

Vol. 5 No. 1 Spring 2026

PIETAS

A Journal of Tradition, Place, and Things Divine



The Declaration of Independence at 250

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John W. Grant

Kevin Slack

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Feature Articles

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by Michael Driscoll

On the Philosophical Significance of Mary as New Eve
by Marco A. Andreacchio

Logos, Law, and Longing: Tarzan as Natural Man
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Armies on the March: two poems (while following the imperial army at Phoenix Flight)
by Cen Shen
translation and interpretive essay by Miriam J. Dawson

Book Reviews

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Colleges and Universities as Talent Magnets*
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Letter From the Editor



Declaration of Independence (1819), by John Trumbull; Public Domain

In this issue of *Pietas* we commemorate July 4th and the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence by beginning with five essays that attempt to follow John Adams’s advice to explicate the “means and measures” of the Revolution. Many thanks to F. Cooper Adamo, John W. Grant, Kevin Slack, Bob Subrick, and Thomas G. West, who challenge us to reflect on the meaning of the greatest of American holidays.

In our first featured article, Michael Driscoll seeks to provide answers to longstanding scholarly interpretive problems in John Locke’s theory of happiness. In his careful reading of Locke’s works, focusing on the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Driscoll stresses Locke’s teaching of degrees of happiness, whose gradations are informed by a standard of higher goods. Thus, Locke’s rejection of the “summum bonum”—the phrase

appearing twice with two different meanings in the *Essay*—is “not a repudiation of the argument that there are goods that are more or less conducive to happiness.”

Marco A. Andreacchio writes on the philosophical significance of the ancient identification of Mary as “New Eve.” Classical Mariology, he argues, is a theology that embraces the natural reason of ancient Platonism. And far from a solely speculative matter, this notion of reason “proves to be providential in the government of human affairs.” Andreacchio distinguishes between a Christian midwifery of rationalism and modern forms of voluntarism, first in the Machiavellian rejection of “common sense” and turn to “rationalizing the irrational” in the “system of cunning we call technocracy.” Islam, he argues is also “an essentially voluntaristic doctrine,” “the most formidable traditional enemy of ‘life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,’ where liberty is key to happiness.” It is only in New Eve that nature is renewed: “what is hidden can become apparent to us; for what is eternally hidden in nature, what hides by its very nature as truth (aletheia) is disclosed.”

Justin Lyons connects the iconic Tarzan stories of Edgar Rice Burroughs to the philosophical literature on nature and natural law. Across his many novels, Burroughs portrays his own quite comprehensive version of natural man, which Lyons compares to the accounts of Aristotle, Aquinas, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Lyons focuses on man’s capacities for reason and speech, sociability, and ultimately the problems and desirability of civil society. But some of the accounts of the state of nature resonate with Burroughs’s intention more than others. Pointing to the lessons we might glean from reflections on human nature, Lyons argues that ultimately Tarzan has “more in common with Aristotelian and Thomistic ideas of a natural inclination toward society and a guiding natural law.”

Finally, we are proud to include Miriam J. Dawson’s English translation and interpretive essay of Cen Shen’s “Armies on the March”—reflections by the great Tang poet on the chaos of war. Cen Shen, known for his frontier poetry, was granted permission to leave his post on the western border to help subdue the An Shi Rebellion in the east. He later held a mid-level position in the court. Dawson’s interpretive essay connects the poet’s somber works to the decline of the civilization and culture he loved: “The An Shi Rebellion was a great tragedy. It was eight years of death and destruction wrought upon the central plains of China. The chaos destroyed the lives of the people and shattered the peace and prosperity that the centralized imperial court of the Tang Dynasty Empire had created.”

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

In our book reviews Ben Peterson appraises Josiah Osgood's *Lawless Republic: The Rise of Cicero and the Decline of Rome*—a provocative and necessary account for all members of our society named after Cicero. Especially fitting for July 4th, Peter Cross reviews Richard Ferrier's *The Declaration of America: Our Principles in Thought and Action*. Marisol Balderas reviews Thomas J. Tacoma's *The Political Thought of Calvin Coolidge: Burkean Americanist*. And Jacob Hiserman reviews David J. Staley and Dominic D.J. Endicott's *Knowledge Towns: Colleges and Universities as Talent Magnets*.

* * *

On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee motioned for a resolution in the Continental Congress “that these united colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent states.” He was acting on instructions from the fifth Virginia Convention’s report from May 15, 1776 (see below). The “Lee Resolution” contained a declaration of independence, a call to form foreign alliances, and a plan for confederation. On June 11, 1776, the congress created three different committees to draft a declaration of independence, prepare a plan “for forming foreign alliances” (John Dickinson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Benjamin Harrison, and Robert Morris) and “prepare and digest the form of a confederation” (a committee with one member from each of the states). Many members of the congress, responding cautiously to the Lee Resolution, wanted instructions from their colonies before voting. On June 24, the Pennsylvania Congress resolved that the states should be independent (see below).

I N C O N V E N T I O N,

Present 112 members.

WEDNESDAY, May 15, 1776.

FORASMUCH as all the endeavours of the UNITED COLONIES, by the most decent representations and petitions to the King and Parliament of Great-Britain, to restore peace and security to America under the British government, and a re-union with that people upon just and liberal terms, instead of a redress of grievances, have produced, from an imperious and vindictive administration, increased insult, oppression, and a vigorous attempt to effect our total destruction. By a late act, all these colonies are declared to be in rebellion, and out of the protection of the British crown, our properties subjected to confiscation, our people, when captivated, compelled to join in the murder and plunder of their relations and countrymen, and all former rapine and oppression of Americans declared legal and just. Fleets and armies are raised, and the aid of foreign troops engaged to assist these destructive purposes. The King's representative in this colony hath not only withheld all the powers of government from operating for our safety, but, having retired on board an armed ship, is carrying on a piratical and savage war against us, tempting our slaves, by every artifice, to resort to him, and training and employing them against their masters. In this state of extreme danger, we have no alternative left but an abject submission to the will of those overbearing tyrants, or a total separation from the crown and government of Great Britain; uniting and exerting the strength of all America for defence, and forming alliances with foreign powers for commerce and aid in war: Wherefore appealing to the SEARCHER OF HEARTS for the sincerity of former declarations, expressing our desire to preserve the connection with that nation, and that we are driven from that inclination by their wicked councils, and the eternal laws of self-preservation,

RESOLVED Unanimously, That the Delegates appointed to represent this colony in General Congress be instructed to propose to that respectable body TO DECLARE THE UNITED COLONIES FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES, absolved from all allegiance to or dependence upon, the crown or parliament of Great-Britain; and that they give the assent of this colony to such declaration, and to whatever measures may be thought proper and necessary by the Congress for forming foreign alliances, and A CONFEDERATION OF THE COLONIES, at such time, and in the manner, as to them shall seem best. Provided, that the power of forming government for, and the regulations of the internal concerns of each colony, be left to the respective colonial legislatures.

RESOLVED Unanimously, That a Committee be appointed to prepare A DECLARATION OF RIGHTS, and such a plan of government as will be most likely to maintain peace and order in this colony, and secure substantial and equal liberty to the people.

EDMUND PENDLETON, President.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Extract from the Minutes,

CHARLES THOMSON, Secretary.

*The DECLARATION of the DEPUTIES
of PENNSYLVANIA, met in PROVINCIAL
CONFERENCE at Philadelphia, June 24, 1776.*

WHEREAS George the Third, King of Great-Britain, &c. in violation of the principles of the British Constitution, and of the laws of justice and humanity, hath by an accumulation of oppressions unparalleled in history, excluded the inhabitants of this with the other American Colonies from his protection: And whereas he hath paid no regard to any of our remonstrances and dutiful petitions for redress of our complicated grievances; but hath lately purchased foreign troops to assist in enslaving us, and hath excited the Savages of this country to carry on a war against us, as also the Negroes to embroil their hands in the blood of their masters, in a manner unpractised by civilized nations; and moreover hath lately insulted our calamities by declaring that he will shew us no mercy until he has subdued us: And whereas the obligations of allegiance (being reciprocal between a King and his subject) are now dissolved on the side of the Colonists by the despotism and declaration of the said King, inasmuch that it now appears that loyalty to him is treason against the good people of this country: **AND WHEREAS** not only the Parliament, but there is reason to believe too many of the people of Great-Britain have concurred in the aforesaid arbitrary and unjust proceedings against us: And whereas the public virtue of this Colony (so essential to its liberty and happiness) must be endangered by a future political union with, or dependance upon a crown and nation so lost to justice, patriotism and magnanimity:

WE THE DEPUTIES of the people of Pennsylvania, assembled in full Provincial Conference for forming a plan for executing the Resolve of Congress of the 15th of May last, for suppressing all authority in this Province derived from the crown of Great-Britain, and for establishing a government upon the authority of the people only, **DO**, in this public manner, in behalf of ourselves, and with the approbation, consent and authority of our Constituents, **UNANIMOUSLY** declare our willingness to concur in a vote of the Congress, declaring the **UNITED COLONIES FREE AND INDEPENDANT STATES**: Provided the forming the government, and the regulation of the internal police of this Colony, be always reserved to the people of the said Colony: And we do farther call upon the nations of Europe, and appeal to the great Arbiter and Governor of the empires of the world to witness for us, that this Declaration did not originate in ambition or in an impatience of lawful authority, but that we were driven to it in obedience to the first principles of nature by the oppressions and cruelties of the aforesaid King and Parliament of Great-Britain, as the only possible measure that was left us to preserve and establish our liberties, and to transmit them inviolate to posterity.

Signed by order of the Conference.

THOMAS M'KEAN, PRESIDENT.

IN CONFERENCE held at Philadelphia, 25th
June, 1776.

PIETAS

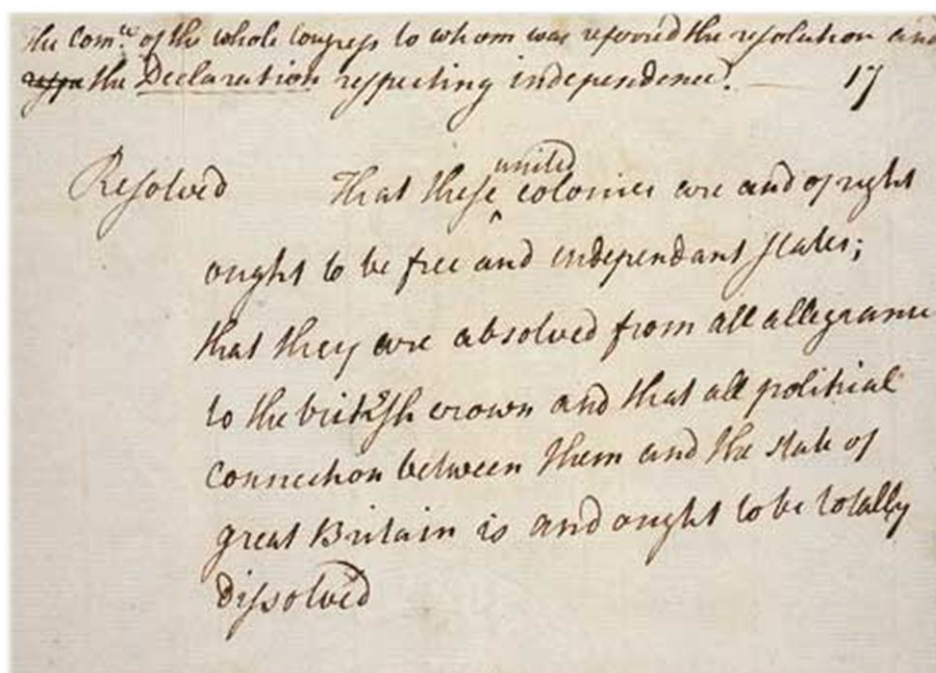
The task for drafting a declaration of independence was given to John Adams, delegate from Massachusetts. He organized a “Committee of Five” that included himself, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Livingston, Robert Sherman, and Thomas Jefferson, whom Adams asked to write the draft because of his talents as a writer and his good reputation. Thomas Jefferson was renting quarters at the Graff House in Philadelphia, where for just over two weeks, from June 11 to June 28, 1776, he wrote the masterpiece of the Declaration of Independence.

On July 2, 1776, the “Committee of Five” presented Jefferson’s draft, or “The Resolution for Independence,” to the Continental Congress. The committee of the whole voted:

Resolved, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.

That it is expedient forthwith to take the most effectual measures for forming foreign Alliances.

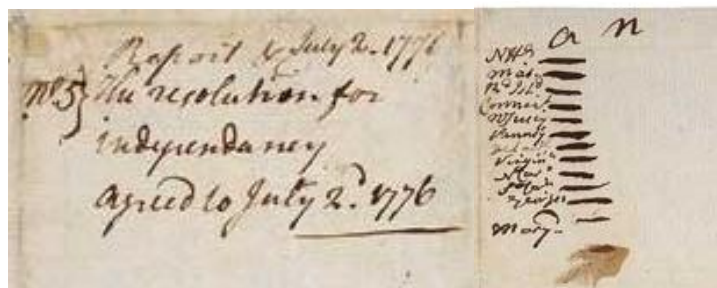
That a plan of confederation be prepared and transmitted to the respective Colonies for their consideration and approbation, Congress adopted the first part (the declaration). The words of the Lee Resolution are echoed in the Declaration of Independence.

A photograph of a handwritten document, likely a reproduction of the original. The text is written in cursive ink on aged paper. At the top, it reads: "The Com^{tee} of the whole Congress to whom was referred the resolution and ~~upon~~ the Declaration respecting independence? — 17". Below this, the main resolution is written: "Resolved That these ^{united} colonies are and of right ought to be free and independant states; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the british crown and that all political connection between them and the State of great Britain is and ought to be totally dissolved".

Credit: Adoption of the Resolution Calling for Independence from England; 7/2/1776; Reports on Administrative Affairs of the Congress; Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789; Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention, Record Group 360; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Twelve colonies voted in favor. New York abstained until receiving instructions from its Convention, which voted in favor on July 9, 1776. The Treaty plan was not approved until September 1776. The plan of confederation, introduced first by Franklin a year before, was not passed until November 1777.



"The resolution for independency, agreed to July 2. 1776"

Congress revised the document over the next two days. On July 4th, it adopted the Declaration of Independence, which provided the reasons for the resolution of July 2. The *Pennsylvania Evening Post* published the Declaration that evening (see below). The *Pennsylvania Gazette* published it the following day (see below).

The Declaration was no ordinary document. John Adams, in a letter to his wife, recognized the exceptional nature of the event:

The second day of July, 1776, will be memorable epocha in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations, as the great Anniversary Festival. It ought to be commemorated, as the day of deliverance by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp, shews, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations, from one end of the continent to the other, from this time forward forever.

The PENNSYLVANIA EVENING POST.

Price only Two Coppers. Published every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday Evenings.

Vol. II.]

SATURDAY, JULY 6, 1776.

[Num. 228]

In CONGRESS, July 4, 1776.
A Declaration by the Representatives
of the United States of America,
in General Congress assembled.

WHEN, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God intitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, That all men are created equal; that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former systems of government. The history of the present King of Great-Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and, when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of representation in the legislature, a right inestimable to them, and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the legislative powers, incapable of annihilation, have returned to the people at large for their exercise; the state remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these states; for that purpose obstructing the laws for naturalization of foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands.

He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers.

He has made Judges dependant on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies, without the consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the military independant of and superior to the civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation:

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock trial, from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these states:

For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing taxes on us without our consent:

For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury:

For transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offences:

For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighbouring province, establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging its boundaries, so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these colonies:

For taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws, and altering fundamentally the forms of our governments:

For suspending our own legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated government here, by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is, at this time, transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty and

DUNLAP'S

Pennsylvania **Wacker**
OR
GENERAL ADVERTISER.

MONDAY, JULY 8th, 1776.

IN CONGRESS, July 4, 1776.
*A DECLARATION by the REPRESENTATIVES
of the UNITED STATES of AMERICA,
in GENERAL CONGRESS assembled.*

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We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all
men are created equal, that they are endowed by their
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That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted
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the inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world:
For imposing taxes on us without our consent:
For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of
trial by jury:

For transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pre-
tended offences:

For abolishing the free system of English laws in a
neighbouring province, establishing therein an arbit-
rary Government, and enlarging its boundaries, so as
to render it at once an example and fit instrument for
introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:
For taking away our charters, abolishing our most
valuable laws, and altering fundamentally the forms
of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring
themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all
cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us
out of his protection and waging war against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt
our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is, at this time, transporting large armies of for-
eign mercenaries to complete the works of death, de-
solation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances
of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most
barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a
civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow citizens taken captive
on the high seas to bear arms against their country to
become the executioners of their friends and brethren,
or to fall themselves by their hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us,
and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our
frontiers, the merciless Indian savages, whose known
rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all
ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned
for redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated
petitions have been answered only by repeated injury.
A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act
which may define a tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a
free people.

Nor have we been wanting in attentions to our Brit-
ish brethren. We have warned them from time to
time of attempts by their legislature to extend an un-
warrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded
them of the circumstances of our emigration and settle-
ment here. We have appealed to their native justice
and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the
ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpa-
tions, which, would inevitably interrupt our connec-
tions and correspondence. They too have been deaf to
the voice of justice and consanguinity. We must,
therefore, acquiesce in the necessity which denounces
our separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of
mankind, enemies in war, in peace, friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the UNITED
STATES OF AMERICA, in GENERAL CONGRESS
assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the
World for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the
name, and by the authority of the good People of these
Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these
United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, FREE
and INDEPENDENT STATES; that they are
absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and
that all political connection between them and the
State of Great-Britain, is and ought to be totally dis-
solved; and that as FREE and INDEPENDENT
STATES, they have full power to levy war, conclude
peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to
do all other acts and things which INDEPENDENT
STATES may of right do. And for the support of
this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection
of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other
our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

Signed by order and in behalf of Congress,

JOHN HANCOCK, President.

Attest: CHARLES THOMPSON, Secretary.

Philadelphia, July 8, 1776.

THE uncommon expence attending the
publication of this news-paper at this day,
obliges the Printer to inform those Gentlemen
indebted for this paper longer than Twelve
Months, that, without pay, it cannot be con-
tinued to them more than Four Weeks from this
date.—Subscribers at a distance can send their
money by letter (Post paid) or any other speedy
way that may suit them best: And Subscribers in
and near Baltimore will please to settle their ac-
counts with Mr. JAMES HAYES, of that place,
who is fully authorized to receive the same.

JOHN DUNLAP.

Just published and to be sold by JOHN DUNLAP,
in Market-street, Philadelphia,

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE
Nature of CIVIL LIBERTY, the Principles
of GOVERNMENT, and the Justice and
Policy of the WAR with AMERICA.

To which is added,

An APPENDIX, containing a state of the Nation-
al Debt, an estimate of the money drawn from the
Public by the taxes, and an account of the National
Income and Expenditure since the last War.

*Heu miseri cives! non Hostem, inimicæ castra,
—Vestras Spes artit.* VIRG.

By RICHARD PRICE, D.D.F.R.S.

* * * This learned judicious and liberal author had
the thanks of the Common Council, and the Freedom
of the City of London presented to him in a gold box,
for this his much admired most excellent pamphlet on
Civil Liberty—And for which he also deserves the
united thanks of America.

NOW to be disposed of by wholesale, on
reasonable terms for ready money, or short credit
(giving security if required) by JOHN MURRAY,
at the Tmp, Philadelphia County, all the GOODS
he has now on hand, amounting to twelve hundred
pounds, or thereabouts.—Also to be disposed of, the
lease of the House and Stores now in his possession.

N.B. As said MURRAY intends quitting business in
that part of the country, he begs all those indebted to
him to send in their accounts and receive their money.

To be SOLD by PUBLIC VENDUE,
at Capt. Kendal Cole's, near Haddonfield, in New-
Jersey, on Monday, the 8th day of July instant, at
Ten o'clock in the morning.

BETWEEN sixty and seventy CATTLE, a large
part of which will consist of four years old steers and
sprayed heifers; the remainder dry cows, oxen, bulls,
young cattle, and cows and calves; at which time and
place the conditions of sale will be made known. †

Philadelphia, July 1, 1776.

To be SOLD by PUBLIC SALE,
on Monday the 22d instant, (July) at seven o'clock in
the evening, at the London Coffee-house,

A CERTAIN lot or piece of ground, situate on
the north side of Mulberry or Arch-street, between
Third and Fourth-streets, in this city, being 25 feet
front on said street, and 124 feet in depth. And on
Tuesday the 23d instant, at three o'clock in the after-
noon, will be sold at the sign of the Mermaid, in Ken-
sington, fifteen lots of ground, situate in Kensington
aforesaid, agreeable to a plan to be seen at the Coffee-
house and at the place of sale, viz. four lots 19 and a
half feet front each on a street 50 feet wide, called Queen-
street, and about 82 feet deep; five lots 20 feet front
each on a street 30 feet wide called Bishop street, and
78 feet deep; four lots 19 and a half feet front each on
a street 52 feet wide, being the first street from the river
Delaware and running parallel with it; one water-lot 78
feet front on the last mentioned street, and extending in
depth to low-water mark; also one lot situate on Marl-
borough-street, between Queen-street and the river De-
laware, being 20 feet front on said street and 120 feet
deep. All the said lots are clear of ground-rent. Late
the estate of Joseph Watkins, sen. deceased.

JOSEPH WATKINS, }
JAMES WATKINS, } Executors.
SAMUEL DAVIS, }

N.B. If the weather should prove unfavourable the
sale will begin on the next fair day. ‡

EIGHT thousand acres of good LAND
in the County of Albany and Province of New
York to be sold by CHARLES WHARTON.

PIETAS

Thirty-two years later, Adams reflected on the essence of the revolution to Hezekiah Niles, “The American Revolution was not a common event. Its effects and consequences have already been awful over a great part of the globe. And when and where are they to cease?” The Revolution, he wrote, was not the war, but “in the minds and hearts of the people, a change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations.”

He also reflected on the annual orations that had become part of July 4th. Writing to posterity, he encouraged them to study the Revolution, but not simply for the “glorioles” of individual deeds and greatness. Rather historians should study the Revolution to learn the uniqueness of its combination of eternal principles and the traditions of a particular people.

To this end it is greatly to be desired that young gentlemen of letters in all the states, especially in the thirteen original states, would undertake the laborious, but certainly interesting and amusing, task of searching and collecting all the records, pamphlets, newspapers, and even handbills which in any way contributed to change the temper and views of the people and compose them into an independent nation....

In this research, the glorioles of individual gentlemen and of separate states is of little consequence. The means and the measures are the proper objects of investigation. These may be of use to posterity, not only in this nation, but in South America and all other countries. They may teach mankind that revolutions are no trifles; that they ought never to be undertaken rashly; nor without deliberate consideration and sober reflection; nor without a solid, immutable, eternal foundation of justice and humanity; nor without a people possessed of intelligence, fortitude, and integrity sufficient to carry them with steadiness, patience, and perseverance through all the vicissitudes of fortune, the fiery trials, and melancholy disasters they may have to encounter.

Perhaps there is no finer statement on the essence of American conservatism.

Many thanks to our authors and reviewers. We wish all our readers a happy Fourth of July.

The Editor

A Founding not Liberal, but Conserving

F. Cooper Adamo

Many of those who celebrate the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of American independence this year will be tempted to parade independence as a radical separation from the *antiquated*, but this sort of celebration is an unfortunate, entrenched obfuscation of the *Spirit of '76*. Recapturing that true spirit is all the more important as it faces undo criticism from not only the Left but also the Right in recent years. Among the Right is an accusatory sentiment against the American founding generation, replacing one of patrial homage. The spirit of this piece is to capture the substance of the American founding, the Spirit of '76, which was not a radical offshoot but a branch in continuity with the venerable.

Criticism of the American founding has always been present. Many have wondered how licit the events of 1776 were. Was it too bellicose? Were the societal forms that it preserved or established too strange? Skepticism did not start with Patrick Deneen's critical work, but since the publication of *Why Liberalism Failed*, it has become increasingly popular. Postliberalism and its fellow travelers, as a result, have gained much traction in the realm of intellectual conservatism. Liberalism is the usual object of ire for the postliberal, integralist, national conservative, common good constitutionalist, and East Coast Straussian. To be more specific, members of these loose-knit groups, in their attempts to understand wherein lies the fault of America's moral, governmental, societal, and economic problems, condemn the American founding for instituting a liberal order to the detriment of the American people.

The fundamental question for one reflecting on the Spirit of '76 is whether the American founding was *good*. The challenges of a growing reign of isolated individualism, libertine morals, majoritarian tyranny, harmful market practices, state-coerced markets, and engulfing centralization in America certainly did not materialize *ex nihilo*. Was the American founding at the root of today's difficulties, or were these Western and American trends, as some scholars have argued, the product of the more radical French Revolution? While this paper will not explore the plausible causes of these challenges, it does suggest that painting all Western revolutions with the same broad brush opaquely the truth of the matter, and that it

is arguably more productive to trace certain revolutionary ideals (and their outcomes) in the West generally to the socialistic derivatives of the French Revolution or the statist codifications of Napoleonic jingoism. The causes of America's current difficulties may more likely be related to the rash majorities formed in colossal electorates, the turning of the Declaration of Independence into an ideological tract, and the erosion of federalism. As monarchies should be wary of tyrants, republics should worry about the tyranny of the majority, particularly when those majorities are captured by ideology and efface the spheres of sovereignty. In finding solutions, Americans should not sacrifice the republic for fear of mob rule, liberty for fear of ideology, nor federalism for fear of anarchy.

This paper forwards a *positive* approach for defining the founding that is simultaneously a *negation* of the liberal characterization expounded by postliberals. Their *positive* approach is also their direct definement of the causes of today's ills, but as previously stated, exploring plausible causes of these ills is not this paper's purpose. This paper will first give a brief overview of liberalism, conservatism, and ideology, before demonstrating the conservative aspects of the founding using a few key figures and secondary sources. After that, it will use the Declaration of Independence as a device for exploring the conservative character of the founding, as interpreted through both the minds of the drafters and the hearts of the delegates who represented their states' constituents. Indeed, the most contentious section of the Declaration reveals a fundamental conservatism (and an underestimated classical-scholastic pedigree) that extends far beyond the document to represent the broader mind of the founding. Next, this paper will demonstrate how the select liberal principles of the founding were not stricken by fatal philosophical implications. The paper concludes with an assessment of how the founding in essence is not only fundamentally conservative, but, through its conservatism, adopts the good of liberal philosophy and expels that which would make it erroneous or ideological.

LIBERALISM: SETTING THE STAGE

For postliberals and similar growing circles of the Right, liberalism is the overarching philosophy of the American founding, thus the founding is the progenitor of today's deep-seated problems. Patrick Deneen has perhaps the most accessible thoughts on the subject in his popular book, *Why Liberalism Failed*. Michael Hanby has provided extreme care and

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detail on the subject from a more philosophical perspective in his 2021 critique in *New Polity*.¹ One may also look to Andrew Willard Jones and D.C. Schindler for considerate, thorough critiques of liberalism. The common, yet crucial, sub-argument for postliberals and those of similar circles is that if the scientific revolution fundamentally rejects certain cornerstones of Aristotelian metaphysics, which it did, then the liberal political thought that followed in the Enlightenment must be fundamentally flawed. If the metaphysical axioms of liberalism do not recognize forms, standards, purposes, and intentions inherent to man, society, and government, then everything is permissible—to the detriment of personal, social, and governmental life. If all is permissible, then collapse is a virtual mandate of society. Hanby states that liberalism, which “commenced in the seventeenth century and provided the intellectual underpinnings for the republican revolutions of the eighteenth,” was part of “a radical *transformation* ... at every level—theological, metaphysical, natural, scientific, ecclesiastical, cultural and sociological.”² Likewise, Deneen asserts that liberalism’s “ascent and triumph required sustained efforts to undermine the classical and Christian understanding of liberty, the disassembling of widespread norms, traditions, and practices.”³ These general formulations of liberalism (and the general critique of it) are not entirely new; one can look to the works of Leo Strauss or to the earlier writings of Joseph de Maistre for similar definitions and arguments.⁴

A liberal order in this light must be a sociopolitical one that is freed from the dictates and demands of nature and God. Under this scheme, there is no essence or purpose beyond what the will of each individual fabricates in pursuit of his own wants; if the person cannot discover the natural law written in human nature, then relativistic morals manifest. Man is free to be whatever he desires in his newfound pride even if he is consumed by greed and loneliness. As a result, liberal society could only ever be a mass of faceless units packed together without any true sense of justice between them. In this society, the weight of

¹ Michael Hanby, “The Birth of Liberal Order and the Death of God: A Reply to Robert Reilly’s *America on Trial*,” *New Polity* (February 2021): 54–85.

² Hanby, “The Birth of the Liberal Order and the Death of God,” 69.

³ Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 27.

⁴ *Liberalism* is widely used in many negative and positive ways. Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, a true polyglot (not to mention a true polymath), considered himself a *liberal*, despite the great overlap in his thought with conservatism. In “The Four Liberalisms”, *Religion & Liberty* 2, no. 4 (July 20, 2010), he defined four types of liberalism since the late eighteenth century. This paper does not seek to rehabilitate the word *liberalism*, though such a quest could be worked. For more on Kuehnelt-Leddihn's political thought, see Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, *Liberty or Equality: The Challenge of Our Time* (Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers Ltd., 1952).

government looms over all to force each to be totally free, totally leveled, and in conformity to the will of the state. With this denial of human nature in its personal, communal, and purposeful aspects, persons are treated as mere amorphous quanta to be used or discarded.

So many of the problems of the day fit this liberal profile, and this builds toward the postliberals' case that the American founding played a key role in the enshrinement of liberalism. But even if one generally agrees with how liberalism is defined, as this paper does, it does not necessarily mean that the founding is the progenitor of liberalism. It would benefit the Right to explore that generally dichotomous character of Enlightenment political thought, that chasm between the Anglo *John* and the Swiss *Jean*.⁵ Roussellian echoes rang across the Continent since the end of the eighteenth century and it is not completely implausible that it made its way to the ears of America's more susceptible at some point—if one is still curious as to the causes of Western and American struggles.

CONSERVATISM: SETTING THE STAGE

Conservatism is best described by Russell Kirk, the father of post-World War II conservatism. His 1953 magnum opus, *The Conservative Mind*, describes conservatism in six observational canons.⁶ Conservatism is essentially a disposition of life that embraces a transcendent order of natural law and morality, prudence over innovation, the recognition of mankind's natural variety and unfortunate imperfectability, a healthy adherence to an intertwining of freedom and property, and the wisdom of tradition, prescription, custom, convention, and continuity.⁷ This disposition touches all aspects of life for a person, people, country, society, government, and church. A similar description also can be found in Kirk's ten conservative principles.⁸ As a loose collection of thought and practice, conservatism is best exemplified by the likes of Edmund Burke, John Adams, Russell Kirk, and M.E. Bradford.

⁵ It would seem that Lockean liberalism in excess would tend toward anarchy, while Roussellian egalitarianism in excess tends toward centralization. The durations of time between Rousseau's work, the French Revolution, and the start of communist movements (i.e. League of the Just) are brief for a reason. There are two roads to go when one denies the sociopolitical form: anarchy or tyranny. The French Revolution and her offspring are decidedly of the latter, grandchildren of Roussellian equality.

⁶ Russell Kirk, *The Politics of Prudence* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1993), 10-11. Kirk's description of the "politics of prudence" gives even more insight into the essence of conservatism.

⁷ Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, 7th rev. ed. (Washington DC: Gateway Editions, 1985), 8-9.

⁸ Kirk, *The Politics of Prudence*, 15-29.

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Kirk presents a concept of conservatism that is flexible, yet unwavering, but he is also known for his deep criticism of ideology.⁹ Most people today use *ideology* to mean “a well-defined set of political ideas,” but Kirk uses it with greater specificity. Ideology is a radical’s manifesto for a secular utopia, characterized mostly by fanaticism for its set of abstract political principles that justify social revolution—violent if need be—, the absolute rejection of any deviation from the asserted absolute truth, and ferocious in-fighting marked by destructive purity tests.¹⁰ Ideology is the inversion of religion and the negation of conservatism.

There are many standards flown among intellectual conservatives when it comes to interpreting the American founding. One enduring battle line is between those who praise the American founding as the embodiment of the liberal project and those horrified by this. Both mistake the underlying substance of the founding. The American founding is fundamentally conservative, not liberal.¹¹ One of the most formidable demonstrations of this comes from Kirk himself, while Michael Lucchese and Mark Henrie have authored fresh reintroductions to his work on the subject.¹² Henrie reminds the modern reader that the events of 1776 did not constitute a *founding*, but rather something uninventive and preserving.¹³ In that precise mode, he is careful not to use the word *founding* as it can connote “undue, imprudent novelty” alongside simple “establishment.” In concert with Henrie, Lucchese puts forth a conservative interpretation of the Declaration in the Kirkian tradition. This paper uses the term *founding* merely out of convention; still, one may use it to mean a *recovery* of something lost to its rightful owners—or seized through tyranny—but not a novel discovery by way of abstract innovation. In agreement with Kirk, Henrie, and Lucchese, this

⁹ Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 9–10. Here is an excellent overview of what Kirk finds to be the general form of radicalism since 1790. One can see the ideological in those radical tenets.

¹⁰ Kirk, *The Politics of Prudence*, 5–6.

¹¹ For a current example, see Jeffery Tyler Syck, “Towards A Conservative Liberalism: John Quincy Adams and the Abolitionist Cause,” *Pietas* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2023): 24–50. The phrase “conservative liberalism” may apply to Burke’s conserving of English liberty or to someone like Tocqueville—whom Kirk called a “liberal conservative”—, but it tends to muddy the waters because the founding was predominantly conservative, and only upon this basis may the effects of its few liberal principles be properly assessed. Only the recovery of this conservatism is necessary to rebut postliberal criticism.

¹² Russell Kirk, “A Revolution Not Made, but Prevented,” in *Rights and Duties: Reflections on our Conservative Constitution* (Dallas, TX: Spence Publishing Company, 1997), 47–60.

¹³ Mark Henrie, “[Russell Kirk’s Unfounded America](#),” *Modern Age*, February 12, 2025; Michael Lucchese, “[Russell Kirk’s Revolution of Memory](#),” *National Affairs* 67 (Summer 2025).

paper presents a conservative interpretation of the American founding, for it is a recovery of the founding, an inheritance of '76, that marks the modern intellectual conservative task.¹⁴

The American founding is conservative in two ways. It is conservative in that it was a reaction against the innovations of Great Britain, and that it sought to conserve a way of life with venerable characteristics—those captured in Kirk's six canons and ten principles. It is not the case that the founders either conserved radical liberation doctrine or established something new and radical.

CONSERVATISM OF THE FOUNDERS AND OF THE FOUNDING

In a brief treatment, it is impossible to provide a full scholarly assessment of the founders' way of life. But it is possible, through a swatch of broad strokes, to provide a glimpse into the period's conservatism alongside appeals to authoritative scholars. Proper interpretation of the founding is situated in the halls of history, not in oft-specious philosophical formulae. Through an initial historical approach, it is less likely that *une fausse idée claire* might supplant an accurate presentation of the ideas truly present and active surrounding 1776, implicit or explicit. All else is an imagined past. To use the language of analytic philosophy, these sorts of assertive illusions are formally valid, but ultimately unsound. And so this brief survey will focus on the conservative disposition of some of the American founders with respect to the first and most important canon of conservatism: "Belief in a transcendent order, or body of natural law, which rules society as well as conscience."¹⁵ Pursuing the flourishing of ethics and politics, this canon invokes both holy dictates from on high and intimate whispers of the heart. It is fundamentally opposed to liberalism's *errors* and especially opposed to liberal *ideology*. While there is abundant evidence that *all* of the conservative canons and principles were present in the founding, this section will provide a focused demonstration of the first canon.

Kirk takes John Adams to be an exemplary figure in the conservative tradition because his home was just law, prudential government, and a transcendent order. A few years after the War of Independence, Adams wrote that the U.S. Constitution "was made only for a

¹⁴ For a curated look at topics concerning America and the founding—from a conservative perspective—, see Russell Kirk, *On America: How to Understand the Legacy of 1776*, edited by Michael Lucchese.

¹⁵ Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 8.

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moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”¹⁶ Likewise, John Dickinson from Pennsylvania, known for his prudent, even if miscalculated, stance against declaring independence—thinking it to be too hasty an action—, wrote regarding the 1766 Stamp Act that “[kings] or parliaments could not give the rights essential to happiness.... We claim them from a higher source—from the King of kings, and Lord of all the earth.”¹⁷ Looking to Virginia, the de facto leader of the colonies at the time, Patrick Henry, who famously but perhaps imprudently said, “Give me liberty or give me death,” also said in 1799 that the “great pillars of government and social life [are] virtue, morality and religion”: they are “the armor ... that renders us invincible.”¹⁸ Men like Adams, Dickinson, and Henry are more representative of the Founding than Jefferson, Paine, and Franklin. There is a plausible argument to be made that Jefferson and Franklin were not as radical as is often described. For example, while Jefferson could be very liberal philosophically, he “had half a mind to be a conservative—and sometimes more than half a mind for it.”¹⁹ Moreover, a correct interpretation of the Declaration of Independence must begin with the conservative character of the delegates to the Continental Congress of 1776. They were not outliers; most of them “had held public offices or at least had directed and led many of their fellow-citizens.”²⁰ They were not ignorant of nor alien to those whom they represented. In the words of Kirk, “the members of the Continental Congress were a different breed from the members of revolutionary France’s National Assembly.”²¹

While the founders and founding certainly had a conservative character, thinkers like Kirk, Bradford, and Daniel J. Boorstin have shown that the founding was also a conservative response to preserve the American colonial societies’ mores and moods. Kirk rightly sees that “the American Revolution was not an innovating upheaval, but a conservative restoration of colonial prerogatives.... [The] colonials felt that by inheritance they possessed the rights of Englishmen and by prescription certain rights peculiar to themselves.”²² In the same vein,

¹⁶ [John Adams to Massachusetts Militia](#), October 11, 1798.

¹⁷ John Dickinson, *An Address to the Committee of Correspondence in Barbados* (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1766), 4.

¹⁸ Patrick Henry, *Patrick Henry in his Speeches and Writings and in the Words of his Contemporaries*, ed. James M. Elson Lynchburg, VA: Warwick House Publishers, 2007), 176.

¹⁹ Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 73.

²⁰ Russell Kirk, *The Roots of the American Order*, 3rd ed. (Washington DC: Regnery Gateway, 1991), 414.

²¹ Kirk, *The Roots of the American Order*, 414.

²² Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 72.

when speaking of the American founding, Bradford states that the American War of Independence “was a revolution to conserve a known regime, not an attempt to create out of whole cloth an ‘empire of reason.’”²³ Likewise Boorstin, who does not always conform to the general conservative mold, finds that the “most obvious peculiarity of our American Revolution is that, in the modern European sense of the word, it was hardly a revolution at all.”²⁴ For all three minds and works, the American founding both enacts a conservative effort and lacks radical change. One might also look to the works of Willmoore Kendall, George W. Carey, Barry Alan Shain, Forrest McDonald, and H. Trevor Colbourn for additional sober analyses of the American founding period.

The Declaration of Independence should be viewed through the lens of conservative form—a reaction to preserve a way life. Whether in praise or condemnation, the Declaration is often treated more like a set of commandments than an important document. But praise for the Declaration need not be worship, and proper praise begins with proper understanding. Correctly interpreting the Declaration will both reveal where today’s problems do *not* lie and open the door to where the real solutions wait. The true character of the founders, founding, and colonists generally will unveil the Declaration’s conservative substance. It is not the case that liberalism masks itself with a conservative facade.

