data are manifestly necessary and constructive. But all are in the most important sense derivative of the *politeia*, of who rules and for what purpose.

The very cogency of his case for embracing Aristotle raises questions regarding Rahe's subsequent emphasis on the practice rather than the philosophy of antiquity. To be sure, he by no means simply neglects the judgments passed by the classical thinkers on the regimes of their day. Quite the contrary. Yet he tends to take, or at least to present, their professions largely at face value. He tends not to focus as much as he might on the fact that his paradigm, Aristotle, views ancient practice with politic reservations that are just as weighty as his explicit endorsements. Hence Rahe is left to look largely to modern thought for criticisms of Greek practice.

To Rahe's credit, he is well aware of and defends openly his focus on ancient practice. “[B]ecause the ancient philosophers really did content themselves [quoting Priestley] ‘with thinking with the wise and acting with the vulgar,’ it is perfectly possible to write a political history of any ancient regime without making reference to philosophy” (p. 234; emphasis in original). To

understand modern history requires a different approach. Modern practice cannot be understood absent our coming to grips with the philosophers of modernity; for modern practice is driven by “popularized philosophy,” or “ideology,” which has replaced religion as the source of those deepest notions adherence to which defines and distinguishes a people.

Nevertheless, to focus on the relation of ancient practice and modern theory appears to presuppose that the self-understanding of the ancient practitioners, combined with the critique of that understanding by the early moderns, is sufficient for grasping republics ancient and modern. Is it? Need one board the train of modern postulates to arrive at the most illuminating critique of ancient practice? More precisely, are the limits and dignity of the ancient *polis* seen most clearly from a perspective whose evaluative standard looks largely to the satisfaction of the desires for self-preservation and comfort?

Before beginning to attempt to answer these questions, fairness to Rahe requires underscoring the fact that he shows himself to be fully cognizant of Aristotle’s distance from the participatory ethos of the ancient *polis*. But to this theme he devotes no more than a few paragraphs (see pp. 217–18; 908, n. 181). Rather, his bent is to emphasize the self-understanding of the *polis* and then to point to Aristotle’s and other ancient thinkers’ apparent concurrence, especially as regards the question of the rank of political activity. Thus his portrait of republics ancient and modern is in danger of being read to present the following dichotomy: Republican man stands at a crossroads. He may march down the ancient trail, where the “city’s freedom and autonomy” demand a bloodthirsty communitarianism and a worldview distinguished by its “fanatical particularity” (pp. 217–18). Or he can walk the smoother, lower, soul-shrinking highway of the modern commercial republic, where happiness is both more reliably insured and, for this reason, more prone to be nauseating for its pedestrianism.

One shudders to think that these are the only alternatives for republican orders. Needless to say, Rahe denies that this is the case; for he finds in America the third and better road. I address his assessment of America in the latter half of this essay. Presently my intention is to clarify elements of Aristotle’s republican vision left somewhat unremarked owing to Rahe’s choice of emphasis. Again, what follows derives from my concern that Rahe’s focus runs the risk of leaving his readers with the impression that his exemplar’s republicanism can be largely lumped together with “ancient practice.”

ARISTOTLE ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Without doubt, Aristotle affirms man’s political nature. Hence he likely would have weighed carefully (in fact, he is in some ways the source of) a number of today’s familiar critiques of the soul-stunting repercussions of the depoliticization-through-commercialism on which modern republicanism de-

pend. Yet closer scrutiny suggests that he in no wise champions the widespread participation practiced by the democratic cities of his day. For Aristotle, the *polis*, by nature, lies between the radical inclusiveness and exclusiveness embraced by republics ancient and modern. Accordingly, between these two extremes *politika* (the “affairs of the *polis*” or “politics”), and therewith the proper scope of political activity, lie. Thus also, his model republic, “polity,” marries elements of two defective regimes, democracy and oligarchy, in a manner that guarantees the hegemony of neither. Through this mixing-balancing of the factions and their ruling claims, Aristotle’s republic nurtures and requires the ability to share in rule, that is, nurtures and requires political activity. So understood, his project can be called “political mixing.”

This simultaneous embrace and rebuff of political participation comes to light in Aristotle’s presentation of the “best and first” democracy, citizenship in which is restricted to the “best” *demos*—the moderately wealthy farmers, who “govern themselves in accordance with laws” (*Politics* 1292a3–b23, 1305a27–32, 1318a38–19b11).⁹ Rahe rightly makes much of the *polemike* of the ancient farmers and links this to the fact that their wealth is in land. Aristotle agrees that farmers as well as herdsman tend to military excellence (*Politics* 1319a20–24). While the political limitations of martial virtue are made clear in his critique of Sparta, he grants that the “soldiering life” encourages self-restraint and public-spiritedness (*Politics* 1271a42–b11; 1269b39–70a5; 1334a25–27; 1279a39–b4).

In addition to *polemike*, the citizens of Aristotle’s best democracy possess moderate wealth. He finds in the “middling sort of life” (a way of life “possible for most to participate in”), a readiness to “obey reason” (*Politics* 1295a25–b27). While wealth and poverty threaten the citizens’ willingness to share honors and offices (through “arrogance” and “envy”), the city’s “wish” to be composed of “similar and equal” persons is best realized by the middling element (*Politics* 1262b7–10). Further, in the static economy of antiquity, inheritance was the most likely avenue to wealth. This lessens the acquisitiveness and brazenness all too often found in those whose wealth is newly acquired. Thus it also reduces the friction often found between buyers and sellers. To this extent, the citizens more closely approximate the “affection” that community requires and hence the “capacity to be ruled and to rule”—the “political” capacity (*Politics* 1277b14–16).

But we overreach when we attempt to equate Aristotle’s “praise” of the “best” *demos* with the ancient democrats’ self-understanding. The chief reason Aristotle elevates farmers is not their participation-meriting sufficiency in political virtue, but their law-abidingness, which results not from their political expertise simply or even primarily but rather to a lack of “leisure” that leads them willy-nilly to “put the law in charge and assemble only for necessary assemblies” (*Politics* 1292b24–29).

In tension with Rahe’s thesis that the ancient democrat views work and

wealth with disdain in comparison to political activity, a key factor in Aristotle's elevation of the moderately wealthy farmers is his observation that this group finds "working more pleasant" than participating in politics, provided that no "great spoils" may be obtained from ruling; "for the many strive more for profit than for honor" (*Politics* 1318b11–17). For Aristotle the crucial political difference between the farmers and the other, "worse" types of *demos* is that the latter—artisans, merchants, and laborers—are "always frequenting the marketplace and the town." Therefore "nearly all" of them are able "easily" to "attend the assembly," whereas farmers are "scattered in the country" (*Politics* 1319a24–32). Because the great majority of the citizens are distant and occupied, the political offices can be filled only by those with the wealth for leisure. While payment for office (practiced in Athens at the time of the *Politics*) can remedy this, Aristotle rejects this on the grounds of its divisiveness (*Politics* 1304b26–30).

On closer inspection, then, Aristotle's "defense" of popular participation argues that the *demos*—even the "best" *demos*—that governs least governs best. He likewise restricts citizen participation in his polity and restrained oligarchy. In the latter, a "multitude" shares in rule and "law necessarily has authority." As in the best democracy, the rule of law in a moderate oligarchy is the product of the fact that the majority of citizens lacks leisure (*Politics* 1293a12–19). Polity, the best practical regime, and the standard for improving both democracy and oligarchy, is also constituted primarily of the moderately wealthy; therefore similar limitations on participation apply (*Politics* 1302a2–15, 1320a20–24; 1294b13–96b40).

In defense of Rahe's reading, it can be argued that these restrictions simultaneously liberate. They increase truly "political" participation by bolstering the citizens' capacity to liberate *logos* from passion in their quest to uncover and enact justice in the city. In the best or mixed democracy, an accessible property requirement and popular power over audits and elections produce a *demos* of sufficient size and power to resist the harassments of the wealthy. While the people pursue profit without oppression, the prohibition on payment for office allows those among the wealthy who seek honor to satisfy themselves through election to high office. The limits on both prevent either from turning their political relation into one of masters and slaves. This mix of inclusion and exclusion reflects both the limits and the dignity of politics. Political beings merit neither the compelled nonparticipation enforced upon a pack of "beasts" nor the unlimited power simply to "do the things" that the people and the wealthy characteristically "enjoy" (*Politics* 1281b19–21, 1310a19–23).

Aristotle's best democracy, then, embraces neither simple majoritarianism nor even the participation by the many in high office. So understood, his republican vision—unlike Greek republican practice—cannot be so easily dismissed by modern thought, for his republic goes no short distance toward moderating the "fanatical particularity" of the cities of his day. Equally important, Aris-

tote's objections to the *polis* not only do not require but in fact largely reject the fundamental premises underlying early modernity's critique of ancient practice. But if Aristotle's republicanism can be lumped together with neither ancient practice nor modern theory, where precisely does it stand?

To do full justice to his republican vision requires, according to Aristotle himself, "political philosophy," on whose basis politics' touchstone is no longer Pericles' Funeral Oration but, rather, the "natural course"—the absolute rule of the one or few of unqualified virtue (*Politics* 1282b14–24). From the standpoint of "one philosophizing," the political community is for the "sake of noble actions." Therefore, those preeminent in political virtue merit a "greater part in the city" (*Politics* 1279b12–81a8). Harboring no illusions as to its likelihood, Aristotle highlights the best city nonetheless. He does so with the intent that we—through reflecting on both the goodness and the infeasibility of the "natural course"—will arrive at a seasoned grasp of the simultaneously noble and problematic character of political life generally (*Politics* 1284a3–b34, 1288a17–29).

So seasoned, we can measure more accurately the extent to which Aristotle endorses his fellow Greeks' endorsement of political activity. On the one hand, he argues that truly *political* activity—ruling and being ruled, rather than struggling for mastery—is the core of political education. As such, it both provides for and results from blunted factionalism. The factions may come to moderate their more extreme claims in light of a human possibility made visible to them only through participation-education in a city that is, as Aristotle describes it, "finely mixed" (*Politics* 1294a30–94b39, 1252b28–30, 1253a30–40). While he has been seen to concede the role and rank of institutions in moderate politics, Aristotle challenges modern republicanism by denying the viability of a simply institutional solution to the political problem. His republic serves, fosters, and depends on political education, which, though "slighted by all," stands as the "greatest" instrument of political health (*Politics* 1310a12–14).