ON THE CONSERVATISM OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

When critics, like some postliberals, condemn the American founding, they are quick to blame the Declaration of Independence. It either contains the seed of radicalism or is the first step toward total severance from the good. For them, it is the progenitor of today’s radical equality, licentious liberty, and totalizing state. Though the Declaration is more than its pithy introduction, these critics treat its first seven sentences as a philosophical treatise. They find in certain words like *liberty*, *equality*, and *rights*, the tenets of radical ideology or the dormant curses of liberalism. But neither is the case.

The few liberal principles of the Declaration and founding are liberal insofar as they were prioritized in the Enlightenment. Yet postliberal critics miss two things with respect to this partial liberalism: the historical and philosophical context of those few principles, and the

²³ M.E. Bradford, *A Better Guide Than Reason: Studies in the American Revolution* (La Salle, IL: Sherwood Sugden & Company, 1979), xi.

²⁴ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 68.

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relationship between those principles and conservatism (this latter concern will be explored later). As a correction, a careful reading of three phrases of the Declaration will reveal the conservative nature of the document, the founders, and American society. For each, the drafters' mind (usually that of Thomas Jefferson) and the hearts of the delegates (the representatives of the colonies-to-be-states) will be presented. While the aim is to demonstrate the founding's conservatism by way of the Declaration's introduction, that short text should not be confused with the whole of 1776; the scope and influence of the founding's conservatism reach far beyond mere words.

“LAWS OF NATURE AND OF NATURE’S GOD”

On its face, the phrase “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God” appears to be Jefferson’s deism on display. Critics argue that there is an unbridgeable gap between classical “natural law” and modernist “laws of nature,” between “the Lord God” of Christianity and “Nature’s God” of the Enlightenment. But if one considers that the Declaration was not only an address to Great Britain but also to the French court, one sees that this language was rhetorical: a way to entice French support by speaking the language of the *philosophe*. In another example, the word “Legislature” was used instead of “Parliament” in order to speak to a non-Anglo audience; a sympathetic listener beyond the commonwealth is a potential ally. This rhetoric was not lost on the delegates. Robert Henry Lee, who made the motion for a resolution to declare independence, also included in the motion to “take the most effectual measures for forming foreign Alliances” and this sort of language is in service of that aim.²⁵ The first two paragraphs of the Declaration did not constitute a radical philosophical divorce, but the practical use of language for tangible goals, especially the goal of attracting foreign allies.

In addition, those who accuse this phrasing of being deistic fail to mention that the Declaration of Independence ends with the phrase, “with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence.” The god of deism does not provide, but the Lord does. Though drafts are not the final say, before the descriptor of “unalienable” was used to describe the colonists’ rights, “sacred” was first used by the deistic Jefferson. The delegates were certainly more conservative in disposition and thought than Jefferson, so when they imparted their

²⁵ *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1776-1789*, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford, 34 vols. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1906), 5:425.

legitimacy upon the phrasing as signing delegates, it is clear that “Laws of Nature” and “Nature’s God” is closer to “classical natural law and the Lord God” than to “classical mechanics and a supreme being.” This classical and Christian understanding is commonplace for the American founding and colonial societies.²⁶ Certainly then, this phrase is conservative in nature alongside the prudent and effective statesmanship that breathed life into it.

“ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL”

Jefferson the drafter did not suppose all people are political equals or even equal in all respects. While his scope of suffrage was broad for the eighteenth century, it is considered limited by today’s standards, revealing that he was not advocating for radical political equality.²⁷ While he abhorred the institution of slavery, Jefferson did not advocate for wide social equality precisely because he was a slaveowner. Contrary to today’s anachronistic readings of “all men are created equal,” Jefferson reveals his inegalitarian views when writing to John Adams in 1813, stating that the “natural aristocracy ... [is] the most precious gift of nature for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society.”²⁸

What equality is referenced? With respect to the mind of Jefferson, one must look to John Locke, whose *Second Treatise on Government* posits that “all men are naturally in ... [a] state also of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another.”²⁹ At first glance, this statement seems individualistic or even anarchistic given it is placed in relation to sovereignty—not so much to physical, social, or moral equality. However, the idea finds its origins in the early sixth century works of St. Gregory the Great, who wrote that “nature has begotten all of us men equals, but, the order of merits varying, the secret appointment sets some above others.”³⁰ This principle of human equality is also found in the Salamanca School of early modern Spanish scholastics, including Francisco de

²⁶ See Kody Cooper and Justin Dyer, *The Classical and Christian Origins of American Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

²⁷ There were contemporaries in the Netherlands, like Rousset de Missy, who did advocate for universal suffrage, notwithstanding the negative effects of imprudent broadening of suffrage at the time as seen in revolutionary France. See Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans*, 2nd rev. ed. (Lafayette, IN: Cornerstone Book Publishers, 2006).

²⁸ [Thomas Jefferson to John Adams](#), October 28, 1813.

²⁹ John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*, Ch. II, Sect. 4.

³⁰ Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, Lib. XXI, Moral, Cap. 10, Nunc. N. 22. Note that equality in one respect does not negate natural inequality in another.

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Vitoria and Francisco Suárez, who held to equality with respect to the authority of a political society.³¹ It is also echoed by St. Robert Bellarmine in *De Laicis*.³² The political thought of early modern scholastics like Suárez, Vitoria, Mariana, Soto, Medina, and Menchaca fundamentally shaped the ideas of Protestant thinkers like Locke, Hooker, Grotius, Pufendorf, and Sidney, who in turn had varying influence on American founders like Jefferson and Adams.³³

By *equal* Jefferson did not suppose that all men are equal in all respects. More properly, “all men are created equal” is a terse admission of a political first principle for the establishment of a new governing form. It is not a unique principle to the peoples of the colonies as all societies form with this truth present. To follow the logic of St. Gregory the Great, St. Robert Bellarmine, and Vitoria, all men are similar in that they each possess a soul that is indistinguishable from the soul of any other. But certainly there exist different persons with their own respective bodies. So, while all men are equal in one respect, they are distinct in another. If all are equal, then no man or aggregate group has inherent power over another. Rather, sovereignty is found in the whole *People*, which is greater than its constituent parts, yet not a power to be lorded over those parts. Sovereignty arises from the real sociopolitical form. This formulation reveals the medieval understanding of “consent of the governed,” even if the scholastics were neither democratic nor republican; the wise society transfers this power to some prudent form of government implicitly or explicitly. Sovereignty and consent are the resulting first principles of politics that come from the admission—or implicit acceptance—of natural human equality. The Declaration’s equality phrase, through the mind of Jefferson, finds its origins in medieval Catholic scholasticism and Protestant legal thought instead of any idea sourced by later French revolutionaries. It is not a principle of radical

³¹ Francisco de Vitoria, *Political Writings (On Civil Power 1. 4. 1.)*, ed. Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 11; Francisco Suárez, *Selections From Three Works*, ed. Thomas Pink, trans. Gwladys Williams, Ammi Brown, John Waldron, Henry Davis S.J. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2015), 430.

³² Robert Bellarmine, *De Laicis or The Treatise on Civil Government*, trans. Kathleen E. Murphy (New York: Fordham University Press, 1928), 35–36.

³³ Several works cover the influence of the Spanish Scholastics, particularly in the Protestant nations and colonies since the late sixteenth century. See Andrew Fitzmaurice, *Sovereignty, Property and Empire, 1500–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Alejandro A. Chafuen, *Faith and Liberty: The Economic Thought of the Late Scholastics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), *Projections of Spanish Jesuit Scholasticism on British Thought: New Horizons in Politics, Law, and Rights*, Jesuit Studies 36, eds. Leopoldo J. Prieto López and José Luis Cendejas Bueno (Leiden: Brill, 2023).

liberalism which demands equality of condition and the relativization (equalization) of good and evil.

As for the delegates of the Continental Congress, the equality phrase was a political principle used to establish a logical, written justification for the purpose of independence, but its main substance had an even deeper meaning. While they believed in an equality under the law, more important to them was an equality in judgment before God and as English subjects of a common empire. Of course, the men of the commonweal are not the whole of humanity, but both meanings of the equality phrase—that *all Englishmen* are equal and that *all persons* are equal—are retained if one speaks to the English government *and* the French court. Delegates and the colonists they represented felt that their rights as Englishmen were not equally recognized by Parliament and the King. The equality phrase was an assertion that they were not inferior to Englishmen in Great Britain. Englishmen on the shores of Albion and in the new world had equal rights rooted in the consequential legal developments throughout Great Britain's history leading up to the events of 1776. The founders and colonists sought to preserve that same British tradition and inheritance.

“THEY ARE ENDOWED BY THEIR CREATOR WITH CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS”

There is a strong argument that Jefferson, as drafter, wrote this phrase with respect to the theory of subjective natural rights, be it a concept somehow classically rooted, a liberal fantasy, or an abstract dogma. If the theory of subjective natural rights is one of the two latter, then one could expect conservative critics to assert that the theory as envisioned in the Declaration is both a rejection of the classical understanding of “natural right” and the progenitor of modern emotive “rights.” But neither claim is true.

In the classical understanding, a “natural right” meant the good or just thing that a person in society had a duty to give to another. It was an objective right (a good or just thing as an “object”). For the critic, the modern understanding subverted this objective sense, taking “natural right” to be a personal power to be used against others instead of a gift of the good to one's neighbor. It is by the rooting of rights in the subject that selfish, relative claims can develop, for they are subjective and relative, not rooted in objective truth.

Conservatives critical of subjective natural rights theory, like Leo Strauss, Alasdair MacIntyre, Richard Tuck, and Michel Villey, have an incomplete understanding of modern

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rights theory in their critiques. How does the conservative critic claim that destructive modern rights come from subjective natural rights? For example, an excessive right, like a “right” to a free college education, is subjective in that the claimant is the recipient subject, but it is obviously objective as well, in that the claimant is demanding an object from another in society. So, the critic blames subjective natural rights theory for modern “rights” because they are subjectively claimed, but, ironically, does not also blame objective natural right theory, even though many modern “rights” are typically about the claim to an object. This little clarification would seem to not extend to subjective rights as powers, however—unless one treats *capacity* as an object to be possessed.

While all that may be true, it does not address the origins of subjective natural rights theory, nor does it disassociate it from the modern rights theory of the liberal order. It would seem that if this theory was a concept specific to the Enlightenment, then it would more than likely lead to modern evils. However, scholarship in the late twentieth century has revealed that the origins of subjective natural rights theory lie not in liberalism but in the thought of the *Decretists* or twelfth-century canon jurists.³⁴ These thinkers explicitly defined *natural right* as a “faculty” or “power” held by the subject. The Decretists defined natural right in this way over a hundred years before Ockham’s time, so the critic cannot say that subjective natural rights theory is derivative of nominalism. It should also be noted that decades before Ockham’s intellectual adoption of right as “faculty” or “power,” the Dominican Thomist Hervaeus Natalis had already been using *right* in the subjective manner.³⁵ One could argue for a logical connection between subjective natural right theory and nominalism, but history has shown that there is no necessary causal relationship between the two.³⁶ The subjective-power formulation is one of several uses of *natural right* that the Decretists explored, so one should not suppose that its subjective and objective formulations are mutually exclusive.

From the twelfth century to the eighteenth century by way of Hervaeus Natalis, William of Ockham, the Spanish Scholastics, and the early modern Protestant legal thinkers, natural

³⁴ Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law, and Church Law 1150–1625* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 62–64.

³⁵ Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights*, 108.

³⁶ Nominalism as a metaphysical theory argues that universals (such as the transcendental predicates or genera) are merely names of utility and do not constitute any real aspect of the particular beings they describe. It has been argued that this sort of metaphysical premise fosters an unintelligibility of the world, thus inviting a dangerous subjectivity that can only be imposed on objects. Following this, “natural right” loses its sense of justice in favor of imposing one’s own subjective powers upon others, for there is no nature or universal governing law to be followed.

rights were continually wedded to morality and duty. Brian Tierney confirms this relationship, arguing that like “most classical rights theorists down to Locke and Wolff they [the Decretists] envisaged a sphere of natural rights bounded by a natural moral law.”³⁷

If this is true, then postliberal and conservative critics who criticize the subjective natural rights phrase in the Declaration cannot say that they are modern or liberal inventions. The fact that twelfth century canon jurists, thomists, nominalists, second scholastics, protestants, and enlightenment thinkers adopted the language demonstrates that subjective natural rights theory is not necessarily animated by any one school of thought. Modern conceptions of *right* may abuse liberty for selfish evils, but this is not the logical conclusion of the “unalienable Rights” of the Declaration. More likely, excessive modern rights as such were the spawn of the French Revolution and the socialism that immediately developed from it.

The American founders were not speaking of abstract natural rights, but of the rights of Englishmen expounded by Sir William Blackstone and the lineage of the English law. Blackstone’s *Commentaries* were standard texts for any lawyer or statesman at the time. The rights of Englishmen claimed by the colonists in 1776 find their origins in the subjective natural rights conceived in the twelfth century. They were situated in and proportionate to a conservative and Christian society informed by duty, justice, and the common good. Subjective natural rights, which have a strong philosophical lineage, were preserved insofar as they were seen as the rights of Englishmen first. Denied these rights as Englishmen, the American colonists lacked all further legal recourse. Thus, the founders in the Declaration appealed to Heaven to secure those innate rights, so that they may live as they had for generations. They conserved rights that were themselves conservative objects, and unlike the abstract rights that would come to haunt France during the French Revolution.

With these clarified ideas of rights in mind, a “right to liberty” is more conservative, Christian, and prudential than liberative, abstract, and unlimited. This critical pursuit of America’s limited liberalism was not nurtured by error nor elevated to a radical form. The right to liberty, as the delegates understood, was a right of Englishmen, a very normal object of personal capacity and power.³⁸ The recitation of these English rights sounds more like a

³⁷ Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights*, 77.

³⁸ There are divisions of liberty which I can only address with a rough, underdeveloped point at this time. There is *moral* liberty, freedom to act virtuously. There is *operational* liberty, freedom to do things in accordance with the good, where such are not specifically objects of moral action. There is *permissive* liberty, freedom to commit certain sins, allowed out of prudence. Of the three, it seems *operational* liberty was on the forefront of the founders’ minds; if one does not

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stodgy tune than a novel opus. The delegates simply reiterated what Blackstone had already said decades prior in his commentaries. He refers to “Absolute Rights of Individuals,” alongside “absolute duties,” yet “absolute” must be read in its context of the *actual* practice in society free from the invocations of Lockean excesses.³⁹ In the English tradition, liberty was not without justice, duty, law, and the common good. Rights of a conserving character were that which the American founding sought to preserve.

CONCLUDING ON THE CONSERVATISM OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Looking to these three phrases of the first two paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence, one sees a strong resemblance between ancient and medieval ideas and a clear conservative effort by the founders to preserve the way of life that they knew for over one hundred and sixty years. This colonial tradition comes from British legacy. While it is true that the Declaration’s conservative nature goes beyond that contentious section, one can see conservative characteristics in them as well.

The Declaration is not particularly philosophical. It is a practical document that is greater than its brief introduction. Those initial two paragraphs certainly express philosophical claims, but they are quite pithy, stating what is otherwise implied in the English context or enticing in a French one. The purpose of that section is to justify the colonies’ act of secession—being in concert with the whole of the document—rather than conjure up a nation through philosophical incantations. In the end, the philosophical ideas in the Declaration are neither floating theory nor abstract vision, for the document strikes a great consonance with good, lived principles captured in the conservative canons.

Thus, the Declaration is first a conservative document that provides a window into the colonists’ concerns, the minds of the founders, and the founding itself. Real people, places, traditions, history, and customs are the roots of the Declaration. It is incorrect to view it through the eyes of a Jeffersonian caricature or Jefferson at his worst. Towards the end of his life, Jefferson asserted that the Declaration’s purpose was “not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of.... neither aiming at originality of principle or

have that, then he cannot sustain his livelihood. The idea of *operational* liberty is sourced in the thought of twelfth century English glossators if one is willing to grant its convertibility with Rufinus’s *demonstrations*. See Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights*, 67.

³⁹ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, ed. George Sharswood (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1893), 121-122.

sentiment” for the ordinance “was intended to be an expression of the american mind.”⁴⁰ This further confirms that a conservative interpretation of the Declaration is fitting. Along with the minds of the drafters, it must be viewed through the hearts of the delegates of the Continental Congress. Without their authoritative signatures, the Declaration would have been nothing more than mere parchment. Many of the assumptions, purposes, and forms of the Declaration come from “intensely practical lawyers and planters and merchants, none of them sheltered from the rough reality of colonial America.”⁴¹ The signing delegates were conservative men, not “abstracted *philosophes*.”⁴² The American founding was fundamentally conservative and not the realization of liberalism.

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Does not the American founding hold to certain liberal principles, though? Are not the ideas of “Laws of Nature,” “Nature’s God,” “rights,” “equality,” and “a right to liberty” in the liberal tradition? They are *liberal* in that they received greater emphasis in the Enlightenment, yet they are *select* in that they were prudently adopted and set against other principles of liberalism, especially those from more dangerous thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau—if one so chooses to paint all enlightened political thought with the same moniker. So, while the American founding is fundamentally conservative, it possesses a partial liberalism. This partial liberalism, however, does not operate as the postliberal might argue.

Instead of asking whether the founding was destined to be struck down by its own sword, one must first ask if the Declaration’s partial liberalism gave way to the destructive developments. The liberty, equality, and rights conceived by the founders were not radical commitments or lingering flaws, but familiar prescriptions that were in danger of being snuffed out. To suppose these old, conserved principles eventually led to either their corrosive or radical counterparts is, in effect, to unknowingly make a patsy of the colonists’ honorable traditions. The American founding did not contain the seeds of today’s destruction in any *uniquely* effectual way. It did not endure liberalism’s errors in any greater capacity than the endurance of error from any imperfect, fallible system comprised of fallen people. So, if one is to blame the founding and the verbiage in the Declaration, he must

⁴⁰ Thomas Jefferson to Henry Lee, May 8, 1825.

⁴¹ Kirk, *The Roots of the American Order*, 414.

⁴² Kirk, *The Roots of the American Order*, 414.

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blame all longstanding institutions and ideas for their mutilation by self-interested or bad actors. Rather what is remarkable is how the founding was *spared* these errors and ideology.

Postliberals and critics on the Right have retorted that along with conserving good things in society, the founders also conserved the liberal ideals that they inherited. This still condemns the founding for leading America down the wrong path. The American founding was partially liberal insofar as it was an offshoot of early modern English society, whose legal developments since at least Magna Carta exercised influence on its political and governmental concepts. *Liberal* and *liberalism* in this instance have as their objects liberty, equality before the law, subjective natural rights, and the limiting of governmental action. It is a separate question whether this sort of liberalism is, by itself, sustainable. Moreover, Deneen and Hanby correctly argue that these liberal principles historically follow from the Scientific Revolution. The rejection or extinguishing of nature and purpose (at least the downplaying or denial of their intelligibility) by the new science was carried over into Enlightenment liberalism.

The liberalism of the Enlightenment was certainly incomplete because it was derived from a deficient metaphysics; it (and its adherents) denied essence and purpose, and this denial threatened to infect its political ideas. But there is wide variation in how, when, and where liberal philosophy, which is both complex and erroneous, was pursued or applied by thoughtful or thoughtless minds. A philosophy might be erroneous in one respect and correct in another. Concerning the American founding, one must speak of partial *error* because it contained none of the far worse liberal *ideology* which later infected the French Revolution. Moreover, errors and right ideas in a certain system of philosophy and politics may or may not be intrinsically related or dependent on one another. A thinker may explicitly hold an erroneous philosophical principle but act according to a contradictory laudable one that he holds implicitly. The deontologist or utilitarian may claim a good man acts according to a certain system, when good men might invariably act as if they were Aristotelians. If Peripatetics of an Anglo-Christian world arrived at fruitful social forms and practices, the colonial inheritant surely kept these refined prescriptions regardless of any contradictory assumptions tacitly held.

INTERPRETING THE SELECT LIBERAL PRINCIPLES OF THE FOUNDING

The select liberal principles of the American founding in the Declaration of Independence are not nascent monsters but concepts guided by a conservative structure. They are non-inventive inheritances that developed and flourished over centuries, objects worthy of preservation. But to the root of the issue: are these principles invariably flawed because of the faulty metaphysics underpinning liberalism?

It is true that the liberalism of the Enlightenment suffers insufficient metaphysics. Its metaphysics rejects the concepts of natural essence and inherent purpose of man, society, will, and government; however, the philosophical critic cannot argue that these metaphysical judgments were explicit drivers of the American founding because their cause for independence was more tangible than philosophical. One can only argue that these metaphysical principles were tacitly held. And while one could argue that they were gradually destructive or simply remained dormant, colonial life from the settlement of Jamestown to the events of 1776 seems to deny these characterizations. One may counter that the timeline for liberalism's destruction is longer, that the seeds of destruction sown in 1776 were the *beginning of the end*. But, what then of the French Revolution? In a matter of a *few years*, France immediately succumbed to the radical upheaval of liberal ideology—driven more by the ideas of Voltaire and Rousseau than Locke and Montesquieu.⁴³ The critic may reply that because France was under the spell of liberal *ideology*, it fell quickly, while because America adopted only liberal *error*, it would experience a gradual deconstruction. This argument depends greatly upon the presumption that the metaphysical errors of the founding's select liberal principles were *not* inactive *nor* superseded by a good metaphysical framework.

Why did the “united States” not immediately suffer by the hands of their select liberal principles?⁴⁴ It would seem that the faulty metaphysics of these principles would erode any present goods at the time or over time. The founding did not suffer by these principles for

⁴³ Conversely, colonial American politics was influenced more by Locke and Montesquieu than by Voltaire and Rousseau from a quantitative perspective. From 1760 to 1779, Locke and Montesquieu were the most cited authors in American colonial political writings. The Bible was referenced most frequently, however. See Donald S. Lutz, “The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought,” *The American Political Science Review* 78, no. 1 (March 1984): 193–94.

⁴⁴ The “united States” at this time was a union of “free and independent” States, not a single nation, hence the use of the uncapitalized, “united.” This is supported by the fact that “State” is capitalized and was convertible with “country” or “nation” in the 1700s. It is also supported by the fact that the Treaty of Paris was between Great Britain and thirteen “free sovereign and Independent States,” each individually named.

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two reasonings. The first reasoning demonstrates inactivity of flawed liberal metaphysics, while the second reasoning reveals the supersession of it by a sound metaphysical framework.

First, this specific group of founding principles—equality, liberty, natural rights, limited government, consent of the governed, and the right to abolish a government—was fruitful because its application was not energized by explicit denials of certain classical-scholastic metaphysical concepts. Rather these principles were adopted as if their underlying metaphysical assumptions were a specialized subset.⁴⁵ One finds an analogy between the new science of the Scientific Revolution and the liberalism of the Enlightenment.

The Scientific Revolution adopted a metaphysics that sought to study only matter and physical causality; it focused on material and efficient causality and had little to say about formal and final causality that was not condemnatory. While focusing exclusively on material and efficient causality, the new science has been incalculably successful, even though its metaphysical assumptions reject the ideas of essence and purpose as it experiments. Material blessings like the efficient movement of data and communication, medicine, transportation, food access, comfort, and longevity of life grow at exponential rates to the benefit of all. These can even afford consequent *spiritual* blessings. Yet there is also a *hidden fact* about the Scientific Revolution's assumptions and productions. The resolute good of the new science did not arise from a focus on formal and final causality, but it did not come from negating their existence either. The study of material and efficient causality does not necessarily deny essence and purpose. So, the new science thrived as a specialized analysis, the study of matter and agent as a subset of classical-scholastic metaphysics as a whole. One can apply the same metric of evaluating the Scientific Revolution and the new science to the Enlightenment and liberalism in the American founding. Both produced significant goods in their respective areas through a non-rejecting specialization of their metaphysics.⁴⁶

With this first reasoning in mind, it becomes more plausible that the American founding did not succumb to the metaphysical errors of the few liberal ideas present; plausibility becomes practical certainty when the second reasoning is appended to the first. When practiced, those principles were successful in certain respects, despite their tacitly assumed

⁴⁵ There is something to be said about the possibility of unexpected effects from form and telos on an ethics and politics that does not recognize them, but this is a conjecture for future exploration.

⁴⁶ See Nathan W. Schlueter, "[Postliberal Dogmatism and Determinism](#)," *Law & Liberty*, June 29, 2021, in reply to Hanby's philosophical arguments regarding the effects of liberalism's tacit metaphysical assumptions on the founding.

and incomplete metaphysics. There were genuine goods to be gained from these concepts, even if they were insufficient and lacked guiding forms and standards. It is akin to discovering some truth of a poem when reading only the first of three stanzas. The critic may argue that while the first reasoning asserts inactivity of the flawed metaphysics, it does not prove that this inactivity is perpetual. Thus, he might say that this metaphysics is like a live ordnance, liable to explode at any moment. While this dormant threat hypothesis is disproven by the evidence of success in America both leading up to 1776 and in the following decades—especially considering the immediate collapse of French society at the end of the eighteenth century—, there is a more substantive explanation for the founding's real success, lack of swift failure, and absence of that which grows errors into failure with respect to adopted liberal principles.

This leads to a second reasoning in two parts. With respect to the first part, the American founding was a revolution not made but prevented. It conserved a society that valued good principles, good practices, and good beliefs. Even the Declaration's seemingly ambiguous principles were rooted in ancient and medieval sources that had been field-tested over centuries in the British Isles. The colonists and founders preserved a society that believed in the Christian God and His precepts, clung to sage prescription, held to tradition and custom, and submitted to the wisdom of prudence and experience as presented in the conservative canons and principles.

The second part of the second reasoning is that those select liberal principles were influenced and guided by the fundamentally conservative character of American society and American political thought. Through the American founding, the colonists preserved ordered liberty against total liberation, equality under the law and under God's judgement against relativization and levelling, and traditional rights against a wave of vast permissiveness. Those few principles of the founding were wedded to the sage prescriptions, wise temperaments, and conservative framework of American society. While liberal metaphysics provided the founding's select liberal principles no natures or purposes, it was the classical-scholastic natures and purposes implicit and inherent to the founding's conservatism that informed said principles. Conservatism was the chief factor of colonial life, orders of magnitude greater than the admirable sparse liberalism it informed, and it was by that abundance that a curated liberalism was supplemented well.

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The critic may rebut that the combination of liberal and conservative principles with respect to their underlying metaphysics is a synthesis doomed to fail. This simply fails to address the second reasoning; there is not a synthesis of liberalism and conservatism in the American founding, but a supplementation and superseding by conservatism and its right metaphysical assumptions. Even then, that rebutting sentiment seems to both deny the strength of good metaphysics, ethics, and politics to then present only a fatalistic nihilism. Are conservatism and Christianity so weak that they can be overtaken by liberalism without question? This view is both an improbable view of good concepts and a seemingly hopeless one. Those who see liberalism as an unstoppable force may find that Western civilization and Christendom are difficult to build but easy to destroy, like a fragile sculpture under threat of a sledgehammer. Instead, this dichotomy is better understood as siege warfare: an array of bombards against the bulwarks of a city. Either side may gain the advantage, but it is wrong to suppose conservatism and Christianity are too feeble to defend the good life. In the fullness of time, God wins the war, even if America loses battles.

As noted above, the mere existence of conservatism does not necessarily mean that the metaphysical errors of the founding's partial liberalism were inactive or superseded. The truth of inactivity and supersession comes from the realization that conservatism was able to supplement the roles of essence and purpose in a political theory and practice devoid of such concepts—a theory that achieved some truth of its own accord. Conservatism sustains social cohesion, justice, and duty where liberalism cannot. The innate conservatism of the founding serves as a healing concrete poured into the cracks of liberalism's faulty metaphysical foundation, but this conservatism itself is the cornerstone of the founding. Conservatism's substitutive forms and purposes rendered the metaphysical errors of the founding's select liberal principles practically inactive and replaced.

The successes of the American founding were brought about by that innate conservatism, its effects, and that which it affected. The actual and possible negative effects of liberalism's metaphysical shortcomings are no greater than what someone might expect from any other fallible, imperfect, or incomplete idea, institution, or people. Otherwise, to suppose that supremely detrimental effects are inevitable because of the mere happenstance of tacit belief, proven to be feeble, is to consequently hold an ideological standard for man and his creations. This sort of notion reveals an implicit assumption that man and earthly institutions

are perfectible through human device alone. According to the ideologue, if the founding had even a sliver of error, then it would have inevitably failed, never being able to produce the perfect society on earth he desperately desires.

Critics on the Right locate the origin of today's struggles in that deficient metaphysics tacitly assumed by the founding's sparse liberalism. Ironically, they overlook the tacit metaphysics of the founding's conservatism and its influences. Sage prescription is olden observation made perpetual for good reason, wise temperament is the experienced heart acting in accordance with its God given nature, and conservative framework is the sturdy home of the tried and true. A metaphysics of conserved things is one of a people that experienced, trialed, intuited, and intellected the successful goods for society. It recognizes the proper nature and purpose of man, society, and government.

This metaphysics of conserved things, canons, and principles is the root of the conservatism that informed both the American founding *as a whole* and its select liberal principles *as particulars*. These prescriptions, temperaments, and framework were not adopted through abstract reasoning, but first by the lamp of experience, a decidedly Aristotelian approach. The philosophical critic of the founding is often fine to fit Aristotle's pagan ideas by way of Islamic philosophers, but grows weary at the idea that a few good political developments came *through* Enlightenment liberalism and *in* Protestant colonies; the praiseworthy in either comes from good classical-scholastic ideas and good conservative traditions. Ultimately, a true philosophical account must address the conservative structures that *informed* and *gave purpose to* the founding's partial liberalism—which achieved some success by its own merits, especially with the help of conservatism's metaphysical assumptions.

In explaining why the American founding prospered with select liberal principles, the greater of the two reasonings presented is that the American founders sought to conserve something proper and familiar to themselves. What they conserved was successfully battle-tested and rooted in good metaphysics and the transcendent order as described by Kirk. Conversely, the French Revolution was a radical destruction of society, not just an alteration of government. Liberal principles without proper guidance will either become ideological commandments or deepen in error instead of being transformed well. Active error can corrupt a good people and ideologues can bring about great disaster: the radicalism in their

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hearts animates swift destruction. Sadly, America seems to continue to lose the goods it once preserved. This is in part due to Americans'—and especially intellectual conservatives'—blindness towards the conservatism of the founding. Many Americans and many intellectual conservatives blindly confuse the American founding for a liberal enterprise, but liberalism, on further inspection, is more orthogonal to the founding than previously thought.

CONCLUSION

Returning to the original question, is the American founding at fault for the growing reign of isolated individualism, libertine morals, majoritarian tyranny, harmful market practices, state-coerced markets, and engulfing centralization in America today? Postliberals and their fellow travelers usually place the fault in the founding because they see it as the embodiment of liberalism. Disproving the contention that the founding is fundamentally liberal where liberalism can cause societal dissolution does not preclude the possibility that the founding was the root cause of societal collapse through different means. While this paper does not delve into other possible causes of today's problems, it does suggest that they are intimately connected to the development of rash majorities formed in colossal electorates, the turning of the Declaration of Independence into an ideological tract, and the erosion of federalism, none of which is integral to or present in the founding. In fact, these were all real fears that the founders took seriously.

Looking to the contents of the Declaration of Independence and thus the substance of the founders and founding, it is not the case that the events of 1776 are the cause of today's ills. On the contrary, the founding is perhaps where Americans ought to look for solutions. It was shown that the founding did not signify a liberal *project*, a *proposition* nation, or an *experiment* in self-government; it was a people's conservative reaction to the radical innovations of Great Britain. It was a pursuit to maintain the personal, societal, and governmental conditions familiar to themselves for over one hundred and sixty years. These ways of life were not errors conserved, but that which is captured in the six conservative canons and ten conservative principles: the loose collection of ways that make life beautiful, livable, and prosperous. In choosing intimacy over ideals, colonial Americans chose hearth over flames.

The American founding was partially liberal, but its select liberal principles were never divorced from the founding's interwoven conservatism. Rather, these curated liberal principles were truly good political advancements in the American context because their underlying metaphysical assumptions were not rejections of sound philosophy, but were, in practice and effect, a specialized subset of classical-scholastic philosophy. Additionally, these principles were significantly shaped and directed by a conservative framework of personhood, society, and politics. Conservatism's sage prescriptions, wise temperaments, and conservative framework all served as substitutes for the deficiencies present in liberalism's metaphysics, for they provided the essences and purposes necessary to sustain a people and their civil social order.

The American founding was spared a collapse like that of revolutionary France because it was a founding in conservatism. Indeed, the founding marked a milestone of success rather than the start of a gradual decline. Yet, because of the Fall, nothing is safe from error. One should expect no fault of the founding greater than any other imperfect system comprised of fallible people. In fact, with respect to political institutions, one should expect to find *less* fault in the American founding than in other modern foundings precisely because the erroneous metaphysics of liberalism was inactive and superseded by America's substantive conservatism.

The only institution that is free from any absolute error—not in prudential areas—is the Catholic Church divinely instituted.⁴⁷ All other institutions are fallible. If one ignores the good to focus solely on fallible systems and people, or ignores those who manipulate the good into evil, he instead makes the perfect the enemy of the good. This impossible standard errs on the side of ideology, which is to chase the perfection of heaven in earthly political schemes. Conservative Christians accept that man is imperfectible. The statesman is not called to make society perfect, only tolerable—perhaps even a little better. Weaving liberty and order in the trust of tradition and the knowledge of man's fallen nature, Edmund Burke wrote, "Liberty is a good to be improved, and not an evil to be lessened."⁴⁸ Similarly, the American founding is better viewed from a positive, where it has greatly succeeded for the goods of man, society,

⁴⁷ To reiterate, even if one believes the Catholic Church does not hold such a status, it is still true that manmade institutions like governments or universities are subject to mistakes and errors.

⁴⁸ Russell Kirk, *Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1967), 73.

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and government, than from a negative, where it falls short. Upon recognition and retrieval of the founding's conservatism does improvement open her doors.

As he edited Edmund Burke's writings on the events of 1688 and 1689 in England, E.J. Payne invoked Sir Joseph Jekyll, describing the Glorious "Revolution" of 1688 as "a revolution not made, but prevented." Kirk employed this phrase, correctly, to the American founding. The American founding is a founding not liberal, but conserving. It was a recovery of something that had been lost, seized once in the eighteenth century and something retrievable in the twenty-first century. To quarrel over an alleged liberal founding is to strike at the illusory, especially when the harbinger of liberal ideology in the West may be found in revolutionary France. To characterize the founding as such is to forego the true character of it and foster an unwarranted hostility toward it.

The American founding's conservatism was in service of a more holistic purpose, far exceeding the good achieved by its laudable amelioration of the founding's partial liberalism: the sustainment of order, "the first need of the soul" and "of the commonwealth."⁴⁹ Without the normative order of conservatism, the blessings of liberty would decay.⁵⁰ This underlying order points to the metaphysics of conserved things; one finds it in Kirk's adopted concepts of "the permanent things" and the "moral imagination," which profess the existence of right order in life and the sense and drive for such order.⁵¹ Knowing these sorts of verities to have once permeated America, we can confidently say the founders "built surely and well."⁵² By way of its conservatism, there is an inheritance in the American founding; we need only say yes to it. Only then can Americans wisely pursue the good of the realm following the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of American independence.

⁴⁹ Kirk, *Roots of the American Order*, 6.

⁵⁰ Conservatism, being a disposition of life, runs deeper than politics. It is the bedrock and guide of those adopted liberal tenets of the founding. It sustained those tenets insofar as they were successful principles in tradition and continuity. It contains that implicit metaphysics, the metaphysics of conserved things, which perpetuates right form and teleology of life. In all these ways, one cannot have ordered liberty without the order gifted by conservatism.

⁵¹ Russell Kirk, "The Moral Imagination," *Kirkcenter.org*, May 31, 2007. The permanent things, borrowed from T.S. Eliot, are the venerable norms of human nature. The moral imagination, borrowed from Edmund Burke, is that innate sense for the order of the soul and society. Kirk's definition of norms is greatly related to the two aforementioned ideas. See Russell Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things* (New Rochelle NY: Arlington House, 1969), 15-27.

⁵² P.H. Ditchfield, *The Manor Houses of England* (London: Bracken Books, 1985), 6. Like the English manor house, America was built to last. In conservatism, there is confidence, hence the founders "built surely and well." With respect to the metaphysics of conserved things (and the remote influence of classical-scholastic thought), it rings true that the founders were "building wiser than they knew." One can say America was "built" in both ways. See The Archbishops and Bishops of the United States, *Pastoral Letter of the Third Plenary Council* (Baltimore: The Baltimore Publishing Company, 1885), 20.

The Declaration and the World at 250: The Challenge of Globalization

John W. Grant

FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

The 250th anniversary of American independence provides a fitting occasion to consider the fate of America's founding principles in relation to the world. After all, the Declaration was written out of a "decent respect to the opinions of mankind...." The founders thought it necessary to explain to the world the causes of the "separation," the dissolution of the "political bands" or "political connection" between the now "free and independent states" and Great Britain. They held that the laws of nature and nature's God allowed America to assume a "separate and equal station" among the nations of the world. In our globalized time, the separate and equal status of nations is denied in principle and in practice.

A summary view of the founding principles is needed to understand the principled ground that the founders held and which justified the dissolution of the political relationship with England. The enumeration of self-evident truths in the Declaration of Independence begins with the assertion "that all men are created equal" and "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." It follows that "Governments are instituted among Men" in order "to secure these rights." Governments derive their "just powers" from "the consent of the governed."

Other important founding-era documents elaborate on these fundamental principles. In the Virginia Declaration of Rights of 1776, equality is described thusly: "All men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, of which when they enter into a state of society, they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity." The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 asserts that "All men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential, and unalienable rights." The residents of Northampton, Massachusetts, discussing the proposed state constitution in the Return of Northampton from 1780, explained that the meaning of "born free and equal ... is true only with respect to the right of dominion, and jurisdiction over one another." In other words, equality means that all human beings are born free of the non-consensual political rule of other human beings; all men are naturally equal in their power and dominion. This natural equality of

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jurisdiction and political power is the foundation of the requirement for the consent of the governed.

Equality necessarily entails the consent of the governed: equal human beings freely come together to form a government that will secure their inalienable natural rights. The people must have the right to ongoing consent in the form of representation and, if government fails in its duty to secure rights, the right to revolution. The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 provides a clear articulation of this doctrine. “The body-politic is formed by a voluntary association of individuals: It is a social compact, by which the whole people covenants with each citizen, and each citizen with the whole people, that all shall be governed by certain laws for the common good.” The “common good” was understood to be the “protection, safety, prosperity, and happiness of the people ... not ... the profit, honor, or private interest of any one man, family, or class of men.... Each individual of the society has a right to be protected by it in the enjoyment of his life, liberty, and property, according to standing laws.” All the powers of government are “originally in the people, and being derived from them, the several magistrates and officers of government ... are at all times accountable to them.” None of the “property of any individual, can with justice, be taken from him ... without his own consent, or that of the representative body of the people: In fine the people ... are not controlable by any other laws, than those to which their constitutional representative body have given their consent.” Just government requires the ongoing consent of the governed through representation as well as the security of rights brought about by the enforcement of impartial laws. It should be noted that the social compact is exclusive. All human beings have rights which must be respected, but the obligation to secure rights applies only to the members of the social compact.

If government fails to secure the common good, “The people alone have an incontestable, unalienable, and inalienable right to ... reform, alter, or totally change the same, when their protection, safety, happiness, and prosperity require it.” In the Declaration of Independence, this same idea is expressed more boldly. When government fails in its end of securing rights through the consent of the governed, “It is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government ... as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.” When ongoing consent in the form of representation cannot secure rights, consent may be withdrawn through the exercise of the right to revolution.

The natural equality of individuals has an analogue in foreign affairs—the equality of nations. In the Declaration of Independence, this concept is expressed in the idea that the “powers of the earth” are entitled to a “separate and equal station” according to the “Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.” We have seen that individual equality means that human beings are by nature free and independent of non-consensual political rule. The Declaration teaches that the equality of states means that “Free and Independent States ... have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.” States are “separate” in terms of their business and especially their concern for what Washington calls their “primary interests.” The separate character of nations is required for their independence from one another. In short, states are rightly free, equal, and independent; they may not justly be subjected to the rule of other states in determining how to best secure their rights.

KEY POLICIES: INDEPENDENCE AND NON-INTERVENTION

The key foreign policies that follow necessarily from the principles of the social compact theory are freedom of action and non-intervention in the purely internal affairs of other nations. Freedom of action is required if nations are to follow their obligation under the law of nature and nature’s God to maintain their separate and equal station in the world. It is also practically necessary as a matter of policy to make judgments relating to war, peace, and commerce that are not subordinated to the interests of another sovereign power.

George Washington, in a well-known passage in his Farewell Address, advised Americans of the importance of maintaining freedom of action in foreign affairs. “The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little *political* connection as possible.” Minimizing political connections with other nations is another way of saying nations must be separate. A crucial reason to avoid political connections is that other nations have “primary interests, which to us have none, or a very remote relation.” Following Washington’s advice is essential if the United States is to be free to “choose peace or war, as our interest guided by our justice shall Counsel.” Washington understood that America must not become involved with interests not our own through political connections with other nations; eschewing political connections is essential to maintaining independence and hence the freedom to pursue American

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interests constrained only by the requirements of justice. Famously, Washington condemned having inveterate hatred or affection for a foreign nation; this is another key means of compromising American sovereignty and the freedom of action required to secure American rights effectively.

Non-intervention is obviously related to freedom of action; intervening in the internal affairs of other nations is a form of political connection to primary interests not connected to the security of rights or independence of the interfering nation. The Monroe Doctrine further illustrates the importance of policies pursuing independence and non-intervention for the founders and their successors. The Monroe administration declared, in language reflecting the social compact theory of the founding, that as a “principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintained, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.” Since the European nations had a “political system” that was “essentially different” from that of the United States, any expansion of European power in the Americas would be a threat to the newly independent nations as well as “dangerous to our peace and safety.” While the ban on future European colonization was due to the recent expansion of independent nations in the Americas and the threat that European powers might seek to re-establish lost colonial possessions, Monroe acted only because the rights and interests of the United States were involved. Our policy was not driven by the belief that America had either the right or the duty to secure the rights and independence of other nations.

The Monroe Doctrine was not only intended to protect the independence of the United States. It was also aimed at clarifying the importance and meaning of non-intervention in American foreign policy. “Our policy in regard to Europe ... is, not to interfere in the internal concerns of any of its powers; to consider the government *de facto* as the legitimate government for us.” Washington’s distinction between the primary interests of America and those of other nations is intrinsically tied to non-intervention. “In the wars of the European powers in matters relating to themselves we have never taken any part, nor does it comport with our policy so to do.”

It is clear that “internal concerns” has the same sense as “matters relating to themselves.” The internal concerns of other powers, internal because they are not American concerns,

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are most importantly the primary interests of the concerned nation. The internal concerns of other nations include their form of government; this is why America is to consider the existing government as legitimate, even when it does not conform to our principles. “It is only when our rights are invaded or seriously menaced that we resent injuries or make preparation for our defense.” The interests of other nations become American concerns when our rights or our independence of action are threatened; in all other instances the United States should respect the independence and rights of other powers and not interfere in their internal affairs.

This respect for the freedom of action of other nations when they are not invading or seriously menacing American rights is a natural, necessary consequence of the social compact theory of the founding. Equal human beings form nations which are in turn equal to one another in their rights; all nations are entitled to a separate and equal station, bound only by the laws of nature and nature’s God. The equality of nations under the laws of nature and nature’s God can have no meaning if one nation may intervene in the purely internal affairs of another nation; such interference violates the equality of other nations as well as their right to a separate station in the world, to be determine how to secure their own rights. Nations cannot be equal if they are not also separate.

GLOBALISM AND THE SEPARATE AND EQUAL STATION OF NATIONS

The meaning and genealogy of globalism is hotly contested. For my purposes, I simply mean the ideological and geopolitical situation that has existed for at least 125 years where the goal is to have one ideology and a corresponding geopolitical and economic system determine the meaning of the earth. This goal follows from the lack, or the perceived lack, of transcendent guidance. Man guided by only values or what is merely esteemed by man will attempt to create meaning and order and impose it on others.

Various systems with vastly different aims have sought to fulfill the common goal of erecting a world-wide standard of justice and one political and economic order. The goals promulgated in the Atlantic Charter are a useful example. In addition to self-determination, equal access to the means of economic prosperity, “improved labor standards, economic advancement, and social security” for “all nations,” the great democratic powers wished “to see established a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within

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their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all men in all lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want....” Social security and freedom from fear and want are needed everywhere and for everyone. The defeat of the Axis powers is a necessary preliminary step to a world free of fear, want, and aggression. Two decades later, John F. Kennedy pledged to help “the many who are poor” in that “half of the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery....” Kennedy wanted “the citizens of the world” to ask “what together can we do for the freedom of man.” Similar pronouncements can be found in the speeches of presidents from Theodore Roosevelt to Barack Obama.

Responsibility for promoting the freedom of man in general and freedom from fear and want in all nations is incompatible with separate and equal nations. Oversight of the production of such a world does not allow for nations to have distinct “primary interests;” nations cannot choose peace or war as their understanding of justice and interest dictate. In sum, nations cannot be sovereign. They must be judged and guided by those nations who are civilized or discern the arc of history.

Most recently, the COVID situation illustrated how powerful this aim for one standard can be. As Giorgio Agamben has masterfully demonstrated in *Where Are We Now?: The Epidemic as Politics*, authoritarian and democratic nations, federal and unitary regimes, presidential and parliamentary systems almost all tended in the same direction of embracing a state of exception that crushed ordinary life under the weight of biopolitical management that has transformed the right to live into a “juridical-religious obligation that must be fulfilled at any cost.”

On the other hand, the conflicts in the Ukraine, Iran, and Venezuela initially seem to show a divided world. It appears we are still in what James Burnham termed a “struggle for the world” in his book of that name. We see disagreements whose seriousness is demonstrated by the shedding of blood and the expending of vast amounts of treasure. But the conflict is always over which party will enforce universal or global values, and the contesting powers tend to appeal to the same global gods or highest standards. For instance, the Ayatollah Khamenei’s professed concerns for women’s rights and anti-racism are instructive. Both sides in the conflict in the Ukraine vie to label their opponent as fascist, on the wrong side of history. These claims might very well be cynical, but it is important that the different parties feel compelled to appeal to common or at least startlingly similar standards.

It would be morally obtuse to think that the desire for a common moral, political, and economic order means there are no meaningful differences between the competing blocs of nations. In practice it usually makes a very great difference who wins in these situations. In the Cold War, both sides claimed to wish to produce a world free of fear and want and intended to eradicate the old European imperialism. But one would have to be blind to fundamental moral and political realities to think that similarity in the most general goals means there would be no meaningful difference in the means effecting the rights and prosperity of hundreds of millions or even billions of people.

The two distinct trends seen in the overwhelming unity of the COVID response and the conflicts raging in various areas of the world are both opposed to the existence of nations that are meaningfully separate and equal. The demand that all nations conform to newly minted biosecurity measures, and armed conflict between different nations or groups of nations fighting over who will best oversee a world order and give meaning to the earth, are both inimical to separate and equal nations.

The different universalisms do not admit, at least in principle and often in practice, the right to a separate and equal station under the laws of nature and nature's God. The universal ideals of the founders, as we have seen, demanded a separate and equal place for nations in relation to one another.

Whether it is even possible to have a world of separate and equal nations is a very great problem. It is not obvious that the effects of 125 years of globalization can be easily undone. If such a change is possible, it might require a great deal of time and a number of intermediate steps. Avoiding wars aiming at regime change in favor of the current understanding of democracy and human rights would be one such step; pursuing economic policies that allow for relative independence in key matters such as defense and energy would be another.

Doubts about globalization have risen to prominence in the last decade. We will have to see if these doubts can lead us back to a world of separate and equal nations.

The Declaration in the Sermons of the Revolutionary Era

Kevin Slack

Long ago historian Perry Miller questioned what he called the “obtuse secularism” of those who interpreted the American Founding ideas: “A pure rationalism such as [Jefferson’s],” he noted, “might have declared the independence of [Americans in 1776], but it could never have inspired them to fight for it.”¹ He was making a point about the transcendent nature of politics. Every political community must educate its citizens that it is more important than life itself—that it is worth sacrificing for. Aristotle in his *Politics* said that the political education consists in beautiful speeches that inculcate noble images and provide a measure for honor and shame; this he opposed to the education of the vulgar by pleasure and pain. Thus, every political order requires some religious teaching. In the colonial period, that teaching was conveyed by American ministers. Mark Noll reminds us that the average American colonist heard more sermons each year than he received pieces of mail.² And so in this brief essay, we will first look at the Election Day Sermons—what they were and the role they played; how they changed during the 18th century; the teachings they instilled; and finally, the role that the ministers played in the revolution.

The election day sermon was a Puritan inheritance from Protestant England,³ and it was a fixture of American civic and religious life for 250 years.⁴ In Boston, the election of selectmen took place in the March town meeting. Massachusetts citizens elected representatives to the General Court in mid-May. And Election Day, a holiday, took place on the last Wednesday in May.⁵ The election sermons were delivered after the votes but

¹ Perry Miller, “From the Covenant to the Revival,” in *The Shaping of American Religion*, ed. James Ward Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Princeton University Press, 1961), 343.

² Mark A. Noll, “The Election Sermon: Situating Religion and the Constitutional in the Eighteenth Century,” *DePaul Law Review* 59, Iss. 4 (Summer 2010): 1225.

³ Ministers preached sermons before the House of Commons and at the Lord Mayor of London’s election. American political sermons were not just a feature of New England; see William Sith, *A SERMON, Preached before The GENERAL ASSEMBLY, AT WILLIAMSBURG, March 2. 1745–6* (Williamsburg: William Parks, 1746); *The Sinfulness and Pernicious Nature of Gaming: A Sermon Preached before the General Assembly of Virginia...* (Williamsburg: Hunter, 1752); William Giberne, *The duty of living peaceably with all men...* (Williamsburg: Hunter, 1759).

⁴ The sermons were an annual, published event from the Restoration until Massachusetts ended the practice in 1884.

⁵ Election Day in Massachusetts Bay was a civic festival day that included large gatherings, militia parades, and celebrations, especially in Boston. In Connecticut, Election Day was initially held on the second Thursday in May,

before the new government began its work, allowing the minister to address both the outgoing and incoming officials. After the sermon, the new assemblymen elected their Speaker and a new council. Puritan leader John Cotton gave the first recorded election day sermon in 1634. He urged the reelection of John Winthrop. The General Court ignored his recommendation. Sermons were not just reserved for Election Day. Ministers preached on Thanksgiving days, fast days, and other state holidays.

The role of the election sermons was first to instruct magistrates, the new deputies, and the public on their duties to God and the community. They frequently drew on Old Testament themes: the “New-England Israel” was a covenant with God.⁶ Many followed the style of the “jeremiad,” a form of lamentation based on the prophet Jeremiah, warning of divine punishment for public and private sins.⁷ A second important function was reconciliation: to remind the people and leaders who differed over policy of a higher purpose of their political covenant. The religious language—*ligare*, to bind—unified the people in a common moral order. God was not of one party or another. Finally, election day sermons used eloquent rhetoric to craft an image of a distinct *people*—what they were and *ought* to be.⁸ The images educated a certain character type by drawing the affections of listeners to an ideal, worthy of imitation and sacrifice. Jonathan Mayhew, Congregational minister at Boston’s Old West Church, and an intimate of James Otis, John Adams, and Sam Adams, preached in 1766:

Having, also, from my childhood up, by the kind providence of my God, and the tender care of a good parent now at rest with him, been educated to the love of liberty, tho’ not of licentiousness; which chaste and virtuous passion was still increased in me, as I advanced towards, and into, manhood, I would not, I cannot now, tho’ past middle age, relinquish the fair object of my youthful affections, liberty, whose charms, instead of decaying with time in my eyes, have daily captivated me more and more.⁹

accompanied by a large turnout of voting freemen in Hartford. In the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, elections were held on the first Wednesday in May, with celebrations in Newport.

⁶ Cotton Mather, *A pillar of gratitude. Or, A brief recapitulation, of the matchless favours, with which the God of heaven, hath obliged the hearty praises, of his New-England Israel...* (Boston: Green & J. Allen, 1700).

⁷ See Samuel Dunbar, “The Presence of God With His People [1760],” in *Political Sermons of the Founding Era, 1730–1805*, ed. Ellis Sandoz, 2 vols. (2nd, Liberty Fund, 1998), 218: “When God’s professing people forsake him ... it is necessary ... that God testify his displeasure against them, and punish them” to “bring them to repentance.”

⁸ See George Whitefield, “Britain’s Mercies, and Britain’s Duties [1746],” in *Political Sermons*, 123.

⁹ Jonathan Mayhew, “The Snare Broken [1766],” in *Political Sermons*, 261; See also John Allen, *An Oration Upon the Beauties of Liberty; Or the Essential Rights of the Americans* [1773], in *Political Sermons*, 303.

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Mayhew's sermon praised the Boston merchants who participated in a nonimportation agreement to refuse to purchase British goods in response to the Stamp Act, but it also pled for unity with those set against the policy, so the colony might "begin our civil, political life anew."¹⁰

The election day sermons also changed throughout the 1700s. While the New England colonies already had a long history of both self-government and resistance by ministers to arbitrary rule, the sermons of the 1740s and 1750s accompanied changes from the First Great Awakening, or the series of revivals that swept through the colonies.¹¹ First, as the American colonies grew to include more Christian sects, the sermons originally exclusive to Congregationalists began to include others. There followed a convergence amidst theological differences. George Whitefield's 1739-1741 American tour (immediately preceding the Presbyterian schism from 1741-1758) challenged the established ministers who had dismissed the emotional revivals by preaching that true conversion comes from personal heart-change, not one's parents' church affiliation. Itinerant minister Gilbert Tennant warned of an unconverted ministry. Both men supported King George's War as a Protestant war against French Roman-Catholics.¹² But this nondenominational Christianity laid the foundation for a broader effort against the British. On a public fast day in 1774, Connecticut minister Samuel Sherwood said:

There are many good men, of sound integrity, of unblemished morals, and truly lovers of their country in every denomination of Christians. [I]t matters not with me, whether a man be a stated member of this or that church, whether he be in communion with that established in Old England, or in New; provided he be a good man, actuated by evangelical principles and motives, and will stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made him free."¹³

¹⁰ Mayhew, *The Snare Broken*, 261-62.

¹¹ See Sandoz, *Republicanism, Religion, and the Soul of America* (University of Missouri, 2006), chs. 1-3; Thomas S. Kidd, *God of Liberty* (Basic Books, 2010); Noll, "The Election Sermon," 1224: "The key development ... was the combination of fervent revivalism and imperial warfare. From that combination arose the particularly American amalgamation of religion and politics that carried the colonies toward independence..." By 1800, sermons included themes like religious liberty and American exceptionalism; see Thomas Baldwin, *A Sermon, delivered before His Excellency Caleb Strong, esq., governor...* (Boston: Young & Minns, 1802).

¹² Gilbert Tennant, *The late association for defence, farther encouraged, or, Defensive war defended* (Philadelphia: Franklin and Hall, 1748); Whitefield, "Britain's Mercies," 126: "So that if the Lord had not been on our side, Great Britain, not to say America, would, in a few weeks, or months, have been an Aceldama, a field of blood."

¹³ Samuel Sherwood, "Scriptural Instructions to Civil Rulers [1774]," *Political Sermons*, 377-80, preached to the "Freemen" of Connecticut that all denominations, even "those who have gone off from the scheme and plan of religion professed by the first fathers of this country," had common cause to defend the "Civil government" (403-404).

Moreover, American Catholics and Protestants (even Baptists) could agree on a natural law that included the right to conscience.¹⁴ In 1773 Charles Carroll, whose brother John would become the first American Catholic bishop, waged a pamphlet war against Tory Daniel Dulany in making the case for Catholic Whiggism and natural rights. In 1779, Boston Baptist pastor Samuel Stillman was the first non-congregationalist invited to deliver the Election Day sermon.

Second, the Election Day sermons began to synthesize sources from philosophy and theology to educate a coherent political theory, what Thomas Jefferson called the “common sense” of the Revolution. They supplemented references to the Old Testament with writers like Locke, Sidney, and Hoadley. Both reason and revealed Scripture, preached Benjamin Colman, demonstrate a “Supream Governour of the World,” who has ordered both the natural and the moral worlds by his law.¹⁵ In appealing to both the laws of Nature and Nature’s God, the Americans provided a resolution to the problem of the conflicting authorities of Church and State. In the words of Thomas G. West, it taught “political obligation on a new basis consistent with Christianity’s universal claim but independent of any particular religious sect. The God of all mankind could now be the God of a particular political community. For if natural liberty and natural law come from God, only one kind of community will satisfy God’s law: a consent-based republic protecting the equal liberty of all.”¹⁶ Citizens could fight for their country in good conscience, but free of sectarian fanaticism.

Finally, Election Day sermons provided a shared religious-political language to shape the character of the citizens. Here the underlying emotions are more important than the logic. Ellis Sandoz noted that Patrick Henry’s cry, “Give me liberty or give me death!” is not a syllogism. This teaching imbued a view of human nature. Samuel Cooper preached, “We want not ... a special revelation from heaven to teach us that men are born equal and free; that no man has a natural claim of dominion over his neighbours, nor one nation any such claim upon another.”¹⁷ Numerous ministers preached that the “state of nature” preceding civil government is a state of equality. Certainly there were inequalities—“It is never expected,”

¹⁴ On “liberty of conscience,” Sherwood, “Scriptural Instructions,” 404; Isaac Backus, “An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty [1773],” *Political Sermons*, 362: “that dearest of all rights, equal liberty of conscience.”

¹⁵ Benjamin Colman, “Government the Pillar of the Earth [1730],” *Political Sermons*, 19.

¹⁶ Thomas G. West, “Foreword,” Algernon Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government* (Liberty Fund, 1996), xxiii.

¹⁷ Samuel Cooper, “A Sermon on the Day of the Commencement of the Constitution [1780],” *Political Sermons*, 637.

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preached Zabdiel Adams, “that all should be philosophers.”¹⁸ Or in the words of Elisha Williams, “We are born free as we are born rational. Not that we have actually the exercise of either as soon as born; age that brings one, brings the other too.”¹⁹ All are equal who possess the reason to know their equal rights and duties under the moral natural law.²⁰ Thus liberty could not be license. “The law of nature which bounds this liberty, forbids all injustice and wickedness, allows no man to injure another in his person or property, or to destroy his own life.”²¹ Ministers found an analogy between our natural rights and duties in the Golden Rule, “The law of GOD directs us to do unto others, as we would they should do unto us.”²² Upon this basis of equality was grounded the unalienable natural rights to life, liberty, and property. “All are born thus naturally equal,” preached Williams, “with an equal right to their persons; so also with an equal right to their preservation”: “And every man having a property in his own person, the *labour of his body and the work of his hands* are properly his own, to which no one has a right but himself.”²³ This right to property extended to include the Americans’ right to the soil, over which the king could make no claim.²⁴

Yet human passion overcomes reason. The state of nature is one of fallen, sinful man, thus government is necessary for the ends that God designed.²⁵ “The necessity of civil government,” preached Moses Mather, “aris[es] from the depravity of human nature.”²⁶ Thus

¹⁸ Zabdiel Adams, *An Election Sermon, Boston, 1782: Comprehensive view of relationship between citizens and governors*, in *American Political Writing During the Founding Era: 1760-1805*, ed. Charles S. Hyneman and Donald Lutz, 2 vols. (Liberty Fund, 1983), 555; or Charles Chauncy, *Civil Magistrates Must be Just, Ruling in the Fear of God* [1747], *Political Sermons*, 152: “Every man is not fit to have the sword of justice put into his hands.”

¹⁹ Elisha Williams, *The Essential Rights and Liberties of Protestants* [1744], *Political Sermons*, 56.

²⁰ See Zabdiel Adams, *An Election Sermon*, 554-55, on virtues and education; on equality; Samuel West, *On the Right to Rebel Against Governors (Election Day Sermon)*, Boston, 1776, *Political Writing*, 413: “is a state wherein all are equal,—no one having a right to control another...”; Sherwood, *Scriptural Instructions*, 382-83. Or Elhanan Winchester, *A Century Sermon on the Glorious Revolution* [1788], *Political Sermons*, 990: “protected all men in the enjoyment of their equal and unalienable rights, such as life, liberty, property, and the lawful pursuit of happiness.”

²¹ Simeon Howard, *A Sermon Preached to the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company in Boston* [1773], *Political Writing*, 187: “In a state of nature ... God has given to every one liberty to pursue his own happiness ... provided he keeps within the bounds of the law of nature.” On natural law, Samuel West, *On the Right to Rebel*, 413.

²² John Allen, *An Oration*, 305, also posits a fundamental equality, under the “law of nature.”

²³ Williams, *Essential Rights and Liberties*, 56-57; on the “right of dominion over [one’s self] and his power’s and faculties,” Moses Mather, *America’s Appeal to the Impartial World* [1775], *Political Sermons*, 444; John Witherspoon, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Woodward, 1810), 77: “Private property is every particular person’s having a confessed and exclusive right to a certain portion of the goods which serve for the support and conveniency of life.”

²⁴ John Allen, *An Oration*, 310; Mayhew, *The Snare Broken*, 240.

²⁵ Jared Eliot, *Give Caesar his Due: Or, the Obligation that Subjects are under...* (New London: T. Green, 1738), 27-28; Andrew Eliot, *A sermon preached before His Excellency Francis Bernard, Esq.* (Boston: Green and Russell, 1765), 8.

²⁶ Mather, *America’s Appeal*, 445n.

all just government is sanctioned by God, as it conforms to his rational design.²⁷ To remedy the defects of the state of nature, preached Howard, “individuals ... combine[d] together for mutual defence and security; to give up a part of their natural liberty for the sake of enjoying the remainder in greater safety; to agree upon certain laws among themselves to regulate the social conduct of each individual.”²⁸ It was a social compact: citizens part with some of their alienable rights to protect their unalienable rights.²⁹ “There are some natural liberties or rights which no person can divest himself of, without transgressing the law of nature.”³⁰ Catholic Bishop John Carroll appealed to social contract theory: “Americans associated into one great national union, under the express condition of not being shackled by religious tests; and under a firm persuasion that they were to retain, when associated, every natural right, not expressly surrendered.”³¹

Retaining their natural rights, the people are sovereign.³² Or, as preached Moses Mather, “From whence are authorities, dominions and powers? from God, the sovereign ruler, as the fountain, through the voice and consent of the people.”³³ Government is either by consent, fraud, or violence.³⁴ “When government is founded in mutual consent, it is the undoubted right of the community to say who shall govern them.”³⁵ “The people are the right and foundation of power and authority, the original seat of majesty, the author of laws and the creators of officers to execute them.”³⁶ The importance of this social contract, taught the ministers, was that it limited the ends of government to the power delegated it by the people “The great end of civil government, is the preservation of [citizens’] persons, their liberties

²⁷ Chauncy, *Civil Magistrates Must be Just*, 143: “government ... originates in the reason of things.... For the voice of reason is the voice of God. And he as truly speaks to men by the reason of things...”

²⁸ Howard, Artillery Sermon, 188. They retain that natural liberty “excepting what they have *expressly* given up for the good of the whole society.”

²⁹ Sherwood, *Scriptural Instructions*, 382: “created beings ... in a state of nature, previous to their uniting as members of society, have their liberty and free choice to agree upon ... a form of government, and mode of administration in their civil and temporal affairs, as they judge most conducive to their happiness and good...”; Eliot, *Give Caesar his due*, 31.

³⁰ Howard, Artillery Sermon, 188.

³¹ John Carroll, “To the editor of the Gazette,” *The American Museum* 6, June 10, 1789; Williams, *Essential Rights and Liberties*, 61: “members of a civil state ... retain their natural Liberty or Light of Judging ... in matters of religion.”

³² Chauncy, *Civil Magistrates Must be Just*, 166: “Dominion is not founded in grace”; Williams, *Essential Rights and Liberties*, 58: “the fountain and original of all Civil power is from the people, and is certainly instituted for their sakes.”

³³ Mather, *America’s Appeal*, 444.

³⁴ Jared Eliot, *Give Caesar his due*, 31; Andrew Eliot, *A Sermon*, 17: “all power has its foundation in compact and mutual consent, or else it proceeds from fraud or violence.”

³⁵ Andrew Eliot, *A Sermon*, 18.

³⁶ John Allen, *An Oration*, 307.

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and estates, or their property.”³⁷ The key was the people’s ability to remove those delegates.³⁸ Said Samuel McClintock, “In free governments, where all supplies originate with the people, and the authority delegated by them to their rulers, [it] is revocable at their pleasure...”³⁹ Among a free people, sovereignty is recognized in elections. In the words of John Allen, it is the people’s right “to resume that delegated power and authority they intrusted them with, and call their trustees to an account ... and punish the unfaithful and corrupt officers.”⁴⁰ Those whose property was taxed or taken without their consent were in the position of slaves. John Witherspoon connected the defense of property to the defense of conscience: “There is not a single instance in history in which civil liberty was lost, and religious liberty preserved entire. If therefore we yield up our temporal property, we at the same time deliver the conscience into bondage.”⁴¹ Rulers violate natural justice when they act arbitrarily, tax the people without consent, fail to equally enforce the laws enacted, take on immense public debt, or violate the “natural rights” of the people.⁴²

Thus election sermons also justified armed resistance. Jonathan Mayhew’s 1750 *Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission*, one of the most widely read sermons of the revolutionary era, used scripture to support the right to revolution or resistance; it was a Christian duty. The jeremiad became less about how the people had fallen from God and more about how imperial rulers were violating their rights. Moreover, God would punish these rulers through his human instruments, which is why a revolution is an “Appeal to Heaven.”⁴³ John Allen asked in 1772, “For violating the people’s rights, Charles Stewart, king of England, lost his head, and if another king, who is more solemnly bound than ever Charles Stewart was, should tread in the same steps, what can he expect?”⁴⁴ He asked the Earl of Dartmouth:

³⁷ Williams, *Essential Rights and Liberties*, 58.

³⁸ Anonymous Author, PS, 427.

³⁹ Samuel McClintock, *A Sermon Preached before ... the Council ... the Senate, and House of Representatives of the State of New Hampshire* [1784], *Political Sermons*, 808.

⁴⁰ John Allen, *An Oration*, 307–308. Mather, *America’s Appeal*, 446: “In civil government, rightly constituted, everyone retains a share in the legislative, taxative, judicial, and the vindictive powers, by having a voice in the supreme legislature, which enacts the laws, and Imposes the taxes”; Chauncy, *Civil Magistrates Must be Just*, 143, “Whatever power any are vested with, ‘tis delegated to them according to some Civil constitution”; John Joachim Zubly, *A Humble Inquiry into the Nature of the Dependency of the American Colonies upon the Parliament of Great-Britain*, *Political Sermons*, 288.

⁴¹ John Witherspoon, *The Dominion of Providence Over the Passions of Men*, *Political Sermons*, 549.

⁴² Chauncy, *Civil Magistrates Must be Just*, 156, 158; the right to property is also violated by inflation (150).

⁴³ Samuel Davies, *The Mediatorial Kingdom and Glories of Jesus Christ*, *Political Sermons*, 193–94.

⁴⁴ John Allen, *An Oration*, 307; William Gordon, “Foreword,” *Political Sermons*, xiii, mocked, “As if the religion of the blessed Jesus bound them tamely to part with their natural and social rights, and slavishly to bow their neck to any tyrant.”

Supposing ... that the Rhode-Islanders, for the sake of blood-bought liberties of their forefathers, for the sake of the birthrights of their children, should shew a spirit of resentment against a tyrannical arbitrary power that attempts to destroy their lives, liberties and property ... (which the law of nature and nations teaches them to do),” would then “be butchered, assassinated and slaughtered in their own streets by their king? Consider, my Lord, that we must all appear before the Judgment seat of Christ, and that it would be a cold cordial for your Lordship, at the bar of God, to have thousands of Americans rise up in Judgment against you. Yet I would rather this was the case, tho’ I suffer’d death with them, than they should lose their essential rights as Americans. But ... if the Americans unite ... to stand as a band of brethren for their liberties, they have a right, by the law of GOD, of nature, and of nations ... to resist any military ... force...”⁴⁵

Samuel Sherwood mocked “the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance, so zealously preached up by some artful and designing men, who act as creatures of the state, and probably expect high honours and promotions from a corrupt ministry.”⁴⁶ The same principles that required obedience to just government also commanded resistance to tyranny.

Finally, we see the role the ministers played in the revolution. Loyalist refugee Peter Oliver called the American ministers the “Black Regiment.” He wrote that on entering electoral politics, James Otis, the great Boston revolutionary who argued for the rights of the colonists against general writs of assistance, had said, “that it was necessary to secure the black Regiment ... & his Meaning was to engage [the] dissenting Clergy on his Side.”⁴⁷ Christian pastors led the opposition when governors dismissed colonial assemblies.⁴⁸ Leading resistance to the 1765 Stamp Act were the Reverends Andrew Eliot, Charles Chauncey, Samuel Cooper, and Jonathan Mayhew.⁴⁹ Mayhew in 1766 preached a Thanksgiving Day sermon after the repeal of the “unconstitutional, oppressive, grievous [and] ruinous” Stamp Act. He exhorted the preservation of the colonists “enjoyment of their ancient rights and

⁴⁵ John Allen, *An Oration*, 312-13.

⁴⁶ Sherwood, *Scriptural Instructions*, 396; see Samuel West, *On the Right to Rebel*, 412-13.

⁴⁷ Peter Oliver, *Peter Oliver’s Origin & Progress of the American Rebellion: A Tory View*, eds. Douglass Adair and John A. Schutz (Stanford University Press, 1961), 29, 41-45; on the “black regiment,” “An American Merchant,” *Boston Gazette*, December 7, 1772, 2; Z.Z., *Boston Weekly Newsletter*, January 11, 1776, 2; “Dialogue between a Pensioner and a Divine,” *Boston Gazette*, July 25, 1768: “the Clergy interest themselves too much in the political Dispute of the Day. The Gentlemen in Crape have no Right to intermediate in such Things. But Otis says he could not carry his Points without the Aid of the black Regiment.”

⁴⁸ Rev. Samuel Cooper opposed Governor Thomas Hutchinson’s dismissal of the Massachusetts assembly in May 1774. Others challenged the dissolutions of the Virginia House of Burgesses by Governor Botetourt in 1769, the New Hampshire Assembly by Governor Wentworth in June 1774, and the Georgia Assembly by Governor Wright in 1775.

⁴⁹ Alice M. Baldwin, *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution* (Duke University Press, 1928), 90.

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privileges” to taxation by representation and trial by jury.⁵⁰ “We have a natural right to our own [money], till we have freely consented to part with it, either in person, or by those whom we have appointed to represent, and to act for us.”⁵¹ If property may be taken without consent, added minister John Zubly, one cannot be said to possess anything at all: “those that have not liberty enough to keep their property in reality have no property to keep.”⁵² After the Townshend Duties, ministers held all-day spinning bees in their homes and on their front yards to spin yarn for domestic cloth, and they supported the non-importation pacts.⁵³

The reverends John Lathrop, Charles Chauncey, and Samuel Cooke preached against the 1770 Boston Massacre.⁵⁴ In June, Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson complained to John Pownall: “It is certain that the present leaders of the people of Boston wish for a general convulsion, not only by harangues, but by the prayers and preaching of many of the clergy under their influence, inflame the minds of the people, and instill principles repugnant to the fundamental principles of government.”⁵⁵ Citing the recent Artillery Election Sermon, he continued, “Our pulpits are filled with such dark covered expressions and the people are led to think they may as lawfully resist the King’s troops as any foreign enemy.” James Madison, the cousin of the U.S. president, president of William and Mary College during the Revolution, and later an Episcopal Bishop, sometimes prayed the Lord’s Prayer, “thy *Republic* come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”⁵⁶ As tensions grew, in 1775 ministers like Timothy Dwight advocated America’s separation from Great Britain as a divinely sanctioned cause.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Mayhew, *The Snare Broken*, 241, 239; on vice admiralty courts, see John Allen, *An Oration*, 307.

⁵¹ Mayhew, *The Snare Broken*, 240.

⁵² Zubly, *A Humble Inquiry*, 298; Mather, *America’s Appeal*, 474, repeated the point.: “he that hath right to take one penny of my property, Without my consent, hath right to take all.”

⁵³ Baldwin, *The New England Clergy*, 154–55; Oliver, *Origin and Progress*, 65: “Mr. Otis’s black Regiment, the dissenting Clergy, were also set to Work, to preach up Manufactures instead of Gospel—they preached about it ... untill the Women & Children, both within Doors & without, set their Spinning Wheel a whirling in Defiance of Great Britain: the female Spinners kept on spinning for 6 Days of the Week; & on the seventh, the Parsons took their Turns, & spun out their Prayers & Sermons to a long Thread of Politicks...”

⁵⁴ Claude H. Van Tyne, *The Causes of the War of Independence* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1922), 362; the Massachusetts House of Representatives ordered that Cooke’s sermon be printed and distributed.

⁵⁵ “Hutchinson’s Letters Continued,” *Massachusetts Spy*, August 8, 1775, 4.

⁵⁶ Sandoz, *Republicanism*, 7. Moses Mather, *America’s Appeal*, 473, taught separate social compacts with the king.

⁵⁷ B.F. Morris, *Christian Life and Character of the Civil Institutions of the United States* (Philadelphia: George W. Childs, 1864), 367–68. In August 1775 William Smith, Episcopal minister, wrote, “all our Clergy [in Philadelphia] within my knowledge, two only excepted, have preached on the Fast of July 20th. Some of their Sermons are printed, and more in the press” (*Life and Correspondence*, ed. Horace W. Smith, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Ferguson Bros. & Co., 1880), 1:539).

More than exhortation, American clergy actually fought in the war. Paul Revere's ride was to the home of the Rev. Jonas Clark in Lexington, where he was lodging Patriot leaders John Hancock and Samuel Adams. Hearing of the British regulars, Hancock and Adams asked Clark whether the people would fight, to which he replied, "I have trained them for this very hour!"⁵⁸ According to historian Joel Headley, after the alarm sounded in Lexington: "There they found their pastor the [Rev. Clark] who had arrived before them. The roll was called and a hundred and fifty answered to their names.... The church, the pastor, and his congregation thus standing together in the dim light..."⁵⁹ After the skirmish, some eighteen Americans lay on Lexington Green, eight dead, all from the Rev. Clark's church.⁶⁰ Looking on the dead bodies Clark exclaimed, "From this day will be dated the liberty of the world!"⁶¹ When the news of Lexington and Concord arrived, parson after parson left his parish and marched toward Boston. Some of those who awaited the British along the road were local pastors who led their congregations to arms. Alice M. Baldwin, in her classic work, describes David Grosvenor, of Grafton, who left his pulpit and, musket in hand, joined the minute men who marched to Cambridge.⁶² Or Jonathan French, of Andover, Massachusetts, who left his pulpit on the Sabbath morning, when the news of Bunker Hill arrived, and with surgical case in one hand and musket in the other started for Boston. Ministers, some fighting and preaching, were present at almost every engagement.⁶³

After the bloodshed at Bunker hill, Jacob Cushing preached, "But blessed be GOD, to whose infinite mercy we ascribe our deliverance, who was then a present help. These barbarous savage enemies were put into fear, they were made to flee before us, and hastily to retreat (as wild beasts to their dens) before a few scattered, undisciplined freemen: Not to our courage or conduct, but to God's name be all the praise and glory."⁶⁴ He then roused his

⁵⁸ "Clarke, Jonas," *New American Supplement to ... The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 5 vols. (Chicago: The Werner Company, 1897), 2:818.

⁵⁹ J. T. Headley, *The Chaplains and Clergy of the Revolution* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1864), 79.

⁶⁰ Headley, *Chaplains and Clergy*, 79-82.

⁶¹ "Clarke, Jonas," 818.

⁶² Baldwin, *The New England Clergy*, 162-63.

⁶³ Headley, *Chaplains and Clergy*, 68-72; Daniel Dorchester, *Christianity in the United States from the First Settlement Down to the Present Time* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1888), 265: "Of Rev. John Craighead it is said that 'he fought and preached alternately.' Rev. Dr. Cooper was captain of a military company. Rev. John Blair Smith, president of Hampden-Sidney College, was captain of a company that rallied to support the retreating Americans after the battle of Cowpens. Rev. James Hall commanded a company that armed against Cornwallis. Rev. William Graham rallied his own neighbors to dispute the passage of Rockfish Gap with Tarleton and his British dragoons."

⁶⁴ Jacob Cushing, *Divine Judgments upon Tyrants* [1778], *Political Sermons*, 623.

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audience to enlist, “You were spared, it may be ... to do yet greater service for GOD and your bleeding country, which calls aloud to you, and all its hearty friends, to rouse and exert themselves, for the destruction of the common enemy and oppressor; and to wipe away the blood wherewith this land has been stained. To arms! To action, and the battle of the warrior is the language of divine providence.... Cultivate, my friends, a martial spirit, strive to excel in the art of war, that you may be qualified to act the part of soldiers well; and, under providence, be helpful in vanquishing and subduing the enemies of GOD and this people; and be numbered among those who shall be worthy to wear the laurels of victory and triumph.”⁶⁵

One of the most famous stories of colonial era ministers—largely rejected by killjoy historians but, I will point out, for which there is no solid *disproof*—is that of Dutchman John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg, Pastor of a Lutheran church in Woodstock in the Shenandoah Valley. He rose in his pulpit one Sunday in 1776, not to preach the sermon, but to plead with his congregation to join the fight for freedom. He opened his ministerial gown to show that underneath he wore the uniform of an American officer. Buckling on his sword, he implored the able-bodied men in the congregation to follow his example: “To everything there is a season ... and a time to every purpose under the heaven...a time of war and a time of peace.” One man in the congregation rose to sing [“Ein’ feste Burg ist unser Gott”] *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*. Outside the church door, the drums began to roll as men kissed their wives and then walked down the aisle to enlist. In half an hour 162 men were enrolled. Muhlenberg, who had earned the nickname “Devil Pete,” and his Virginia regiment, known as the German regiment, fought at Brandywine, Germantown, Monmouth, Stony Point, and Yorktown.

When a British force of 2,500 approached the college-town New Haven on July 4, 1779, to enter private homes and desecrate property and belongings, a group of young men agreed to delay their entry to allow the townspeople to flee with their property. Reverend Naphtali Daggett, President of Yale, rode by them ferociously on his old black mare, long rifle in hand. One student recalled, “We knew the old gentleman had studied the matter thoroughly, and satisfied his own mind as to the right and propriety of fighting it out; but we were not quite prepared to see him come forth in so gallant a style to carry his principles into

⁶⁵ Cushing, *Divine Judgments*, 623–24.

practice.”⁶⁶ Standing alone on a hillside, Daggett repeatedly fired his rifle down at the British troops below. Eventually captured, over a period of several hours the British stabbed and clubbed Daggett with their bayonets. Local townspeople eventually secured his release, but he never recovered.