On the other hand, it is now apparent that too much is often read into Aristotle's emphasis on the educational potential of political activity. Read rightly, he lends scant succor to supporters of participatory republics, ancient or modern. In fact, his very defense of his best practical regime reveals most conspicuously his distance from the participatory ethos. While his moderate democracy and oligarchy seek to balance the claims and powers of the rich and poor, in "polity" neither of these factions, but rather the "middling element," dominates. Polity's moderation appears to owe most to its socioeconomic structure. Its uniformity largely dispenses with the need to balance powers. While his project to temper democracy and oligarchy depends for its effectiveness on its ability to educate the two most powerful factions in the benefits of "mixing," his polity neutralizes these groups through the numerical and martial superiority of the heavy-armed, middling element. Moderate property, a "mix" of wealth and poverty, makes political mixing most possible. Without the preeminence of

such a body, the attempt to balance opposing factions through education is prone to instability (*Politics* 1304a38–b3). Polity's lessened dependence on political education-participation is proportional to its fulfillment of the city's "wish" to be composed of "similar and equal persons," without which there is insufficient sameness to promote civic "affection." In addition, polity's widespread yet moderate wealth deflects the many from an excessive, and thus *apolitical*, participation in politics (*Politics* 1318b14–17).

Aristotle's aim to limit participation through satisfying acquisitiveness appears to move his project much closer to that of his modern republican successors. Yet the two differ markedly in their visions. The primacy of the "natural course," or unqualified excellence, not of life, liberty, and property, animates Aristotle's project, which seeks the ascendancy of that "certain" multitude whose way of life renders it militarily powerful and simultaneously restrained in and satisfied with its political participation. Polity satisfies acquisitiveness to the extent that it allows the many to "strive" unharassed after "profit," which they desire more than "honor." At the same time, it restrains the acquisitiveness of both rich and poor by opposing to both a middle class whose wealth is largely static. Polity "mixes" satisfaction and restraint with the view to limiting those who possess merely freedom and/or wealth to a level of participation proportional to their political contributions. In so doing, it attempts to provide the restrained political arena required for virtue to be heard, and perhaps, to some extent, to rule.

Accordingly, polity is the best practical alternative not because it is the most inclusive and secure of regimes—though this it is—but first and foremost because its domestic health and peace buy for the naturally best the opportunity to exercise their virtue on the city's behalf. For Aristotle the political contribution par excellence is "prudence" or practical wisdom. As is true of all the Aristotelian virtues, prudence exists in activity; prudence, to be, must be practiced. Polity allows the one or few who excel in prudence to exercise their virtue, that is, to be virtuous fully, and for this reason polity ascends. In the opportunity it opens to the influence of virtue polity resembles the rule of the "god-like"; it reaches toward what is for Aristotle the most divine or best regime simply (*Politics* 1284a3–15, 1284b25–34).

Aristotle appreciates fully the obstacles to the rule of prudence presented by the *polis*. Nevertheless, he deems it the city's natural inclination to desire to be ruled by the true God. All communities, he observes in the very first sentence of the *Politics*, aim at what appears good. This aim necessarily includes the desire to know the good. Stated differently, man's directedness toward the political community is explained fully and finally by his desire to "live well," and hence presupposes his desire to know what the good life is. The *polis*, by nature, intends to learn and practice virtue and to know the truth about the source and ordering principle of the cosmos (*Politics* 1328b4–22, 1325b16–31; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a27–b12).

In this light, Aristotle's republican vision presents a city animated neither by antiquity's fanatical particularism nor modernity's tepid universalism.¹⁰ For Aristotle the political animal remains too much an animal to prosper from unrestricted political participation. At the same time, the soul refuses simply to be identified with and satisfied through a hedonist calculus. Because human nature is mixed, so must be the healthy city. Constructed thus, Aristotle's polity offers itself as a third way between republics pitiless and prosaic.

THE FLIGHT FROM POLITICS

In Aristotle's appraisal of Greek practice we find a core that—without denying the differences among the classical thinkers—represents the general direction of classical political philosophy. The compass guiding the ancients' appraisals of the cities of their day is the "natural course" or classical natural right, the political culmination of which is the unqualified rule of unqualified virtue, or the best regime. Against this backdrop, modernity's critique of the *polis* comes more clearly into focus. Again, it is no more accurate to treat the moderns as a simple unity than it is do so with the ancients. Nevertheless, Rahe reveals a nucleus of shared principles on the basis of which all the seminal modern thinkers reject the ancient *polis*.

The period between the death of the *polis* and the birth of modernity, the Middle Ages, saw the ancient view of man as a political and rational animal carried on by Catholicism (p. 217). Also in agreement with the ancients, the Christian Middle Ages held science to be higher than a mere means to the "relief of man's estate" (p. 98). That these classical tenets survived and even prospered after Christianity trumped paganism was not accidental. As Nietzsche observes, original Christianity is popularized Platonism. Christianity did for all men what Platonism had done only for a politically impotent few; it demoted the status of family, city, this-worldly ambition, and political activity (p. 219). Man is first and foremost not the self-legislating citizen but God's obedient subject. His completion lies less in loving his city than in loving his neighbor. And his neighbor is not merely his fellow citizen, but whoever is in need (cf. the parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10: 25–37). The universal blessings and requirements of a God who is no respecter of nations became the new dispensation, on whose basis wholehearted devotion to the polity was no longer defensible.

If the Church allowed through its spiritual gates the Greek gift of trust in *logos*, it soon discovered that with it came the factionalism that had so riven the ancient republics. Rahe cites Gibbon: in the Church "[t]he study of philosophy . . . was as often the parent of heresy as of devotion'" (p. 222). In fact, fidelity to *logos* produced even worse factionalism in the Church than it had in the *polis*; for, "[i]n a world in which salvation is universally held to depend on an

acceptance of the true faith,” issues of heresy and scriptural interpretation “are of greater concern than mere life and death.” As it had been for the pagans, “*logos* turned out to be a double-edged sword—so that, if speech and reason brought Christians together, argument and disputation conspired to drive them apart” (p. 223).

Moreover, given the character and ferocity of certain tenets of the faith, philosophy—while ostensibly condoned and even welcomed to an extent theretofore unseen—was countenanced and commissioned solely as theology’s handmaiden. No less a mind than Thomas Aquinas openly defended the pious view that “‘whatever is discovered in the other sciences must be condemned as entirely false if it is repugnant to the truth’” of Christian revelation. In the final count, philosophy during the Christian Middle Ages was at least as subjugated as before (p. 228).

When the founders of early modern thought looked at the marriage of Jerusalem and Athens, they found first among its offspring pointless carnage and intellectual darkness. They found the Crusades and the trial of Galileo. Had fanatical particularism fallen, only to be replaced by fanatical universalism? This was the question raised by the early moderns, and its suppressed premise would become the lens through which they would focus on and reject both the *polis* and the Church.

That the revolutionary intentions of the early moderns are nearly invisible to our generation is owing to the success of the school of thought according to which historical change results from impersonal forces rather than from the thoughts and deeds of individuals and parties (p. 234). To paraphrase and summarize this school, “There are no great men, only mediocre men who find themselves at the helm during great historical movements.” Allied to this notion is radical historicism, which has produced a consensus on the point that rational self-consciousness—the means to and end of liberation from our epoch’s unique presuppositions—is impossible. Be the barrier class, status, or “the spirit of the age,” there is no escaping culture’s cave (p. 235). Were this set of blinders not sufficient to obscure modernity’s revolutionary ends, we find ourselves confronted by another obstacle. Rahe provides exhaustive historical evidence that the early moderns wrote esoterically; they were dissemblers whose works’ pious surface camouflages an impious core (pp. 233–48). Here he signals his debt to Leo Strauss, who first gleaned both the fact of and grounds for early modernity’s covert operation (p. 918, n. 21).

Machiavelli launched the modern attack on Christianity and its classically inspired trust in *logos*. His critique of moral reason, in turn, paved the way for a wholly new species of republicanism (pp. 228–29). Crucial to the break with antiquity was his replacement of proper pride with the “principles of humanity” (pp. 260–74). While the ancients granted the value of the feeling of humanity or pity, they did not count it among the virtues. But, from Machiavelli on, humanity came to be regarded as a virtue. This elevation, along with the justi-

fication for the new science, required a new understanding of *virtù*, which became mere “virtuosity—an instrument fashioned for the attainment of ‘security and well-being’” (p. 262).

Grounding the promotion of humanity and demotion of pride is Machiavelli’s denial of the ancient view that the quest for fame points beyond itself to the cultivation of the virtue for which men achieve fame. He “severs the link between the beautiful or the noble and the good” (pp. 264–65). This decoupling derives from his analysis of desire. Because desire is insatiable, self-restraint is finally unsatisfying. Hence the notion that happiness consists in the cultivation of the moral virtues is a sham. Virtue and happiness consist not in limiting but in satisfying limitless desires. On this basis, the life of unceasing “acquisition” ascends. The “effectual truth” of the matter is that men divide not between the immoral and the moral, but between the ambitious and the fearful. *Logos* is not naturally drawn to discover and communicate the just and good, but is by nature an instrument of the domination required to satisfy insatiable desire in a world where the good things are few and their would-be captors many.

If Machiavelli is the fountainhead of the project to bring the effectual truth of matters moral and political to the attention of thinking men, significant elements of modernity emerged later and sometimes as the fruit of fundamental disagreement with the Florentine. Rahe directs us to Montaigne, who, in building on Machiavelli’s foundation, dislodges from its facade the one stone still shared with antiquity—the exaltation of the quest for glory. Montaigne’s trenchant critique of heroic virtue would become the cornerstone of modernity’s misgivings about both the Christian martyr and the ancient warrior (p. 268). Heroism and self-restraint, classical as well as Christian, are diseases of the soul bred of an unjustified and unjustifiable pride. This pathology has been the primary source of man’s inhumanity toward himself and others throughout history. Better fitting man’s nature—understood here as his desire for security and well-being—are not courage and self-sacrifice but “‘mildness and ease of disposition.’” The latter reveal their worth when the good comes properly to be identified with “the useful,” and when *logos* accordingly focuses on the advantageous. In this view, the cruelty concomitant with the ancient warrior’s virtue now comes to light as humanity’s worst vice (pp. 269–72).

The success of the new man, the man of “natural mildness,” will be bolstered by modern science. So argues Francis Bacon. By making life longer and more comfortable, science promises to dilute religion and the older, austere virtue. So constituted, the new man, whom Bacon labels a “‘citizen of the world,’” will become more sensitive not only to his own security and well-being but also to that of his fellow citizens and mankind generally. The blessings brought by modern science will themselves educate men in the principle and practice of “humanity” (p. 279). Moreover, reasons Bacon, the weakening of religion—and, with it, of scorn for this life’s happiness—will increase

men's seriousness about their lives here and thus render them more fearful, pacific, and law-abiding. Because the project to persuade men to care more about this world requires first and foremost that this world become more hospitable, Bacon deems advances in medicine critical. While one result of these material advances will be to deafen the many to calls to hard and dangerous virtue, the longings of the few are less easily satisfied. To them Bacon offers not only the Machiavellian enticement of political mastery over *fortuna* but also the promise of the scientific conquest of nature (pp. 280–81).