Perhaps the greatest role the ministers played in the Revolution was in supporting the rule of law, both God and man. They were involved in every aspect of introducing, defining, and securing America’s civil and religious liberties. New Jersey Reverend John Witherspoon, for example, served in the Continental Congress, and on over 100 committees, including the Board of War. Ministers served as military chaplains, judges, and on committees to draft new state constitutions.⁶⁷ They participated in the movement for a federal union, both pointing out the flaws of the Articles of Confederation and promoting the new Constitution.⁶⁸ To ratify the new Constitution, dozens of clergy were elected as delegates in the state conventions.⁶⁹ Four ministers were elected to the first federal Congress.⁷⁰

In the Election Day sermons after the war, Christian ministers used the memory of the revolution to unify Americans. Samuel MccClintock preached to the New Hampshire senate, “By this revolution, the rights and privileges of men in a state of Civil society, are secured to us; and we have the precious opportunity, which few nations have ever enjoyed, to take up government on its first principles, and to chuse that form which we Judge best adapted to our situation, and most promotive of our public interests and happiness.”⁷¹ The ministers also continued the task of teaching the principles and proper ends of government,⁷² such as the protection of the unequal faculties of men.⁷³ And of course there was jeremiad. Because the laws of nature were moral laws, with a lawgiver, the only proper support for

⁶⁶ William Buell Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1857), 481–82.

⁶⁷ Pennsylvania’s military chaplain Joseph Montgomery served in Congress and as judge of the court of common pleas in Northumberland County. Rev. Jacob Green was member of a committee to draft the New Jersey constitution. Rev. Frederick Muhlenberg helped draft Pennsylvania’s 1776 constitution. In 1799, Jonas Clark was appointed a delegate to the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention; Rev. Samuel Stillman helped draft Massachusetts’ 1780 constitution.

⁶⁸ James Hutchinson Smylie, *American Clergymen and the Constitution of the United States of America* (New Jersey: Princeton Theological Seminary, doctoral dissertation 1958), 127–29, 139, 143.

⁶⁹ John Eidsmoe, *Christianity and the Constitution* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 352n15.

⁷⁰ Abiel Foster (NH), Benjamin Contee (MD), Manasseh Cutler (MA), and Paine Wingate (NH).

⁷¹ Samuel McClintock, *A Sermon on ... the New-Hampshire Constitution* [1784], *Political Sermons*, 802.

⁷² Elizur Goodrich, *The Principles of Civil Union and Happiness Considered...* [1787], *Political Sermons*, 917: “tho’ all the laws of nature cannot be enforced with civil sanctions, yet every righteous state adopts those ... necessary for the preservation of the public peace, and for an equal and impartial distribution of rewards and punishments.”

⁷³ Nathanael Emmons, *The Dignity of Man* [1787], *Political Sermons*, 900: “In free republics, where liberty is equally enjoyed, every man has weight and influence in proportion to his abilities, and a fair opportunity of rising, by the dint of merit, to the first offices and honours of the state.”

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morality was religion. Zabdiel Adams preached, “Statesmen may plan and speculate for liberty, but it is religion and morality alone which can establish the principles upon which freedom can securely stand. The only foundation of a free constitution is pure virtue.”⁷⁴ A vicious people is incapable of liberty, but will only exchange “tyrants and tyrannies.”⁷⁵ McClintock took the opportunity to remind the New Hampshire lawmakers, “as Virtue is the basis of republics, their existence depends upon it, and the moment that the people in general lose their virtue, and become venal and corrupt, they cease to be free. This shews of what importance it is to preserve public virtue under such a constitution as ours.”⁷⁶ He concluded, “It is of the last importance to the honor of a nation, to maintain the public credit and the faith of solemn treaties inviolate.” For no “No other nation, nor even their own citizens, will trust a people in their exigencies, who have often violated their promises, and defrauded their creditors.” Those without virtue would be ruled despotically. Samuel Wales reminded his congregation in 1784, “But security in happiness is not the lot of humanity. This is equally true of all mankind, whether we consider them as individuals or as united in society. In the midst of all our present publick happiness, dangers surround us and evils hang over our heads.”⁷⁷ Wales reminded them of the vices of ingratitude, injustice, a loss of patriotism, a disregard for civil authority, and the “danger of the evils which arise from luxury and extravagance in our expences.”⁷⁸

Ministers were largely responsible for American education—they played the crucial role of teaching and preserving the religious principles indispensable to civil and religious liberties. There was little strictly secular higher education. The first five presidents of my own Hillsdale College, founded by Freewill Baptists in 1844, were ordained ministers.⁷⁹ In 1860, 91 percent of all college presidents were ministers, and more than one-third of university faculty members.⁸⁰ In 1861 only 17 of the 246 colleges were not affiliated with some

⁷⁴ Zabdiel Adams, *An Election Sermon*, 557; see Chauncy, *Civil Magistrates Must be Just*, 167.

⁷⁵ Zabdiel Adams, *An Election Sermon*, 557; see McClintock, *A Sermon*, 811.

⁷⁶ McClintock, *A Sermon*, 805, 806-809.

⁷⁷ Samuel Wales, *The Dangers of Our National Prosperity* [1785], *Political Sermons*, 840.

⁷⁸ Wales, *Dangers of Our National Prosperity*, 843-53.

⁷⁹ Daniel McBride Graham, Edmund Burke Fairfield, James Calder, and DeWitt Clinton Durgin.

⁸⁰ Warren A. Nord, *Religion & American Education* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 84; George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 11.

denomination;⁸¹ by 1884, 83 percent of America's 370 colleges were still denominational colleges.⁸²

I'll finish with two quotes by John Adams on Christianity and Revolution. Adams later wrote to Thomas Jefferson of the basis of American unity during the Revolution:

What were these general Principles? I answer the general Principles of Christianity, in which all those sects were united: And the general Principles of English and American Liberty, in which all those young Men United, and which had United all Parties in America, in Majorities sufficient to assert and maintain her Independence. Now I will avow ... that those general Principles of Christianity, are as eternal and immutable, as the Existence and Attributes of God; and those Principles of Liberty, are as unalterable as human Nature and our terrestrial, mundane System.⁸³

And in a letter to Hezekiah Niles, Adams described the religious nature of the revolution:

But what do We mean by the American Revolution? Do We mean the American War? The Revolution was effected before the War commenced. The Revolution was in the Minds and Hearts of the People. A Change in their Religious Sentiments of their Duties and Obligations. While the King, and all in Authority under him, were believed to govern, in Justice and Mercy according to the Laws and Constitutions derived to them from the God of Nature, and transmitted to them by their Ancestors— they thought themselves bound to pray for the King and Queen and all the Royal Family, and all the Authority under them, as Ministers ordained of God for their good. But when they Saw those Powers renouncing all the Principles of Authority, and bent up on the destruction of all the Securities of their Lives, Liberties and Properties, they thought it their Duty to pray for the Continental Congress and all the thirteen State Congresses.⁸⁴

⁸¹ E. P. Cubberley, *Public Education in the United States* (Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1919), 204; Luther A. Weigle, *The Pageant of America: American Idealism*, ed. Ralph Henry Gabriel, 15 vols. (Yale University Press, 1928), 10:315.

⁸² Charles B. Galloway, *Christianity and the American Commonwealth* (Methodist Episcopal Church, 1898), 209–10.

⁸³ [John Adams to Thomas Jefferson](#), June 28, 1813.

⁸⁴ [John Adams to Hezekiah Niles](#), February 13, 1818.

The Declaration of Independence and Economic Growth

Bob Subrick

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—Declaration of Independence

When the authors of the Declaration of Independence wrote those immortal words, they did not realize they stumbled upon one of the major sources of economic growth. Ideas matter for economic growth and the Declaration of Independence represents an idea. “All men are created equal” may have been a rhetorical flourish, but its acceptance transforms economic relations. Treating people with equal dignity and respect changes the nature of economic interactions. It shifts the trajectory of a country through a change in attitudes towards business. Merchants no longer have a stigma around them. They are productive citizens. When everyday people view entrepreneurs and private businesses as honorable vocations, or at least less dubious ones, market transactions become legitimate. People began to see mutually beneficial and voluntary transactions as a means to human flourishing.

The idea of dignity as a source of economic growth is not self-evident. Common explanations for economic growth stress capital accumulation, geography, the extent of trade, secure property rights, and cultural factors such as the Protestant Ethic. No doubt these have some explanatory power, but without equal dignity, economic growth plateaus. Capital accumulation faces diminishing returns. Geographic factors such as being landlocked limit economic opportunities, but technological change often loosens the constraint. Secure property rights existed for centuries before the Industrial Revolution began. The less said about Weber’s Protestant Ethic, the better.

Only recently have students of economic growth stumbled on the simple idea that dignity matters. Deirdre McCloskey has emphasized the role of changing attitudes towards private enterprise as a crucial factor in explaining the sustained increase in GDP per capita since the Industrial Revolution.¹ She argues that in Holland and England, attitudes towards business

¹ Deirdre McCloskey, *Bourgeois Dignity: Economics Can’t Explain the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

owners shifted from hostility to admiration. They became respectable. This change sparked the transformation of the economic world.

But how does equal dignity lead to economic growth? The change in attitudes leads to a gradual change in occupations people choose. People consider monetary benefits and non-monetary benefits when deciding on their career path. Part of the non-monetary benefits includes status which confers dignity. For example, some people accept lower salaries because they value admiration they receive from others. Academics, at least before the recent troubles, often accepted lower salaries because of the approbation bestowed upon them by the title of Professor.

This subtle change affected labor markets. The shift in favor of entrepreneurs and merchants yields social benefits. People admire innovators and inventors. They want to become entrepreneurs. They do not want to become people who destroy redistribute wealth. They move into careers associated with wealth creation. They belief that improving the well-being of humanity comes from voluntary trade.

Once dignity and respect have become generally accepted, the virtuous circle of economic growth development begins. Once traders become worthy of admiration, people mimic them. As private businesses rose in status, previously high-status occupations such as lords of the manor who lived off the labor of others fell. The change in the relative status of these groups changes the composition of the labor force. Fewer people spend time trying to legally or illegally capture others' wealth, and more people devote more time creating it.

The epigraph used earlier from the Declaration does not exhaust how it helped usher in an era of economic growth. The Declaration continues:

That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

First dignity and then “good” governance. Unfortunately, the Declaration does not provide a framework for a government “most likely to effect their safety and happiness.” But it does suggest some of the key factors when it lists the grievances that led to the Declaration.

Not all the grievances point in the direction of the policies of a government that would

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provide the basis for economic growth. But some do. These include:

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:

These selected grievances highlight the importance of the rule of law, international trade, predictable taxes, and judicial impartiality. These are all factors of what economists define as economic freedom. Economic freedom allows people to best use their resources as they see fit. They can trade their stuff or they can keep it. If they choose to exchange it, they do not require permission from others on how to utilize their resources. Instead, they take risks based on their personal assessments of likely outcomes. If they succeed, they reap the rewards. Numerous empirical studies have found a positive relationship between economic freedom and economic growth.² Dignity and economic freedom, the core ideas of the Declaration, would become the basis of the economic transformation of the United States from 1776 until the present.

Too often scholars of American economic growth focus on the US Constitution with its separation of powers, checks and balances, and federal structure. For example, F.A. Hayek does not mention the role of the Declaration in American prosperity.³ Milton Friedman argued that “all men are created equal” meant “equality before God”; it implied that the “elite did not have the right to impose its will on others.”⁴ Dignity remained in the realm of politics. For economists such as Hayek and Friedman, political institutions shape the incentives for people to invest in education or in their businesses: they affect the relative rates

² R.A. Lawson, R. Murphy, and B. Powell, “The determinants of economic freedom: A survey,” *Contemporary Economic Policy* 38, no. 4 (October 2020): 622–42.

³ F.A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

⁴ Milton and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement* (Harcourt, 1990), ch. 5.

of return to various activities. But arguably they did not recognize that the role of changing attitudes toward the merchant class affected these incentives as well.

Treating everyone with equality dignity and respect in an institutional environment based on economic freedom unleashes “the creative powers of a free civilization.”⁵ Through experimentation, people learn what people want and how to produce it cost-effectively. They take advantage of the information they have that others do not. If more people become involved in this process because of the widespread acceptance of equal dignity, societies tend to flourish. The degree of specialization increases and so does productivity, and people create things and ideas that no one predicts. They combine existing ideas in new ways that create ever more innovations and inventions. Prosperity continues.

Sustained economic growth in the United States did not happen due to randomness. Nor was it pre-ordained. Its foundational text stressed the equal dignity of humanity. It rebelled against a society based on hierarchy. It condemned limitations on economic freedom. Instead, it offered a vision for a prosperous society that social scientists have only begun to appreciate.

⁵ Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, ch. 2.

Foreign Policy Principles of The Declaration of Independence

Thomas G. West

What are the foreign policy principles of the Declaration? Do they lead inevitably to America's recent policy of world-wide interventionism, as some say? Or, as others ask, does the Declaration contain any foreign policy principles at all?

It is often said that as soon as America became a major power, these principles led directly to today's so called "rules-based international order," in which America strives to impose its version of liberalism on the world. Stephen Walt writes: "John Quincy Adams may have recognized that the early republic was too weak to 'go out in search for monsters to destroy,' but the temptation to spread liberal ideals became more alluring as the United States grew stronger. Once the country stood at the pinnacle of power, it was impossible to resist."¹

To respond to this typical modern error, I will quickly summarize the political theory of the Declaration of Independence and then turn to its bearing on foreign policy.

PRINCIPLES: "created equal"; "laws of nature"; "secure these rights"; "consent"

To begin: "All men are created equal." Or, as paraphrased in Virginia's Bill of Rights, "by nature equally free and independent." From this equal natural liberty, specific rights and duties follow. First, in the Declaration, all human beings everywhere are endowed with inalienable rights. Second, all are equally duty bound to respect those rights in others. In the founders' language, the "laws of nature and of nature's God" are both the source of those rights AND establish moral limits on their exercise of those rights. Liberty is not license. All have a right to liberty, but no one has a right to take liberty away from another by ruling him without his consent.

We need government "to secure these rights" because outside of government, our rights are insecure, and our duties are not enforced. Hamilton explains: "Why has government been instituted at all? Because the passions of men will not conform to the dictates of reason

¹ Stephen Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2018), paraphrasing John Mearsheimer. Also Robert Kagan, *The Jungle Grows Back* (New York: Vintage, 2018).

and justice, without constraint” (*Federalist* 15). Madison adds: “in a state of nature, ... the weaker individual is not secured against the violence of the stronger” (*Federalist* 51). It follows, as the Declaration says, that “to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from consent of the governed.”

Why must governments derive their just powers from consent? If we are born free, then voluntary agreement, consent, can be the only basis of the “just powers of government.” Slaves are ruled without their consent. But who is doing the consenting? “The governed.” The rights of mankind belong to everyone everywhere. But the consenters are only those who (as it were) secede from the rest of the human race and choose to subject themselves to be governed by a particular government. The preamble of the 1780 Massachusetts Constitution explains: “The body politic is formed by a voluntary association of individuals: It is a social compact, by which the whole people covenants with each citizen, and each citizen with the whole people, that all shall be governed by certain laws for the common good.” The social compact is for citizens only, “the individuals who compose it.” Americans are no more responsible for securing the inalienable rights of Libyans or Ukrainians than Libyans or Ukrainians are for securing the rights of Americans.

FOREIGN POLICY CONSEQUENCES

The Declaration of Independence does not describe the distinctive roles of foreign and domestic policy in securing our rights. Here the Massachusetts Constitution preamble is helpful. It clarifies government’s specific duties in both areas. Government’s first task, which Massachusetts states as the sole purpose of foreign policy, is “to secure the existence of the body politic, [and] to protect it.” This is immediately followed by a statement of government’s sole domestic policy task: “to furnish the individuals who compose it with the power of enjoying ... their natural rights and the blessings of life.” The first task, protection of the society’s very being from external harm, is obviously the condition for the second but higher task. The protection of life, liberty, and property against harm from other citizens, most importantly by means of criminal and civil law, enables the enjoyment of “the blessings of life.”

The Declaration vividly portrays the existential importance of foreign policy in its complaints against the king of Britain. He has declared us “out of his protection and [is]

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waging war against us.” “He has ... burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.” He has “constrained our fellow citizens ... to bear arms against their country.” That is, he has violated the fundamental duty of government, “to secure these rights,” not only by failing to protect the natural rights of “the *lives* of our people,” the *liberty* of our “fellow citizens,” and our *property* (“burnt our towns”), but worse, by treating us instead as his enemy, going to war to deprive us of these rights.

In contrast with the Declaration’s focus on “securing these rights” for citizens only as the sole purpose of foreign policy is the later view that it is America’s responsibility to secure these and many other rights for the whole world. Franklin Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms included the mission to establish freedom from want and freedom from fear “everywhere in the world.”² President Eisenhower echoed FDR’s pledge when he called on “all peaceful nations to a new kind of war. This would be a declared total war, not upon any human enemy but upon the brute forces of poverty and need.” This, said Eisenhower, is “the greatest task” of foreign policy.³ These sentiments have been echoed by almost all presidents since then.

“Separate and equal station”; “things which independent states may of right do”

Sovereignty—complete independence in the conduct of all policies foreign and domestic—is a necessary consequence of the founders’ theory of consent as the only legitimate basis of government. Either we rule ourselves or others rule us. The United States, says the Declaration, are ready “to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature’s God entitle them.” That “separate and equal station” must be respected by Britain and other nations, without leave or hindrance. Composed of individuals “created equal” who are now citizens, the United States therefore have a right to retain the original freedom of its members by acting collectively as a nation free from any obligation to any other nation in the world. Near the end of the Declaration, the conclusion is made explicit: “as free and independent states, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do.”

² Franklin Roosevelt, Annual Message to Congress, January 6, 1941.

³ Dwight D. Eisenhower, “The Chance for Peace,” April 16, 1953.

War is a necessary instrument of national policy to resist attack. The “full power to levy war” is a necessary ingredient of national sovereignty. The Massachusetts Constitution, describing the need for a state militia, explains the connection between war and security of natural rights: the governor must be ready “to assemble in martial array, and put in warlike posture, the inhabitants thereof, and ... to kill ... and conquer,... such person and persons as shall, ... attempt ... the destruction, invasion, detriment, or annoyance of this Commonwealth.”

The power to “contract alliances” also follows from the sovereign right of national defense. Mutual defense agreement with other nations can be useful in wartime. And the power to “levy war” must include the power to end a war, to “make peace” through negotiations and diplomacy. All of this is to be in the service of the overall purpose of government, “to secure these rights” by protecting the nation from foreign threats and attack.

“Enemies in war, in peace friends”

The right to national sovereignty is also a duty to recognize other nations’ sovereignty. In the language of the Declaration, the “laws of nature and of nature’s God” affirm a right of America to “assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature’s God entitle them.” A reciprocal American duty to other nations follows from the same principle. Britain and all other countries also must be given the respect due to “free and independent states.”

Toward the end, the Declaration sums up the proper understanding of America’s relations with other nations in this phrase: “enemies in war, in peace friends.” In other words, as long as you are not attacking us, we will treat you as “friends.” This applies even if we believe your government fails to protect the liberties of your own subjects, or if your government is engaging in unjust war with its neighbors.

Two maxims follow. First, a presumption of *non-interventionism*. No American imperialism or involvement in the internal affairs of other nations is allowed—no ruling other nations without their consent and no “regime change.”

Second, a presumption of *neutrality*. When other nations are at war with each other, America is obliged to remain neutral. The only exception would be if another nation’s conduct threatens or harms America’s territory, people, or government.

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In the 1790s debate over whether America should support the French revolution, the founders strongly endorsed the non-intervention principle. The French, wrote Hamilton, “declare that they will grant fraternity and assistance to every people who wish to recover their liberty.” This “extraordinary decree amounted exactly to ... an interference by one nation in the internal government of another.... This decree was little short of a declaration of war against all nations having princes and privileged classes.” Jefferson also denounced the French for “endeavoring to force liberty on their neighbors in their own form.”⁴ Thirty years later, the Monroe Doctrine explicitly renounced any idea that America would involve itself in European affairs, as long as they were no threat to us.

That policy held until 1917. As Wilson said in his War Message to Congress, America’s object in this war is not primarily to defend itself as a nation. No, “Our object ... is to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power.” Our only goal is “for a universal dominion of right.” As Hamilton said in *Federalist* 6, only a man “far gone in utopian expectations” could engage in such a “deceitful dream of a golden age.” In the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, Calvin Coolidge, following Wilson’s lead, pledged that the United States would never again to engage in war “as an instrument of national policy.” Implied is that wars fought as an instrument of *international* policy—wars “for a universal dominion of right”—are permitted. Of course, the United States has fought a number of wars since then, and many of them did serve America’s national defense. But the view that foreign policy must serve the interests of the whole world, and not only the United States, continues to inform that policy up to the present.

In sum, then, the founders would be called “nationalists” or “isolationists” in today’s pejorative use of those terms. They prioritized the American nation. They did not believe that the social compact authorizes government to concern itself with the internal affairs of other nation by replacing “autocratic power” with democracy. Nor was government authorized to interfere in the wars of other nations, as long as those wars did not threaten or harm America.

⁴ Alexander Hamilton, *Pacificus* No. 2, July 3, 1793; Jefferson to Thomas Randolph, June 24, 1793.

LAW OF NATIONS

The U.S. Constitution implicitly adopts the political theory of the Declaration in its foreign policy. The purpose of foreign policy is announced in its preamble: “to provide for the common defense.” And there is a near-explicit reference to the social compact theory of the Declaration in Article I, where Congress is given the power “to define and punish ... offences against the law of nations.” The *law of nations* was then understood as a legal term of art that refers directly to the founders’ social compact theory. In this clause, the law of nations is taken to be authoritative.

Today, this clause is little noticed and less understood. Eugene Kontorovich, a modern scholar, writes, “The term ‘law of nations’ is synonymous with what is today called ‘customary international law.’ These rules,” he continues, “are created not by treaty, but by the general consent and practice of states through their mutual dealings.”⁵ In other words, the law of nations, in today’s view, is wholly conventional, not based on any principles of right outside itself. That was not the founders’ view.

The authorities that the framers most often consulted argued that the law of nations is grounded in the law of nature. Blackstone’s *Commentaries* was the most quoted book on politics in America in the 1790s. He explains that the law of nations has two sources: first, “the rules of natural law,” and second, “mutual compacts, treaties, leagues, and agreements” between nations. The second source is what Kantorowicz calls the law of nations—purely voluntary agreements among nations. But the first source of the law of nations is natural law. Blackstone adds that when it comes to the interpretation of treaties and agreements, “we have no other rule to resort to, but the law of nature; being the only one to which all the communities are equally subject.”⁶

Emer de Vattel explains more fully than Blackstone how the law of nations is grounded in the law of nature.⁷ His *Law of Nations* was probably the book most often consulted on this subject during the founding era.⁸ I quote Vattel here to show the tight connection between

⁵ Eugene Kontorovich, “Offenses Against the Law of Nations Clause,” *Heritage Guide to the Constitution*, 3rd ed., ed. Josh Blackman and John Malcolm (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2025), 192.

⁶ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, orig. pub.1765 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), Introduction, sec. 2.

⁷ Emer de Vattel, *The Law of Nations, Or, Principles of the Law of Nature*, 1758 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008); quotations are taken from the Introduction.

⁸ Bernard Natelson, “The Power to Restrict Immigration and the Original Meaning of the Constitution’s Define and Punish Clause,” *British Journal of American Legal Studies* 11, no. 2 (2022): 220.

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reasoning behind the founders' conception of the law of nations and the political theory of the Declaration. Vattel begins with the Declaration's principle of natural equality and the laws of nature:

all men inherit from nature a perfect liberty and independence, of which they cannot be deprived without their own consent.... As men are subject to the laws of nature,—and as their union in civil society cannot have exempted them from the obligation to observe those laws, since by that union they do not cease to be men,—the entire nation, whose common will is but the result of the united wills of the citizens, remains subject to the laws of nature, and is bound to respect them in all her proceedings.... We must therefore apply to nations the rules of the law of nature, in order to discover what their obligations are, and what their rights: consequently, the *law of nations* is originally no other than the *law of nature applied* to nations.

From this premise, Vattel goes on to deduce the basic rights and duties of nations towards each other:

[N]ations composed of men, and considered as so many free persons living together in the state of nature, are naturally equal, and inherit from nature the same obligations and rights. Power or weakness does not in this respect produce any difference. A dwarf is as much a man as a giant; a small republic is no less a sovereign state than the most powerful kingdom....

The consequence, says Vattel, is that

a nation then is mistress of her own actions so long as they do not affect the proper and perfect rights of any other nation.... If she makes an ill use of her liberty [in her internal or foreign policy], she is guilty of a breach of duty; but other nations are bound to acquiesce in her conduct, since they have no right to dictate to her.

Vattel anticipates here the non-intervention and neutrality policies called for by the Declaration, based on the right of every nation to a “separate and equal station”—the right to national sovereignty. This principle has been routinely violated by America since 1898, when the Spanish-American War was waged to stop Spanish mistreatment of Cubans and to uplift the supposedly backward Filipinos into modern civilization.

On the basis of the same natural law arguments, Vattel concludes that morally just war must be defensive war: The “consequence of [my] premisses is, that if a nation takes up arms when she has received no injury, nor is threatened with any, she undertakes an unjust war.

Those alone, to whom an injury is done or intended, have a right to make war.” In other words, “enemies in war, in peace friends” is the proper stance of nations toward each other.

CONCLUSION

Today’s international relations theorists tend to argue that there are two leading foreign policy approaches: realism and idealism. “Realists” sacrifice morality to self-interest. “Idealists” prioritize a nation’s moral duties to the world over its own interest. Although the founders have sometimes been called realists because of their hard-headed and unapologetic concern with national defense, it is nevertheless true that they were idealists in their sincere attempt to ground foreign policy on principles of justice. Their understanding of the law of nations means that they conceived nations to be bound by genuine moral duties.

Hamilton provides a clear example in an essay arguing for repayment of America’s Revolutionary War debts owed to European nations. Hamilton writes,

The established rules of morality and justice are applicable to nations as well as to individuals; that the former as well as the latter are bound to keep their promises, to fulfil their engagements, to respect the rights of property which others have acquired under contracts with them. Without this, there is an end of all distinct ideas of right or wrong justice or injustice in relation to Society or Government. There can be no such thing as rights—no such thing as property or liberty.... Every thing must float on the variable and vague opinions of the Governing party of whomsoever composed.⁹

This is as remarkable a rejection of “realism” as one could wish. But it was the same Hamilton who “realistically” warned that wars will always be with us, and that only a “deceitful dream” would lead a nation to base its foreign policy on anything other than protection of the life, liberty, and property of American citizens.

⁹ Hamilton, *The Vindication*, no. 3, 1792.

Suiting the “Relish of our Minds”: Locke’s Account of Reason and Happiness

Michael Driscoll

*John Locke is widely regarded as a defender of the right of individuals to pursue happiness, but scholars disagree about whether Locke imposes any limits on that pursuit or if he thinks the pursuit should be informed by any other consideration or standard. The range of interpretations is as wide as can be, with some arguing that Locke does not provide any such standard, while others say that he is a bona fide natural lawyer. An additional wrinkle, especially challenging to those who hold the latter position, is Locke’s famous rejection of a highest good. In this paper, I provide an interpretation of Locke’s treatment of happiness in the *Essay* that seeks to address some of the interpretive problems. My primary contention is three-fold: first, that Locke thinks there are degrees of happiness; second, that Locke thinks men should train themselves to pursue higher goods; and third, that his rejection of the concept of a “summum bonum” is not a repudiation of the argument that there are goods that are more or less conducive to happiness.*

I. INTRODUCTION¹

To ask about the foundations and ends of John Locke’s political philosophy and of his natural law is to invite controversy, and after decades of scholarly debate, several interpretive camps have emerged. Some are based on a premise from which, it is purported, the rest of Locke’s political theory flows. For some, Locke subscribes to a politics of “voluntarism” predicated upon the “unfettered and autonomous choice of individuals” and therefore rejects the notion that individuals ought to limit their choices on account of their obligations to their “community,” the “created order,” or “God.”² For others, Locke is a bona fide “Reformed” natural lawyer, i.e., “a practitioner of the Protestant natural law tradition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.”³ Additionally, interpretations differ between those who

¹ References to Locke’s works will be to the following editions and in the following formats: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Niddich (Oxford University Press, 1979), hereafter abbreviated as “*Essay*” followed by the book, chapter, and section (e.g., *Essay*, 1.1.1); *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge University Press, 1988), hereafter as “*First Treatise*” or “*Second Treatise*” followed by the section number (e.g., *Second Treatise*, §6); *Some Thoughts Concerning Education and Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov (Hackett, 1996), hereafter as either “*Education*” or “*Conduct*,” followed by the section number (e.g., *Education*, §1); and John Locke, *Locke: Political Essays*, ed. Mark Goldie (Cambridge University Press, 2008), hereafter as *Political Essays* followed by the page number.

² Patrick J. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (Yale University Press, 2018), 31 and 34.

³ Graedon Zorzi, “Natural Teleology in John Locke’s Ethics,” *The Historical Journal* 67, no. 3 (2024): 387.

make dedicated studies of Locke himself, and those who are critical of liberalism simply and study Locke as “the first philosopher of liberalism.”⁴ To some degree, one can say that interpretations of Locke are related to the author’s feelings about Locke or the subjects about which he writes. To appropriate a line from Locke himself, interpretations of Locke’s political thought are a function of the “Principles, Notions, and Relishes” of men, which are “so different that it is hard to find [an interpretation] which pleases or displeases all.”⁵ For the sake of this essay, I wish to distinguish three interpretive positions that have emerged that implicate Locke’s understanding of ethics and happiness.

First, in spite of challenges over the years, there persists a view that Locke’s theory of natural rights amounts to “all rights and no duties.” This long-standing view has been invigorated in recent years among the so-called “post-liberals” who see Locke, in Graedon Zorzi’s summation, as the “pivotal subverter” of the traditional approach to the natural law.⁶ Such scholars have argued that Locke is an arch liberal whose arguments on behalf of natural rights untether men from all limitations.⁷ One of the earliest articulations of this view came from Willmoore Kendall, who thought that Locke’s argument for self-preservation was “ideological, not philosophical... born out of defiance of the norms of philosophical discourse, because it claims a right that has no correlative duties.”⁸ More recently, in the words of Peter Lawler, Locke’s project was to “redefine all of human life in terms of personal sovereignty, and... to free the individual from all experiences of indebtedness to others, nature, or God.”⁹ Similarly, Pierre Manent has argued that in the Lockean view of human nature, “man and the rights of man form a perfect and self-sufficient circle that contains the promise of an absolutely unprecedented liberation of man.”¹⁰

⁴ Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, 32. Likewise, Ruth Grant, “John Locke on Custom’s Power and Reason’s Authority,” *The Review of Politics* 74, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 608n2, has noted that the individualist view of Locke has been reinforced by studies that “associate Locke with liberal individualism, Enlightenment individualism, or modern individualism.” For examples of such studies, consider Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) and Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁵ *Essay*, Epistle to the Reader, 9

⁶ Zorzi, “Natural Teleology,” 388.

⁷ At present, Patrick Deneen’s book *Why Liberalism Failed* is arguably the best-known statement of this view in the United States.

⁸ Willmoore Kendall, “John Locke Revisited,” in *Willmoore Kendall Contra Mundum*, ed. Nellie D. Kendall (Arlington House, 1971), 439.

⁹ Peter Augustine Lawler, “Natural Law, Our Constitution, and Our Democracy,” in *Modern America and the Legacy of the Founding*, ed. Ronald J. Pestritto and Thomas G. West (Lexington Books, 2007), 207.

¹⁰ Pierre Manent, *The City of Man*, trans. Marc A. LePain (Princeton University Press, 2000), 138. Another recent scholar of this persuasion is D.C. Schindler, *Freedom from Reality: The Diabolical Character of Modern Liberty*

A second camp, antithetical to the first, build on John Dunn in arguing that Locke's political thought rests on a more or less orthodox Protestant understanding of natural law.¹¹ These theorists have sought to challenge the arguments made above, but have struggled to win adherents due to the challenge of defending a Lockean view of natural teleology that, for example, squares with Locke's rejection of the summum bonum.¹² Zorzi has attempted to address this shortcoming by arguing that Locke's view of the human person as a "relational self" can be used to ground a coherent natural teleology.¹³ Yet while Zorzi's focus on man's relation to others and to God helps to refute aspects of the post-liberal critique, his argument has little to say about the reality of meaningful human differences and their implications for the pursuit of earthly happiness (a point to which I will return later in this article). It might be said that the chief shortcoming of this position is methodologically similar to that of the first camp, namely, it puts too much weight on certain elements of Locke's presentation while paying insufficient attention to others.

The followers of Leo Strauss have carved out a third position with multiple variations. Some, more closely following Strauss's argument in *Natural Right and History*, argue that Locke builds his project upon the Hobbesian (or a refined Hobbesian) view of self-preservation with an emphasis on natural rights.¹⁴ Others say that Locke's political thought requires a stronger moral basis and depends (to give some examples) upon a view of man as

(University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 48 and 50, who argues that Locke conceives of the human will as a "self-determining power" that is an "end in itself," which, consequently, makes "the question of God [and the requisite moral limitations such a God would demand]... more or less a matter of indifference." For an argument similar to Schindler's, see Michael Pakaluk, "From Natural Law to Natural Rights," in Michael Rohlf et al., *The Modern Turn* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 89-111.

¹¹ I borrow this categorization from Zorzi, which includes John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke: An Historical Account of the Argument of the "Two Treatises of Government"* (Cambridge University Press, 1969); Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations in Locke's Political Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Diego Lucci, *John Locke's Christianity* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), among others. See Zorzi, "Natural Teleology," 387-88.

¹² See *Essay*, 2.21.55. Zorzi states this problem helpfully (see "Natural Teleology," 388).

¹³ Zorzi, "Natural Teleology," 390.

¹⁴ See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (University of Chicago Press, 1953); Patrick Coby, "The Law of Nature in Locke's *Second Treatise*: Is Locke a Hobbesian?," *The Review of Politics* 49, no. 1 (1987): 3-28; and Thomas L. Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke* (University of Chicago Press, 1988).

a “self-owner”¹⁵ or on the priority Locke gives to reason over custom and desire.¹⁶ As an interpretive block, the Straussians are generally united in their opposition to the first two camps, as they would say that 1) Locke does put at least some limits on human freedom, and that 2) Dunn and his followers conflate reason and revelation and thereby paper over important problems in Locke’s arguments. In turn, the proponents of the reformed natural law interpretation see the Straussian Locke as a “secularizer,” but a more charitable reading might be that the Straussians understand Locke as continuing an effort, arguably initiated in early modern political philosophy, to lower the aim of politics in a way that deescalates tensions and bloodshed that could and did arise from a religiously motivated politics.¹⁷ Additionally, some Straussians view Locke’s natural law and religious allusions as insincere or carefully crafted “noble lies” that place his allegedly novel arguments on traditional and, therefore, familiar foundations.¹⁸

Recently, Daniel Burns has taken a position that rejects the esoteric assumptions of other Straussians and relies instead on Locke’s explicit statements concerning the natural law. Burns suggests that while Locke does provide an argument for natural rights that resembles that of Hobbes, the Straussians err in their effort to discredit 1) Locke’s distinction between the state of nature and the state of war, and 2) his several arguments insisting that all men are in a relationship to “some type of deity” that made them and thus set bounds for their conduct towards each other.¹⁹ Burns believes that establishing the grounds of the natural law

¹⁵ Michael P. Zuckert, *Launching Liberalism: On Lockean Political Philosophy* (University Press of Kansas, 2002). Some critics have questioned how each person’s claim to self-ownership could generate mutual obligations (see Thomas G. West, “Nature and Happiness in Locke,” *Claremont Review of Books* 4, no. 2 (2004): 54. Others contend that Locke’s view of self-ownership should be modified due, in part, to his arguments for divine ownership (e.g., Johan Olsthoorn, “Self-Ownership and Despotism: Locke on Property in the Person, Divine Dominion of Human Life, and Rights-Forfeiture,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 36, no. 2 (2019): 242–63).

¹⁶ Ruth Grant, “Reason’s Authority,” especially 621–26. See also Peter C. Myers, *Our Only Star and Compass: Locke and the Struggle for Political Rationality* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).

¹⁷ For example, compare Zorzi, “Natural Teleology,” 389, n. 12 and Zuckert, *Launching Liberalism*, 12, 14, 153, and 305.

¹⁸ Pangle provides a good example of this approach. After arguing that Locke subtly reinterprets Scripture to fit his purposes, Pangle adds the following note: “Locke continues to employ biblical language and references not merely to elude persecution, and avoid offending pious potential adherents, but also because of his conviction that among the vast majority of men reason, and the god reason discovers, will always need strong reinforcements if it is to be effective as the guide of life” (See *Modern Republicanism*, 150).

¹⁹ Daniel E. Burns, “Hobbes and God in Locke’s Law of Nature,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 32, no. 5 (2024): 1001 and 1008.

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must be done first before scholars can address other contentious issues, such as Locke's hedonism or his arguments regarding innate ideas.²⁰

While recent accounts have offered correctives to many of the problems in earlier interpretations, I think many of these arguments fail to get to what Locke terms the "bottom."²¹ Despite their nuances, these accounts still do not address the grounds upon which Locke's arguments for natural law are founded. Instead, the debates focus on the proper way to construe Locke's various teachings, or "doctrines" as Strauss called them, with many focusing on the natural law. While not a problem in itself and acknowledging that not every article or book can address every possible contingency, such approaches tend not to appreciate the arguments for natural law as a conclusion that depends on other assumptions. For example, while Burns may be a careful reader of Locke's natural law teaching, his argument does not address the ultimate purpose of the natural law. For Locke the natural law, like all law, aims at promoting happiness:

For Law, in its true Notion, is not so much a Limitation as the direction of a free and intelligent Agent to his proper Interest... Could they be happier without it, the Law, as a useless thing would of it self vanish; and that ill deserves the Name of Confinement which hedges us in only from Bogs and Precipices.²²

The argument here assumes that Locke thinks man has some end which the natural law helps him achieve. But by implicating happiness, Locke is nudging us to other places in his writings where he takes on that subject. Hence, it is necessary to address topics such as Locke's treatment of happiness in the *Essay* before addressing his view of the natural law.²³

A few scholars have attempted to specifically address the role of happiness in Locke's view of natural law. Elliot Rossiter argues that Lockean man can identify a path to happiness by reflecting upon his own experience of pleasure and pain. This is achieved through what Rossiter calls Locke's idea of "Convenientia," which says that God sows pleasure and pain into our lives to "function as signposts of divine intent," and to "give us incentives to act

²⁰ Burns, "Hobbes and God in Locke's Law of Nature," 1001.

²¹ See Locke, *Conduct*, §44.

²² Locke, *Second Treatise*, §57.

²³ In reading Locke in this way, I follow the insight of Thomas G. West, that Locke, like Plato, forces you to consider his works alongside one another in order to see the breadth and depth of his thought. See West, "The Ground of Locke's Law of Nature," *Social Philosophy & Policy* 29, no. 2 (July 2012): 49.

morally.”²⁴ Moreover, Rossiter argues that God “harmonizes” the duties that man must observe to achieve heaven “with our temporal happiness.”²⁵ However, despite thoughtfully attending to Locke’s treatment of experience, Rossiter’s approach is heavily dependent upon the same assumptions as the reformed natural law camp and therefore open to similar critiques.

More comprehensive is the argument provided by Thomas West. West argues that the foundation for Locke’s teaching on the law of nature is “his understanding of the conditions of human happiness.”²⁶ When “reason is doing its proper job,” says West, each person is able to pursue his own “idiosyncratic path to happiness” and to pursue “common goods—such as life and procreation of offspring.”²⁷ What sets West’s interpretation apart is his treatment of Locke’s account of human differences and the importance of those differences for the pursuit of happiness of particular men. Moreover, West’s argument for the “idiosyncratic” path to happiness provides the most plausible explanation for Locke’s famous rejection of the “summum bonum” that I have encountered. Still, as I will show, West’s account might overemphasize the significance of human differences, and his treatment deemphasizes Locke’s insistence that men should train themselves to enjoy greater goods here on earth.

Following interpreters like West and Rossiter, this essay seeks to provide an account of Locke’s view of happiness in the *Essay* that can serve to illuminate his teachings on natural law.²⁸ Focusing on the arguments in Locke’s mature works, I provide overview and analysis of Locke’s treatments of pleasure, pain, man’s ability to suspend his immediate desires for

²⁴ Elliot Rossiter, “Hedonism and Natural Law in Locke’s Moral Philosophy,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 54, no. 2 (2016): 210.

²⁵ Rossiter, “Hedonism and Natural Law,” 214. Likewise, Alex Scott Tuckness, “The Coherence of a Mind: John Locke and the Law of Nature,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 37, no. 1 (1999): 86, argues that “[i]f there is an expectation of future rewards for compliance to the law of God, then those who disobey that law act irrationally and in a manner that is morally reprehensible since they are not using the tool God has given them for decision making, reason, properly” (86).

²⁶ West, “Ground of Locke’s Law of Nature,” 2. Similarly, Eric R. Claeys, “The Private Society and the Liberal Public Good in John Locke’s Thought,” *Social Philosophy & Policy* 25, no. 2 (2008): 208, says that Locke is a “‘eudaimonistic’ consequentialist,” who “measures good consequences in reference to happiness” and understands such happiness to refer “primarily to a state of moral well-being of the sort people associate with ‘mature’ or ‘virtuous’ individuals.”

²⁷ West, “Ground of Locke’s Law of Nature,” 49.

²⁸ Due to the scope of my argument, I will not devote time to the natural law itself in this essay, although I will make some cursory remarks in the conclusion. Additionally, many of the scholarly debates regarding this section of the essay are the purview of those studying philosophy, epistemology, metaphysics, and ethical theory. I will point to some of their views in the course of my discussion but will come back to the debates outlined in the introduction when discussing Locke’s rejection of the summum bonum.

the sake of future happiness, and his rejection of the *summum bonum*.²⁹ My key contribution to the debates described above is two-fold. First, I argue that Locke recognizes that there are degrees of happiness that are attached to things themselves and, second, that his statement rejecting the *summum bonum* is not a denial that some goods are better than others (or an endorsement of relativism). Rather, Locke's famous discussion in *Essay* 2.21.55 is an assessment that most men follow their native constitutions or passions, rather than reason, in their pursuit of happiness. However, as I will show, Locke insists that men can (and should) employ their reasons and train their desires, not only with a view to attaining heavenly bliss (as the Christian interpreters of Locke point out), but because it tends to greater degrees of pleasure here on earth. In my conclusion, I consider some unresolved tensions in Locke's thought on happiness, especially the tension between his insistence that men can train themselves to enjoy greater goods and his recognition of human differences and the limits this may place on their capacity for improvement.

To clarify my core argument, two additional point should be stated at the outset. Firstly, my interpretation rests on the presupposition that by studying nature, Lockean man can learn about how he ought to live in order to pursue and attain some degree of happiness.³⁰ Locke says that all the "materials of Reason and Knowledge" are derived from our perception of and reflection upon our "Experience."³¹ If happiness is the aim, then a Lockean approach would begin with an investigation into the "nature of things"³² with the aim of properly identifying the "true intrinsick good or ill" of the things investigated.³³ In so doing, a man might come to understand which activities and goods most conduce to happiness and which accordingly ought to receive his preference. For Locke, a proper examination of the world

²⁹ Two points on methodology. First, I share Burns's concern that some have overstated and taken liberties when interpreting Locke esoterically. Instead, I, like Burns, think any argument about Locke needs to begin with the words on the page, "which even Strauss claimed (at least) was the right way to interpret Locke's works" (see Burns, "Hobbes and God in Locke's Natural Law," 1001). Second, my primary concern is with Locke's mature, published works (i.e., those published around or after 1689). When I discuss unpublished writings, I mostly focus on those that are written in the same general timeframe that help to clarify themes found in the published works. As a result, I do not enter debates regarding the significance of the revisions Locke made to the *Essay*, for example (e.g., Matthew Stuart, "Agency: The Revised Account," in *Locke's Metaphysics*, ed. Matthew Stuart (Oxford University Press, 2013).

³⁰ This is akin to Rossiter's argument for "Convenientia" insofar as Locke believes nature to be intelligible.

³¹ Locke, *Essay*, 2.1.2.

³² In the *Essay*, Locke makes frequent use of this phrase to critique academic explanations that do not adequately attend to the nature of the thing in question, e.g., 2.13.18 and 20. For other examples of this phrase see 2.21.37 and 2.23.32.

³³ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.53.

will prompt man to virtuous action, because it is the surest way to happiness in this world (and possibly in the next).³⁴

Secondly, as a consequence of Locke's insistence that all knowledge comes from experience and rational reflections upon experience, my essay seeks to avoid conflating reason and revelation in Locke's arguments concerning happiness in the *Essay*. Interpretations of Locke's natural law have been divided on this point. As Burns notes, while Locke insists that the natural law is "knowable by the light of Nature... without the help of positive Revelation," many scholars (mostly following Dunn) believe Locke's natural law relies upon "the specifically Christian morality of his age or of his personal conviction."³⁵ In a similar way, while Locke makes frequent reference to the Bible when discussing happiness in the *Essay*, he states in the conclusion to the book that discovering how to pursue happiness falls "within the compass of Humane Understanding."³⁶ Moreover, in the same conclusion, Locke defines "Ethicks" as a species of practical science, which seeks to discover the "Rules, and Measures of Humane actions, which lead to Happiness and the Means to practise them."³⁷ Accordingly, while I do not pass any judgment concerning the reasons for which Locke may invoke the authority of Scripture, my focus is on his treatment of how men can pursue happiness by utilizing reason to reflect upon the phenomena they experience.

II. PLEASURE: THE CORE OF HAPPINESS

For Locke, the essential components of happiness and misery are pleasure and pain. When we say that something makes us happy or miserable, we mean that it gives us some sort of pleasure or pain. He provides the following definitions:

Happiness then in its full extent is the utmost Pleasure we are capable of, and Misery the utmost Pain: And the lowest degree of what can be called Happiness, is so much ease from all Pain, and so much present Pleasure, as without which any one cannot be content ... what has an aptness to produce Pleasure in us, is that we call Good, and what is apt to

³⁴ It is worth noting that while Locke will sometimes speak of the "knowledge" we can gain regarding our pursuit of happiness, it is not "knowledge" in the sense in which Locke strictly defines it in book four of the *Essay*. Many scholars have noted that Locke is fairly pessimistic when it comes to obtaining "certainty" on questions of morality (E.g., Patrick J. Connolly, "Locke's Theory of Demonstration and Demonstrative Morality," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 98, no. 2 (2019): 435–51). Rather, Locke's argument that being a student of nature can help man to achieve happiness, would seem to rest more on his understanding of "Assurance," i.e., the "highest degree of Probability" (See *Essay*, 4.16.6).

³⁵ See Locke, *Essay*, 1.3.13 and Burns, "Hobbes and God in Locke's Law of Nature," 999–1000.

³⁶ *Essay*, 4.21.1.

³⁷ *Essay*, 4.21.3.

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produce Pain in us, we call *Evil*, for no other reason, but for its aptness to produce Pleasure and Pain in us, wherein consists our Happiness and Misery.³⁸

Some interpreters consider statements of this type as indicative of a kind of relativism regarding happiness. For example, D.C. Schindler finds it significant that Locke's definition allows for things to be good or evil based on one's peculiar perception.³⁹ In contrast, others believe that Locke's treatment of happiness is too nuanced and evocative of classical arguments to reduce to simple relativism.⁴⁰

For our purposes, it is sufficient to highlight the fact that Locke recognizes degrees of happiness. The lowest degree is characterized merely by the absence of all pain and the possession of enough pleasure to be content. The zenith, or happiness in the complete sense, is unknown to us, according to Locke. "Happiness and Misery are the names of two extremes, the utmost bounds whereof we know not; 'tis what *Eye hath not seen, Ear hath not heard, nor hath it entered into the Heart of Man to conceive*."⁴¹ Nevertheless, while these extremes are unknowable and unavailable in this life, "several instances of Delight and Joy on the one side and Torment and Sorrow on the other," have provided us with a sufficient grasp of the different degrees (and perhaps kinds) of happiness and misery.⁴² One of the clearest discussions illustrating the different degrees of happiness comes in Locke's discussion of "Love" and "Joy" in the *Essay*.

Locke defines Love as the "Delight, which any present, or absent thing is apt to produce in him."⁴³ Taking the example of grapes, Locke says that man will say that he loves them, i.e.,

³⁸ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.42.

³⁹ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 29. See also James W. Byrne, "The Basis of the Natural Law in Locke's Philosophy," *The Catholic Lawyer* 10, no. 1 (1964), 59.

⁴⁰ For example, Douglas John Casson, *Liberating Judgment: Fanatics, Skeptics, and John Locke's Politics of Probability* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 169, asserts that Locke does not conceive of happiness in "purely subjective terms" and that Locke thinks "certain tastes or relishes simply do not lead to happiness." Likewise, Steven Forde, *Locke, Science, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 120, says that Locke is able to "escape relativism" by distinguishing between the goods to which one would be prompted by "raw appetite" and those that are conducive to more stable happiness. Even more striking, Phillip Mitsis, "Locke on Pleasure, Law, and Moral Motivation," in *Moral Motivation: A History*, ed. Iakovos Vasiliou (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 158, thinks that there is merit to reading Locke's hedonism "within the teleological and eudaimonist perspective of ancient ethical theory" (though he does acknowledge some differences).

⁴¹ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.41, emphasis in the original. The italicized section is quoted from I Corinthians 2:9. While Locke's reference speaks of the Christian promise of heavenly bliss, it is noteworthy that he employs the quotation to emphasize that perfect happiness is unknown to us. To translate the biblical text into the Lockean lexicon, experience cannot help us to comprehend perfect happiness or misery. At most, in this life, men can dimly consider what it would be like to experience these extremes.

⁴² Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.41.

⁴³ Locke, *Essay*, 2.20.4.

“the taste of Grapes delights him,” while he is eating them or when he is thinking about them while they are out of season. However, if the same man by a change in his health or palate ceases to be pleased by their taste “he then can be said to *love* Grapes no longer.”⁴⁴ This statement is instructive for understanding Locke’s view of the pleasures we can receive from “inanimate insensible beings,” namely, that none of them can produce perpetual pleasure, and what pleasure we do gain from such goods is heavily dependent upon our constitutions. Conversely, our love for human beings is of a different character.⁴⁵

When discussing the love that we feel for other people, Locke says that we are referring to the “Delight, which we find in ourselves arising from a consideration of their very Being, or Happiness.” In other words, our happiness is contingent upon their happiness. This is the kind of delight a man takes in the “Being and Welfare” of his “Children or Friends,” whom he loves. It seems that this kind of pleasure is qualitatively different from the delight which a man may take in grapes. Locke says that the delight produced by the love for another human is on account of their “very Being, or Happiness” and is a “constant Delight.”⁴⁶ This is in contrast to the delight taken in eating the grape which provides the pleasure only while being eaten or reflecting upon the prospect of tasting a grape in the future. The same distinction is made in Locke’s description of another passion, “Joy.”

“Joy” is the “delight of the Mind” stemming from our reflection upon “the present or assured approaching possession of a Good.”⁴⁷ Locke again gives two examples, one pertaining to the satisfaction received from an inanimate good and one describing how man takes joy in other human beings. For the first, he says that a man “almost starved, has Joy in the arrival of Relief” even if his hunger is not yet (but will soon be) satiated. This is again in contrast to the second type of joy, that taken in human beings. Locke says that a Father delights in the “well-being of his Children,” which is a constant possession of his so long as his children persist in “such a State” of well-being.⁴⁸ The possession he has in his delight in his children’s well-being is special because it is an endless source of pleasure, “for he needs but to reflect on it to have that pleasure.”⁴⁹ Given his treatments of love and joy, it would

⁴⁴ Locke, *Essay*, 2.20.4.

⁴⁵ Locke, *Essay*, 2.20.5.

⁴⁶ Locke, *Essay*, 2.20.5.

⁴⁷ Locke, *Essay*, 2.20.7.

⁴⁸ Locke, *Essay*, 2.20.7.

⁴⁹ *Essay*, 2.20.7.

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seem that Locke thinks there is a higher kind of pleasure to be taken in one's children or friends by reflecting upon their welfare than in perishable goods such as food.

In an unpublished essay written in 1692, Locke builds upon this theme, arguing that if we wish to attain happiness, we must prioritize the right kind of pleasures:

If then happiness be our interest, end, and business 'tis evident the way to it is to love our neighbour as ourself, for by that means we enlarge and secure our pleasures, since then all the good we do to them redoubles upon ourselves and gives us an undecaying and uninterrupted pleasure. Whoever spared a meal to save the life of a starving man, much more a friend, which all men are to us who we love, but had more and much more lasting pleasure in it than he that ate it. The other's pleasure died as he ate and ended his meal. But to him that give it him 'tis a feast as often as he reflects on it.⁵⁰

This statement is a clear example of Locke's view of the superiority of certain pleasures. Rossiter, commenting on Locke's argument, summarizes the case clearly saying that the person who "forgoes material pleasures for the sake of others obtains immaterial pleasures that are longer lasting and greater in magnitude than the glutton or libertine."⁵¹ While Rossiter argues that acts of charity provide the "the greatest pleasure that can be found in this life," Locke makes other statements indicating that friendship and philosophy should share the podium.⁵²

FRIENDSHIP, PHILOSOPHY, AND HAPPINESS

While Locke does not have a definitive treatment of friendship, that friendship is an obvious source of happiness is evident throughout Locke's career.⁵³ Perhaps the strongest statement Locke makes on the pleasure derived from friendship comes from the dedication of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* to his friend Sir Edward Clarke: "For I know no greater pleasure in this life, or a better remembrance to be left behind one [after his death], than a long friendship with an honest, useful, and worthy man and lover of his Country."⁵⁴ A more

⁵⁰ Locke, "Ethica A," in *Political Essays*, 319.

⁵¹ Rossiter, "Hedonism and Natural Law in Locke," 212

⁵² Rossiter, "Hedonism and Natural Law in Locke," 212.

⁵³ In "Essays on the Laws of Nature VIII," in *Political Essays*, 133, Locke says that the "observance of this [the natural law] gives rise to peace, harmonious relations, *friendship*, freedom from punishment, security, possession of our property, and—to sum it all up in one word—happiness" (my emphasis). Myers also recognizes that friendship is an important component of Lockean happiness and shares my lament that Locke did not treat of it more fully (see Myers, *Star and Compass*, 158–60).

⁵⁴ Locke, *Education*, Dedication, 9.

subtle, but instructive praise for friendship is found in the argument of the *Education* itself. The possibility for friendship between father and son is one of the crowning achievements of Locke's educational recommendations.

Another thing of greater consequence, which you will obtain by such a way of treating him [your son], will be *his friendship*. Many fathers, though they proportion to their sons liberal allowances, according to their age and condition; yet they keep the knowledge of their estates and concerns from them with as much reservedness, as if they were guarding a secret of state from a spy or an enemy. This, if it looks not like jealousy, yet it wants those marks of kindness and intimacy, which a father should show to his son; and, no doubt, often hinders, or abates that cheerfulness and satisfaction, wherewith a son should address himself to, and rely upon his father. And I cannot but often wonder to see fathers, who love their sons very well, yet so order the matter, by a constant stiffness, and a mien of authority and distance to them all their lives, as if they were never to enjoy or have any comfort from those they love best in the world, till they have lost them by being removed into another. Nothing cements and establishes friendship and good-will, so much as *confident communication* of concerns and affairs.⁵⁵

Here, Locke suggests that friendship should be the fulfillment of the love between a father and son. The educational program Locke prescribes is meant to facilitate the son's maturation to adulthood, which ultimately means he is a capable equal and therefore potential friend to his father. By admitting the son into his counsels and the affairs of his life and business, the father can cement the education his son has received, and he can "enjoy" and have "comfort" from his son, one of the persons whom he "love[s] best in the world." Moreover, friends are also companions with whom one can engage in the pursuit of knowledge. In fact, Locke says that it was conversations with his "Friends" that gave the "first Occasion" for his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, and the pleasures that accompanied that philosophical inquiry.⁵⁶

Locke extolls the endless pleasures to be gained through philosophy and the improvement of our knowledge. Locke calls the "UNDERSTANDING" the "most elevated Faculty of the Soul," the use of which produces "greater, and more constant Delight than any of the other [faculties of the soul]." The philosopher enjoys the "Hunter's Satisfaction," because at "every moment of his Pursuit" he is rewarded with some delight. Indeed, the very

⁵⁵ Locke, *Education*, §96, emphases in the original.

⁵⁶ Locke, *Essay*, Epistle to the Reader, 9.

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“Progress towards knowledge” is as pleasant if not more so, than its acquisition.⁵⁷ Locke elsewhere develops a similar point when discussing the perpetual pleasures that can be gained from the study of theology. While some may only have the “time and industry” to study the “most necessary parts” of theology, those with leisure and ability “may be enabled to go on to the more abstruse parts of it, and penetrate into those infinite depths dilled with the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”⁵⁸ On this point, Locke continues in the tradition that sees intellectual activity as the source of the most rarified earthly happiness. For example, Locke agrees both with Hobbes who says that the good derived from the pursuit of knowledge is “Indefatigable,”⁵⁹ and with Aristotle, who says that attached to philosophy are “pleasures that are wondrous in purity and stability.”⁶⁰

However, while Locke suggests that such actions are a source of great pleasure, he also recognizes that most people are not moved to pursue higher goods even if they acknowledge that those goods are productive of more rarified happiness. To understand this dynamic, we must attend to Locke’s understanding of pain.⁶¹

III. PAIN, DESIRE, AND THE IMPETUS TO HAPPINESS

In contrast to pleasure, which is the most elemental part of “happiness” and “good”, pain is the most fundamental part of “misery” and “evil.”⁶² Locke defines evil as that which “is apt to produce or increase any Pain, or diminish any Pleasure in us; or else to procure us any Evil, or deprive us of any Good.”⁶³ Similar to pleasure, Locke says that pain has the “same efficacy and use to set us on work,” or to lead us to choose one course of action over another in order to avoid the pain.⁶⁴ There are two related but distinguishable reasons for which pain motivates actions. First, pain warns us that continued exposure to certain objects will cause

⁵⁷ Locke, *Essay*, Epistle to the Reader, 6.

⁵⁸ Locke, *Conduct*, §23.

⁵⁹ See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge University Press, 1996), Ch. 6, 42.

⁶⁰ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1176a20–28.

⁶¹ My account explores the dynamic Locke describes without attempting to illustrate the plausibility or implausibility of his theory or to determine whether men are free or determined when acting to remove pain or satisfy desires. It is sufficient to note that these are questions of interest to scholars approaching Locke from the disciplinary perspective of philosophy. For example, see Mitsis, 169–78 and Valtteri Viljanen, “[Locke on Freedom, Moral Agency, and the Space of Reasons](#),” *Locke Studies* 24 (2024): 1–20.

⁶² Locke, *Essay*, 2.7.2.

⁶³ Locke, *Essay*, 2.20.2.

⁶⁴ Locke, *Essay*, 2.7.4.

us harm and second, pain indicates that something essential is missing from our happiness. The first concept is evident whenever we touch something sharp: we pull our hand away on account of the pain, which protects us from a deeper and more serious wound. Pain can also serve as a warning that too much of a good thing would be bad for us, since it is “often produced by the same Objects and Ideas, that produce Pleasure in us.” From the manner in which pain serves as a warning, Locke concludes that pain not only protects us from superficial injuries, but it is indicative of nature’s intention to promote the health of each “part [of the body] and organ in its perfection.”⁶⁵

Locke uses the examples of heat and light to show how the excess of a pleasant thing can be harmful to us. Even though heat is very “agreeable to us in one degree,” when the temperature rises even slightly, it is “no ordinary torment.” Likewise, light, “the most pleasant of all sensible Objects... causes a very painful sensation” when it is too intense.⁶⁶ Reflecting on these phenomena, Locke comes to his conclusion about the “end or use of pain.” It has been “ordered by Nature,” Locke says, that when an object would harm us, “by the vehemency of its operation,” the pain we feel warns us to escape to protect our organs “for the future.”⁶⁷ Pain preserves man by informing him about what is “necessary to the preservation of life, and the exercise of the several functions of the Body,” and thereby the body’s perfection. Thus, for Locke, man is able, upon proper reflection, to perceive how the natural order directs him away from what would do him harm. In the same way, Locke says that the pain a man feels when he lacks something integral to his happiness also indicates nature’s intention to direct man to his good.

The passion that motivates man to pursue goods that he lacks is “desire.” Locke defines “desire” as an “uneasiness of the Mind for want of some absent good.”⁶⁸ Such uneasiness could stem from present experience of pain or the acknowledgement of some good that we do not presently have but are “in pain for it.”⁶⁹ However, while we always desire to be rid of present physical or mental discomfort, we do not always pine after goods that we do not possess, “because the absence of good is not always a pain, as the presence of pain is. And

⁶⁵ Locke, *Essay*, 2.7.4.

⁶⁶ Locke, *Essay*, 2.7.4.

⁶⁷ Locke, *Essay*, 2.7.4.

⁶⁸ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.31.

⁶⁹ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.31.

therefore, absent good may be... considered without desire.”⁷⁰ Experience confirms that desire or uneasiness is pain, because when one tries to delay the satisfaction of desire, he becomes “Heart sick.”⁷¹ Thus, Locke says that even “Life it self, and all its Enjoyments” are a “burden” when oppressed by “uneasiness.”⁷²

The efficacy of pain to motivate us to act leads Locke to the conclusion that uneasiness alone moves the human will.⁷³ It is only due to the uneasiness a man feels in his present circumstances that motivates him to change his station. Locke's reflection upon the pain brought about by desire re-introduces the “All-wise Maker” and man's natural condition regarding pleasure and pain. God has put into man “the uneasiness of hunger and thirst, and other natural desires, that return at their Seasons, to move and determine their Wills, for the preservation of themselves and the preservation of their Species.”⁷⁴ These natural desires motivate the will because of their strength; man is not free to ignore them. To illustrate this, Locke points to a man who delights in study, but is accosted by the pangs of hunger. Although his will was “never determined... by the pleasant taste” of food and drink, yet due to his hunger and thirst, he is “presently determined to Eating and Drinking.”⁷⁵ These “natural desires,” as Locke calls them, seem to carry with them their own force, that is, no one needs to be coerced or encouraged to eat, drink, satisfy sexual appetite, etc. For most people, “greater goods,” such as study, do not carry with them their own force.

Consequently, greater goods do not motivate the will on their own. Contrary to the “general consent of Mankind... the greater good, though apprehended and acknowledged to be so, does not determine the will, until our desire, raised proportionably to it, makes us

⁷⁰ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.31.

⁷¹ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.32.

⁷² Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.32.

⁷³ See Locke, *Essay*, 2.20.6 and 2.21.33–35. Locke comes to this conclusion by arguing against the freedom of the human will. However, this does not mean men do not have liberty. For Locke, only agents can be free, so the real question is not “Whether the will be free, but whether a Man be free” (2.21.20). The word “will” stands for a “faculty” or “power,” that denotes the ability of an agent to prefer one thing to another, but there is not necessarily liberty to be exercised in this preference. For example, Locke says that a man falling into water is under the necessity of falling and is not free to stop though he would prefer not to fall (2.21.9). Similarly, the mind of “A Man on the Rack” is unable to focus on anything else despite his preference for comfort (2.21.12). Liberty, on the other hand is “the power a Man has to do or forbear doing any particular Action, according as its doing or forbearance has the actual preference in the Mind,” i.e., accords to his own will (2.21.15). Thus, “will” merely describes the thing a man wants while “liberty” consists in the “power to act, or not to act” (2.21.23).

⁷⁴ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.34. This allusion to God does not appear to be to the God of Christian Revelation, per se. Rather, it seems to be another way of invoking providence or the intelligibility of nature.

⁷⁵ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.43.

uneasy” due to our lack of that same good.⁷⁶ To illustrate this point, Locke provides the example of the drunkard who experiences uneasiness for his “cup” and drinking “Companions,” which “drives him to the Tavern.” This man recognizes that there may be greater goods, such as virtue, financial security, good reputation, or “the joys of another life,” and he even makes “resolutions to pursue the greater good” in the future. However, no good will be able to overcome the strength of his “habitual thirst,” until his desire for drink—“the tickling of his palate with a glass of Wine”—is replaced by the desire for a greater good.⁷⁷ Contentment, and especially the lack of it, proves to be the greatest force motivating the will.

To reiterate what was said above, “the lowest degree of what can be called Happiness” is contentment, that is, sufficient “ease from all Pain” and the enjoyment of “present pleasure.”⁷⁸ This desire to be at ease from pain is what Locke means when he says that only uneasiness moves the will. “Pain and uneasiness,” are for everyone, “inconsistent with happiness; spoiling the relish... [and] serving to marr all the pleasure” we might have.⁷⁹ Thus, the “first and necessary step towards happiness,” is “always” the removal of pain.⁸⁰ Notably, however, the desire to remove pain does not necessarily lead to a pursuit of genuinely higher pleasures. Indeed, so long as man is plagued with the pain of various lower passions, he is distracted from the consideration of better pleasures. Even when vividly presented, the “unspeakable joys of heaven”⁸¹ fail to motivate those enslaved to bodily pain, the pangs of love, or the “impatient desire for revenge.”⁸² Thus, since men “in this life [are] beset with sundry uneasinesses, [and] distracted with different desires,” they tend to satisfy those desires that will remove immediately pressing pains.⁸³ A simple example is hunger, an all-consuming sensation that can be simply removed by eating.⁸⁴

What follows from these reflections is that ordinary life consists of a relentless train of desires that prevent us from focusing on higher goods. There are the “natural” desires such as “Hunger, Thirst, Heat, Cold, Weariness with labour, and Sleepiness,” which can never

⁷⁶ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.35.

⁷⁷ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.35.

⁷⁸ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.42.

⁷⁹ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.36.

⁸⁰ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.36.

⁸¹ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.37.

⁸² Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.38.

⁸³ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.40.

⁸⁴ Consider the studious man described earlier, who is distracted from his work by hunger. See Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.43.

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be fully removed.⁸⁵ There are also “adopted” desires such as the “itch after Honour, Power, or Riches,” which Locke calls “habits” acquired by “Fashion, Example, and Education,” i.e., by “custom.”⁸⁶ With this bevy of desires constantly bombarding him, man is “seldom at ease, and free enough from [their] solicitation,” and is, therefore, unable to pursue “absent goods” that are higher and unrelated to the appeasement of his immediate needs and wants.⁸⁷ Locke suggests that the only way to overcome this situation is for man to exercise his reason.

IV. RATIONALITY: THE SOURCE OF HUMAN LIBERTY

To elevate our minds to greater pursuits, man must exercise his rational faculty and make those distant goods more proximate.⁸⁸ Locke says that this is accomplished, by “repeated Contemplation,” which can provide the good with some “relish” whereby we begin to consider the good in question to be necessary to our happiness and make it “stand[] upon fair terms with the rest” of our desires.⁸⁹ Locke describes the process for raising our estimation of a good as follows: “[B]y a due consideration and examining any good proposed, it is in our power, to raise our desires, in a due proportion to the value of that good, whereby... it may come to work upon the will, and be pursued.”⁹⁰ It would appear that this process is impossible since man could never have the “leisure” for such contemplation given the existence of the many passions and desires that plague his life.⁹¹ However, Locke says that man, as a rational and intelligent being, has the power to “suspend the execution and

⁸⁵ While they serve as distractions, it is important to remember that these natural desires are not bad in Locke's view. On the contrary, these natural pains serve to teach men how to preserve themselves and are a foundation from which we can move to consider the goodness of God. This last point will be discussed later. See Locke, *Essay*, 2.7.5-6.

⁸⁶ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.45. In this same section, Locke says that these customary habits are “made natural to us” by virtue of their being practiced.

⁸⁷ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.45. It is arguments like this where Locke highlights man's preoccupation with present discomfort and the constant intrusion of desires that leads Manent (wrongly in my view) to conclude that Locke's description of human action makes man a “prisoner of the present” who “never has the time to desire the good for its own sake” (See Manent, *The City of Man*, 131). Manent's conclusion echoes Strauss's “joyless quest for joy” (See *Natural Right and History*, 250).

⁸⁸ Again, recent theorists who approach this material often do so with an eye toward Locke's philosophical contributions to theories of human freedom of choice, such as Locke's suspension theory (e.g., Viljanen, “Space for Reasons,” 7) or his treatment of man's “weakness of will” or Akrasia (e.g., Matthew A. Leisinger, “[Locke's Diagnosis of Akrasia](#),” *Journal of Modern Philosophy* vol. 2, no. 6 (2020) and Samuel C. Rickless and Leonardo Moauro, “[Locke's Diagnosis of Akrasia Revisited](#),” *Journal of Modern Philosophy* vol. 6, no. 0 (2024)).

⁸⁹ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.45.

⁹⁰ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.46.

⁹¹ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.45-46.

satisfaction of any of [his] desires” and thus, has the “liberty” to consider each desire and weigh them against each other.⁹²

For Locke, it is the “perfection of our nature to desire, will, and act” according to our judgment concerning happiness.⁹³ In fact, Locke thinks that the failure to use this liberty rightly leads to all “variety of mistakes, errors, and faults,” and even to our “Misery and Slavery.”⁹⁴ For example, the man who fails to examine his conduct is tossed about by his passions and is therefore enslaved to them, such as the drunkard described above.⁹⁵ This is unbecoming of a human being with an intellect who is capable of reasoning and freely choosing to act for the sake of what is good for him. In other words, those who do not act consciously in their interest are “under the determination of some other than himself, which is a want of liberty.”⁹⁶ According to Locke, the fact that man is a reasoning being puts him “under a necessity... to be determined in willing by his own Thought and Judgement, what is best for him to do.”⁹⁷

His logic is simple: If man has the ability to evaluate and choose that which will make him happy, it would be absurd for him not to take advantage of that power.⁹⁸ In a parallel way, God and the “superior Beings... who enjoy perfect Happiness,” are also determined by what is best, i.e., it is not a limitation on God’s freedom that He is always happy.⁹⁹ Man’s liberty to pursue happiness is the same, since no one would say that he who acts for happiness is not free and, thus that “mad Men and Fools are the only Freemen.”¹⁰⁰ Man’s ability to “suspend any particular desire” and to follow the “Guide,” his reason, allows him to consider his circumstances and do what is most conducive to his happiness.¹⁰¹ Thus, as this section of

⁹² Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.47.

⁹³ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.47.

⁹⁴ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.47 and 48.

⁹⁵ See Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.35. For a similar interpretation of Locke’s use of the drunkard, see Forde, *Locke, Science, and Politics*, 120–21. See also, Leisinger, “Locke’s Diagnosis of Akrasia.”

⁹⁶ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.48.

⁹⁷ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.48.

⁹⁸ Locke uses the language of “necessity” and “duty” to describe man’s responsibility to act toward his happiness. Of course, there is no fixed law in nature requiring that he do so. The closest thing to an efficacious natural law in Locke’s thought would seem to be the reality of natural consequences. Locke says that one of the reasons men do not choose rightly concerning their happiness is that they do not adequately consider how the consequences of any present action or good will conduce to happiness or misery in the future (See Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.66.)

⁹⁹ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.49.

¹⁰⁰ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.50.

¹⁰¹ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.50.

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the argument draws to a close, Locke lays out the following program for those who wish to overcome their desires in order to achieve, “true and solid happiness”:¹⁰²

In this we should take pains to suit the relish of our Minds to the true intrinsick good or ill, that is in things; and not permit an allow'd or supposed possible great and weighty good to slip out of our thoughts, without leaving any relish, any desire of it self there, till, by a due consideration of its true worth, we have formed appetites in our Minds suitable to it, and made our selves uneasie in the want of it, or in the fear of losing it... Nor let any one say he cannot govern his Passions, nor hinder them from breaking out, and carrying him into action; for what he can do before a Prince, or a great Man, he can do alone, or in the presence of God, if he will.¹⁰³

With this rousing conclusion that seemingly points to some conception of eudaimonia, it comes as some surprise that what follows is a rejection of the concept of a “summum bonum”—a single greatest good for all men. However, it is essential we keep in mind the passage just quoted as we turn to address Locke's famous argument.

V. ON THE NATURE OF BEES, BEETLES, AND MEN

The premise upon which Locke issues his rejection of the “summum bonum” is that men have different natural tastes and aptitudes. Locke famously likens the human “mind” to the human “palate,” an analogy that seeks to explain why some men pursue such diverse things as “Study,” “Hunting,” “Debauchery,” and “Riches,” in their pursuits of happiness.¹⁰⁴ Locke's argument is that the constitutions of particular men lead them to pursue different ways of life in their quest for happiness, since activities that might be “agreeable” to some will be “extremely nauseous and offensive” to others.¹⁰⁵ Thus, it was “in vain,” says Locke, that the older philosophers sought the “Summum bonum” in “Riches, or bodily Delights, or Virtue, or Contemplation,” because just as food tastes pleasant to one with the palate for it, so “the greatest Happiness consists, in the having those things, which produce the greatest Pleasure” which are different for different people.¹⁰⁶ This relativism regarding happiness is what one must conclude, according to Locke, if men are likened to a “Company of poor Insects” with

¹⁰² Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.55.

¹⁰³ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.53.

¹⁰⁴ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.55 and 2.21.54.

¹⁰⁵ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.55.

¹⁰⁶ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.55.

“no Prospect beyond the Grave.”¹⁰⁷ In this view, some men are bees “delighted with flowers and their sweetness,” while others are “beetles, delighted with other kinds of Viands,” which they enjoy before they perish and “exist no more forever.”¹⁰⁸ What should be made of this argument? Scholars give several interpretations.

A predictable and reasonable interpretation of this passage is that it lends support for the argument that Locke is a relativist when it comes to the different ways of life men can lead. For example, Thomas Pangle connects Locke’s argument about human tastes with his rejection of innate practical principles.¹⁰⁹ For Pangle, Locke’s deemphasis of innate moral ideas, and his emphasis on natural differences in human tastes in the “pursuit of happiness,” means that “agreement on the ultimate goals or greatest pleasures and goods of life,” i.e., is impossible.¹¹⁰ Similarly, Manent laments Locke’s “deliberate coarseness” in “reducing the question of the sovereign good to a choice among apples, plumbs, and oranges.”¹¹¹ Following Manent, Schindler contends that Locke’s reduction of happiness to human tastes precludes Locke from articulating a conception of the good life.¹¹² In a view I share with others, such interpretations fail to explain why Locke would spend the previous sections unpacking such an intricate line of reasoning about the pursuit of happiness only to “endorse a simplistic relativism” in the final analysis.¹¹³ There are at least three more satisfying conclusions that help to make sense of Locke’s rejection of a highest good and his insect metaphor (Graedon Zorzi and Thomas West will help to explain the first two, and I will provide the third). Additionally, in the remainder of this section and in the conclusion, I will identify some of the short comings in the three interpretations as well as some of the deeper problems they reveal.

¹⁰⁷ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.55.

¹⁰⁸ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.55.

¹⁰⁹ See Locke, *Essay*, 1.3.

¹¹⁰ Thomas L. Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 183 (see also, 176–183). In a parallel manner, J. Budziszewski objects 1) to Locke’s view of the mind as a “blank slate” that must be engraved upon through sense experience (*Essay*, 2.1.2) and 2) to Locke’s argument in the *Second Treatise* that reason only teaches those “who will but consult it” (*Second Treatise*, §6), which he argues means that “poor reasoners have no conscience” (J. Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 1997), 193).

¹¹¹ Manent, *The City of Man*, 169. See also 130.

¹¹² Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 29–30.

¹¹³ West, “Locke’s Law of Nature,” 33.

CHRISTIAN REVELATION'S HARMONIZING HIGHEST GOOD

Zorzi has recently revived the argument that the above interpretation ignores Locke's disclaimer about man's future state in *Essay* 2.21.55. When Locke argues that the inference—"let us enjoy what we delight in, *for tomorrow we shall die*"—is "certainly right," scholars like Zorzi point out that the inference is predicated on the presumption that men are "only like a Company of poor Insects... which having enjoyed for a season... cease to be, and exist no more for ever."¹¹⁴ Thus, as Zorzi argues, "Locke's point in this section is not... that there is no summum bonum," but that the pagan philosophers "did not properly acknowledge the relationship between man as a reasonable, dependent creature and his Creator."¹¹⁵ For Zorzi, Locke avoids the trap of relativism by appealing to the afterlife promised by Christian Revelation and reason can be shown to support that conclusion.

Zorzi provides a good example of Locke's effort to harmonize reason and revelation in the *Essay*. After explaining that the natural effect of our experience of pain is to help preserve the various organs of the body, Locke points to "another reason" for which "God hath scattered up and down *several degrees of Pleasure and Pain, in all the things that environ and affect us*," namely, so that we might recognize the "imperfection, dissatisfaction, and want of complete happiness, in all the enjoyments which the creatures can afford us," and so we might seek "[happiness] in the enjoyment of him, *with whom there is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore*."¹¹⁶ Importantly, while not cited by Zorzi, Locke offers a comment regarding the unique conclusion that one can only draw from the experience of pain when one reflects upon it in light of revelation. After citing the passage from the *Psalms*, Locke says that while the addition of revelation "may not... make the *Ideas of Pleasure and Pain* clearer to us, than our own Experience does," it serves to give us "due sentiments of the Wisdom and Goodness of the Sovereign Disposer of all Things... The knowledge and veneration of Him, being the chief end of all our Thoughts, and the proper business of all Understandings."¹¹⁷ Accordingly, we see that Zorzi's interpretation

¹¹⁴ Zorzi, "Natural Teleology," 398.

¹¹⁵ Zorzi, "Natural Teleology," 398. See also, Mitsis, "Locke on Pleasure, Law, and Moral Motivation," in *Moral Motivation: A History*, 166.

¹¹⁶ Locke, *Essay*, 2.7.5, emphases in the original. The second italicized text is a quotation Locke takes from Psalm 16:11. See also, Zorzi, "Natural Teleology," 400.