Equally a philosopher of will and an enemy of Christian zeal is Descartes, whose repudiation of heroic virtue and religious piety is evinced by his refusal to cede the distinctions traditionally made among the love of God, the desire for honor, and the base desires for wealth and bodily pleasure. This refusal arises from his denial that body is finally subordinate to soul (p. 286). Because he finds body to be the source of all desire, his account of the soul becomes “merely a branch of physiology,” which is accordingly subsumed under Descartes's “new and revolutionary mathematical physics” (p. 287). A soul whose unity supervenes its subordination to body can know no principle of hierarchy by which to order the virtues. Hence the *générosité* with which Descartes replaces greatness of soul (*megalopsuchia*) cannot claim the latter's architectonic status. Rather, *générosité* is “an inborn quality,” an “overpowering lust for mastery.” It is not virtue but replaces virtue. It is the master passion and, as such, the final source of resolute resistance against the periodic chaos caused by the other passions.

Rahe cautions us lest we take the surface for the core. Descartes argues explicitly that *générosité* is the source and spring of man's willingness and ability ““to do great things,”” and the greatest of deeds is ““doing good to other men.”” When goodness is measured by the gauge of security and well-being, scientific progress emerges as man's greatest benefactor. *Générosité* inspires the work that both advances science and turns it to the relief of man's estate. For fear that such humanitarian rhetoric will lull us into the self-satisfaction Descartes promises, Rahe calls our attention to the fact that, at bottom, *générosité* “is the hard, unrelenting, willful, aristocratic self-assertion at the heart of modernity's soft, democratic *humanity*.” As Rahe reads it, Descartes's *générosité* is Machiavelli's “savage *virtù*” turned from the lust for empire to the quest to rule nature through science (pp. 289–90).

Equally beholden to Machiavelli's turn to the “effectual truth” is John Locke, whose realism finds that ““power and riches, nay virtue itself, are valued only as conducing to our happiness,”” that is, to this life's ““enjoyments”” (p. 293). Accordingly, austere notions of virtue cannot be relied on to spawn ““conformity of action.”” Required instead is a system of morality and politics that secures each man's pursuit of his private enjoyments. The full import of this change comes to light when we recall that Locke inaugurates the use of the term “self” in place of “soul.” The self is distinguished by an egocentrism that,

in the absence of a hierarchy of pleasures, is necessarily idiosyncratic in its quest for satisfaction. The very impossibility of consensus on the content of happiness elevates the pursuit of happiness. But for Locke the pursuit of happiness must remain a pursuit, one that finally leads nowhere. The pursuit of happiness is less the quest for the good than the flight from the “uneasiness” of pain and “the prospect of death” (p. 294). Life in Locke’s republic reveals itself to be—quoting Leo Strauss’s memorable description—“the joyless quest for joy.”¹¹ From this, virtue comes to light as bourgeois virtue; or, as Locke states it, self-preservation provides the solid ground on which to “regulate our religion, politics, and morality” (pp. 294–95).

Crucial to his attempt to reestablish civil society on solid ground is Locke’s stratagem regarding Christianity. While his professed target is not Christian faith but “priestcraft,” his critique of the latter eventuates in a Christianity far different from what it had been theretofore. By steps it becomes a “religion of humanity” grounded in the view of the “inadequacy of God’s provision” for man, “inclined to tolerate and even condone” certain “weaknesses of the flesh,” and focussed primarily on improving “man’s estate in this world” (pp. 301–3). Appealing to the Protestant emphasis on individual conscience, Locke succeeds in diluting the doctrine of justification by faith to the requirement of mere sincerity. In so doing, his aim ultimately is not to eradicate but to soften Christianity in order that it might no longer oppose but come to prop the new morality of *humanity*. The engine driving Locke’s project as well as his instrumental biblical hermeneutics is his employment of reason as the final standard of both the meaning and the soundness of revelation.

Should that project succeed, the new man of Locke’s new order no longer will be seduced by dreams of heroic virtue nor inflamed with religious zealotry. He will embrace the “cautious hedonism, the mild skepticism, and the genial tolerance” generated by commerce. His will be a “busy” life, one engrossed by the quest to improve this world and hence less than “zealous for salvation in the world to come” (pp. 314–17). Lockean man will echo the critique of classical virtue later offered by Montesquieu, who loathes the ferocity of ancient life, preferring the “timid bourgeois,” who devotes himself not to a bloodthirsty particularism but to pacific and homogenizing commerce and technological progress. The new man’s virtues consist not in a haughty rejection of money making, not in an inhumane contempt for the body and this life, but in a prudent frugality and a softness in manners. In Locke’s and Montesquieu’s new world commerce replaces war and slavery as the primary means of acquisition. Equally important, though not stated explicitly, the new science, by protecting the material life of the many from unconcerned nature, will also protect the intellectual life of the few from overly-concerned religion.

No less a midwife to the birth of the new world is Thomas Hobbes, whom Rahe credits with founding “a new science of politics aimed at eliminating politics altogether” (pp. 364–66). Building on the work of Grotius, Selden,

Descartes and, above all, Bacon, Hobbes continues the modern attack on the classical trust in *logos*. Because reason is but the “scout and spy” of desire, and because the latter is inconstant, the ordinary terms of moral discourse have different and often opposed meanings for different men and even for the same man when later swayed by a contrary passion. Moral reason, at once fettered and fitful, can thus serve neither to found nor to maintain commonwealths. Not reason singly or primarily but the fear of violent death drives men to establish commonwealths; for only fear can fully focus the mind and smother the other passions (p. 376).

Hobbes’s critique of moral reason serves to delegitimize political activity and bolster absolute sovereignty. His program to escape politics looks to Machiavelli’s view of human nature, but is finally more optimistic, because it marries to the Florentine’s dissection of desire Bacon’s aim to elicit true excellence by turning *logos* from piety and politics to science and the technical arts. Human perfection is wrought through yoking *logos* to method. Neither the great-souled nor the pious man, but, rather, the scientist-inventor is Hobbes’s and modernity’s paragon of excellence. Here Rahe brings to light nicely the “hidden teleology” beneath Hobbes’s explicit (rhetorical) repudiation of teleology. Hobbes extols “calculating, industrious, scientific reason,” praises the “virtues of civility,” and never slackens in his “demand for consistency” (pp. 395–97).

These fundamental Hobbesian principles Locke both adopts and modifies. So amended, they would come in time to inform the work of the American Founders (p. 397). But if the *Leviathan* is the raw material and the *Two Treatises* the finished product, the effect of both on the American founding is seen clearly only after appraising the workmanship of a thinker relatively unknown and, to the extent that he is known, misinterpreted—James Harrington (p. 409). Rahe’s Harrington serves as something of a mediator between Hobbes and Locke. Harrington grants Hobbes’s major premises but rejects absolute sovereignty and champions popular self-government. From his defense of the latter, he is routinely read as a classical republican. This reading Rahe rebuts. Harrington’s *Oceana* proscribes public debate for the same reason that Hobbes prescribes absolute monarchy. Both aspire to eliminate divisive public dispute over the advantageous, just, and good. That is, both attempt to eliminate politics, to abolish “the middle ground that had been the central feature of self-government in ancient times” (pp. 414–15).

Rahe declares Harrington the first patron of self-government to erect a republic independent of the ancient premise “that one can inculcate civic virtue and public-spiritedness through education.” His republic relies on judiciously constructed institutions to wring the common interest from individual selfishness (p. 421). In fact, these institutional means (e.g., secret ballots and the ban on debate) intend to *encourage* men to vote their interests and hence to lessen in their souls the weight and, with it, the divisiveness of moral-political con-

cerns (pp. 422–26). In all this, Harrington, along with Hume and Montesquieu—and contrary to Aristotle—looks to “political architecture,” to the “‘structure’” of government, as the source of its ruling principle (pp. 440–41).

Locke likewise embraces Hobbes’s ends while harboring reservations with his means (p. 463). Initially adopting Hobbes’s Erastianism, Locke later comes to champion religious toleration along with constitutional monarchy and the right to rebel. Never doubting the political deadliness of religious strife, he nonetheless eventually decides that religious persecution, not religious diversity, is the chief danger. Accordingly, toleration, not state supremacy over holy dogma, proves the better method for preventing disputes over the health of man’s immortal soul from spreading sickness to the body politic (pp. 459ff.). Because he expects religious liberty to end violent religious struggle, Locke can dismiss the need for Harrington’s program to eliminate the “middle ground of politics” (p. 473). Political activity will be made finally safe for the world because religious freedom will declaw politics.

Examination of other key elements of Locke’s project reveals the depth of his debt to Hobbes. On the issue of the role and rank of political education Locke breaks with Harrington, joining Hobbes to insist that a foundation be laid in public opinion sanctioning the employment of modernity’s institutional mechanisms (pp. 478–79). This doctrinal foundation consists chiefly in the propositions later deemed self-evidently true by the Declaration of Independence (p. 479). Locke also sides finally with Hobbes’s critique of moral-political reason. Because reason is bound to boundless desire, men cannot exercise objectively the “‘executive power’” that inheres equally in each in the state of nature (pp. 496–99). For this cause men flee nature through art—they construct civil society. Hence the relevant political sense in which Locke no less than Hobbes deems men naturally “free and equal” follows from nature’s failure to endow *logos* sufficiently to establish a natural capacity for rule.

Nature is no less niggardly in the economic realm. Man is left largely alone to provide for his necessities. His natural neediness permits, in fact, hallows the emancipation of the acquisitive instincts (p. 501). With the fall of the value of nature’s supply rises the dignity of human labor. Value owes virtually all to labor, and the labor of each man’s body is and can be his alone. Hence Locke reasons that man “‘has a property in his own person.’” In fact, because it is “in his own person,” rather than in nature, that man finds what is truly valuable, his “person” is property par excellence—is that which “‘nobody has any right to but himself’” (p. 502). Accordingly, we discover at the pinnacle of Locke’s teleology the “‘industrious and rational,’” whose conquest of nature with a view to comfortable self-preservation is the end in whose service politics is legitimated (pp. 504–8). While the current fashion in scholarship is to read Locke’s teaching on property as proof of his bondage to the interests of the English upper class, Rahe’s careful account finds Locke’s overriding concern is for the welfare, not of the rich and idle few, but of working men and women (pp. 514–18).

Rahe argues that Locke's chief intentions—redirecting *thumos* toward acquisition as part and parcel of the larger project to pacify men through trade; replacing guidance from moral reason with calculating reason; and elevating labor over political activity—to some extent made their way into the colonies during his tenure on the Board of Trade (pp. 519–20). Rahe also offers extensive testimony about the depth and breadth of Locke's intellectual leverage on the continent. From Blackstone, Sidney, Trenchard and Gordon, Bolingbroke, and Priestley to Hutcheson, Smith, and Hume, there was, despite their important differences, general agreement regarding the essential rectitude of Locke's program (pp. 530–39). Although Harrington spawned English republicanism, it was Locke who would become its “dominant intellectual force” (p. 535).