¹¹⁷ Locke, *Essay*, 2.7.6, emphasis in original. In a similar passage from *Conduct*, §23, while arguing for the merits of studying theology, Locke says that the "true end" of "all other knowledge," is "the honor and veneration of the Creator and the happiness of mankind." This seems to be related to part of Locke's project in the *Essay* to drive home the

harmonizing Locke's arguments from reason and revelation can be legitimately derived from the text of the *Essay*. Moreover, his view can be shown to dovetail nicely with some of the conclusions in Locke's other writings, especially his religious writings and earlier unpublished works.¹¹⁸

Still a problem remains, as Locke never provides an argument from reason alone for an afterlife. When he does appeal to the afterlife in the *Essay* it is almost always the case that he blends rational arguments with revelation (mostly by means of biblical references).¹¹⁹ In the chapter from the *Essay*, "Of Power," the most Locke is willing to defend by reason alone is that the afterlife is an irrefutable possibility. As a result, Locke thinks the rational man should behave as if God and Heaven exist even if he is without belief, because the "bare possibility" of their existence cannot be disproven:

He that will allow exquisite and endless Happiness to be but the possible consequence of a good Life here, and the contrary state the possible Reward of a bad one, must own himself to judge very much amiss, if he does not conclude that a vertuous Life, with the certain expectation of everlasting bliss, which may come, is to be preferred to a vicious one, with the fear of that dreadful state of Misery.¹²⁰

For added emphasis, in his follow-up to this passage, Locke reiterates that if "a future Life is at least possible," it would be wrong to prefer "the short pleasures of a vicious life," even if one has not attempted to achieve certainty regarding eternity.¹²¹ Thus, for Locke, this assumption is sound whether or not we can rationally demonstrate any relationship to God.

Beyond this, a second limitation of Zorzi's argument is that it does not address the reality of human differences that Locke draws our attention to time and again.¹²² It is true, as Zorzi states, that Locke says men share a "greatest interest, *i.e.*, the Condition of our eternal

importance of living well. When men have eternal life as their aim, they will recognize the importance of "Virtue and Religion," because "God the righteous Judge... render[s] to every Man according to his Deeds." This argument conforms with another of Locke's statements in the *Essay*, that says it is rational for men to take care of their "Behaviour here," since their conduct determines whether they will spend eternity in a "State of perfect Happiness or Misery" (see *Essay*, 2.21.60).

¹¹⁸ E.g., see Zorzi, "Natural Teleology," 398–403.

¹¹⁹ For examples, consider Locke, *Essay*, 2.7.5, cf. Ps. 16:11; *Essay*, 2.21.41, cf. I Cor. 2:9; and even *Essay*, 2.21.55, cf. Isa. 22:13 and I Cor. 15:32.

¹²⁰ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.70.

¹²¹ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.70. See also Rossiter, "Hedonism and Natural Law," 215.

¹²² I will discuss Locke's treatment of two such types (the studious man and the Epicurean) below, but consider the insect metaphor itself and his discussion of the "hunter" in the Epistle to the Reader. See also West, "Locke's Natural Law," 33–34.

Estate,” and therefore “*Morality is the proper Science, and Business of Mankind in general; who are both concerned, and fitted to search out their *Summum Bonum*.*”¹²³ Yet just as morality is mankind’s general business, Locke says that “several Arts, conversant about several parts of Nature, are the Lot and private Talent of particular Men, for the common use of humane Life, and their own particular Subsistence in this World.”¹²⁴ In other words, while revelation teaches that men share a unifying highest good, certain earthly pursuits or “Arts” are reserved to certain persons only and then only by happenstance. This corresponds to the different human types implicit in Locke’s dichotomy between bees and beetles and points us to a different set of considerations.

AN “IDIOSYNCRATIC” HIGHEST GOOD FOR EACH

Thomas West has a unique interpretation of Locke’s rejection of the summum bonum that directly addresses the issue of human differences. For West, the key to Locke’s argument depends on a joint recognition that while some ways of life are better than others, there are different human types, and these differences preclude men from pursuing happiness in the same manner. Thus, some men are like bees who enjoy sweeter things like philosophy, while others are beetles who enjoy other “viands” (West notes the significance of the allusion to “beetles,” which “often feed on decaying organic matter such as feces”).¹²⁵ In making this argument, West thinks that Locke means to reaffirm a classical insight—“that the philosophic life is best for those few who have the talent and inclination for it”—but unlike the classics, Locke chooses to be subtle and “refuses to insult those whose natures or conditions make them incapable of such a life.”¹²⁶ Accordingly, this framework should inform our reading of Locke’s insistence that men pursue “their *Summum Bonum*,” that is, the highest good suited to each person’s own natural capacities.¹²⁷

¹²³ Locke, *Essay*, 4.12.11, emphasis in original. See also, Zorzi, “Natural Teleology,” 399. West interprets this passage differently, arguing that the statement “their *Summum Bonum*,” refers to a highest good for each individual person according to his capacities (see West, “Locke’s Natural Law,” 37). I describe his view in more detail below.

¹²⁴ Locke, *Essay*, 4.12.11.

¹²⁵ West, “Locke’s Law of Nature,” 34.

¹²⁶ West, “Locke’s Law of Nature,” 38. Similarly, see Clayes, “The Private Society and the Public Good in John Locke’s Political Thought,” 210, and Myers, *Star and Compass*, 149–55.

¹²⁷ See Locke, *Essay*, 4.12.11 and West, “Locke’s Law of Nature,” 37. For West’s full discussion of this topic, see 29–33, 36–38. In this reading, whereas Zorzi’s argument seeks to harmonize some of the challenges posed by Locke’s rejection of a highest good for all men, West sees Locke as a qualified relativist on the question of happiness on account of the intractableness of the differences between certain human types. This is not a radical relativism that seeks to reject

West's argument for the "idiosyncratic" pursuit of each person's own highest good helps clarify Locke's argument regarding the pursuit of happiness. West correctly shows that Locke is imploring men to seek more rarified earthly happiness, not just because it may lead to heavenly bliss, but because it will improve their earthly lives. This is confirmed by Locke himself when he implies that a virtuous man is better off on earth compared to "wicked Men" who "all things rightly considered, have... even the worst part here [on earth]."¹²⁸ But, while West may be right to emphasize the relationship between the differences in human types and the pursuit of happiness, he may overread Locke's insistence on the intractability of human differences (a point West himself admits).¹²⁹

EXHORTING MEN TO "CORRECT THEIR PALATES"

To address this point, we need to return to Locke's insect metaphor. Locke suggests that some men are "bees" while others are "beetles," the implication being that you are unlikely to turn one into the other. Locke confirms this point in *Conduct of the Understanding*, saying that there is "great variety in men's understandings, and their natural constitutions," which education cannot fully overcome. Even for those who have been similarly educated, "there is great inequality of parts."¹³⁰ In another place, Locke says that some men will be better suited to excellence in their pursuits on account of their natural constitution.¹³¹ Yet, despite these natural obstacles, Locke suggests that man's constitution is malleable to a point. Indeed, in several places, he argues that men should strive to "rectify" any ill "habits" they have received by "common Opinion... education[,] and custom."¹³² To return to the insect analogy, while a beetle may not be made to love flowers for their own sake, as a bee does, there may at least be some beetles who can come to appreciate sweeter things.¹³³

or resist reality, but one which recognizes that "belittling the nonphilosopher... is like criticizing a beetle for not being a bee" (37).

¹²⁸ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.70.

¹²⁹ West says that "[Locke's] argument about human diversity is only part of the truth" and that men also share important things, such as common human natures, which allows Locke to make sense of the natural law and the possibility of common public goods (West, "Locke's Law of Nature," 39). According to West, some of the goods that men hold in common include life, property, children, liberty, friendship, and virtue, and most communities seek to cultivate or protect them (39).

¹³⁰ Locke, *Conduct*, §2.

¹³¹ Locke, *Education*, §1.

¹³² Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.69.

¹³³ In *Conduct*, Locke suggests how beetles could become more bee-like. He says that "most men come very short of what they might attain unto in their several degrees [of knowledge] by a neglect of their understandings" (*Conduct*, §2). In other words, Locke is optimistic about the general intellectual capacity of mankind, provided that they practice using

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Locke's example of the Epicurean can help to illuminate this interpretation. Although the Epicure is motivated to take up studying, he does not love it for the delight it provides. Rather, he "buckles to study," because his reputation depends on it, both in the public eye and in that of "his mistress."¹³⁴ The choice of word is telling. The fact that he "buckles" indicates that he does not enjoy the activity, but he receives "new Gusto" for the work on account of its pleasant consequences.¹³⁵ Thus, while there are unchangeable differences in human nature, some men of meaner capacities, the beetles, may come to appreciate (if only begrudgingly) higher goods such as study and virtue.

In sum, while I agree with West concerning the importance of human types in Locke's thought, we must keep two points in mind. First, Locke thinks different goods are productive of different degrees of happiness in themselves, a point he returns to consistently throughout the discourse on happiness.¹³⁶ Second, men (at least in theory) are capable of elevating their desires by training and accustoming themselves to higher things:

Men may and should correct their palates, and give relish to what either has, or they suppose has none. The relish of the mind is as various as that of the Body, and like that too may be alter'd; and 'tis a mistake to think, that Men cannot change the displeasingness, or indifferency, that is in actions, into pleasure and desire, if they will do but what is in their power. A due consideration will do it in some cases; and practice, application, and custom in most.¹³⁷

Moreover, this reading helps to clarify Locke's pivot from his discussion of happiness to his rejection of a highest good. When Locke says that "it is easie to give an account... [about how] though all Men desire Happiness, *yet their wills carry them so contrarily*, and

their intellects. This is not to say that someone will overcome natural differences, but someone might become more adept and even enjoy intellectual activities if he trains himself. However, as we will see, the optimism expressed here must be weighed against some of Locke's other statements.

¹³⁴ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.43.

¹³⁵ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.69. However, while one might receive "new gusto" for something unpleasant on account of its pleasant consequences, Locke suggests that this method is ultimately less effective and that "the pleasure of the action itself is best acquir'd, or increased, by use and practice." It is in overcoming "trials" repeatedly that "wears us into a liking" of what previously "displeased us" (2.21.69).

¹³⁶ I will list a few of the most striking passages here (some of which I have already referenced): Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.53, says we should "suit the relish of our Minds to the ture intrinsick good or ill, that is in things"; 2.21.55, "Happiness consists, in the having those things, which produce the greatest Pleasure"; and in 2.21.56, "The eternal Law and Nature of things, must not be alter'd to comply with his [a man's] ill-order'd choice. If the neglect or abuse of the Liberty he has, to examine what would really and truly make for his Happiness, misleads him, the miscarriages that follow on it, must be imputed to his own election."

¹³⁷ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.69.

consequently some of them to what is Evil,” he means that most men do not allow their reason to guide them along the way to happiness.¹³⁸ But Locke thinks this is wrong, because men have the power of “Examination,” which is like “*consulting a guide*” who can help us not to “mistake true felicity.”¹³⁹

VI. CONCLUSION

I will review the ground covered before concluding. This paper has argued that Locke recognizes higher and lower degrees and even kinds of happiness that correspond to different sorts of goods and that men should utilize their reason to suspend their desires for immediate gratification so as to desire goods that are of superior quality. I then set out to reconcile this argument with Locke’s rejection of the concept of the *summum bonum*. While the statement in *Essay* 2.21.55 seems to repudiate the implications of Locke’s different degrees of happiness, the reality is more complicated. What I have argued is that Locke’s statement is an acknowledgement that most people, though capable of pursuing higher goods on account of their possessing reason, do not adequately train themselves and therefore do not improve their desires as they should.

A few comments regarding what we should take away from the foregoing are in order. First, I think it is helpful to establish Locke’s understanding of happiness before addressing his treatment of the natural law. As noted above, Burns has suggested that one should first clarify Locke’s natural law before attempting to understand other themes, such as his hedonism.¹⁴⁰ However, it may be more fruitful to consider the natural law, which Locke equates with reason in the *Two Treatises*, as an example of the dynamic of evaluating what is best for man to do—of “consulting a guide.”¹⁴¹ This approach may, for example, augment challenges to the extreme libertarianism or libertinism ascribed to Locke by his “post-liberal”

¹³⁸ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.54, emphasis in the original.

¹³⁹ Locke, *Essay*, 2.21.50, emphasis in the original. My addendum to West also applies to the argument raised by Peter Myers that Locke’s rejection of the *summum bonum* constitutes an attempt to “steer us away from extreme expressions of... perfectionism... [a]s a fixation upon the most perfect imaginable happiness is likely to make one’s present life seem miserable” (See *Star and Compass*, 166). While there may be some truth in Myers’ view that Locke aims to instill a sort of “moderation” in the pursuit of happiness (208), such an argument would seem to contradict Locke’s insistence that men can and should improve their desires.

¹⁴⁰ Burns, “Hobbes and God in Locke’s law of nature,” 1001.

¹⁴¹ Locke, *Second Treatise*, §6. West, “Locke’s Law of Nature,” 18, makes this point implicitly when interpreting Locke’s argument for the strong desires that serve as the basis for the natural law in the *First Treatise*: “reason must evaluate the [given] desire and pronounce it to be good.” Cf. *First Treatise*, §86. For a fuller discussion, see West, “Locke’s Law of Nature,” 15–19.

interpreters.¹⁴² If one can show, as I have attempted to do here, that Locke acknowledges superior and inferior degrees of happiness, it cannot be said that he believes that all ways of life are equally good.¹⁴³ Future research should strive to ascertain whether considering Locke's treatment of happiness alongside his natural law reveals a hierarchy of goods such as the hierarchy presented in other natural law thinkers.¹⁴⁴

Second, while I have argued that Locke's *Essay* can be shown to support a range of different interpretations that qualify his rejection of a highest good for men, it is worth noting that West's argument for an "idiosyncratic" pursuit of happiness, or a "*Summum Bonum*" relative to each person points to deeper questions.¹⁴⁵ I have emphasized Locke's often-overlooked arguments regarding the superior degrees of happiness that certain goods provide and his insistence that men train themselves to pursue those higher goods. Yet, while Locke at times expresses a certain level of confidence that beetles could train themselves to act more like bees, other statements suggest that some may be permanently doomed to "beetledom." For example, while critiquing the concept of "*Man*" as a "rational Animal capable of Conversation," Locke observes that there are "Naturals amongst us, that have perfectly our shape, but want Reason, and some of them Language too."¹⁴⁶ Locke describes the situation of such individuals in the *Second Treatise*, when he argues that "*Lunaticks*" and "*Ideots*" must be ruled by a superior as perpetual children, due to their lack of reason.¹⁴⁷ Is any sort of happiness available to such persons if they lack reason but reason is necessary for pursuing happiness?

Or consider a less dramatic, but nonetheless problematic example. What of the people who have the capacity, but do not properly apply their rational faculties, as those who fail to follow the natural law due to ignorance or excessive self-interest?¹⁴⁸ Is Locke indifferent to

¹⁴² For a recent account that ably challenges the pervasive libertarian reading of Locke, see David Azerrad, "Is Locke a Libertarian?," *The Political Science Reviewer* 50, no. 1 (2026). Azerrad ultimately rejects the libertarian interpretation of Locke but also admits that the "libertarian flavor" of his arguments may have exposed him to exploitation by libertarian thinkers.

¹⁴³ See also, West, "Locke's Law of Nature," 29–33, and Myers, *Star and Compass*, 155–60.

¹⁴⁴ While he does not attempt to make this exact argument, David Braybrooke argues that there is a "basic convergence" in their natural law teachings of Locke and St. Thomas Aquinas (See David Braybrooke, *Natural Law Modernized* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 29). Braybrooke argues that despite the clear influence of Christianity on both authors, each articulates a natural law teaching that does not explicitly depend on Christian Revelation (See, Braybrooke, *Natural Law Modernized*, Ch. 2).

¹⁴⁵ E.g., West, "Locke's Natural Law," 49 and Locke, *Essay*, 4.12.11, emphasis in the original.

¹⁴⁶ Locke, *Essay*, 3.6.21 and 22, emphasis in the original.

¹⁴⁷ Locke, *Second Treatise*, §60, emphasis in the original.

¹⁴⁸ Locke, *Second Treatise*, §124.

the prospects of happiness for such people? In sum, while Locke does make forceful statements concerning the potential for men's rational improvement, as I have shown, it would be wrong to conclude from this that Locke is sanguine about the prospects for general enlightenment.¹⁴⁹ In a view I share with others, my reading is that Locke thinks such improvement is unlikely.¹⁵⁰ I think West is right to point to moral law and education in morality as Locke's typical solutions to the problem of human error.¹⁵¹ Further, as I argue elsewhere, Locke believes public policy should be crafted with an eye to cultivating the moral conditions happiness requires.¹⁵² Explicating more fully how Locke's arguments for the rational pursuit of happiness relate to his arguments for moral instruction and law is a project for further research.

¹⁴⁹ Examples of those who believe Locke seeks to bring about "enlightenment" include Peter A. Schouls, *Reasoned Freedom: John Locke and Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), and, to a lesser extent, Peter Myers, *Star and Compass*, 171. While he does not claim that Locke necessarily believes in general enlightenment, Zorzi seems to imply that Locke thought natural law reasoning should come easily to most people: "Because Locke thought humans quite capable of grasping the natural teleology of the relational self, his view of natural law was contiguous with rather than disruptive of the pre-modern teleological view of humanity... Locke did not think humans have any such difficulty grasping our final cause and our teleological orientation toward it, because Locke thought that we could quite easily recognize ourselves to be persons" (See "Natural Teleology," 403).

¹⁵⁰ Ruth Grant flatly rejects the possibility of general enlightenment and argues that for Locke, "[p]ractical, nonrational, and irrational social forces will affect opinions and behavior always" ("Custom's Power and Reason's Authority," 627-28). In a similar vein, Casson argues that part of Locke's project was to cool rather than stoke the enlightenment optimism of his context (See Casson, *Liberating Judgement*, 134). See also West, "Locke's Natural Law," 43-44, and Steven Forde, *Locke, Science, and Politics*, 193-94.

¹⁵¹ West, "Locke's Natural Law," 45-48. In particular, West thinks that one of Locke's overarching aims is to improve the law of opinion: "All of Locke's books are devoted to changing the 'law of fashion' among his readers. He aims to create a climate of moral opinion that will shame the immoral, the quarrelsome, and the contentious, and honor the decent, the rational, and the industrious. In particular, Locke's books are designed to change elite opinion, which in turn shapes common opinion" (47).

¹⁵² Michael J. Driscoll, "Curbing the 'Corruption of Manners': John Locke, Domestic Policy, and the Moral Conditions of Happiness," *The Political Science Reviewer* 50, no. 1 (2026), forthcoming.

On the Philosophical Significance of Mary as New Eve

Marco A. Andreacchio

Inter vocationem Beatae Virginis et verae philosophiae strictam consonantiam prospicere licet.—Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §108

NEW ADAM, NEW EVE

In order to best appreciate the ancient identification of Mary as “New Eve,” we should recall the ancient identification of Jesus Christ as “New Adam”. In 1 Corinthians 15:45 we read of the distinction between two Adams. The first Adam is a paradigm for all men (*ho protos anthropos Adam*), defined as a living soul (*psyche zoes* or *anima vivens* already as per Genesis 1:30), or as soul (*psyche* or *anima*) in flesh or “the earthly” (1 Cor 15:48); the second, last or final Adam (*ho eschatos Adam*) is found in life-creative spirit (*eis pneuma zoopoion*). While the Adam we read of in Genesis is endowed with life, the Adam named Jesus Christ *endows* with life; while the first enters into flesh, the last draws out of the flesh—out of darkness. The second Adam is the fulfillment of the first in the sense that in the second manifests the truth about or perfection of the first. The very light that descends into darkness is revealed as the light that ascends out of darkness, into itself as light, or into light’s proper or heavenly place (1 Cor 15:47–50). The truth about the descent is revealed in the ascent, so that ascent emerges as a “return” or “turning back” (*metanoia* as the Hebrew *teshuvah*). The truth about the animated Adam—Adam moved outside of himself—is revealed in an unmoved moving Adam.

What is the difference between “soul” and “spirit” here? Spirit is that by which soul enters into darkness and ascends out of it. Spirit is the eternal, heavenly or divine (1 Cor 15:50) motor or true nature that soul leaves behind on its way back to it.¹ Soul is then the

¹ “The principle of motion within the thing itself is its nature” (ἡ γὰρ φύσις ἐστὶν ἡ ἐν αὐτῷ ὑπάρχουσα κινήσεως ἀρχή—Aristotle, *De Caelo*, Bk. 3.3, 301b17). Compare *Metaphysics*, 1070a4–9. Though the “earthly” center of moving things (their *causa formalis*) does not move, it does not resolve motion in itself, but in the “heavenly” end for the sake of which things move (their *causa finalis*), even as the “Omega” (*terminus ad quem*) of movement is none other than the vindication of the “Alpha” (*terminus a quo*).

erring guise of an unerring spirit.² Man within darkness—outside of his proper, heavenly seat—versus man outside of darkness, or hidden to darkness, even as he manifests himself to the earthly in earthly or mortal terms.

The ascent (*anabasis*) presupposes a descent (*katabasis*), so that “what is first is not what is spiritual, but what is animated [here *psychikos* rather than *physikos* or “natural”]; thereafter comes what is spiritual” (*sed non prius quod spiritale est, sed quod animale: deinde quod spiritale*—(1 Cor 15:46). “First” (*proton*, reads the Greek) denotes temporality. The first Adam, as it were, falls into time (in Aristotelian terms, he is a *causa finalis* turned into a *causa formalis*). The second, however, marks the *end* of time and so of finite or discrete motion: as spiritual (*pneumatikos*), he marks the essential distinction between the human and the beastly. In the second Adam the first is fully redeemed in the sense that his superiority with respect to all other animals or animated beings is fully confirmed. Unlike all other animals, man descends into darkness by way of rising all the way out of it, to his “proper” or heavenly place; for though he is in this world, he is not of this world (John 17:14–16).³

Now, in Books 3.23.5 and 5.19.1 of his *Against Heresies* (*Adversus Haereses*), with reference to Genesis 3:13, Irenaeus (second-century bishop of Lyon) draws a direct, if only tacit parallel between the two Adams of Romans 5:19 and two virgins—both equally pure, though only the first was “disobedient,” in the sense of not being heedful to God's word. As “second Eve,” Mary personifies the perfection of Eve beyond all erring. Just as through Eve's being led astray by the Serpent of Eden mankind falls into bondage to death, now through Mary's being guided by Archangel Gabriel, mankind is freed to partake in everlasting life. But just as Jesus represents the truth or perfection of the Adam of Genesis, so must the Virgin Mary personify the spiritual truth about the first woman. In or as Mary, the prototypical Virgin is sanctified as untainted receptacle of universal salvation.

In the final paragraph of his 1997 encyclical *Faith and Reason* (*Fides et ratio*), Pope John Paul II quotes Pseudo-Epiphanius, eighth-century Christian theologian, as having compared the Virgin Mary to “the table at which faith sits in thought.”⁴ The encyclical adds that in Mary,

² Cf. Romans 5:19: the one door through which “the many” (*hoi polloi*) cease listening to God is the very door through which they regain their hearing.

³ Compare Aristotle, *De Caelo*, 2.12–13 and 4.5.

⁴ Pseudo-Epiphanius, *Homily in Praise of Holy Mary Mother of God*, *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, 161 vols. (Petit-Montrouge: Imprimerie Catholique, 1857–1866), 43:493.

“the holy monks of Christian antiquity ... saw a lucid image of true philosophy and they were convinced of the need to *philosophari in Maria*.” Mary would be the image of true philosophy as “feminine nature” or pure receptacle of the Incarnation, just as philosophy would be the place where we are purged of the obscurity preventing us from understanding the theological content of our faith. In this sense would philosophy be *ancilla theologiae* (handmaiden of theology): not in the sense that its freedom is limited by or subsumed under religious authority, but in the sense that natural reason justifies our *fidei intellectionem*, our “understanding of faith,” which is our “theology,” awakening us to the truth about the divine foundation of our world—a truth that Christianity will name *parousia*.⁵

Socrates himself, to be sure, highlights the mediating/purging function of philosophy as preparation for a death envisioned as realm of discourse with pure spirits: dialogue hidden in nature.⁶ But is *logos* in nature not the truth about “natural reason” (*ratio naturalis*), the

⁵ On a vulgar/modern reading of Thomas Aquinas, the *doctor angelicus* would be positing “theology” as making use of philosophy as a lesser discipline helping clarify what is taught by theology itself independently of philosophy (for an example of such a reading, see Jonathan Culbreath, “[The Marian Vocation of the Philosopher](#).” The reading in question is likely to take its textual bearings from Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*, 1a q. 1 a. 5 ad 2, where Thomas is juxtaposing a “sacred teaching” (*sacra doctrina*) to “philosophical disciplines” (in the plural). These disciplines are posited as less theoretical than the “science” (the “sacred teaching” as “secret transmission”) presented by Aquinas, insofar as this science acquires (*accipit*) its principles directly from God through a revelation (*immediate a Deo per revelationem*). The divine unveiling is juxtaposed to *degrees* of “manifestation” (*manifestatio*) of the contents of the sacred teaching. Yet, Thomas is not pitting theology against philosophy, but defending the primacy of a purely theoretical science (*theorein* as such) over practical sciences. In his *Commentary to Boethius’s De trinitate*, Aquinas identifies *sacra doctrina* with what Boethius calls *theologia* or *divina scientia*, being “the science of God” or “metaphysics” or “first philosophy”—Lecture 2, Q. 5, art. 1—while distinguishing further a worldly sense of theology from a sacred sense. In the former case, “principles” are considered in the abstract relatively to things, while in the latter principles are *things themselves*. The expression *sacra doctrina* should then be read as pertaining to “true philosophy” or *pure* natural reason, or reason-in-God, which communicates the principles of things as *ideas* generated directly by the divine mind, whereby they would be self-evident (belonging to the divine as such) prior to their becoming evident relatively to human efforts (to discover or to understand). Thomas’s *sacra doctrina* as *prima philosophia* is none other than the secret transmission of what Plato would call “ideas” (the true forms of things, or things-themselves as purely spiritual realities) from God to God (hence its properly speculative character). In this context, we move from ancillary, relatively “practical” (*practica*) modes of knowledge to a purely “speculative” (*speculativa*) knowledge. Yet, the latter’s disclosure stands as the principle of the workings of “practical” disciplines. When all is said and done, *sacra doctrina* pertains to a transmission of understanding at work *within* all human efforts to understand—much as Aristotle’s *energeia* inheres in all ordinary *ergon*. It would be fair to say that “philosophy is the handmaiden of theology” (though Aquinas avoids any such blunt proposition) insofar as the divine guides us to itself through natural reason as “incarnation” of God’s innermost being (and in this case theology will belong properly to God alone). Aquinas’s reference to practical sciences as ancillary to speculative science is another story. What Aquinas calls “philosophical theology” stands to a properly divine *sacra doctrina* as Aristotelian “universals” stand to Plato’s *ideas*, where the idea manifests itself to us as a poetic form in and through which we are to undergo spiritual purgation. This is what St. Bonaventure would call *itinerarium mentis in deum*—the journey of the human mind to its perfection in God.

⁶ As spiritual “midwife,” Socrates helps his interlocutor (including posthumously Plato’s reader) produce views serving as stages for reflection and so as aid to a spiritual awakening. Plato’s dialogues offer us ironic samples of how human consciousness is purged on a ladder of forms pointing hierarchically to the form of the good, which Plato’s foremost student, Aristotle, would expose as belonging to pure thought alone (properly speaking, only God can think or see God). See Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1965), 165: “Socrates’

reason that defines us as human beings prior to our attempting to define *it*? That same natural reason—as we shall see—would call us to be fully human, or to fulfill a properly human mandate.

Reason in nature is at once what our classical (both ancient and medieval) tradition calls *ars naturae*, the creativity of God “speaking” from within things, or producing all things eternally.⁷ In the light of “reason in nature,” or of “the reason of nature” we begin appreciating spiritually enriching implications of the papal encyclical’s qualification of philosophy’s support of theology’s understanding, “so that it may be fruitful and productive” (*fecunda sit et efficax*). If theology is the understanding of faith, “true philosophy” (*vera philosophia*) cannot serve as mere or pragmatic appendix to it. As natural reason itself, philosophy must be inherently divine, or rooted in divine agency, filling the theological understanding of faith with a living content. Without true philosophy, there could be no Incarnation (which evidently entails the concreteness of the divine in human experience), but merely—if at all—hearsay intimations, echoes, promises of the presence of the divine, i.e., of divine agency, in our daily life. Without true philosophy born in Mary’s bosom/form, our faith would be in vain,⁸ for we would then trust words that may be true *qua* words or as generic hypotheses (even as some Kantian “as if” / *als Ob*), but that would be false as regards to factual content (the words being mistaken for things themselves).

If we are to have faith in more than *nuda nomina* or “mere names,” we are to accept Mary, true philosophy’s immaculate persona or perfect Muse, as mediator allowing us to see the actual content of the names by which we refer to the divine, and so to the sacred content of nature. In Mary, true philosophy would awaken us to the living presence of the names we faithfully profess, purging us of the darkness that the names alone (names unaided by true

maieutic art, as we infer from what he says in the *Theaetetus* (150bff.; 210bff.), is more likely to make young men deliver ‘nonsense’ (151c7) and ‘wind-eggs’ (151e6; 210b9) than to make them deliver something ‘genuine and true’ (150c3). But to submit oneself to refutation without getting angry and feeling disgraced is the first and indispensable step in the process of ‘giving birth’ to something true, that is to say, in the process of learning.” On Socratic maieutics as aiming at improving opinions/*doxai*, see Hanna Arendt, “Philosophy and Politics,” *Social Research* 57, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 81.

⁷ On this problem see Marco Antonio Andreacchio, *Medieval Teachers of Freedom: Boethius, Peter Lombard and Aquinas on Creation from Nothing* (New York: Routledge, 2023).

⁸ See Emmanuel Falque, “[The Virgin Mary, Birth, and Philosophy](#),” *Church Life Journal*, May 4, 2018. While in 1 Corinthians 15:14 it is explicitly the Resurrection—man’s awakening (the verb ἐγείρω is invoked) out of nature-as-death, in God—that justifies the Christian’s faith, the Resurrection-as-*anabasis* (ascent) loses all content without a presupposed Incarnation-as-*katabasis* (descent). To evoke the Gospel of John, light must descend into darkness in order to illuminate the world lost in it. In this respect, Michelangelo Buonarroti’s allusions to form hidden in marble (in Aristotelian terms, *eidos* hidden in *hylē*) testify to the Platonic soul of classical Christianity. See Michelangelo’s Rime 151, in Michelangelo, *Rime e Lettere*, ed. Paola Mastrocola (Torino: UTET, 1992): 196–97.

philosophy) would otherwise be used to conceal.⁹ Law itself would cease serving as a mask of iniquity in the hands of corrupt souls by being interpreted as a mirror of divine providence at work in human nature. And so our nature itself would no longer be assumed to be subject to laws imposed upon it *ex machina*, if only in the aftermath of its having been coerced into signing a contract of convenience that binds our desire to legal chains and thus compels us to love our servitude.¹⁰ Instead, our “fallen” nature would be seen in light of its divine perfection as worthy of inheriting a heavenly kingdom of pure spirit (*spiritus sanctus*) that laws can at best intimate but never seize for themselves—no more than darkness can appropriate light in John 1:5.

Pope John Paul II’s encyclical helps us appreciate why the bulk of modernist, non-Catholic biblical criticism would be opposed to medieval (viz. Catholic/Orthodox) Mariology.¹¹ Lack of understanding may be a necessary cause, but it is not a sufficient one given that the “active openness to the understanding” that is faith (*fides quaerens intellectum*) does not presuppose understanding, at least not in the order of generation, to speak with Aristotle.¹² A theology opposed to classical Mariology is a theology opposed to the natural reason embraced already by ancient Platonists—a reason that, while being seated in nature, proves to be providential in the government of human affairs.

PLATONIC THEOLOGY’S OBJECTION TO VOLUNTARISM

If reason is not to be found in nature, then what is? For the anti-Platonist or *voluntarist*, the truth about nature is incompatible with human freedom, or with our free choice.¹³ There is then an irreconcilable conflict between human freedom and natural necessity. Theologically speaking, God’s will is radically incommensurate with our will. Our will would need to submit

⁹ See Andreacchio, *Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet in Dante’s Spirit* (Routledge, 2026), which shows how Shakespeare articulates the questions at hand.

¹⁰ Giambattista Vico, *Principi di Scienza Nuova* (Napoli: Stamperia Muziana, 1744) and *De universi juris uno principio et fine uno* (Neapoli: Felix Musca, 1720), articulated a rigorous defense of classical Christianity as fundamentally incompatible with the contractualism of modern jurisprudence. For an introduction to Vico’s “antidote” to modern jurisprudence, see Andreacchio, “Autobiography as history of ideas: an intimate reading of Vico’s *Vita* (from «Lord Vico» to «The Names of Law»),” *Historia Philosophica*, 11 (2013): 59–94.

¹¹ See David Lawrence Edwards, *Christianity: The First Two Thousand Years* (New York: Continuum, 2001).

¹² Aquinas, *Commentary to Boethius’s De Trinitate*, Q. 6, A. 1.c.4, citing Isaiah 7:9 via St. Augustine.

¹³ John Milton, *Areopagitica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 28: “*When God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had been else a mere artificial Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions [i.e. in a puppet show].*”

to God's will *irrationally*. Our religion should be one of unconditional surrender, or submission. By the same token, to echo Tertullian, Athens (philosophy) would have nothing to do with Jerusalem (Revelation).

Platonic Christianity rejects the voluntarist stance as obfuscating the true relationship between man and God. For on a classical Platonic understanding of things, faith is a gift that is at once divine *and* natural. This is to say that God opens us to himself *naturally*: it is not that our faith presupposes any decision (for us) to be faithful, but that our will presupposes our openness to the divine. Our openness, our faith, is primordial with respect to our will. We will anything by having already been opened to something, where that "something" is ultimately Being itself—mind as "creative understanding," what Aristotle called *nous poietikos*. God opens us to him whether we like it or not, and so quite aside from evil's influence on us. The light shines in the dark, disclosing our very being. We are then originally open to God and this openness of ours—this constitutive openness—is what our classics call *faith*. Those who do not have faith are precisely those who have abandoned their being to believe that faith depends upon their autonomous consent—their decision to submit to an irrational will. The faith they may then believe to acquire is an imposture, at least with respect to our original faith as human beings.

"Of what use is our freedom?" we might then ask. If we are not free to choose whether to have faith or not, can we truly be free? The God of the Bible—the one of Abraham and of Jesus, the one of Adam, the *true* one of the *anthropos*—calls us not to mistake a freedom based on our will, with a freedom grounded in divine intelligence. The former is deemed to be an imposture. Are we then not to will anything at all? What of "free will"? Once again, we are called to recognize that our will is free only inasmuch as it is disclosed in faith, where faith is the very disclosure of free will. Your faith heals you, placing you on the path of truth and so of liberation from evil (Mark 10:52, John 8:32). Here faith is the proper portal to the path of salvation, primal openness to truth itself. Indeed, faith seeks illumination: *fides quaerit intellectum*. Faith is thus an openness that journeys, an *active* openness.

The Platonic Christian acknowledges that we do not choose God; rather it is God who chooses or "elects" us through His incarnation (John 15:16: "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you; and ordained you so that you may go and bear fruit and so that your fruit remain; so that whatever you shall ask the Father in my name, he may give you"). By the

same token, our Rabbi chooses us, not we our Rabbi or guru. What do *we* choose? Where our choice is *autonomous*, it rehearses the movement of self-affirmation of the fallen angel—the angel fallen from Grace into mechanical compulsion, strife or war. Autonomous choice is choice blind to its ground and thus compelled by the ground it is ignorant of. Free choice, on the other hand, is reason itself, which is the presence of divine intelligence in our dark world. We are truly free *naturally*, so that our freedom is inalienable; we are constitutionally free in the sense that our specific being is defined directly by God—defined by *reason in nature*. Accordingly, in his *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.60, Thomas Aquinas invites us to see that man is distinguished from other animals by a cognitive faculty that depends directly on divine intelligence and is thus unmediated by corporeal forces or motion. God moves the will (*movet voluntatem*, as seen in Prov. 21:1, Phil. 2:13). Further citing Jeremiah 10:23, Aquinas reminds us that “man is not the master of his actions (*homo non est dominus suorum actuum*). And yet, Aquinas adds, *Ecclesiasticus* (*The Book of Sirach*) 15 tells us that “God establishes man from the beginning, leaving him in the hands of his own counsel ... i.e. in freedom of choice” (*Deus ab initio constituit hominem, et reliquit eum in manu consilii sui ... idest in libertate arbitrii*).

Aquinas helps us see that freedom of choice depends on reason’s success in journeying through or examining particular circumstances of life, thereby making moral judgment free from contingencies. It is only to the extent that we remain rational and are moved by divine intelligence that we can exercise any free choice:

But man acts with judgment, since by the faculty of knowing he judges whether something is to be avoided or pursued. But since that judgment is not from natural instinct at work in a particular situation, but from some rational comparison, he then acts with free judgment, capable of being carried into diverse matters [*potens in diversa ferri*]. Thus reason concerning contingent matters is on a path open to opposites, as it is evident in dialectical syllogisms and in the arguments of persuading rhetoric. But particular works [*operabilia*] are certain contingent matters and so concerning them rational judgment stands on diverse paths, and it is not limited to one. And it is necessary that man be endowed with free choice, to the extent that he is rational.¹⁴

¹⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, Q. 83, art. 1, resp.: “*Sed homo agit iudicio, quia per vim cognoscitivam iudicat aliquid esse fugiendum vel prosequendum. Sed quia iudicium istud non est ex naturali instinctu in particulari operabili, sed ex collatione quadam rationis; ideo agit libero iudicio, potens in diversa ferri. Ratio enim circa contingentia habet viam ad opposita; ut patet in dialecticis syllogismis, et rhetoricis persuasionibus. Particularia autem operabilia sunt quaedam contingentia, et ideo circa ea iudicium rationis ad diversa se habet, et non est determinatum ad unum. Et pro tanto necesse est quod homo sit liberi arbitrii, ex hoc ipso quod rationalis est.*”

“Free choice, which is nothing other than a faculty of election” (*liberum arbitrium, quod nihil aliud est quam vis electiva*)¹⁵ pertains to *means* to be related back to their proper end or given/original perfection. Whence the distinction Aquinas highlights between free choice and a free will (*libera voluntas*), which is a will that is free to the extent that it is determined directly by pure or divine intelligence.¹⁶ In this sense, God wants the salvation of men out of a gratuitous or *natural* will (*Deus vult salutem hominum ex gratuita voluntate*), as opposed to any will bound to a necessity outside of divine intelligence (*ergo non vult ex necessitate*); for God’s will stems directly or eternally “from the necessity of his own nature” (*ex necessitate suae naturae*), which is pure intelligence or noetic illumination.¹⁷ What God wants is nothing falling short of Himself, though in a secondary sense he wants all things restored or saved in God. Only God is perfectly free. We, on the other hand, are free only to the extent that we are rational and so only to the extent that we are guided by the presence of God’s intelligence in our dark or fallen world.¹⁸ What God wants primarily he wants eternally and that is his own eternal being (*esse*).¹⁹ In Aquinas’s words: “Whatever God wants to be in himself he wants by necessity; yet, whatever he wants concerning creatures he does not want by necessity.”²⁰ What God wants “concerning creatures” (*circa creaturas*) is not simply their eternal place in God, but signs of that place relatively to creatures’ falling short of it. God wills creatures into being in the sense that he wants them perfect in himself, but their being must emerge *naturally* out of dark non-being. The necessity of the will going hand in hand with the necessity of its object, God wants eternally only the perfection of things in himself and contingently the means or signs of that perfection. Insofar as we are not in God, our being and freedom fall short of necessity. We are then not merely willing the good, but electing signs reminding us of the good—signs of perfection, signs of our freedom in God. We are then, properly speaking, free in reasoning, rather than in willing:

¹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, Q. 83, art. 4, resp.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, Q. 19, art. 3, resp.

¹⁷ Aquinas, *De Veritate*, Q. 23, art. 4, sc. and arg. 2–3.

¹⁸ For further articulations of the problem at hand, see Andreacchio, *Medieval Teachers of Freedom*.

¹⁹ Aquinas, *De Veritate*, Q. 23, art. 4, arg. 3.

²⁰ “*Quicquid Deus vult esse in se ipso de necessitate vult; quicquid autem vult circa creaturas non de necessitate vult*”—Aquinas, *De Veritate*, Q. 23, art. 4, resp.; see also resp. 10.

Reasoning in a proper sense is to arrive from one thing to knowledge of another, wherefore in a proper sense we reason of conclusions, which are known from principles. Similarly, with respect to appetite, volition entails a simple appetite for a certain thing, whence the will is said to be of an end, which is sought for itself. But choosing is seeking [*appetere*] something for the sake of attaining to something else, so that in a proper sense it is of those things that are for the sake of an end.... Just as intellect is to reason, so is the will to the faculty of election, which is free choice.²¹

Choice then pertains to means and we choose means freely inasmuch as God's intelligence enters into darkness to shape signs of divine perfection, which is what we primarily want, though in our present condition we fall short of it. In choosing anything we are seeking a reminder of the "end" of what we choose, in God; and this end is what we primarily want, keeping in mind that in wanting it truly we are already in God.

If we are free in God, our present condition presupposes a fall from freedom and our need to return to or recover what we have lost, namely our proper place in divine intelligence. Yet, even in our fallenness, we retain a degree of openness to the divine. Even in darkness, we are sustained by light to reflect and reflect-upon that light. Now, that reflection necessarily entails the openness that is faith, even as the biblical sinner is alienated from his faith. So it is that in the Gospels, Jesus turns people back to their faith; his word, his very being encourages reflection, or a return that is both moral and cognitive to our being-open-to-God, our standing-in-faith to be filled with understanding, bathed in light, resurrected or awakened in the fullness of being.

Poenitemini, et credite Evangelio / μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ: "Turn back and believe in the Good Message." In Mark 1:15, Jesus calls Galileans to repentance—*teshuvah* or *metanoia*. Jesus is awakening listeners to their own humanity. But Jesus is the Word itself that speaks—no longer alone in the desert as that of the Baptist—in our very constitution as human beings. Not a word reaching us from without, but one manifesting itself from within, as living truth, the truth of our own life. No longer in the wilderness as a cry for tyrants to behead at a reptilian behest, but *being itself* speaking within the city, reminding us that the heart of the city remains open to a transcendent light of the mind. By

²¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, Q. 83, art. 3: "*Ratiocinari ... proprie est devenire ex uno in cognitionem alterius, unde proprie de conclusionibus ratiocinamur, quae ex principiis innotescunt. Similiter ex parte appetitus, velle importat simplicem appetitum alicuius rei, unde voluntas dicitur esse de fine, qui propter se appetitur. Eligere autem est appetere aliquid propter alterum consequendum, unde proprie est eorum quae sunt ad finem ... sicut se habet intellectus ad rationem, ita se habet voluntas ad vim electivam, idest ad liberum arbitrium.*"

being turned back to that light, we believe in things unseen, sustained by the light shining at the heart of our life, sanctifying our very birth in this our fallen world. We are called. Our birth is our mandate. We do not choose to have faith; our faith is not contingent upon our own decision, whether to impose our own ignorance upon things themselves, or to abdicate all free choice. We are called, and the calling awakens us to itself as living word—the water that quells all thirst eternally. Who would be speaking, awakening us as it awakens faith? It is the Word to which we owe our being, our very birth in faith; so that far from being a choice, repentance would be a calling that bespeaks the presence of God in Man. So do the Gospels show that faith itself has no precondition outside of God’s own agency in man; and that man is not truly or fully himself unless he places himself back in God.

VOLUNTARISM AND ISLAM

The foremost doctrinal manifestation of closure to reason in nature is found in Islam, which must be then understandably strenuously opposed to the right of existence as liberal nations—nations that swear by the possibility of progressing towards a world in which freedom triumphs over barbaric violence. As an essentially voluntaristic doctrine, Islam stands as the most formidable traditional enemy of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” where liberty is key to happiness. The Islamic enemy of “the West” does not believe in the *natural* dignity of the human being; he does not believe that happiness is compatible with the exercise of freedom. That is because he sees the human being as such, the “pagan” man, if not as radically evil, at least as radically prone to evil and so as being in dire need of submitting radically to a divine will altogether incommensurate to man’s will. The “enemy of the West” is not merely praying for the accomplishment of our heavenly father’s will, in which his children’s will is perfected; the Muslim as Muslim feels compelled to bring about a will that is so powerful and lofty that it has no place for genuine human freedom within it. Freedom is simply absent from the Islamic theocratic equation. What counts is not the restoration of human freedom in its heavenly father, but the transformation of human freedom into a license conceded by a will that has nothing fatherly about it—a will that does not raise us to it paternally, but that replaces our fathers as a perfect machine for which reason is allowed only as means to justify a universal mask of the machine, a *deus ex machina*, a God imposed mechanically or without any mediation—no questions asked. Hence, for instance, the

Quran's decisive modification of the Bible's account of Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac. In the Islamic text, both Abraham and his unnamed son readily submit to irrational or mad authority, while God averts infanticide directly—no longer through an angel—on strict condition of unquestioned submission to a *de facto* tyrant. No room is left for the notion of a named son (a *who*, not merely a *what*) protesting his father's irrational submission to a God who turns out to be rational, after all. In short, Islam stands by a divinity of power that does not educate us as children, but that turns us into martyrs through a bond of unqualified submission. What we have here is submission without reflection, with the implication that pure reflection endangers our proper relationship with God.

TOWARDS A PLATONIC REDISCOVERY OF MARY

That Protestant theology would depart from medieval Mariology should come to no surprise given the distinctively *voluntarist* and thus anti-Platonist or neo-nominalist bent of the modern Reformation movement that finds in Martin Luther its staunchest father.²² Nor should it surprise us that the Protestant turn to an “original Christianity” preceding medieval Christianity mirrors an Islamic leap back to the origins of the universe, a leap expressive of an absolutist will to bypass the natural unfolding of human things.²³

²² Far from vindicating human freedom, voluntarism uproots it from reason in nature, thereby converting it *de facto* into license. On the anti-Platonic character of modern/Protestant Christianity, see Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 10, 60–61, 323–23; Edward Feser, “[Razor Boy](#),” *edwardfeser.blogspot*, March 8, 2011. For a “doctrinal” attempt to counter medieval nominalism/voluntarism, see John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 15–16. Insofar as nominalism is not merely a free-floating doctrine, so that it is ill understood when considered nominalistically—especially when it comes to interpreting the progressive/historical nominalism of our modern world (nominalist ontology unfolding existentially)—it cannot be adequately countered on doctrinal grounds. Inevitably, in falling back on the logic of worldviews, Milbank's work remains an “intellectual history” (guided by a consequentialist logic) that fails to escape the gravitational pull of voluntarism and its “traditionalist”/“perspectivist” ramifications. Indeed, post-modern attempts to return to “tradition” have systematically fed into the immanentistic/historicist conception of rationality or discourse proper of modernity (neo-nominalism). Strauss's “Preface to Spinoza's Critique of Religion,” in *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1997) exposes Franz Rosenzweig's noble failure to overcome the challenges posed by modern rationalism for Jewish orthodoxy. On the contribution of ideologues such as Umberto Eco, author of *A Theory of Semiotics* (1976), originally published as *Trattato di semiotica generale* (1975), and Fredric Jameson, author of *The Prison-House of Language* (1972) that set the stage for a “transmodern” reconstruction of tradition on strictly voluntarist grounds, see Andreacchio, “[The Scientific Reconstruction of Dante](#),” *VoegelinView*, February 19, 2023. Even C.S. Lewis, who, in *The Abolition of Man* (1943), appealed to traditional “norms” to counter modern man's collective moral suicide, failed to escape the voluntarist trap. For a vivid representation of Lewis's romantic bent, see “The Queen of Underworld” in *The Silver Chair* (1953), or *The Discarded Image* (1964), which conflate the mystical and the imaginary beyond redemption. For a fuller discussion, see Andreacchio, “[Christianity in Narnia](#),” September 16, 2025.

²³ On the substantive rift between Islam and classical Christianity, see Rémi Brague, *Europe, la voie romaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992). On the virtues and vices of Brague's work, see Andreacchio, “[Rémi Brague's Europe: la voie romaine](#),” *VoegelinView*, November 13, 2020.

To be sure, the Jesus of the Gospels does incarnate the direct link between the human and the divine, a link bypassing, as it were, all other nexuses. Yet, the Gospels do not announce the overcoming of “pagan” nature, but its redemption.²⁴ The Gospels announce a spiritual restoration of both law and nature, rather than a legalistic suppression of nature in its pagan or ancestral dimension.²⁵ The Incarnation confirms the rootedness of paganism in true divinity, as well as the proper function of law as mirror of what is sacred in nature. The “primary cause” vindicates the inalienable dignity of “secondary causes” by confirming the teleological and hierarchical order of being. The pagan *qua* pagan—as “the Samaritan” of Luke 10:30—is not the enemy of the true faith, but the rightful inhabitant of a world begging to be illuminated.²⁶ True faith’s task lies here, in the illumination of the world in which all men are born as pagans. True faith does not seek to alienate us from our pagan roots, but to cultivate them in light of a common principle of order.²⁷

In Mary philosophy discovers itself, its destiny, as Christ, true natural reason, the light that shines in the darkness of the past, of the realm of the dead. Mary as true form of philosophy is the Christian muse *par excellence*, the model for all other women (etymologically, “wives of men”), so that they, too, may be *madonne*, ladies belonging to men-as-poets, as the form in and through which human desire is purged or converted into desire of the good itself, as of all that is good in all things.²⁸

Yet, Mary as philosophy’s true muse is by and large alien to us or to modern approaches to Christianity, in no small measure because of the modern rise of nominalism. This rise was occasioned by the extreme difficulty necessarily faced by pre-modern Platonists in defending the Platonic life before the tribunal of a popular imagination in the grip of what St. Augustine

²⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 1, 8 ad 2: “Grace does not eliminate, but perfects nature” (*gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit*). The Medieval saying reminds us that God is not an imposition on nature, or that the divine act is the absolute fullness of the act of nature. Nature responds to its divine perfection in gratitude (*gratitudo*). The imperfect responds to the perfect in recognition of the former’s indebtedness. Grace and gratitude are bound by an eternal covenant: the way down and the way up; the descent and the return (*metanoia* as *anabasis*), joined in a mysterious ring. Grace descends to convert, raise, fill, and resurrect the fallen—to awaken the fallen and to redeem the imperfect, incomplete, and potential back into the fully actual. This is the hidden fullness of the act, of life, of being. Gratitude is kindled as we ascend into the fullness of grace—raised to partake in the mover that is not moved, the circle that is not encircled.

²⁵ Christianity’s medieval success tended to open the door to the legalism, or binding of truth to legal conventions, that the Gospels are strenuously and openly opposed to. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 157–64, further shows how, in the name of freedom, modernity radicalized the legalistic tendencies found in medieval scholarship. See Andreacchio, “Leo Strauss on Modern Christianity,” May 18, 2025.

²⁶ See Andreacchio, “The Good Samaritan: A Phenomenological Sermon,” *Voegelin View*, December 3, 2022.

²⁷ Vico, “Of the Elements,” *Principi di Scienza Nuova*, 5–7.

²⁸ This problem is cardinal to Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. See above, n6.

notoriously denounced as *dominandi libido* (“lust for domination/power”).²⁹ Because the classical (both ancient and medieval) Christianity of “true natural reason” yielded *de facto*, if not *de jure* (as we see most notably in Protestantism), to a voluntarist enterprise continuously at war with the forces of anti-biblical progressivism, the very notion of a Christian *rationalism* is likely to strike us as an oxymoron. Yet, careful examination of the general character of modern Christianity and its “critical” underpinnings can help us appreciate the sense in which for classical Christianity man relates to God primarily through pure or purified natural reason and only secondarily or derivatively through the imagination.³⁰

As a result of the Machiavellian/Cartesian revolution, Christianity has generally become a matter of words and feelings: the Christian is expected to believe in words and then fill the words he believes in with his “charismatic” feelings supplemented or confirmed by charitable deeds—works of grace (*charis*). We begin with empty names that we then try to fill “creatively”. But is this what classical Christianity is about? When the Gospels call for belief in the *name* of Jesus Christ, they call us not to hold fast to a Cartesian ideal to be realized empathetically (through our love) but to pledge allegiance to the inherence of the divine in political or properly-human life.³¹ It is not enough for the Christian to posit the divine beyond the human; he must stand for the presence of the divine, the *parousia*, as the saving agent for nations. The Christian as such attests to the divine’s “con-descending” *under* the law: the principle of the law becomes *subject* to the law, exposing all legal corruption from the Cross. Yet, through the Cross, the legal mask of iniquity is converted into a mirror of man’s divine destiny to purge himself (to undergo repentance, as the “turning back” denoted by the Hebrew *teshuvah*) in preparation for the eternal life of pure spirit.

²⁹ In the preface to *City of God*, St. Augustine describes the earthly life of people as “dominated by lust to dominate” (*dominandi libido dominatur*). On Christianity as a Platonic defense of the Bible read as defender of the Platonic life, see Vico, “Of the Method,” *Principi di Scienza Nuova*. While the Christian defense of Platonic philosophy in light of the Bible is not legalistic, it necessarily occasions the blurring of the distinction between law and spirit/nature (see Strauss, “Classic Natural Right,” *Natural Right and History*, 120–64. In the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche infamously dismissed Christianity as “Platonism for the ‘People’” (*Platonismus fürs »Volk«*). He argued that Europe, from resentment against the Platonic “error”, had grown strong enough to embrace a vitalistic non-dogmatic truth, one “beyond good and evil” and so beyond any absolutely pure good. On Vico’s reading, however, the “philosophy” that represses people is not Platonic, but nominalist/voluntarist. Christianity would then not impose any Platonic error upon nations, but invite them to awaken from their subjection to lust for domination by countering that lust’s voluntarist roots. Its pure reflection would transcend Nietzsche’s “will to power” by illuminating the irrational roots of his *amor fati*. Rather than Platonism translated for non-philosophers (this is Nietzsche’s point), Christianity is a universal invitation/call to “die” (or prepare for) a Platonic life. That invitation was made possible by the Hebrew Bible.

³⁰ On the distinction between the mystical (viz., natural reason in God) and the imaginative, see Aquinas, *Commentary to Boethius’s de Trinitate*, Q. 6 art. 1.

³¹ See Andreacchio, “[The Salvation of Nations: Why Jesus Helped the Centurion \(Matthew 8:5–13\)](#),” July 7, 2025.

The Gospels, however, expose a grievous obstacle to faith in Jesus Christ. Full commitment to the Cross is impossible as an imposition. The Christian faith must be *natural*; the Christian must gradually learn to see the Cross with open, candid eyes. He must undergo a *poetic education* allowing him to suffer without fear, to see Christ's pain as his own. This is where the appeal to the Virgin Mary emerges most meaningfully. Mary's eyes are to be our own. Only through Mary's intercession can we regain a pristine sight of things both human and divine; only thus can we see the divine at work in the human *naturally* and escape the trap of voluntarism, or the habit of conceiving the divine as an imposition on human nature.

Mary herself must be approached gradually, beginning from Eve, her foremost biblical antecedent. Genesis 3.15 is a *locus classicus* that helps us to approach Mary gently, appreciating her role as mediator between men and the perfect mediator found in Jesus Christ. In the canonical Latin rendering of the biblical verse where God addresses "the Serpent," *Inimicitias ponam inter te et mulierem, et semen tuum et semen illius: ipsa conteret caput tuum, et tu insidiaberis calcaneo ejus*. Modern critics have long accused this translation of deviating from the original Hebrew (and Greek) by rendering a male pronoun with the feminine *ipsa*. Why is it that in the Vulgate and more generally in great exegetes of the Roman Catholic Church, Genesis 3.15 is read as indicating that it is Eve, notably in the person of Mary, who shall "bruise" or "crush" the head of the snake? The Greek αὐτός σου τηρήσει κεφαλὴν reads הָיָה *shuwph* as τηρέω or "watch over" in the sense of "guarding against," while the Vulgate *conteret* denotes a crushing. Do the Hebrew and Greek alike not indicate through a masculine pronoun that the *seed* of Eve shall "crush" the snake's head? The syntactical shift is understandable given the metaphorical character of "your head," which must be understood as extending to generations to come, but that in the original Hebrew addresses ostensibly the serpent, rather than its seed. Just as the text's "your head" refers to the serpent's seed, so does the *ipsa* or "she" of the Vulgate refer to Eve's own seed. Thus "she will crush your head" is to be read as including the sense of "her seed shall crush yours," with the further understanding that Eve shall act in her seed (as a spiritually renewed Eve) just as the serpent shall be "crawling" in his own. Thus the war between Eve and the serpent shall remain between the two at the heart of the conflict between their respective progeny. Similarly, the conflict between what St. Augustine speaks of as the City (or citizenship/community) of God (thus a purely spiritual order) and the earthly City

corresponds to an underlying conflict between good and evil. But how should Eve be good in the aftermath of her first error/erring?

In Act 2.2 of his *Twelfth Night*, a play dedicated overall to the celebration of spiritual renewal—of the Epiphany as well as of the purification *post-partum* of Mary—Shakespeare invites us to consider, through the character Viola, that Eve’s first fault is not, properly speaking, her own, but of her sight cut off from speech. Eve’s erring is not due to her will, which is good in itself, but to the way her will can be easily manipulated by false appearances, or evil disguised in words. Platonic interpreters of Genesis have, to be sure, long emphasized Eve’s innocence. Eve went astray by separating from Adam, and this she did not do out of any ill-will but because of the frail nature of the senses. Indeed, Eve would be traditionally seen as representing our sensory faculty, while Adam would be representing our rational faculty. Eve’s “distraction,” to echo Shakespeare, would pertain to her incapacity to follow reason or the rational thread of discourse, as opposed to “skipping” words. And yet, ironically, throughout antiquity it is thanks to Lady Eve that men have been taught to regain their reason—as Theseus recovers his “thread” thanks to Ariadne. Without the lady, the male hero would have remained lost in the labyrinth of language, even though the task of overcoming the monster hidden within the labyrinth could ultimately be met by a Theseus alone (in *Twelfth Night* “monsters” are related to “gender confusion”).³²

To return to Genesis 3:15, Eve crushes the serpent’s head, even as the Greek reads “watches out for” or “guards against”. The serpent is to hide and never dare become authoritative, for now Eve and her true progeny are strengthened by God’s Word—not a Word spoken merely to Adam apart from Eve, but a Word spoken both to reason and to the senses. This “complete,” *prophetic* Word allows Eve to be purged of her error, her being-misled by deceptive speech and the images it evoked in her imagination. The Bible itself confirms Eve in her capacity to oppose sophistry. Yet, the Bible itself begs for interpretation, so that Eve alone could hardly rise above the plane of mere suspicion against the deceitful speech biting at her heel (*tu insidiaberis calcaneo ejus*). Eve must work with Adam, not in competition with him. She must and will support Adam, by loyally warning

³² In Plato’s *Phaedo*, Socrates emerges as the slayer of the Minotaur. Jacob Klein, “Plato’s *Phaedo*,” in *Lectures and Essays*, ed. Robert B. Williamson and Elliott Zuckerman (Annapolis: St. John’s College Press, 1985), 378, notes that “the new and *true* Theseus is *Socrates* and the old and *true* Minotaur is the monster called *Fear of Death*.” Socrates thus exposes the original, hidden identity of the Minotaur, an identity hidden in all discrete monsters, whether old or new.

him against spiritual “serpents”. Her pious senses will fight back, allowing Adam to then reason without hindrance.

The importance of Eve can hardly be overstated. Eve is entrusted with the mission of making Adam’s heroism not only possible but successful; and this thanks to the Bible, or the authoritative Word of God. Without this Word—this *Law*—Eve would not have the strength to guard against evil, so that Adam’s reason would lack a pure common-sense foundation. Reason could then be formally correct, though factually misguided as regards to content.

No one revolted against this discrepancy between form and content more heroically than Giambattista Vico, whose work stands as the glorious fruit of Renaissance poetry, or of the great revival of Platonic poetry that finds its foundational verses or *fioretti* in Dante Alighieri. Vico articulates with supreme and elegant precision problems that Shakespeare is articulating in opposition to the rise of a “brave new world” of Machiavellian extraction—a world in which a new “symbolic” form would be imposed universally upon content conceived as originally formless or worthless (what Descartes called *res extensa*). Vico’s objection to “the moderns” (from Machiavelli to Descartes, Hobbes and Spinoza) comes with a warning against a peculiar radicalization of what Vico exposes as the corruption of pre-modern Christianity—a corruption that is traditionally known as *voluntarism*. The question of Eve’s purity is most pertinent. If Eve’s imagination (our *sensus communis*) is not originally or essentially pure, then human (Adam’s) reason can trust fully only its abstractions or “formulas of words” (Vico’s expression), not least of them “God” conceived *ex machina*. The theological-political upshot of the rejection of Eve’s natural purity is a religion for which God is an absolute imposition, or in which man’s proper stance towards the divine is defined absolutely as “submission.”

To be sure, once “God” is posited *ex machina* and submitted to *irrationally*, we can be reassured that God “loves” us, that he is closer to us than our jugular vein. What is of the essence is not what God can become for us, but what he is for us prior to our accepting him. Christianity exposes God as mysteriously or originally submitted to man: God gives/humbles himself—as light shining in the dark—prior to our accepting him as authoritative. Islam fails to understand this. God is imposed *first*. God is primarily *Allah*, all-powerful, the mightiest. Only upon accepting God’s own power can we discover that he is sustaining *our own*. This is where it becomes most evident that “God” (Allah) serves as mask of man’s will-to-power.

While in submitting to Allah the Muslim seeks a basis for his own empowerment, with Christianity God submits to worldly authorities by way of rising back to himself beyond mere will-power, in the element of pure reflection, and so as a pure act of the intellect (*intellectus agens*, or *ratio pura*). Hence the cardinal discrepancy between Islam and (classical/canonical) Christianity: the former is essentially voluntaristic; the latter, essentially rationalistic.

This must seem strange to us insofar as we are raised as moderns to take voluntarism for granted. Yet, as we purge ourselves of our modern prejudices, we begin discerning the essence of Christianity as a *spirit* that converts us from the supposed primacy of the will to a fundamental primacy of reflection. What is at stake is a conversion in terms of *orientation*, whereby we are no longer discerning our ends in legal(istic) terms, but in terms of *contemplatio/theorein*, or the “circular” spiritual movement that Aristotle announces as *nous*.

How is the question of Eve’s purity pertinent to the essential distinction between Islam and Christianity? If Eve is pure—as she is supremely in the person of the Blessed Virgin Mary—then there is no need for Allah. For then we would have the disclosure of a field of contemplation, a womb of reflection in which we become participants in God’s essential movement/activity, which involves God’s own self-sacrifice. We would be invited to discover God as primordial and paradigmatic self-giver. On the other hand, if Eve were not pure, *philosophy* itself—philosophy as Socratic way of life—would be impossible. “The pagan world” must be originally *innocent* for philosophy to be capable of curing it *poetically* in the direction of a disclosure of God in the element of pure reflection.

With Islam, the pagan world is redeemable primarily in the element of *law* and/or *submission* to law. The *spirit* of law is disclosed to those who *first* submit to the law, and that spirit serves as basis for the *empowerment* of Allah’s servants. Once again, insofar as we primarily “encounter” Allah as supreme *will*, he is there to empower our own will. We may then live assuming that we are serving Allah, while *de facto* serving our own will, even and especially when we thereupon *use* “philosophy” (reason) to justify our own conduct.³³

³³ On traditional/medieval Islam’s use of philosophy, see Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 95–141. One might object that the pious Muslim should be eager to die for Allah and that *this* is a sign that the Muslim is not serving his own will. Yet, as Prince Hamlet showed incisively, what man wants on his own is nothing falling short of death, or more precisely suicide. See Andreacchio, *The Passion of Reason: Shakespeare and Ariosto as Dantean Philosophers* (New York: Peter Lang, 2026).

Philosophers might appeal to the primacy of thought over will/volition, but as long as they do not recognize the purity of Eve, or “the New Eve” (Eve renewed in the Christian God), they are left with “formulas of words” bereft of the element of certainty. What such philosophers hold as “true” (*verum*) will remain most uncertain or lacking in what is certain (*certum*). As a result, the door will remain wide open for an Islamic-like objection to philosophy, whereby an absolute certainty will be imposed to support all reason(ing): a “divine will” introduced as salvation of human freedom from its corruption.

A philosophy that does not recognize the sanctity of common sense is a philosophy that feeds inevitably into the rise of a voluntaristic world. But such is the philosophy promoted by Machiavelli and adhered to thereafter by all modern intellectuals *qua* modern. Today, such a philosophy finds its consummation in technocracy as the regime of empowerment, of the will’s “growth” or “self-affirmation” over and above all reflection. Reflection remains as *ancilla voluntatis*, a servant of the will: the will is not there to serve reflection, but to resolve reflection in the will’s own affirmation—in willpower as the truth about God. Gradually, reflection properly understood yields to a mechanistic instrument of universal self-affirmation; the only reason recognized as just is the reason of power and so of the machine. Reflection that points beyond the limits of the will is deemed, if only tacitly, heretical.

Conceiving the proper link between man and God in terms of will, the voluntarist has little appreciation for a classical, Platonic hermeneutics that seeks the divine in man’s ascent from will to intelligence. While for the modernist God is manifest in man’s will, for the classical Platonist God is manifest in man’s natural reason. These are two incompatible ways of conceiving man as “the image of God.”

Ultimately, we are faced not merely with two ways of seeing the world, but with two ways of living. In the classical-Platonic case, life is properly ascent to the divine via a natural hierarchy of ends, a “ladder of being” allowing the soul or desire to purge itself through its forms, or in search of its true, pure form. Virgin or immaculate Mary signals the inherence of purity in all (natural) forms of desire. Purity is not to be imposed upon an impure desire. Desire is not to be purged from above, or legalistically. The Christian and so Platonic alternative is unequivocal: purity illuminates desire from within, which is to say that the divine acts *naturally*. This does not preclude divine authoritative sanction—the divine *reminder* of the inherence of the divine in nature. Yet, under no circumstance should a divine will be

imposed upon man's will as essential condition for the purification of desire. The *revelation* of the divine must remain *moderated* by recognition of the primacy of the latency of the divine *in* nature over any manifestation of the divine *above* nature. Accordingly, when speaking (cautiously) of "the supernatural," canonical medieval Christianity has in mind nature's own (divine) principle of generation, as distinguished from generation as such.³⁴ Submission to a divine will should never be allowed to serve as a mask for appeals to the divine placed in the interest of all-too-human tyranny.

In or as the Virgin Mary, Eve emerges as adequate basis for the purification of man and ultimately as womb of human perfection itself. Hence the importance of the angelic Annunciation, which invites us to recognize the divine as "impregnating" nature from within. The "outer image" we have of the Archangel Gabriel should not be confused with the essential character of angelic *agency*, which, far from entailing an extrinsic imposition, denotes a most intimate *intellectual intuition*, as immediate communication proceeding from God to God. In Gabriel, God would be speaking as Father to God-as-Son. The first message the angel carries for Mary is that she is "endowed with grace" (κεχαριτωμένη, from χάρις) and in this sense God is with her (Luke 1:28), so that she is "blessed" (Εὐλογημένη, from εὐλογέω) among women: endowed with the good word (*eu-logos*). God is not with Mary "from above," but from within, as an internal gift that renders Mary a purely good model for all women/wives. Now, the angelic "logos" is said to be altogether troubling for Mary (*turbata est*), so that the angel encourages her not to fear, by noting that she has found/discovered (εὑρεῖς, he says) grace "by God" (παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ—1:29). Is grace to be found in danger? The Greek διεταράχθη, καὶ διελογίζετο, "thoroughly troubled and thoroughly reasoning," suggests that the angel has *moved* Mary to reason about what he said. Is reasoning needed to understand the angel's subsequent warning that Mary will conceive (the Greek *sun-lambano* suggests a "seizing-within")? Does the angel move Mary to conceive Jesus in the element of reason? Mary is the one who, having brought forth a son from within her womb, is to name him. While "Jesus," the name, is divinely rooted, the name is to be named by Mary, *naturally* in a *rational* context. What does this tell us about Jesus, "the savior," or the one in whom God saves? Does divine salvation come in the element of natural reason—of a reason that springs forth out of a pristine nature in accordance with a rational plan, or

³⁴ See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, Q. 31, art. 5.

providentially? Is natural reason a divine gift saving us from fear? Is our reason to be purged in light of a natural paradigm announced in the Gospels? Do the Gospels warn us against the corruption of reason and about the importance of our returning to a pristine reason as the activity we are originally or divinely moved to?

The angel's message unfolds to indicate that the reason/*logos* that can save us from fear—thus the *good (eu)* reason—is to be named by Mary insofar as God speaks within or from within her. The “name” (*nomen/ὄνομα*—1:31) is of importance, here; for the name carries the weight of authority—as *law (nomos)*. Do the Gospels call us to discover law in conformity with natural reason? Is law to be understood as justified in a divine reason that speaks in nature? Is Gabriel other than Jesus prior to his being named? Is Jesus Gabriel under a law arising out of a nature uncontaminated by the stain affecting all women who are not Mary? In Gabriel do we behold the light of reason poetically displayed as link between God and the law? Is Gabriel the annunciation itself of Jesus? Does Gabriel beg to be born as Jesus? Is Mary impregnated by the voice personified by Gabriel—a voice that speaks “from within” even as *we* are given to imagine it “without”?³⁵ Is Gabriel a message in search of a pure womb, a stage on which (or out of which) the message may be displayed authoritatively? Can Gabriel speak to crowds only in the person of Jesus? Is the “salvation” addressed by the Gospels at once theological and political? Is this not what Luke 1:33 suggests when anticipating Jesus's reign over the house of Jacob “forever” (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας) or in a kingdom without end (*et regnabit in domo Jacob in aeternum, et regni ejus non erit finis*)? Is Jesus's reign what every reign is in God?

If Jesus marks the theological roots of all political life and order, the revelation of those roots must find a suitable womb, one receptive to its divine mandate. Without Mary, the Gospel (Good News) would lend itself to be heard as a tyrannical imposition. Purity in the midst of human corruption is to be found as a privileged place in which nature “discovers” (Luke 1:29) God within, even in the midst of rampant corruption.

Are we to understand that there is an ineradicable purity in the soul, in which alone God's *presence* is recognized? Would “Mary” name a natural “clearing” (to speak with María Zambrano) constituting a necessary condition for the salvation of corrupt nations and corrupt

³⁵ To Mary's spiritual impregnation corresponds the spiritual nature of Christ's birth. See St. Ambrose of Milan, [Letter 42.6](#), esp. with ref. to Ezekiel 45:1–4. The Bishop stresses that Mary is virgin not merely in conceiving, but also in giving birth (*parituram virginem...virgo concepit et genuit*).

souls, alike. Is Jesus the light that, descending directly from God, is born among men in a place of dialogue/*logos* (Matthew 18:20) untainted by our corruption and lest the *polis* fall as Sodom (Genesis 18:26-33, Matthew 11:23, Luke 17:29, Romans 9:29)?

Gabriel's promise of an everlasting reign cutting through all corruption does not suggest any equivalence between the house of Jacob and Sodom, but it does warn about the dividing line separating the two (Genesis 13:13-17). The house of Jacob can avoid the fate of Sodom in virtue of its recognition of the divine light shining from within it. Conversely, our fall into chaos would coincide with the obscuring of a *logos* that ties man naturally to the divine (Luke 1:35).

The difficulty raised by Mary in Luke 1:34 is at once theological, pertaining as it does to divine agency in nature (how can she have a child if she "knows no man"?), and political, pertaining as it does to a royal lineage (how can authority be secured without man's mediation?). Gabriel's answer is in effect that royal lineage is defined directly by God, or that man is generated by God prior to being generated by another man. Yet again this is possible only insofar as God finds or illuminates a place—a womb—open to God's presence: an opening in an otherwise obscure world. But is that opening not itself created by light itself? Does the divine spirit plunge into darkness to establish the kingdom that St. Augustine would call *civitas dei*? This is a reign defined by reason-in-nature, a reason that marks the distinction between man and beast; hence St. Augustine's *ubi primum occurrit aliquid quod non sit nobis commune et pecori, hoc ad rationem pertinet*: "this place where something occurs that we do not have in common with cattle, pertains to reason."³⁶

We are called here to partake in reason-in-nature, or natural reason, as that which defines what is properly human—setting the human aside with respect to all other animals. But this reason that hides in nature is proclaimed in the Gospels as the savior of the house (*oikos/domus*) of Jacob: reason calls men to live in a house open to reason, a society open to reason in nature, a reason defining our civility. The everlasting kingdom that Gabriel invokes would then be the order of nature over which unfolds the temporal course of nations.

³⁶ Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 15 a. 1 s. c. 8, paraphrasing St. Augustine, *De trinitate*. 12.3.3. For an alternative paraphrase replacing "reason" with "mind," see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 55, a. 4, arg. 3. In Q. 15, a. 1, obj. 10, Aquinas cites Boethius's *De consolacione*, Bk. 5, to the effect that reason (*ratio*) is proper to mankind as pure intelligence (*intelligentia sola*) belongs to the divine (obj. 11 confirms that what is meant by "intellect" is the divine root of deliberative reason).

This is not, to be sure, an order determined by dark or unbridled passions, but one governed by a divine mind, as the mind of nature—the mind underlying all generation.³⁷

Our modern upbringing tends to obscure the classical sense of “nature” evoked by the Gospels. For we are raised to relate to nature either “romantically” in the element of feelings, or “scientifically”/mechanistically in terms of abstract/symbolic formulas, only to be driven to a synthesis of the two aspects of nature (the “irrational” and the “rational”) divined as a Rational Society of Machiavellian extraction in which the mere-conflict between (irrational) nature and law (“reason of State”) yields to an open-ended process of *rationalizing* the irrational, or of channeling and controlling unreason, where the irrational is integrated into the system of cunning we call technocracy.

Being raised to take for granted the modern split between the rational and the irrational, we tend to conceive divine reason in voluntaristic terms, as a will beyond all human reason (which is “abstracted” from nature). The typically Kantian appeal to the irreducibility of nature to mere *res extensa* should not distract us from the Deist character of modern religiosity. In formally allowing for divine transcendence (viz. the sublime, or the noumenon), Kant set the stage for the triumph or radicalization of medieval voluntarism. Reason becomes strictly instrumental (read, Machiavellian) insofar as it can no longer be purely *natural*. While promising to save “nature” (including human nature) from being subsumed under the category of law, Kant strips nature of any capacity to *guide* our reason. Nature loses all authority, allowing us to *pretend* to do justice to nature’s irreducibility to merely-mechanical forces by positing *hypothetical* meaning in nature, such that would justify or support our modern reason/freedom. What is meaningful in nature is now conceived as an “ideal” (a formal “as if” or *als ob*) supporting the progress of instrumental reason in bringing about a “Kingdom of Ends” (Kant’s *Reich der Zwecke*), a realm in which freedom is fully realized in its legal/nominal formulas, these being “perfected” as pure expressions of what Rousseau would call a “general will” (*volonté générale*).

Evidently, modern reason stands at the antipodes of the Platonism of the Gospels. The purity of nature reflecting the divine perfection of the understanding (*intellectus*) is replaced by the purity of laws expressive of a modern will, or of the auto-determination of all those who consider man as supremely responsible to contribute to the establishment of a perfectly

³⁷ This is the central theme of Vico’s *Principi di Scienza Nuova*, especially the work’s final paragraphs.

rational society, a society in which man's will triumphs over God's will in the act of appealing to God's will as supreme guarantor of man's own.

The Virgin Mary is at war with the cunning of modernity, which unfolds to obscure the reason that Mary opens her womb to. Standing on a Cartesian-like act of self-determination, our new/modern reason trades classical maturity for progressive *complexity*; substance for vistas; soul for diversity; the concentric for the eccentric. The surface is now everything, or at least all that we are allowed to speak of, to paraphrase Wittgenstein. The Virgin crushes our superficiality as the head of a serpentine cunning that distracts us from the fundamental problems of life. Our superficiality is exposed as demonic insofar as demons are angels fallen into superficiality—*literalist* messengers that seek to reduce spiritual depths to carnal/textual surfaces, and so the journey of the mind in God (*itinerarium mentis in deum*, per St. Bonaventure) to “growth” away from God—growth as the Faustian prize for falling out of grace.

It is in our own truest interest that Mary, as New Eve, counters the demonic spirit of superficiality heralded by modern man as *conditio sine qua non* of our indefinite progress. For such a progress is coextensive with our growing forgetfulness of the reason why we should be idolizing our ideals, a forgetfulness that drives modern man mercilessly to being crushed by his own satanic logic, incapable of distinguishing himself from the spirit that has led him astray. So it is that in crushing the Serpent, Eve's spirit crushes what we have become, or failed to *be*. It is in light of her perfect son, the son that the divine mind awakens Eve to disclose for us, that Eve is renewed triumphant above *all* evil.

The early 13th c. Marian antiphon *Salve Regina* is most pertinent, insofar as it evokes the Virgin Mary as compassionate royal Mother of praying “sons of Eve exiled ... in this valley of tears” (*exsules filii Hevae ... in hac lacrimarum valle*). What is compassionate is the Queen's “eyes,” which we are to pray for. What saves us from our exile is the New Eve's gaze, which allows *us* to see Jesus as the blessed fruit of Mary's womb (*benedictus fructus ventris Mariae*). It is not enough for “sweet Virgin Mary” (*dulcis Virgo Maria*) to guard against the Serpent. We must come to see with her eyes, not only for the sake of avoiding or driving back evil, but for the sake of recognizing—in the aftermath of our exile from Mary's pure sight (*post hoc exilium*)—Mary's blessed fruit as the living Word.

We begin to see, here, why Protestant protestations against Catholic invocations of Mary as savior are misguided. In the *Salve Regina* we need to recover the New Eve's eyes in order to see the Savior who is given to us *in principium*, though we could no longer see him. For one cannot see Jesus with impure eyes, or eyes obscured with evil. Mary's compassionate eyes are invoked so that their gaze may be directed downward to our mortal condition, as openings through which we may behold our Savior. Only thus may we recover the purity of vision required to see its proper form—the living truth.³⁸

Most pertinent is Bernard of Clairvaux's *Memorare* ("Remember"), where the suppliant asks for Mary's help and support (*auxilia* and *suffragia*, both in the plural), with the implication that our sin coincides with our having abandoned (*derelictum*) an authority capable of hearing/heeding the suffering of its subjects. Mary is to lend her hearing by way of continually helping and supporting *our own* hearing of the Living Word—though, naturally, Mary's help is itself contingent upon our prayer.³⁹ For the door is opened to those who knock, so that in asking for Mary's help, far from being intent upon bending the divine will to our own, we open ourselves, our own will, to a light purging us of all compulsion, of all confusion. This message is confirmed in the Marian antiphon, *Regina Caeli*, where we are to rejoice through Mary's rejoicing in the divine's keeping the promise of resurrection (*surrexit Dominus vere*). "Truly has the Lord resurrected": this is to say that the Lord's earthly authority was well grounded; that it had a heavenly counterpart; that it was truly *natural*, rather than merely conventional. The Lord's authority is effective in nature or death, even more so than it is in our fallen world of conventions alienated from nature. The Lord can thus be trusted even in our "valley of tears". There is no need to trust a God who does not descend into our world. Yet, neither should the Christian trust a worldly king claiming to owe his worldly power or success to God. What is to be trusted in practical terms is the Cross, rather

³⁸ In what sense can a "word" be *seen*? It is often said that the Hebrews stood for the primacy of hearing, while the Greeks stood for the primacy of seeing. In the Gospels, which are the Torah for the world, the living Word or Logos (in *Purgatorio* 10.95, Dante speaks of "visible speech"—*visibile parlare*) coincides with the vision of the word that is heard. What is heard, the secret of the Torah, is manifest. Yet, the manifestation is not conclusive insofar as it remains Logos, a verb, an articulation, even an art. Christ represents the art of nature itself: the art of appearing by way of disappearing; the art of hiding in the act of exposing oneself. The Gospels teach that the loftiest vision that the Greeks are capable of falls short of the pure manifestation of what is not apparent, and that such a manifestation is a pointer back to what is by nature hidden; they teach, or invite us to understand that what we see is a sign of what we have heard prior to seeing anything, and so of what we see in hearing long before we see on our own.