As noted, Rahe is well aware of the differences among the above-mentioned thinkers and between them and Locke. Most notable are the misgivings of Hume and Montesquieu about the doctrinairism of Locke's project. If Locke and early modernity generally look to avoid the strife that they suspect supervenes trust in man's capacity to distinguish the advantageous, just, and good, Locke also enunciates a moral-political vision whose universality serves as the touchstone and thus as the potential accuser and subverter of existing orders. To the dangers inherent in the rise of ideology Rahe finds Hume the first to be alert. Along with Montesquieu, Hume seeks to restore somewhat the legitimacy and dignity of the particularism that is inseparable from civic identity. Yet they differ with Locke less over fundamental ends than over the choice of means. While they accept and echo Locke's contention that consent is *the* source of political legitimacy, both look to instill in modern republicanism the flexibility or prudence that they deem a prerequisite to political health (pp. 536–40).

THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC

Where do the American Founders stand in the debate over republicanism between classical antiquity and early modernity? To this question Rahe devotes book 3, entitled “Inventions of Prudence.” In the pre-Revolutionary colonies he finds Locke's influence massive. Between 1760 and 1776 Locke's work was not only the most read and quoted by colonial politicians but was also popular to a remarkably high degree among the Protestant clergy. Such was his power during this momentous period for the colonies that even some Loyalists found it necessary and advantageous to appeal to his authority (pp. 556–57). Rahe guides us through the list of the notables of the time who echo Locke's key premises. Among them are no less than Hamilton, Jefferson, Adams, Mason, Wilson, Morris, and Paine. Moreover, Locke's language found its way into a number of state constitutions (pp. 558–66).

Crucial among the premises assented to by the leading lights of the time was the view that politics is at best an instrumental good, a “burden” to be endured not for its own sake but in order better to protect the primary realm of human

activity and happiness—the household and private affairs. With this the Founders appear to reject the basis on which the ancients accorded politics preeminence. As Paine puts it, “government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil” (pp. 562–66).

Yet the Framers also entertained lofty political aspirations. How did great ambition take hold in the souls of men who ostensibly believed in politics’ secondary status? Rahe concludes that these longings were kindled by ancient examples, which taught the Founders “what it meant to aspire to political greatness” (p. 570). John Adams detected a classical element in the “‘revolution principles’” of the *novus ordo seclorum*. Thomas Jefferson thought it fitting to include Aristotle’s and Cicero’s works among those “‘elementary books of public right’” that support the Declaration. That the two men could make these claims owes in part to the fact that their institution of a modern republic as an improvement on the ancient model was itself “a profoundly political act” (p. 569).

At the same time, Rahe finally rejects J. G. A. Pocock’s influential interpretation of the American Revolution as a “‘flight from modernity,’” that is, as one part “‘of the revival in the early modern West of the ancient ideal of *homo politicus*.’” Rahe minces no words. The “‘civic humanism’” ascribed to the Britain and America of this period is largely “a figment of the scholarly imagination” (pp. 569–70). Few on either side of the Atlantic judged the highest life to fall to the fully committed citizen. At the same time, Rahe finds Rossiter, Bailyn, Appleby, and Diggins no less mistaken in taking the opposite tack of denying any ancient influence on the Founders. Moreover, Rahe’s reading of Locke and subsequent demonstration of his influence in the colonies leave little to justify Gordon Wood’s view that the founding established an “‘essentially anti-capitalistic’” order animated by the republican ideal of individual sacrifice for the “‘greater good of the whole.’” Nor can Hannah Arendt’s case stand Rahe’s scrutiny. For Arendt the “‘ultimate end’” of the Revolution was the “‘participatory “‘freedom’” of the Greek *polis* “‘and the constitution of a public space where freedom would appear.’”

Yet Rahe finds Wood’s and Arendt’s readings plausible to the extent that both discern the guiding role the ancients played for our Founders. Antiquity provided a model of nobility that inspired and fortified the Americans as they undertook the daunting action that was the founding. Rahe’s key point is that the “‘very act of founding’” America “‘was a tacit assertion that some men really are political animals endowed with’” the requisite “‘capacity for *logos*” (pp. 570–72).

Here we arrive at what for Rahe is the core of America’s identity. On the one hand, the Founders granted the import of both the humanitarian critique of the *polis* and Hobbes’s criticism of politics generally. Their new order would thus establish the securing of comfortable self-preservation and its prerequisites as the end to which politics would serve as means. On the other hand, they

“were steeped in the classics, and they felt the force of the ancient example,” which taught the simple, as opposed to the instrumental, goodness of freedom—a goodness that both potentiates and, in turn, evinces itself fully through “man’s capacity for self-governance.” Accordingly, while the new republic would honor first man’s tool-making ability, it would allow and even foster within limits “political liberty”—political participation classically understood—as well. In so doing, the Founders “silently passed beyond” Locke’s first principles. They also reevaluated “traditional Whig political architecture” in light of their conviction that institutions need not merely substitute for, but could in fact also conduce to, the election of competent leaders (pp. 571–72).

This reevaluation of institutionalism yielded the American scheme of separation of powers, which “seeks to vindicate man’s capacity for self-government by teaching him to acknowledge the limits of that capacity and to conduct his affairs accordingly.” Beholden to the modern understanding of equality and its concomitant doubt concerning man’s ability to overcome private passion and serve the common good, separation of powers distrusts politics and thus limits the scope of statesmanship. At the same time, separation of powers is expressly “aristocratic and classical in character” in assuming the power of *logos* in at least a few to whom it opens an opportunity analogous to the “middle ground” of the *polis*. In providing this occasion for the display of public virtue, “it harnesses the pride of the country’s most ambitious men in service to the public good.” Rahe deems this an “indirect” version of the ancients’ “civic *paideia*.” Like its predecessor, the new republic seeks, albeit gently, to transform pride and ambition “into something considerably more exalted.” To the degree that it succeeds in educating and ennobling the players on the national stage, separation of powers also educates the people in “the most effectual way: by the shining examples it holds up for emulation.” So understood, the United States bears “a certain, undeniable resemblance” to the ancient mixed regime, albeit in a “strange, convoluted way”—it strikes the mean between Hobbes’s “enlightened despotism” and classical republicanism (pp. 599–602).

Rahe finds an additional classical element provided by the Supreme Court. The Court fulfills a condition that Socrates, in the *Republic*, thinks indispensable to good government: the Constitution empowers the federal judiciary with a view to guaranteeing that within the regime there will remain an element that embraces “the same understanding (*logos*) of the regime that the lawgiver possessed when he framed its laws.” As such, the Court “contributes powerfully” to the citizens’ “political education” (p. 609). Accordingly, while modern republicanism does not take as its task Plato’s “‘caring for souls,’” America encourages the soul’s “perfection” “stealthily” and by “indirection while openly pursuing less exalted ends” (pp. 615–16).

In sum, only “the unsuspecting glance” judges the United States to be a mere “congeries of special interests” rather than a “people united by a common cause” (p. 650). Against the “unsuspecting” impression, Rahe cites both Mad-

ison's denial that "there is not sufficient virtue among men for self-government," and Hamilton's affirmation that there is a "portion of virtue and honor among mankind." John Quincy Adams identifies the people's "virtue" as fidelity to the principles "proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence, and embodied in the Constitution" (pp. 602–3). Rahe argues that the American people, in giving flesh to the Declaration's spirit, bestowed on the Constitution "a sacred authority limiting their prerogatives, directing their common activities, and forming their character as citizens." This they did acting on the conviction that "man's capacity for self-government can be vindicated only if it can be shown to serve a higher purpose" (p. 604).

What is this higher purpose? What is the content of the "justice" that Madison in *Federalist* 51 asserts is the "end of government?" What kind or rank of "common cause" or common good does Rahe find in America's principles hidden from "the unsuspecting glance"? In what does American popular virtue consist? Our reflection on the very "indirectness" with which the regime promotes its ends points to some answers.

THE ENDS OF THE CONSTITUTION

Ranking the class of ends and level of virtue that can be promoted adequately through indirection requires our first examining more closely the "middle ground" that the Constitution allows and encourages—the political activity of the national office-holders. (Recall that Rahe finds the Framers' justification for opening this ground to be the view that modern like ancient republics depend on some degree of public and private virtue, and in this justification he purports to find at the founding at least the remnants of classical republicanism.) To begin, while the Founders may have disagreed with the ancients concerning the nature and extent of the virtues republics require, they and the philosophers whom they followed may be said to have made a necessity of a species of virtue. Rahe, following Martin Diamond's seminal work on *The Federalist*, recounts the modest but stable virtues bred gently by the influence on manners and mores of life in an extended, commercial republic with a multiplicity of interests and sects (p. 1048, n. 1; pp. 573–616).

In *Federalist* 10, Madison declares "regulating" "various interests" to be the "principal task" of "modern legislation." This task ascends in the shadow of the prior rise of modern, or democratized, commerce. The latter, unlike ancient commerce, affects the behavior, nature, opinions and habits of the majority to an extent heretofore unachieved. Further, while democratized commerce inculcates commercial habits in the people generally, it serves also to focus their commercial allegiances on the "various interests" into which they have been fragmented, thereby downplaying awareness of and conflict over amounts of property. The democratization of commerce exercises both a uniting and a dis-

persing function, and the interaction of both is instrumental in remedying the effects of faction.

For the multiplicity of interests scheme to succeed, individuals must focus on local pursuits and away from potentially fatal struggles over basic or regime principles. The fragmentation required for liberty and served by multiplicity cannot exercise its intended effect in the absence of “opposite and rival interests,” that is, widespread acquisitiveness.¹² This, the root of the “most common and durable” source of faction, is also prerequisite to remedying faction’s effects. The channeling of “rival interests” redresses man’s general lack of “better motives.” If natural selfishness cannot be simply negated, government, “the greatest of all reflections on human nature,” must seek instead to moderate selfishness through multiplying its foci (*Federalist* 55). The coalition process is driven by the citizens’ recognition that, to satisfy their selfish aims, they must come down to the brokerage level, at which a majority composed of diverse interests, religions, and geographies can agree. Creating unity out of extraordinary multiplicity compels, for what need be only selfish reasons, the moderation of the most extreme claims of all. While Madison and the other leading Framers saw the need for “other-regarding” virtue in the people and their representatives, the durability of selfishness appears to be the foundation on which *Federalist* 10 rests. Molded by such circumstances, the citizenry can be expected to do fewer heroic and cruel deeds through either an “inhuman” desire for glory or religious “enthusiasm.” Supplied in place of high and flighty virtue are commerce’s lower, more sober assets, e.g., industry, mildness, and thrift.

With Diamond’s interpretation of *Federalist* 10 Rahe largely agrees. But we have seen that he also underscores the latitude of discretion fostered by separation of powers and multiplicity of interests and sects. In opening the national arena to the possibility of statesmanship, the Constitution both presupposes the capacity for, and in turn seeks to nurture, man’s use of *logos* to discern and communicate the advantageous, just, and good. To this extent, the United States embraces the central tenet of classical republicanism. Stated simply, the infeasibility of direct democracy in a country America’s size makes representation necessary; representation, in turn, makes possible the democratic selection of Jefferson’s “natural *aristoi*.”

Because they recognized the new republic’s need of the “service of an aristocracy of knowledgeable and prudent men,” the Founders took further steps to ensure that such would be rewarded and hence cultivated. This, at least, is the way Rahe reads the Constitution’s protection of copyrights for authors (p. 712). My reading of the constitutional passage causes me to wonder about the precise character of the natural “aristocracy” anticipated and provided for by the Constitution. Article One, Section Eight, Clause Eight provides Congress with the power “[t]o promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries” (emphasis mine). Might Rahe’s description of such

men as “knowledgeable and prudent” be rendered more precisely as Locke’s “industrious and rational”? Tocqueville appears to read it thus.¹³

This denies neither Rahe’s case that the constitutional distribution of “honors and offices” establishes a mild *paideia* for modern-republican man nor his observation that our first six presidents all urged Congress to establish a national university with the view to perpetuating our political institutions through the teaching of our political creed (pp. 712–14). My question concerns not the being but the content of the new education for the new man. Honoring those who contribute to the “progress of science and useful arts” appears to look first and foremost to encouraging that yoking of *logos* to *technai*, to “science and the arts,” that Rahe shows lies at the heart of Hobbes’s enterprise (pp. 395ff.). Rahe has likewise demonstrated that such elevation of technical expertise is quintessentially modern.

In accord with my reading of Clause Eight, Tocqueville expects citizens in a modern democratic republic “habitually to put use before beauty,” whereas those of aristocratic regimes generally exhibit a “contempt for practice.”¹⁴ Rahe finds Jefferson’s view of the political relation between “elegance” and usefulness stated powerfully in the Virginian’s critique of “great cities,” which he considers “‘pestilential to the morals, the health and the liberties of man. True, they nourish some of the elegant arts, but the useful ones can thrive elsewhere, and less perfection in the others, with more health, virtue and freedom, would be my choice’” (p. 726).

I have further concerns about Rahe’s thesis insofar as it posits the identity or at least affinity of the activities of legislators in republics ancient and American. We have seen that American republicanism issues from modern natural-rights doctrine, which, by definition, sets limits to government power. *Federalist* 10 lists as the Founders’ “great object” “secur[ing] the public good and private rights,” and it assimilates the public good to “the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.” Nowhere in this—what has become, for us, the most influential of the *Federalist* essays—does Madison, the Father of the Constitution, utter a word about perfecting ethical virtue or saving souls. While the Constitution’s Preamble states its intention to “establish justice,” justice comes into sight through the lens of private, prepolitical rights and public “interests.” American justice appears to be the prevention of injustice (see *Politics* 1280a31–1281a8; but cf. Rahe, pp. 777ff.).

To be sure, Rahe in several passages powerfully presents the case for, as he puts it, “the restricted, Lockean character of the American understanding of ‘justice and the common good’” (p. 1064, n. 153). We have seen that he himself grants that what the regime “openly” pursues are “less exalted ends.” So understood, the common good requires less in the way of effort and talent and is accordingly more easily coaxed through “indirection.” On the basis of Rahe’s own analysis, then, one cannot help but wonder why what America “openly” pursues—what rules and is honored by everyone in the daylight—

should not be taken as the core of its identity. Rahe rightly cites and emulates Augustine and Mill on just this point. We recall his quotation from Augustine, for whom “‘a people,’” is a “‘multitudinous assemblage . . . united by concord regarding loved things held in common.’” Mill locates political identity in that “‘*something* which is settled,” which is “‘not to be called into question’” and which inspires “‘the feeling of allegiance, or loyalty’” (pp. 2, 22). But recourse only to those principles whose sovereignty is beyond “question” for us—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—leaves us still in search of the “higher purpose” Rahe purports to find in Americanism. We have yet to discover an authoritative, *public* basis on which to identify America with ends any higher than comfortable self-preservation and means any nobler than calculating reason.

Perhaps we err to expect more. John Adams seems to have foreseen little more. Rahe quotes a long passage in which Adams argues that the ancients thought the laws an insufficient check on the people until they

were habituated, by education and discipline, to regard the great duties of life, and to consider a reverence of themselves and the esteem of their fellow-citizens, as the principal source of their enjoyment. In small communities . . . this might be plausible; but the education of a great nation can never accomplish so great an end. (P. 543)

Instead of an education in public virtue, argues Adams, the “only security” lies in opposing power “to power, and interest to interest.” Rahe astutely places this quotation at the very beginning of book 3. What light does Adams’ description cast on the nature of the “middle ground” allowed the national legislators? And to what extent is their activity “political” in the classical sense? We have seen that Aristotle’s mixed regime likewise relies to some extent on the manipulation of interest and passion in order to enhance the rule of rational deliberation. Separation of powers appears to seek the same end, but with this important difference: the separation of powers provides freedom to “deliberate” only about governmental ends already lowered by natural-rights doctrine as embedded formally in the Constitution. Thus, on the one hand, Rahe is correct that the United States rejects a dependence on “political architecture” alone to achieve its national ends. Some reliance on political *logos* is expected and nurtured. But, on the other hand, this is *logos* restricted to securing life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. As such, it is not full deliberation in Aristotle’s sense; rather, it is “lawmaking.” The latter lacks the latitude of discretion that distinguishes the former. The reduction of deliberation to lawmaking follows logically from the reduction of ancient to modern political purposes. Its ends thus condensed, the national regime can rely more confidently on “indirection.” It can leave matters of moral *paideia* as well as higher education to states, families, and churches.

Rahe is right to contest the notion that separation of powers is concerned

merely with maintaining liberty against government encroachment. The constitutional scheme aims at more than negative liberty; it aims at something that appears comparable to classical virtue and prudence in that it strives to glean from its people and their representatives the competence and character requisite to achieving its lower goals. To the extent that it recognizes that even modern liberty requires a measure of public and private virtue, it can be said to reach closest to antiquity. On these terms, the pivotal distinction between republics ancient and modern parallels that between a catechism and a machine, respectively. The Americans agree with the early moderns in lowering the ends of political life. But they deny that even these lowered ends can be achieved in machinelike fashion.

But does this prove Rahe's thesis that the United States, while first and foremost modern and liberal, is also a "deliberately contrived mixed regime"? Are the "wisdom" and "virtue" called for and praised in, for example, *Federalist* 57, anything more than enlightened self-interest or common-sense sobriety, rather than anything uniquely "ancient," much less Aristotelian, in character? As we have seen and will explore further, Rahe finds in multiplicity, federalism, separation of powers, and the like the means by which the Framers resurrected "within a carefully defined and limited sphere, the autonomy of moral and political reason" (p. 602). Yet if he correctly assays the degree to which the Framers followed Locke's view that the only valid moral principles are those "that are absolutely necessary to hold Society together" and follow the "rules of convenience," to what extent is American "moral and political reason[ing]" as "autonomous" as Rahe claims? (pp. 292–93, 315–34).

The road down which this question takes us is illuminated by our reflecting on the dynamics of "political architecture." We have seen that modern thought's relative decapitation of political activity mandates reliance on institutions. Man understood as a passion-driven calculator is more easily administered to and satisfied by a machine-like government. Although they largely agree with Hobbes's view of human nature, the Founders do not take Hobbes to his radically depoliticized conclusion. Such "inconsistency" is salutary, by Aristotle's lights, because he would find Hobbes's view of human nature and politics incomplete in its refusal to take seriously man's desire to live a morally serious life. For Aristotle, Hobbes's self-proclaimed, "realistic" political science—in divorcing itself from man's and the city's natural need to know and participate in the highest—would be, in the final count, unrealistic.

However salutary the Framers' departure from Hobbes may be, if the Constitution frees up *logos* "stealthily" and encourages men to deliberate about concerns that transcend mere advantage, it does little formally to inform its citizens what those higher concerns are. Perhaps at the time of the founding such information would have been superfluous. The "higher purpose" to which Rahe points was supplied by religion and tradition through the vessel of the family. But of late, with the devaluing of the vessel and its cargo, the moral

marketplace has opened wide to a hodgepodge of peddlers of the “politics of meaning.”

These observations point back to the question that opened this essay. Our formal constitutional principles do not answer satisfactorily the question “What does it mean to be an American?” in terms other than those of calculating reason—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. For this reason, all other attempted answers—all that purport to transcend the demands of rationalized interest—are declaimed by one faction or another, at one time or another, as “un-American.” The new republic opens to all individuals all possibilities, and its new science promises unlimited progress—to where, and for what, only the emancipated individual can decide. Given the decline in the transpolitical authority of religion, tradition, and the family—which we must own is in some measure the result of our classical liberal principles—together with the impact of the critique of bourgeois virtue by German philosophy of both the left and right, the decisions of “to where” and “for what” lead largely today to terror or ennui. Both states of soul invite, through different doors, the soft, enervating despotism of which Tocqueville spoke and against which he labored. Needless to say, both states have their representatives in American culture today.

This is neither to assert nor to imply that the Founders thought their new republic free of the need for its citizens to pursue more “exalted ends.” Far from it. They in fact both expected and relied on such other-regarding vocations. But the problem confronting anyone who would analyze America employing Aristotelian regime analysis is that our relegation of such pursuits and of the education in them to states, families, and churches means that what is highest about the national regime is not, properly speaking, part of that regime. Stated differently, what is exalted about our regime is somehow beyond the control, though certainly not beyond the good wishes, of the regime. This becomes more concrete when we first grant what is obvious—the fact that the American story presents a good number of examples of courage, self-sacrifice, generosity, and a certain greatness of soul—and then inquire into its sources.

The Role of Federalism in Completing the Regime

That the “indirect” *paideia* provided by the Constitution encourages its citizens to self-restraint, frugality, etc.—the bourgeois virtues—we have already seen. But where do citizens find the incentive for courage, self-sacrifice, generosity, and the like? To the extent that these are commonly practiced, their source nearly always and everywhere has been piety and, with it, the family, in which piety is inculcated. But these two sources of our more “exalted ends” are, as Rahe is well aware, certainly not the central and in fact hardly even an explicit focus of regulation by the national government (pp. 641ff.). Rahe cites Madison’s description of the chief work of the House of Representatives in

Federalist 56: “‘the objects of federal legislation’ . . . which are of most importance . . . are “‘commerce, taxation, and the militia.’”

At the same time, Rahe rightly notes that the Constitution explicitly leaves the regulation of piety and family to the states under their “police power” (“police” derives from *polis*). He entertains no illusions on the question of whether enlightened self-interest is an ethos sufficient in moral stamina to sustain a democratic republic (p. 687). Rahe is every bit aware of the possibility that the way of life sired by modern republicanism may in time come to undermine the very virtues required for its perpetuation. He finds that a number of New England states at the founding also faced this question and were equally anxious over its answer. Hence these states sought to support religion. And here the Anti-Federalists’ demand for the Religion Clause of the First Amendment appears to aim as much at preventing Congress from interfering with the states’ regulation of religion as preventing Congress itself from supporting religion in anything but a nonpreferential manner.

Rahe appears to agree with Tocqueville that religion is America’s preeminent social institution. From this he concludes, “There was and is more to the American *politeia* than can be found in the nation’s written laws” (p. 764). Thus the fact that the Constitution leaves “moral police by and large in the hands of the family and church” needs to be balanced against the equally relevant point that the same Constitution also “conceded to state and local governments, and to the schools which these set up, considerable leeway in giving them support” (p. 778). To this informal, extraconstitutional, yet regime-completing, spiritual-moral consensus Rahe argues we must return. For no people can sustain itself during “a great crisis” merely on the basis of the ethos of “‘comfortable self-preservation.’” This is due to the fact that, despite modernity’s “best efforts,” man remains what classical political philosophy thought him to be—“a political animal whose public deliberations” resist explanation through a simple hedonist reductionism because they manifest in the final count the natural need to live a morally serious life (p. 772).

Because control over a good deal of what transforms a multitude into a people was left in the hands of the thirteen states, America’s civic *paideia* was completed through the combination of the powers and duties of the national and state and local governments, that is, federalism. Rahe asks that we reexamine and revivify the sphere of political activity that formerly lay open at the local level.

There is much to recommend his recommendation. He finds support for his project in Jefferson and Tocqueville; both saw in local participation a combination of classroom and coliseum in which everyday citizens might sharpen their ruling skills and hence better understand and defend their interests against the subdued and subduing despotism of paternal government. Indeed, this may well be as important to our “indirect” civic education as commerce, multiplicity, and separation of powers. Here Tocqueville underscores the importance of what he

calls the “mental habits” of the citizens. Against the open, popular power of *philosophe* ideology, Tocqueville finds in local participation an oblique method for introducing into liberal democratic culture the “mental habits,” if not the content, of his “new political science,” which looks to provide the prudent flexibility wanting in Locke’s project. Proper “mental habits” promise to illuminate the content by which to guide the citizens themselves in their efforts to maintain liberal democracy.¹⁵ Local participation requires and develops the citizens’ ability to reason inductively, thus undermining the “generalizing tendencies” or doctrinairism of the age. So understood, participation opposes the power of *philosophe*-inspired intellectuals through increasing the power of opinion generated at the bottom—common opinion modified by the knowledge the everyday citizen gains from his tasks at self-government. I find here in Tocqueville Aristotle’s spirit at the least. “Mental habits” appear in one sense to be the modern republican parallel of Aristotle’s *hexis*—the “settled disposition” whose proper orientation toward the passions is virtue (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1105b19–1106a13).

Rahe, following Tocqueville, is not calling for populism or direct democracy, for, like Tocqueville, he values the latitude for deliberation made possible by representation. Rather, popular participation is salutary when circumscribed to objects within the citizens’ experience. Enlightenment requires more than a collective consciousness raised to awareness of the general ideas constituting rights doctrine. It requires also the education that comes from governing, meaning, for us, an education in limits. If the popular dissemination of the doctrine of the Rights of Man teaches radically new possibilities for radically free individuals, local participation teaches the limits to which rights doctrine can be implemented, thus combating the utopianism of *philosophe* thought and, with it, the tendency of rights doctrine to secure the citizens’ acquiescence in pacific serfdom.

Jefferson worried that, with the loss of local participation, citizens would likewise lose the means and motives to defend against federal encroachment. Such “enlightened and vigilant selfishness” was, for Jefferson, demotic virtue, and this must be borne in mind when attempting to come to grips with what some read to be the “classical” character of his view that a measure of public and private virtue is required to maintain republicanism (pp. 726–29). Rahe argues cogently that Jefferson’s anxiety over corruption and embrace of virtue owe “far more to Machiavelli’s subordination of *virtù* to individual security and well-being” than to the ancient understanding. Jefferson’s conception of popular virtue does not include self-sacrifice for the community. Rather, he and Madison, like their Federalist adversaries, “sought to forge from self-interest a substitute for” the other-regarding virtues that the ancients deemed essential to republicanism (pp. 742–43).

For Jefferson, some degree of political activity is necessary to maintain private liberty. Public life is neither noble nor coextensive with human perfection

and happiness. Rather, private vices yield public benefits whose regulation on the local level is an activity that arms the wit and steels the soul against seduction by centralized government. Precisely because it is as selfishly grounded as any of the private vices, political activity in Jefferson's sense promises to educate citizens through an appeal to their natural desire to identify with and hence to seek to protect the powers and perquisites enjoyed by state and local governments under the original federal scheme. Men love most, and hence are most jealous of, their own things. We recall that Aristotle identifies *thumos* as "the power by which we love." Local participation succeeds in fortifying liberty to the extent that the citizen finds in the love of his own community the thumotic puissance by which to raise his head from possessive individualism and, through "political jealousy," maintain the vigilance crucial to modern republicanism.

In sum, local participation is both possible and substantial because each community provides the smallness, homogeneity, and closedness ("community standards") required if individual citizens are to come at least in some measure to identify the public interest with their own. The local community alone approximates the intimacy requisite to the political catechism of the ancient *polis*. For these reasons, Tocqueville finds federalism enhances and protects the two senses of liberty (political and civil) that he finds at work in liberal democracy. Local self-government (political liberty), though too easily a source of danger to security in private enjoyments (civil liberty), also serves the latter by guarding against a despotic accumulation of powers in the central government.

Against this defense of local participation stands the rationale behind "incorporation"—the procedure by which certain requirements of the Bill of Rights have been applied to the states. According to this rationale, the threat to civil liberty posed by states, communities, and sundry private, voluntary associations outweighs the benefits of the education in political liberty that participation at these levels provides. Rahe rightly laments incorporation's virtual emasculation of the regime-fortifying capacities formerly granted the states under the police power. As he states it, "the federal courts have transformed the Constitution and the Bill of Rights into an instrument subversive of the private institutions that provide the modest, moral *paideia* needed to sustain our regime" (p. 780). How did this occur?

While a good deal of our movement toward centralized government can be traced to the demands of an ever more sophisticated modern economy as well as advances in communications technology, no less responsible for the blows struck at federalism over the last six decades has been the explosion of "rights." With the Fourteenth Amendment serving (contrary to the intent of its framers) as the constitutional conduit by which the bulk of the Bill of Rights' restrictions (along with a growing number of pseudo-rights) has trickled seriatim to the states, uniformity necessarily has emerged where federalism-created diversity previously prevailed.

The Fourteenth Amendment owes its being to the Civil War. The war, in turn, would not have been fought were it not for slavery. Now, those familiar with the theory of justice presented in the Declaration are hard pressed to deny the persuasiveness of Lincoln's case that slavery is inimical to the Declaration's core principles. This even some Southerners granted, at least at the time of the Constitutional Convention and the unhappy, nearly fatal, compromise on slavery that it produced. But if it is clear that the South could claim little support for its peculiar institution in a proper reading of the Declaration, it is less clear that it failed to find succor there for its asserted right of secession. This is shown most powerfully by Rahe's argument that the author of the Declaration, had he been alive in 1860, may well have defended the South's right to secede—and this with the full, painful awareness of the inhumanity of the institution secession sought to save. Why?

The Hamilton-Jefferson Debate as Regime Paradigm

Jefferson's defense was animated by a view of republican liberty in which we have seen Rahe finds merit and to which he bids us now return. Our age stands in critical need of relearning the indispensability of demotic "watchfulness" and distrust of the federal government, and this Jeffersonian "jealousy" both feeds on and fosters the states' rights argument. Without a power base apart from and largely independent of the national government, popular "distrust" of centralized authority lacks the means to resist encroachments. It also lacks the palpable perquisites by which attachment to and hence defense of local government might make a convincing case before the bar of self-interest. Thus, while he judges Jefferson's critique of Marshall's *Marbury* opinion an "overreact[ion]," Rahe takes quite seriously Jefferson's general caveat concerning "judicial 'despotism' and 'oligarchy.'" For while Rahe agrees with Hamilton that America—"a species of compromise between Hobbesian monarchy and classical democracy"—was at its founding "insufficiently monarchical," it today faces the "opposite" danger (p. 781).

Quite so; at the same time, and as Rahe is well aware, it was not the national government but the states that were responsible for the single most oppressive institution in our history. And it was not the national government but the postbellum states that continued to some extent to deny to the freed slaves the rights to which they were by both nature and political convention entitled. As the old sally in the law schools goes, "You can't have federalism so long as you have Mississippi." The rights to which the Declaration tells us all men everywhere are entitled cannot vary in magnitude—and, a fortiori, cannot exist or not exist—depending on one's location in relation to the conventional boundaries that we call states. In short, our commitment to federalism fell to our commitment to justice. The turning of the Bill of Rights against the

states—against the very entities whose most ardent defenders were largely responsible for the addition of a Bill of Rights—was publicly justified by the southern states' refusal to secure fully the rights of the descendants of slaves. The repudiation of federalism is due first and foremost to this fact. Allegiance to smallness faded and, with it, the place of federalism in our constitutional system, because smallness came to be viewed as more, not less, dangerous to individual liberty than was the large, extended republic. Because for us liberty is less the exercise of the virtues of the citizen and more the protection of the enjoyments of the householder, largeness not smallness—centralized government not federalism—becomes the *sine qua non* of the best regime.

Rahe grants that Jefferson's strident defense of agriculture and states' rights was ultimately an "almost grotesque error in statesmanship." While his defense was far from synonymous with the South's later case for slavery, Jefferson's apparent position provided intellectual and moral legitimacy to slavery's supporters.¹⁶ In the course of detailing the unwitting role played by Jefferson and Madison in support of the southern cause, Rahe raises implicitly the question whether the institution of Hamilton's reforms at the time he presented his *Report on the Subject of Manufactures* might not have made it possible for the country to resolve the slavery dispute without recourse to the bloodiest war in its history. Hamilton's program to strengthen the national economy would have had the effect of assimilating states more to each other while diversifying the elements within states, and hence may have undermined the passion with which the South identified itself with slavery. Had Jefferson's and Madison's efforts against Hamilton, commerce, and the growth of the national government not been so short sighted and intemperate, and had the homogenizing and pacifying because commercializing effects of Hamilton's economic reforms been able to take hold south of the Mason-Dixon line, perhaps the slavery problem could have been resolved in the same, remarkable manner at which Tocqueville marvelled on reviewing our change of government from the old Articles to the new Constitution—"without its costing humanity a single tear or drop of blood."¹⁷

We shall never know what the early implementation of Hamilton's program would have effected. We do know that there was to be no irenic solution to the slavery issue, and this failure is at once the most tragic and the most illuminating event in American history. We also know that Lincoln as president "implemented a program of political and economic reform that owed much" to Hamilton (p. 779). The man who proclaimed "all honor to Jefferson" resurrected many of the economic and political reforms of Jefferson's greatest opponent and denied through conquest the right of Jefferson's Virginia to secede.¹⁸ With Lincoln, through no fault of his own, came war, and with war, as Madison predicted, came an inevitable growth in the size and power of the central government (p. 723). But the real—and illegitimate—inflation of federal power came not from Lincoln and the Civil War Amendments but from the subsequent misinterpretation of those amendments, especially the Fourteenth,

in the twentieth century, which has produced the incursions on family and church against which Rahe today properly protests.

Here, then, lies a paradox. For those who consider the swelling of national power to be in some measure disastrous, the defense of federalism by which this growth was at least forestalled appears salutary. Yet that defense Rahe shows was animated first and foremost by the passionate attachment to slavery and, later, to racial segregation. In the defense of injustice we find a level of spiritedness and, with it, martial force sufficient to block the bloating of central government for some time here. The South, whose putative allegiance to federalism, it should be noted, was equally a game of on-again, off-again opportunism, nonetheless seems to have been more committed to maintaining its mastery over slaves than the citizenry as a whole has since been committed to maintaining its freedom against an enslaving central government. The exaggerated—indeed, the depraved—pride of the slave master and his moral heirs seems to have been the engine driving and maintaining the independence of state and local government. Lost with the vices of mastery and overweening pride was also a way of life sufficiently attractive to render the local citizenry amply “jealous” of federal expansion.

At the same time, we have seen that the primary antagonism to federalism emanates ostensibly in the name of the project to institute uniform justice across the nation in light of the perceived dictates of the Constitution. Now, men may be faulted for their particular notion of justice, but that they should take their view of the just so seriously that they long for it to rule the world—at the least to rule *all* of their own country—is not only understandable because natural, but also good in this sense: the lack of such commitment nearly always derives not from an enlightened appreciation for the flexibility required of prudence but from an indifference to the gods of other peoples born of a like indifference to the principled foundations of one’s own way of life. Universal tolerance and, with it, peace is a dividend most likely to be received from the universal conviction that no principle of justice is worth fighting and dying for.

In this light, the centripetal pressure on American politics is hardly to be wondered at. And this pressure is all the more likely and legitimate given the fact that the Founders established (as Madison remarks in *Federalist* 39) “in strictness neither a national nor a federal Constitution, but a composition of both.” That fellow NATO members would repulse suggestions from one another concerning their respective domestic policies is understandable and proper. That Mississippi can rightly claim to merit similar autonomy against the moral demands of her northern neighbors is another matter.

Yet such “detachment” seems to be precisely what an effective federal arrangement requires. Federalism looks to institutionalize the conviction that the liberties we share as members of one nation depend somehow on our separate and simultaneous identities as members of the various states and local communities. The maintenance of the brand of federalism on which the Federalists and

Anti-Federalists reached their compromise at the founding requires our firm, principled embrace of principled flexibility. Montesquieu insisted on this in the face of and as a remedy for the doctrinairism that he and Hume saw lying dormant in modern natural-rights teaching. Looking to the liberty of all, we need somewhat to look away from the practices of each. At the very least, this means allowing local communities discretion on the widest possible range of issues and responsibilities (states were already at the founding too large for the intimacy required of civic *paideia*). Barring violations of the Constitution, communities must be allowed the latitude to err at times in their policies and practices. But, as Tocqueville sees, such forbearance is anathema to *philosophe* rationalism, which views with “disgust” the halting half-steps and “numerous blunders” concomitant with local self-government.¹⁹ No less can be said of the response by the bulk of this century’s educated elites to the states’ conduct on the issues of segregation and apportionment. Thus it is less than remarkable that the desire to make justice uniform came to trump the view that the maintenance of liberty as well as justice requires a like maintenance of the identities and powers of the state and local governments.

Moreover, it may be that a part of our nature would rather be compelled to be just than be free to do injustice. We want more than self-preservation, latitude, and idiosyncratic contentment. We want, most of all, to discover and participate in a way of life whose goodness has such luster that it finally outweighs all other considerations, including that of life itself. While such longing may lie dormant and undisclosed in the souls of most men most of the time, it is in fact implicit in what Rahe’s ancient Greeks found to be *the* trait by which man is distinguished from the beasts—the natural need to discern and communicate what is advantageous, just, and good. Thus, while one may view the downfall of local participation as proof of Acton’s maxim, it may be no less an indication of man’s longing for justice.

From these reflections issues perhaps a more precise portrait of the distance between American and classical republicanism. First, while the ancient Greeks also practiced federalism, theirs was of a substantively different sort. We have seen that their end in remaining small was to retain the conditions necessary to moral *paideia*. Politics is for the sake of character, and character formation requires smallness; hence any *politeia* worthy of the name must remain small. But Jefferson’s defense of the rights of states and the goodness of partitioning the states into “wards” looks to inculcate a demotic “virtue” of a sort markedly different from that sought by classical defenders of smallness (p. 719). As we have seen, the local political participation encouraged by federalism does not constitute man’s completion but is a means to transpolitical ends whose goodness is illuminated fully by the cold light of calculating reason. On this basis, I must conclude that our peculiar mix of national and federal principles is finally a marriage of Locke and Montesquieu rather than Rahe’s fusion of Hobbes and ancient republicanism. Of course, Locke is in key respects a Hobbesian, but the

view that Montesquieu is in any important way a classical republican Rahe roundly refutes. Accordingly, while Rahe has convinced this writer of the “mixed” character of the American polity, we appear to be finally not an amalgam of ancients and moderns but rather a mix of the competing modern schools—“architecture” versus demotic “watchfulness”—whose contours Rahe so masterfully illustrates.

AMERICAN POLITICS, TRAGEDY, AND MYTH

My earlier critique of the deliberative limitations of Rahe’s constitutional middle ground appears to find implicit support in one of his chief concerns, if not his chief concern, over America’s present and future. He blames “judicial encroachment” in large part on a Congress eager to “sidestep controversy” (p. 781). The very validity of his accusation produces the following melancholy reflection. If the Constitution opens a middle ground for legislators to employ their *logos* to deliberate about the just and good, this very group seizes nearly every opportunity to flee that ground. Why?

Disputes that are deeply political, those which move directly to the heart of our principles, also most antagonize a good number of a legislator’s constituents. Hence the initial happiness with which some politicians met the *Dred Scott* ruling. They, the people’s representatives, were emancipated from the duty of making the painful decision over slavery, the burden having been passed to the unelected, life-tenured, putatively unpolitical federal judiciary. Hence also the hand wringing and waffling by politicians on both sides of the abortion question in the wake of the profederalism *Webster* decision. The overwhelming majority of legislators operates on the basis of the “electoral imperative,” which mandates that they avoid principled conflict whenever possible. The judiciary has hardly “wrested” power from the legislature; it has largely been handed jurisdiction over previously labelled “political questions” on a silver platter and with Congress’s blessings.

In the face of this ignoble abdication by their elected representatives, how have their constituents responded? By reelecting them regularly. The average legislator is returned to Washington term after term in part because his constituents deem him successful at plucking from the national treasury their fair share of the public plunder. “Avoid politics; satisfy material wants” is the bumper-sticker rendering of the program articulated by the founders of modern political philosophy. Might one conclude that this credo describes no less the *modus operandi* of our national representatives? Perhaps little more is to be expected in the new republic, given its acute sensitivity to the fact that a “zeal for different opinions” concerning the advantageous, just, and good has rendered men “much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to co-operate for their common good” (*Federalist* 10).

At the same time, and against these depoliticizing dynamics, we have weighed the effects of the retention by the states of the police power. A good deal of American “politics” in Rahe’s precise sense takes or took place not at the national but at the state and local levels. Given the extent of the previous role played by these smaller, subordinate entities in regulating and thus deliberating about religion, art, science, family matters, and the like, incorporation, as currently construed, reveals itself to be a further means of depoliticization. Incorporation’s removal from communities of the powers requisite to transform a multitude into a people effectively dislodges the last source of anything resembling a viable, because intimate, civic *paideia*. In this sense, incorporation pushes us further toward the modern end of the continuum between ancients and moderns on which Rahe places us, and this is a substantial part of what he means when he warns that today we have moved too much in the direction of “Hobbesian monarchy” (p. 781). But while Rahe recognizes that the Court- and bureaucracy-enforced depoliticization of the citizenry is due first and foremost to the self-depoliticization of our national legislators, he seems less disposed to highlight the basis in our fundamental principles for Congress’s self-imposed exile from the middle ground.

The drive toward more centralized government and, with it, the diminution of the demotic virtues fostered by local participation, has been effected in pursuit of quintessentially modern ends, namely, the extension of the utmost privacy and security to the individual and hence the “privatization” of previously public or quasi-public concerns, e.g., religion and morals. This we have seen was ordained with a view to insulating citizens from government’s—any government’s—regulation of those activities judged to fall under the category of “preferred freedoms.” In this century, liberty, so understood, has come to trump economy as the principled engine driving centralization. If Rahe rightly remarks the applicability today of Jefferson’s concern over judicial “despotism,” and if the courts’ overreaching both feeds on and fosters the demise of local participation, then liberty understood as enjoyment of private pursuits entails a tyrannic logic no less than liberty understood in the classical sense as sharing in social power. While Montesquieu argues powerfully that “virtue itself has need of limits,” the lesson of the American experience rejoins that liberty modernly understood is no less needy. Single-minded fealty to either project appears a precondition of despotism. In the case of the American project, incorporation has so tipped us in the modern, depoliticized direction that we can be said to have undergone a change of regime in this century. Thus Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, while sadly mistaken about the Founders’ deepest moral intentions, spoke more truth than he knew when he declared, “While the Union survived the Civil War, the Constitution did not. In its place arose a new, more promising basis for justice and equality, the Fourteenth Amendment. . . .”²⁰

Marshall’s remark returns us to the theme of slavery and, with it, raises the

question whether the American story is finally a tragedy. One must concede that the Framers' effort to form a more perfect union through the adoption of the Constitution left them no alternative but to allow slavery to continue for the foreseeable future. But this appeal to necessity, while valid, cannot simply erase the moral ugliness of the circumstances necessitating the compromise. Moreover, the disease with which the nation was afflicted as an embryo has in a number of ways metastasized over our more than two hundred years as a nation. Granted, we removed the growth through the bloodiest war in our history. But in the century thereafter we continued to flout in practice what we espoused in principle. Finally, the evil became so unbearable that to rid ourselves of it we acquiesced in the growth of the federal leviathan in whose bureaucratic belly our participation-dependent virtues are now in danger of suffocating. Had we not inherited slavery prior to the founding, and had so much of our subsequent history not been the product, direct and indirect, of the institution, one cannot but wonder whether this would not have dampened the angry spirit of uniformity and, with it, the cause of centralized government.

As it happened, the massive project publicly defended as necessary to eliminate slavery and, later, official segregation brought us face to face with the other horn of our national dilemma. While the fall of the peculiar institution brought down with it the depraved pride for which the southern aristocracy was notorious, such high self-regard and spiritedness were not limited to upper-class plantation owners. Everyday southern citizens, according to Burke, “‘were by far the most proud and jealous of their freedom’”; for political liberty, precisely because it was not shared by all in the South, was taken by all as a sign of distinction, something to be esteemed, something of which to be jealous, something worth fighting and dying for (pp. 549–50). Clearly, the repugnant foundation of this pride also spawned a culture stunning for its moral and economic sluggishness, not to mention outright decadence. Nevertheless, our justified revulsion at chattel slavery cannot justify our blinking at the melancholy fact that, in its peculiar institution, the South—more than any region at any time in our history—found the pride and spiritedness by which to practice that “jealousy” of national power that Jefferson thought so crucial to the maintenance of republican liberty. But must melancholy be our last reaction to the American story?

Never has there been a founding less dependent on myth and more open to the influence of unassisted reason than America's. For this very reason, our inability to recover from our hereditary affliction may well drag down with it modern philosophy's best practical defense before the bar of politics. If America is finally to rectify the consequences of slavery and, therewith, rescue its fate from the pronouncement of tragedy, the road by which it will do so lies in discovering a new source of pride and robust independence, one free of the depravity that must accompany mastery. The proper object of the culture's derision should not be the conventional slave but, rather, natural slavishness—

the state of soul in which freedom appears good only for the material advantages it brings, rather than for the intellectual and moral development it allows.²¹ The noninstrumental stance toward freedom, which Tocqueville recognizes as characteristic of aristocratic societies, clearly runs in tension with the passion for equality that both moves modern democracy and invites centralizing government. Precisely for this reason pride and its concomitant *thumos* are salutary for us. In brief, for America to experience a “new birth of freedom” today, we must discover or recover the noble—the splendor of justice, the good as lovable in itself. Only to the extent that a people freely chooses the noble can it hope plausibly to proclaim, to a “candid world,” the nobility of its choice of freedom (see *Nicomachean Ethics* 1115b18–23; *Politics* 1281a2–8). In order for us to identify and esteem Jefferson’s natural *aristoi*, we must be taught, and taught to revere, the beautiful and just possibilities that inhere in man’s possession of a public nature.

Yet, if the above accurately describes one road to an American renaissance, the dilemma immediately arises concerning the utility of making a public case for the public utility of a nonutilitarian morality. Better perhaps would be some tale in which the steadfast conviction of the independent dignity of political life is advertised not as a foreign import but as the rediscovery of a truth that informs the construction of our most sacred documents. Demonstrating the superiority—on several levels—of the latter approach will stand as one of the many lasting contributions of *Republics Ancient and Modern*.

Past attempts to find classical elements in America’s principles have met with derision from some. Such “myth-making,” say the critics, comes too late in a regime founded on enlightenment principles. It would be less than surprising were Rahe’s claim to find antique components in America greeted likewise in certain quarters. At the same time, few, if any, of these critics are likely to deny that Americans today are in need of a “politics of meaning,” be it left or right, ancient or modern. But to concede this need goes some distance toward granting what Rahe deems antiquity’s distinguishing premise—that man’s nature requires for its completion his employing *logos* to the end of discerning and communicating the advantageous, just, and good. Of course, while nearly all of today’s competing camps endorse to some extent the citizens’ endorsement of the view of the independent dignity of politics, some in these camps append the disclaimer that the noninstrumental view of politics is finally but a salutary myth—it is more than merely un-American, it is also untrue. Yet this very qualification compels them to deny that what they praise as salutary about what they condemn as mythical is itself a myth. So far as this admission questions the optimism that undergirds and justifies the enlightenment project, the classical view appears rehabilitated. Accordingly, to the extent that the founding principles do not hinder and in fact depend on the public elevation of public virtue, the antiquing of America may not be the myth that certain of its critics in the past have supposed. At the very least, our shared concern over the dehu-

manized character of a depoliticized citizenry signals our need to explore with fresh and sympathetic eyes the philosophy as well as the practice of Greek antiquity.

CONCLUSION: THE POLITICS OF *REPUBLICS ANCIENT AND MODERN*

Paul Rahe has written this book, he informs us, in order that we as a people might pause to ponder seriously what our “first principles are and what they entail” (p. 782). He intends his work to serve a restorative function. In our coming to grips with his analysis of the founding we stand a better chance of halting our tendency toward principled “drift” (p. 777). An earlier loss of our national bearings was faced by Lincoln. By way of concluding, Rahe reflects on the relevance Lincoln’s 1838 Lyceum Address holds for America today. Mindful of the differences between Lincoln’s day and ours, Rahe finds nonetheless that our day, like Lincoln’s, must plead guilty to gross ignorance of our founding principles. Exacerbating our national amnesia are the psychological and moral atrophy concomitant with “more than four decades of comparative peace and prosperity. . . . Our success is, paradoxically, the cause of our defects” (p. 776).

These defects render our current predicament as “extreme” as that confronted by Lincoln (p. 777). While “the Founders argued for and sought to institute an enlightened republic,” the task of enlightening the citizenry was failing in Lincoln’s day and is no less at risk in our own (p. 778). In his time, the principles of the Revolution had been largely forgotten in the North and were brazenly contradicted in the South. In our time, “We spend colossal sums on education, but it cannot be said that we manage to inculcate a reverence for or even an understanding” of our core principles and the Constitution whose construction they inform (p. 779). In his time, growing popular adherence to the views of the goodness of slavery and the simple rectitude of popular sovereignty threatened to make a sham of the Declaration. In our time, sundry European philosophic movements—“utilitarianism, positivism, idealism, historicism, Marxism, pragmatism, and existentialism”—all highly influential in our institutions of higher learning, alike trumpet their incompatibility with the Declaration’s self-evident truths.

Worse still, our age’s difficulties are exacerbated in a manner that Lincoln’s were not. Gone with his day is “largely local” and hence “real and tangible” self-government by which communities were able to “reinforce the family and church in matters of moral police” (p. 780). In our day, national unification and administrative centralization have grown far beyond anything ever envisioned by Hamilton. Serving as both symptom and cause of these difficulties has been the steadily growing power of the federal courts. In this light, Rahe rightly judges Jefferson’s fears concerning judicial “despotism” to ring much truer in our day than they did in his (p. 781).

If Paul Rahe entertains similar fears, he ends his book on a note of hope nonetheless. While it remains a question whether we now possess the energy and moral unity to survive the next “great crisis” that will inevitably come our way, Rahe encourages by reminding us that while we may be adrift at present, we have been so before and regained our bearings (p. 782). But to restore our first principles we must first “seriously ponder” their meaning and application. *Republics Ancient and Modern* will prove an enduring and indispensable support in the quest for the self-knowledge on which the preservation of our more perfect union depends.

NOTES

1. See Joseph Cropsey’s incisive 1975 essay, “The United States as Regime and the Sources of the American Way of Life,” in his *Political Philosophy and the Issues of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Phoenix Edition, 1980), pp. 1–15.
2. See Martin Diamond, *The Founding of the Democratic Republic* (Itasca, IL: Peacock, 1981), pp. 2–12.
3. All page references in this review are to the hardcover, single volume.
4. Whether the momentous 1994 elections in fact represent a sea change in these practices must, at this writing, remain an object of speculation.
5. See Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), pp. 25–43.
6. (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1952), pp. 22–37. This and other of Strauss’s works have been charged with ignoring or paying insufficient attention to the “historical context” of philosophic thought. Rahe examines exhaustively the context in which the early moderns wrote; in so doing, he comes to concur wholly with Strauss’s thesis regarding not only the break between antiquity and modernity, but also, and more importantly, the self-conscious or horizon-transcending character of this break.
7. Consider the setting of Plato’s *Republic* as well as the intellectual and moral relation between America’s coasts and “heartland.”
8. The deep and pervasive effect technological innovation can exercise over a regime is easily understood by Americans, for whom the inventions of the cotton gin and the birth control pill have had profound consequences not only on the laws but, even more importantly, on popular mores.
9. I supply the original Greek with key terms, while following Carnes Lord’s translation of the *Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
10. On this subject, see Stephen G. Salkever’s “Women, Soldiers, Citizens: Plato and Aristotle on the Politics of Virility,” in *Essays on the Foundations of Aristotelian Political Science*, edited by Carnes Lord and David K. O’Connor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
11. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 251.
12. See Martin Diamond, “The Federalist,” in *American Political Thought*, edited by Morton J. Frisch and Richard Stevens (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971).
13. *Democracy in America*, translated by George Lawrence, edited by J. P. Mayer (Garden City: Anchor Books), pp. 454–68.
14. *Democracy in America*, pp. 465, 462. Cf. Aristotle’s *megalopsuchos*, whose concern for his “independence” or “self-sufficiency” accounts for his preference for “beautiful and unprofitable” over merely “useful” things (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1125a11–13).
15. I am indebted to James W. Ceaser’s analysis of Tocqueville in *Liberal Democracy and Political Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 143–76.

16. On this subject Rahe acknowledges his debt to Harry V. Jaffa's "Agrarian Virtue and Republican Freedom: An Historical Perspective," in *Equality and Liberty: Theory and Practice in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 42–66. On Lincoln's relation to Jefferson and the Declaration, see Jaffa's seminal *Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959), pp. 308–99.

17. *Democracy in America*, p. 113.

18. Letter to H. L. Pierce (1859), in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, edited by Roy P. Basler et al., 9 vols. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953–55): vol. 3, p. 376.

19. *Democracy in America*, p. 62.

20. Remarks at the annual seminar of the San Francisco Patent and Trademark Law Association, Maui, Hawaii, May 6, 1977, p. 7.

21. On the enduring perspicacity of Aristotle's teaching on natural slavery, see Darrell D. Dobbs's "Natural Right and the Problem of Aristotle's Defense of Slavery," *Journal of Politics* 56(1994): 67–94.