³⁹ The Virgin's "support" (*suffragium*) entails an election: we are supported by being chosen for heeding the Word manifest to us through the Virgin.

than the worldly sword: the Cross signaling the manner in which the divine enters into our valley of tears; the Cross as vehicle for an ascent to authority in nature; the Cross, not as mere passivity, but as *transformation* or *immolation* of the earthly unto the heavenly; the Cross as site of *translation* of what is below us, into what is above us; the Cross as vehicle of our purgation out of darkness; the Cross as a crusading *spiritual* sword—as *word*—cutting through the curtain of violence to expose it reflectively to the light of the understanding, of discovery of meaning in nature.

The God entering our world on a Cross is the God who has deigned to illuminate our world with the joy of resurrection (*Deus, qui per resurrectionem Filii tui, Domini nostri Iesu Christi, mundum laetificare dignatus es...*). Why “deigned”? For the resurrection can be exposed only through a *condescensio*, a descent within our valley of tears. God no longer awaits on a mountaintop in the respect that his presence, his spirit is universally announced in laws. The spirit comes forth to redeem laws from serving as instruments of alienation from spirit, or as masks of violence allowing us to live *as if* there were peace. Spirit is “the new law” or “law renewed” in the sense that spirit (re)appropriates law for itself, showing us that the law’s proper function is to announce spirit—to bespeak law’s inherence in nature as spirit. This is law as a *poetic form*, a mirror of things that are not evident to us (*non apparentium*).

Now, if law is in nature as spirit, civil law is to be understood as emerging out of nature. Hence the importance of Mary as “Nourishing Mother of the Redeemer” (*Alma Redemptoris Mater*), providing permanent access (as *porta*/“gate” that “stays viable”/*manet pervia*) to the heavens as a “star” in the sea of death, sustaining the dying who care to ascend out of death (*pervia caeli porta manes, et stella maris, succurre cadenti, surgere qui curat*). God nourishes us in nature as Mary is the light that reminds us sweetly (with *dulcedo*, to return to the antiphon, *Salve Regina*)—as the sweetest poetry—of our heavenly destiny in the darkest hour.

Mary’s natural nourishing virtue is, of course, announced to the world with respect to Jesus, the perfect man. Thus does the antiphon *Alma Redemptoris Mater* read: “you who, Nature marveling, gave birth to your saintly Parent” (*tu quæ genuisti, Natúra miránte, tuum sanctum Genitórem*), adding that Mary remained a Virgin before *and* after she had been “saluted” directly by Gabriel’s mouth. What is of pivotal significance here is the reference to nature: nature marvels, not merely aside from the birthing of the parent, but *as* that very

birthing. In Mary nature herself is marvelous, awakening our “virgin”/pure sight to our heavenly destiny. Mary is the opening of nature to a light crossing her eternally—“from God to God”. As such, Mary is not merely impregnated by God through his angelic light, for in the act of being impregnated, Mary rises as “Lady of Angels” (*Domina Angelorum*) to cite the *Ave Regina caelorum*: “the door through which the light of the world springs forth” (*porta, ex qua mundo lux est orta*).

In or as the New Eve, nature herself is renewed. No longer a mere valley of the dying, nature emerges marvelously to our own sight as womb of eternal life. Thanks to Mary, what is hidden can become apparent to us; for what is eternally hidden in nature, what hides by its very nature—as truth (*aletheia*) is disclosed paradoxically only in “otherworldly” hiding—is spontaneously *named* for the salvation of all nations. Indeed, the Gospels attest to that *natural* naming, a naming that springs divinely out of nature as the form illuminating the Gospels themselves. Such, as we have seen, is natural reason insofar as it appears with poetic humility under the law to awaken us, ordinary subjects of the law, to an altogether otherworldly vision, a pure understanding that serves as essential condition for all worldly vision.

Logos, Law, and Longing: Tarzan as Natural Man

Justin D. Lyons

The Tarzan stories of Edgar Rice Burroughs depict a version of natural man that may be compared to the accounts of Aristotle, Aquinas, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, particularly regarding the capacities for reason and speech. The question of man's natural condition gives rise to different understandings of the origin, purpose, desirability, and, ultimately, proper functioning of civil society. The Tarzan stories show elements of the state of nature accounts of all these thinkers but ultimately have more in common with Aristotelian and Thomistic ideas of a natural inclination toward society and a guiding natural law.

Edgar Rice Burroughs (1875–1950) published his first story, *Under the Moons of Mars*, in 1912. He would go on to write almost 80 books of action-filled adventure fiction stretching from the Earth's core to the jungles of Africa to distant planets "beyond the farthest star." His most influential literary character has been Tarzan. The story of Tarzan has carved a place in our cultural memory, though that memory is often vague and erroneous because of the overlays of television and film. But Burroughs's books have declined in popularity, and Tarzan does not hold the place in the imaginations of young readers that he once did. Tarzan as Burroughs wrote him is virtually unknown to the current generation.

Readers were given their first introduction to Tarzan in *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912), where we learn of the tragic demise of Lord John Clayton and his wife, Lady Alice, on a remote African coast, leaving their infant boy alone and vulnerable. Adopted by Kala, the she-ape, after the death of her own child, the boy grows up in a far different world than the one he would have known, a world where he struggles to find his place. Many of his struggles revolve around his nature being unsuited to his environment. Physically, he is different from the members of his adoptive clan. He is hairless, and is thus named Tarzan by the apes, meaning "White-Skin."¹ He is comparatively small and weak, especially as a child. Indeed, it is only Kala's love that prevents the other apes from destroying or discarding him as a burden. But he very quickly far exceeds the strength and agility attainable by civilized man.

¹ Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes* (New York: Quiet Vision Publishing, 2003), 33.

Of even greater importance is the difference in his intellect. Tarzan uses his cleverness to overcome foes and to aid the apes in the continuous battle for survival. Eventually, in conjunction with his physical prowess, it will propel him to leadership over the tribe. But he finds little satisfaction in his position. He discovers the products of civilization, especially books, in a lonely cabin which houses the sad remains of his parents, though he knows them not. His mind begins to awaken to new possibilities.

Dissatisfied with life among the apes and recognizing his differences from them, he seeks out other humans. The nearby village of cannibals does not fulfill his longings, however. When Professor Archimedes Q. Porter, daughter Jane, and party arrive, marooned on the coast, he begins a journey that will lead him out of the jungle and into the society of men.

Twenty-three more novels follow Tarzan's path to civilization and back again, battling both mighty creatures and devious human enemies. Though Burroughs never claimed his work held high literary value—he wrote to entertain—there is much here to speculate upon if we allow ourselves.

NATURAL MAN

Tarzan may be viewed as a depiction of natural man, man untutored and unhindered by civilization, before social and political organization, living in perfect freedom. As such, he is a participant in a discussion that runs from Aristotle through Aquinas, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. The question of nature is immensely important for the political; from it arise different understandings of the origin, purpose, desirability, and, ultimately, proper functioning of civil society.

In the *Politics*, Aristotle argues that man is by nature a political animal, indicated, above all, by his capacity for reason and speech (*logos*). Therefore, anyone who is by nature outside the city (*polis*) is either inferior or superior to man, “either a beast or a god.”²

Following Aristotle, Aquinas also emphasizes reason and speech as proof that humans are meant to work and live together. But, in *On Kingship*, he also points to other indicators: their relatively fragile physical construction lacking means of defense such as horns and claws and the weakness of their natural instinct. The compensation for this lack of natural provision

² Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Bk. I, Ch. 2 (Hereafter cited by Bekker numbers), 1253a8–30.

is the capacity to reason: “Instead of all these, man was endowed with reason, by the use of which he could procure all these things for himself by the work of his hands.”³ Reason can conquer the hazards and deficiencies of the natural condition, but only given time and cooperation: “But it is not possible for one man to arrive at a knowledge of all these things by his own individual reason. It is therefore necessary for man to live in a multitude so that each one may assist his fellows, and different men may be occupied in seeking, by their reason, to make different discoveries—one, for example, in medicine, one in this and another in that.”

Aristotle and Aquinas agree that association between human beings is natural: that we are formed in such a way as to desire such association and to find not only practical advantages but the fullness of our humanity within it. But these ideas would be challenged.

Early modern political thinkers offer a rival telling of the formation of human community which came to prominence in the seventeenth century: social contract theory. In this theory man is not naturally drawn to community, quite the opposite. In the writings of Thomas Hobbes, the state in which men live before the formation of civil society (the state of nature) is a terrible place. It is a state of war of every man against every man. Man is not by nature directed toward political community; rather, nature dissociates men and renders them “apt to invade and destroy one another.”⁴ Man can expect nothing from nature but unending conflict. The state of nature as described by John Locke is only slightly more tolerable, but the result for both writers is that man must seek some way to escape his natural condition. This escape is accomplished through the social contract. People eventually realize that anything is better than living the way they are, so they get together and agree to create civil society for their own preservation. This society is not natural as it was for Aristotle and Aquinas; it is an artifact of human making.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was also a social contract theorist, though he saw both advantages and disadvantages in the formation of civil society. “Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains” begins his *Social Contract*, meaning that society’s benefits were accompanied by the evils of social, political and economic inequality, exploitation, and deceit.⁵ The original

³ Thomas Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics*, ed. William Baumgarth and Richard Regan, trans. Richard Regan (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub, 2002), 204.

⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 76.

⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract, with Geneva Manuscript and Political Economy*, ed. Roger D. Masters, trans. Judith R. Masters (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1978), 46.

freedom which man had enjoyed before government emerged is lost. Putting aside his prescriptions for solving this problem, let us focus on his description of natural man:

...by considering him, in a word, such as he must have issued from the hands of nature, I see an animal less strong than some, less agile than others, but, all things considered, the most advantageously organized of all: I see him sating his hunger beneath an oak, slaking his thirst at the first Stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that supplied his meal, and with that his needs are satisfied.⁶

Rousseau characterizes natural man as an a-rational, isolated semi-ape incapable of real communication or more than momentary association with his species. Rousseau was the first thinker in the eighteenth century to posit that humans evolved from apes.⁷ As simple and solitary as they were in Rousseau's formulation, they were happy and good because they were still free from the source of evil, dependence upon others.

How does Tarzan fit within these characterizations?

REASON AND SPEECH

Aristotle's description of those outside human community by nature or choice as being either beasts or gods finds an echo in Burroughs's stories. Tarzan is described as having the characteristics of both. He bears much resemblance to the beast in his early life—in freedom, strength, ferocity, and simple existence—and he often behaves as one, but he is not a beast. He is more. Thereupon hinges his entire tale. When Jane is contemplating his strange existence and attempting to discern his character, she describes him in transcendent terms: "What a perfect creature! There could be naught of cruelty or baseness beneath that godlike exterior. Never, she thought had such a man strode the earth since God created the first in his own image."⁸ But he is not a god either. That leaves only the middle position—that of man. By what signs is this demonstrated?

The emphasis on reason and speech in Aristotle and Aquinas is reflected upon in numerous ways in the tales of Tarzan. Though Tarzan lives among the beasts, it is his rationality that makes him fundamentally different. Reason functions as the catalyst for many

⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Victor Gourevitch, *The First and Second Discourses Together with the Replies to Critics and Essay on the Origin of Languages* (Estados Unidos: Harper Torchbooks, 1990), 141-142.

⁷ Larry Arnhart, *Political Questions: Political Philosophy from Plato to Rawls*, 3rd edition (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2003), 223.

⁸ Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 167.

of his adventures, the means by which he survives them, and a driving force of his development as a character.

Burroughs points to reason as the fundamental difference between Tarzan and the beasts around him: “But there was that which had raised him far above his fellows of the jungle—that little spark which spells the whole vast difference between man and brute—Reason.”⁹ Far from providing only theoretical benefits or distant practical advantage, reason saves Tarzan from immediate death on multiple occasions—its practical application is immediately apparent. When young Tarzan (described here as the man-child) and an ape companion are being stalked by Sabor, the lioness, Tarzan is able to comprehend the danger and react far more quickly than his companion: “His life amidst the dangers of the jungle had taught him to meet emergencies with self-confidence, and his higher intelligence resulted in a quickness of mental action far beyond the powers of the apes.”¹⁰ Tarzan dives into the deep water before him, thus escaping death and discovering an ability to swim, which none of the great apes possess.

Though it is true that reason unaccompanied by Tarzan’s physical prowess would not have saved him from the “the iron muscles and tearing fangs’ of his bitter enemy, the great ape Terkoz; it did enable him to make the best use of his abilities and overcome his foe. “It was the half-Nelson of modern wrestling which the untaught ape-man had stumbled upon, but superior reason showed him in an instant the value of the thing he had discovered. It was the difference to him between life and death.”¹¹

Reason also provides Tarzan other advantages, and his cleverness is depicted in multiple ways. He alone learned to twist long grasses together into ropes, which he used to great effect in both play and combat. Reason showed him the use of the knife he found in coastal cabin, and reason enabled him (rather miraculously) to teach himself to read with the books he also discovered there. “In Tarzan’s clever little mind many thoughts revolved, and back of these was his divine power of reason.”¹²

Reason and curiosity go together. Tarzan is curious. He desires to know not only the “what” but the “why” of the world around him. *Jungle Tales of Tarzan* (1919), the sixth

⁹ Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 93–94.

¹⁰ Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 36.

¹¹ Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 94.

¹² Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 39.

Tarzan book in order of publication, which revisits the scenes of his early life, pursues this theme.

His was an inquisitive mind. Always he had been full of questions concerning all that passed around him; but there never had been one to answer his questions. In childhood he had wanted to KNOW, and, denied almost all knowledge, he still, in manhood, was filled with the great, unsatisfied curiosity of a child. He was never quite content merely to perceive that things happened—he desired to know WHY they happened. He wanted to know what made things go.¹³

That the apes do not share his curiosity and are incapable of *logos*, the unity of reason and speech, begins to widen the gap between them and Tarzan.

Aristotle emphasizes speech in man's political nature by noting that "Man alone among the animals has speech."¹⁴ While animals have voice and can indicate "the painful or the pleasant," humans can deliberate and communicate about good and bad and just and unjust and "partnership in these things is what makes a household and a city." In Burroughs's description, the great apes do have a kind of language, which Tarzan can speak, but its vocabulary is extremely limited, and it does not have the power to describe or contemplate much beyond the immediate concerns of food and survival.

Imagine, if you can, a child filled with the wonders of nature, bursting with queries and surrounded only by beasts of the jungle to whom his questionings were as strange as Sanskrit would have been. If he asked Gunto what made it rain, the big old ape would but gaze at him in dumb astonishment for an instant and then return to his interesting and edifying search for fleas; and when he questioned Mumga, who was very old and should have been very wise, but wasn't, as to the reason for the closing of certain flowers after Kudu had deserted the sky, and the opening of others during the night, he was surprised to discover that Mumga had never noticed these interesting facts, though she could tell to an inch just where the fattest grubworm should be hiding.¹⁵

Tarzan cannot find true community in accordance with his nature with the apes. Thus, dissatisfactions of reason and speech are a wedge between Tarzan and the tribe that will ultimately take him out of his jungle existence.

¹³ Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan* (New York: Quiet Vision Publishing, 2003), 190.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Politics* 1253 a9-18.

¹⁵ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 190-191.

In *Tarzan of the Apes*, the acquisition of the ability to speak with his fellow humans plays a large part in his actual departure for civilized lands. After many years of studying in the coastal cabin, Tarzan presents the unusual spectacle of an ability to read unconnected to verbal speech. When Jane and her party arrive in the company of the cutthroat sailors who are stranding them there, Tarzan writes a note proclaiming his ownership of the cabin and its contents but, though he saves both Clayton and Jane from certain death, he is unable to communicate with them except by primitive signs. It is only after a French cruiser arrives to rescue them and Tarzan rescues the courageous Lieutenant D'Arnot from cannibals that he will gain this ability. Tarzan watches over the wounded D'Arnot as he recovers, and the Lieutenant asks in writing how he might repay the kindness. "Teach me to speak the language of men," is Tarzan's reply.¹⁶

D'Arnot begins to teach him in French, which he comes to regret because it does not reflect written English. Nonetheless, Tarzan progresses very quickly in verbal communication. When D'Arnot recovers sufficiently for them to return to the coast, they find Jane and the others have departed. Tarzan's grief is poignant: "A great bitterness rose in his heart. He would go away, far into the jungle and join his tribe. Never would he see one of his own kind again, nor could he bear the thought of returning to the cabin. He would leave that forever behind him with the great hopes he had nursed there of finding his own race and becoming a man among men."

He does depart but is recalled by social impulse and responsibility: "If you are an ape you will do as the apes would do.... If you are a man, you will return to protect your kind," he chastises himself. "You will not run away from one of your own people, because one of them has run away from you."¹⁷ This newly firm idea of his "own people" is grounded largely in an increased horizon of understanding achieved through effective communication.

Driven much by his love for Jane, Tarzan insists D'Arnot help him travel to America, her homeland. They agree to march north toward civilization, and the Frenchman employs the time educating Tarzan and preparing him to live among his fellow human beings.

¹⁶ Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 196.

¹⁷ Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 197-99.

THE GUIDE OF NATURAL LAW

All of the thinkers we have mentioned are concerned in one way or another with what drives human behavior in regard to the formation of political community. From Aquinas onward, the conversation is carried on in terms of natural law or a law of nature. Aquinas roots natural law in the eternal law of God: “the plan of governance of the world existing in God as the ruler of the universe has the nature of law.”¹⁸ The special participation of rational creatures in the eternal law is the natural law, which gives them inclinations in accordance with their nature.

Aquinas’s formulation of these natural inclinations provides a useful framework for examining the Tarzan stories in terms of his desire and ability to find and live in meaningful community. The dictates of the natural law in Aquinas can be summed up as inclinations to self-preservation, to the procreation and education of offspring, to live in society, and to know truths about God.¹⁹

SELF-PRESERVATION

Aquinas’s first dictate of the natural law, an inclination to self-preservation, finds ample illustration in Burroughs’s Tarzan novels. Preserving himself from the many mortal threats lurking beneath the jungle canopy provides the framework for Tarzan’s experience.

Self-preservation forms a key aspect for the law of nature in the other thinkers as well. The bedrock of Hobbesian natural law is the right of nature, which he defines as “the liberty each man hath to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature, that is to say, of his own life, and consequently of doing anything which, in his own judgement and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto.”²⁰ Similarly, Locke sees self-preservation as foundational, though he adds the concept of duty to mankind in general and therefore restraint: “...when his own Preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, to preserve the rest of Mankind, and may not unless it be to do Justice on an Offender, take away, or impair the life, or what tends to the preservation of the Life, the Liberty, Health, Limb or Goods of another.”²¹

¹⁸ Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics*, 16.

¹⁹ Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics*, 43–44.

²⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 79.

²¹ John Locke, *The Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, ed. Raymond Geuss and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 271.

LOGOS, LAW, AND LONGING: TARZAN AS NATURAL MAN

But a drive to preserve oneself does not necessitate capacity. An indicator that man is meant to live in community discussed by Aquinas in *On Kingship* is a lack of physical advantages sufficient for survival in isolation: “For all other animals, nature has prepared food, hair as a covering, teeth, horns, claws as means of defence or at least speed in flight, while man alone was made without any natural provisions for these things.”²² Tarzan’s physical weakness is apparent to the great apes. Kala, his adoptive mother, is chided about his inadequacy by her husband: “‘He will never be a great ape,’ he argued. ‘Always will you have to carry him and protect him. What good will he be to the tribe? None; only a burden.’”²³ Though slowly by the standards of the jungle, Tarzan does develop enough physically to survive. By human standards, he exceeds anything within the reach of civilized man: “Though but ten years old he was fully as strong as the average man of thirty, and far more agile than the most practiced athlete ever becomes. And day by day his strength was increasing.”²⁴ With adulthood, he is described as a “forest god” by the civilized people who first encounter him. He can defeat great apes and lions, and it is with justification that he claims after his first combat kill, “There be none among you as mighty as Tarzan. Let his enemies beware.”²⁵

Tarzan’s capacity for self-preservation is firmly established and Burroughs’s characterizations of his massive strength cries out for comparison to another aspect of Rousseau’s natural man: he is strong—much stronger and more capable than civilized man. Because he has no machines or devices to aid him, his body is far more powerful and his physical abilities far superior to his modern, cultured descendant.

Since his body is the only tool which savage man knows, he puts it to various uses of which our bodies are incapable for want of practice; our industry deprives us of the strength and the agility which necessity obliges him to acquire. If he had an axe, could he break such solid branches by hand? If he had a sling, would he throw a stone as hard by hand? If he had a Horse, would he run as fast?²⁶

²² Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics*, 204.

²³ Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 33.

²⁴ Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 34.

²⁵ Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 57.

²⁶ Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*, 142.

If civilized man had time to gather all his machines about him, he would no doubt best natural man. But the contest would be even more unequal and the result very different if they were pitted against each other naked and unarmed.

Against what must man protect himself? Beasts are the primary threat for Tarzan, and he must overcome them with power of both body and mind. But other dangers to self-preservation are emphasized by political thinkers. The first is the environment. Aristotle notes that humans need resources for survival and that those needs are increasingly met through developing community. Aquinas writes of “the hazards and deficiencies of the natural condition,” which are again, overcome through cooperation. The emphasized threat begins to shift with the early moderns toward man himself. While killing in war and self-defense are present in Aquinas, they take center stage in the Hobbesian description of the state of nature. According to Hobbes, the three principal causes of conflict in the state of nature are competition (arising from two or more men desiring the same thing which they cannot both enjoy); diffidence (distrust arising from the anticipation that others might attempt to deprive a man of what he has); and glory (reputation, that others should value a man at the same rate he sets upon himself). These seeds of conflict sprout out of the grime of Hobbesian human nature into the gruesome crop of perpetual war, the “war of every man against every man.”²⁷

While Locke’s initial descriptions of the state of nature are less violent than those of Hobbes, as his account in the *Second Treatise of Government* proceeds the moderating effects of his law of nature fall away, leaving man in a state of violence and insecurity sufficient to drive him to create civil society through the social contract as the only means of preserving himself.

For Rousseau, man was happy in his natural state. While he had to guard against beasts, he was strong and self-reliant enough to do so. He did not need others of his kind. He did not want others. Increasingly complex social ties created all the quarrels of man versus man.

Despite these differences, for the early modern thinkers nature does not encourage complex human society; it will be difficult to create and to maintain. But for all of these thinkers, from Aristotle on, the private household is the precursor to, and in some sense the

²⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 76.

pattern for, later political life. Tarzan also starts his journey by attempting to satisfy his natural longings at the domestic hearth.

PROCREATION AND EDUCATION OF OFFSPRING

Tarzan's desire for a mate is the subject of the story "Tarzan's First Love" in *Jungle Tales*. There is nothing sexual in Tarzan's feelings for Teeka, a young she-ape with whom he had grown up. He reflects on her beauty, but what he craves is affection, which no one in the harsh jungle has shown him since the death of Kala. "The ape-boy craved affection.... It was not until he was bereft of her that the boy realized how deep had been his attachment for his mother, for as such he looked upon her. In Teeka he had seen within the past few hours a substitute for Kala—someone to fight for and to hunt for—someone to caress...."²⁸

But Teeka has another admirer, Taug the great ape. When Taug is captured by the natives, Tarzan at first rejoices that the prize will be his. But, as he puts his arm around Teeka, he is suddenly struck by their differences.

As he did so he noticed, with a start, the strange incongruity of that smooth, brown arm against the black and hairy coat of his lady-love. He recalled the paw of Sheeta's mate across Sheeta's face—no incongruity there. He thought of little Manu hugging his she, and how the one seemed to belong to the other. Even the proud male bird, with his gay plumage, bore a close resemblance to his quieter spouse, while Numa, but for his shaggy mane, was almost a counterpart of Sabor, the lioness. The males and the females differed, it was true; but not with such differences as existed between Tarzan and Teeka.

Tarzan was puzzled. There was something wrong. His arm dropped from the shoulder of Teeka. Very slowly he drew away from her.²⁹

Realizing his mistake, Tarzan rescues Taug from certain death, telling him to go to Teeka. Tarzan now knows she is not a suitable mate for him.

"For the Gomangani there is another Gomangani," he said; "for Numa, the lion, there is Sabor, the lioness; for Sheeta there is a she of his own kind; for Bara, the deer; for Manu, the monkey; for all the beasts and the birds of the jungle is there a mate. Only for Tarzan of the Apes is there none. Taug is an ape. Teeka is an ape. Go back to Teeka. Tarzan is a man. He will go alone."³⁰

²⁸ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 10–11.

²⁹ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 14–15.

³⁰ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 17.

This story bears some resemblance to the account of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2. Viewing and naming all the animals God has created, Adam finds no helper fit for him. He needs someone who also bears *imago Dei*, and God fashions Eve because “It is not good that man should be alone.” Tarzan’s longings reflect this need for a helper but, like Adam, he cannot find one suitable among the beasts. It is only when Jane Porter enters his life that he will find the union proper to his nature.

Though Tarzan’s search for a mate is temporarily thwarted, he still has a longing for family. He is much attached to Teeka and Taug’s offspring, Gazan. When they have accepted him as part of their family, Tarzan watches over the young one: “Their fears were allayed and Tarzan now found himself often in the role of nursemaid to a tiny anthropoid—an avocation which he found by no means irksome, since Gazan was a never-failing fount of surprises and entertainment.” But, as fond as Gazan was of him, he was not his parent—Tarzan’s longings are unfulfilled: “...he only knew that he craved something which was denied him; something which seemed to be represented by those relations which existed between Teeka and her balu, and so he envied Teeka and longed for a balu of his own.”³¹

When Tarzan comes across a mother and child at the river near the native village, it occurs to him to take the boy for his own: “Here was a balu fashioned as he himself was fashioned. Of course this one’s skin was black; but what of it? Tarzan had never seen a white man. In so far as he knew, he was the sole representative of that strange form of life upon the earth. The black boy should make an excellent balu for Tarzan, since he had none of his own.”³² But Tarzan does not desire to have a child merely as a possession, he wants to take on all the responsibilities of parenthood: “He would tend him carefully, feed him well, protect him as only Tarzan of the Apes could protect his own, and teach him out of his half human, half bestial lore the secrets of the jungle from its rotting surface vegetation to the high tossed pinnacles of the forest’s upper terraces.”

The project does not go well. The child is quite reasonably terrified by his new existence, longs for his mother, and begins to decline physically. Tarzan is forced to admit that Go-bu-balu, as he calls him, is not well fitted to the life of the jungle. In the end, Tarzan returns the boy to his mother. He is driven both by compassion and the realization that the pairing is

³¹ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 66.

³² Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 69-70.

again not suitable: “For Teeka there is Teeka’s balu,’ he soliloquized; ‘for Sabor there are balus, and for the she-Gomangani, and for Bara, and for Manu, and even for Pamba, the rat; but for Tarzan there can be none—neither a she nor a balu. Tarzan of the Apes is a man, and it must be that man walks alone.’”³³

But Tarzan is not happy with being alone. He strongly desires to find partnership and affection. This desire shapes the character’s narrative arc more powerfully than any other characteristic. In accord with his nature, he desires to live in society rather than being driven into it by necessity.

TO LIVE IN SOCIETY

Burroughs’s depiction of Tarzan is in accord the Aristotelian and Thomistic notion that man is meant to live in society. Another proof is found in Tarzan’s desire to do so. His entire story could be said to be about his search for a community where he belongs. In the social contract theory of Hobbes, natural man does not desire community except as a means of safety. Locke is slightly more generous, but the desire is still not sufficiently powerful in itself to escape the state of nature. Tarzan is not concerned with safety. He would have no fear of the Hobbesian state of nature. Rousseau’s natural man, at least initially, has no desire for community at all beyond what is necessary for procreation; he is barely aware of other members of his species. Burroughs’s apes are more communal than Rousseau’s human semi-apes.

The question of safety raises a point of contrast between, especially, Hobbes and Rousseau. The idea of the noble savage is most frequently connected to Rousseau, though he never used the phrase. Noble savage implies the innate goodness of humans not exposed to the corrupting influences of civilization. Rousseau disagrees with Hobbes’s characterization of natural man and his description of the state of nature. The aggressive behaviors Hobbes attributes to natural man that make the state of nature unbearable, Rousseau believes to be products of society. The self-centered indifference of Rousseau’s natural man is not as aggressive as the socialized vanity that insists on proving superiority to others. As a result, the state of nature is essentially peaceful, contra Hobbes. What is more, Rousseau’s natural man is moved by the natural sentiment of pity. Compassion carries him

³³ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 87.

to the assistance of those who suffer and restrains him from injuring others where his own existence is not threatened.³⁴

Is Tarzan innately good? Does he conform more closely to the vision of Hobbes or Rousseau? He is certainly free of those elements of society that would make him dependent upon others. Tarzan is the epitome of the man who needs no other for survival, nor does he require any tools or comforts beyond what he can make with his own hands or find within the jungle. And Tarzan clearly does display compassion and fellow feeling even during his life among the beasts. He comes to the defense of his tribe many times, even exceeding Rousseau's natural man by putting his own survival at serious risk to do so. He demonstrates compassion for beasts even outside the tribe. His attempt to adopt a child taught him to sympathize with Sabor, the lioness as she grieved over her dead cub: "With the acquisition of Go-bu-balu, Tarzan had come to realize the responsibilities and sorrows of parentage, without its joys. His heart went out to Sabor as it might not have done a few weeks before."³⁵

But if he met Sabor in different circumstances, he would not hesitate to kill. Tarzan is a killer. He has to be to survive. What is more, Tarzan kills for reasons beyond survival:

To kill was the law of the wild world he knew. Few were his primitive pleasures, but the greatest of these was to hunt and kill, and so he accorded to others the right to cherish the same desires as he, even though he himself might be the object of their hunt. His strange life had left him neither morose nor bloodthirsty. That he joyed in killing, and that he killed with a joyous laugh upon his handsome lips betokened no innate cruelty. He killed for food most often, but, being a man, he sometimes killed for pleasure, a thing which no other animal does; for it has remained for man alone among all creatures to kill senselessly and wantonly for the mere pleasure of inflicting suffering and death.³⁶

But what of killing his own kind? The above passage occurs in the context of Tarzan's first contact with man, Kulonga, the son of the chief of the local village. Tarzan kills him. He plunges his knife into Kulonga's heart. But it is not for pleasure that he does so. It is for revenge. For Kulonga had recently killed Kala, Tarzan's ape mother. Her death had evoked a tremendous display of anger and grief, but these emotions have subsided before he kills Kulonga: "And when he killed for revenge, or in self-defense, he did that also without

³⁴ Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*, 162-163.

³⁵ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 81.

³⁶ Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 74.

hysteria, for it was a very businesslike proceeding which admitted of no levity.”³⁷ Tarzan stalks Kulonga mercilessly, but he is in control of himself. He waits, he follows, because he wants to learn as much as possible about man. Kulonga’s humanity is a separate issue from the task of revenge.

Tarzan observes the native village with great curiosity, for here were beings like unto himself. Nonetheless his identification with them only goes so far: “Tarzan of the Apes was no sentimentalist. He knew nothing of the brotherhood of man. All things outside his own tribe were his deadly enemies....”³⁸ Yet this is not the whole tale. In the episode of the *balu*, Tarzan fights to save the boy and his mother from a hungry lion. When he sees her fearless love for her son, of which he now has a greater understanding, he cannot but return her child to her.

A crucial aspect of all the accounts of natural man is his attitude toward his fellow human beings and its results for the formation of society. A final meeting point between the thinkers discussed may be seen in the first moments Tarzan becomes aware of others like himself. The first is when Tarzan is trailing the killer of Kala: “In the soft mud on the bank of a tiny rivulet he found footprints such as he alone in all the jungle had ever made, but much larger than his. His heart beat fast. Could it be that he was trailing a MAN—one of his own race?”³⁹ His curiosity and excitement are evident, as is his desire to see and understand those like himself.

The second is when he first glimpses “a number of white men like himself” on the beach near the coastal cabin. He witnesses is one of the mutinous sailors shooting another in the back. His first impulse to rush forward crumbles: “It was well, thought he, that he had not given way to his first impulse to rush forward and greet these white men as brothers.”⁴⁰

Like Robinson Crusoe finding the footprint in the sand, Tarzan has a desire to be with those of his own kind. But in both instances, he is dismayed by the wickedness of humanity. He discovers that the natives are cannibals who torture their victims: “Tarzan of the Apes, young and savage beast of the jungle, wondered at the cruel brutality of his own kind. Sheeta, the leopard, alone of all the jungle folk, tortured his prey. The ethics of all the others meted

³⁷ Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 74.

³⁸ Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 74.

³⁹ Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 69.

⁴⁰ Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 102.

a quick and merciful death to their victims.”⁴¹ His impression of white men is no better: “They were evidently no different from the black men—no more civilized than the apes—no less cruel than Sabor.”⁴²

The Tarzan stories can be a source of rich reflection on natural man and the origins of society because they contain elements of the theories of all of our thinkers, from Aristotle to Rousseau. Tarzan struggles to survive and develop more complex, meaningful relationships, his social impulses challenged by inner drives as well as external threats. But Aquinas alone writes of a natural inclination to know God. That inclination, too, is found in the stories Edgar Rice Burroughs penned about the jungle hero.

TO KNOW TRUTHS ABOUT GOD

Tarzan of the Apes is perhaps not the first literary character one would associate with theological questions, but “The God of Tarzan,” one of twelve stories comprising *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, deals explicitly with Tarzan’s search for the divine.

Tarzan is curious. He desires to know not only the “what” but the “why” of the world around him. In his early wanderings he uncovers a vast treasure-store of knowledge, the coastal hut in which he was born, which still contains the books belonging to his father. His native intelligence, combined with determined labor and great patience, reveals to him the purpose of the letters on the pages, which he calls “bugs,” that in various combinations form a silent language describing objects and concepts.

Of all the many unfamiliar concepts before the eyes of the young Tarzan, some exert a more powerful beckoning pull: “There were, of course, certain words which aroused his curiosity to a greater extent than others, words which, for one reason or another, excited his imagination. There was one, for example, the meaning of which was rather difficult to grasp. It was the word GOD.” He is first attracted to the word because of the number of “he-bugs” (upper-case letters) that figure in its definition— “Supreme Deity, Creator or Upholder of the Universe”—indicating its importance.⁴³

After many months of consideration, Tarzan comes to think of God as a mighty chieftain, the king of all the Mangani (great apes). But unlike other things described in the books, he

⁴¹ Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 81.

⁴² Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes*, 102.

⁴³ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 46.

finds no picture of God. He does find pictures of places dedicated to His worship, strengthening the idea of God's power and influence. The idea occurs to him that God might be of a different form altogether, and Tarzan resolves to set out in search of Him.

First, he goes to the wise and experienced. He questions Mumga, "who was very old and had seen many strange things in her long life."⁴⁴ But she is consumed by the trivial. The small dramas of everyday life make more impression upon her than "all the innumerable manifestations of the greatness of God which she had witnessed, and which, of course, she had not understood." Overhearing, an old he-ape called Numgo, advances a theory. He posits that lightning and rain and thunder come from Goro, the moon, and that Tarzan might begin his investigation there.

That night, Tarzan climbs the tallest tree in the jungle to investigate Goro, but he finds the moon allusive and far away. Nonetheless, Tarzan poses his questions: "'Tell me,' he continued, 'if you be the great king who sends Ara, the lightning; who makes the great noise and the mighty winds, and sends the waters down upon the jungle people when the days are dark and it is cold. Tell me, Goro, are you God?'"⁴⁵ Receiving no answer, Tarzan concludes that Goro is afraid and cannot be God.

This apparent cowing of the moon increases Tarzan's sense of self-importance and power. He returns to Numgo to boast of his victory. But this mood does not last long, it was but the manifestation of the rule of the jungle, which beats its chest, bares its fangs, and seeks to prove its strength. When Numgo bids him go away and let him sleep, Tarzan almost desperately presses his question: "'But where shall I find God?' insisted Tarzan. 'You are very old; if there is a God you must have seen Him. What does He look like? Where does He live?'"⁴⁶

Exasperated by Tarzan's insistence, and never having had any true interest in the investigation, Numgo answers flippantly: "'I am God,' replied Numgo. 'Now sleep and disturb me no more.'" When Tarzan shakes and nearly strangles the ape, demanding to know if Numgo will indeed claim divinity, Numgo quickly realizes he must send this earnest

⁴⁴ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 47.

⁴⁵ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 48.

⁴⁶ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 49.

seeker on another path. He tells Tarzan to ask the humans where God is: “They are hairless like yourself and very wise, too. They should know.”⁴⁷

Though his relations with the natives in the nearby village have not been friendly, Tarzan decides to follow this advice. Watching from the branches of an overhanging tree, Tarzan witnesses a ceremony full of religious spectacle and awe, the initiation of young warriors into adulthood. Presiding over this ritual is the village witchdoctor, dressed in all the fantastic habiliments of his arcane art and endeavoring through every strange and grotesque motion to instill awe in his devotees.

The longer Tarzan watches the more he is convinced that he is looking upon God. Determined to have words with the Deity, he leaps down into the middle of the village, much to the terror of the spectators, and confronts the witchdoctor with a direct question: “Are you God?” The natives flee in terror, leaving the witchdoctor alone to confront this terrible apparition.

Though the witchdoctor does not understand Tarzan’s speech, he understands clearly enough that his professional position, and likely his life, are at stake. He does his best to intimidate Tarzan with every dramatic effect of speech and action aimed at creating religious dread. Unmoved, Tarzan continues to advance until the witchdoctor, realizing his failure, flees. Mystified by this reaction, Tarzan tries to reassure the hastily retreating figure: “Come back, God, I will not harm you.”⁴⁸ A scuffle follows, in which the buffalo-hide vestments and fearsome visage of the witchdoctor are torn from him, revealing a terrified and merely mortal man. Tarzan is disgusted: “‘So you are God!’ he cried. ‘If you be God, then Tarzan is greater than God.’” His belligerence has returned: “‘Tarzan is greater than God. See!’ and with a sudden wrench he twisted the black’s neck until the fellow shrieked in pain and then slumped to the earth in a swoon.”⁴⁹ After voicing the terrible victory cry of the bull ape, Tarzan departs.

Despite his claim of victory over God, it is clear from his subsequent continuing search for the Deity that, like his overawing of the moon, the episode of the witchdoctor has not convinced him that he has truly met the divine. Yet, as the remainder of the tale reveals, the search has affected him, has begun to change him.

⁴⁷ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 49.

⁴⁸ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 53.

⁴⁹ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 53-54.

His search for the truth of God has also excited opposition and danger. The village chief, Mbonga, having witnessed the defeat of the witchdoctor, is determined to destroy the “forest demon” and stalks him with raised spear. A large part of his motivation is to save the reputation of the theological arm of his governance: “...as a chief he was well convinced of the power of the witch-doctor as an arm of government, and often it was that Mbonga used the superstitious fears of his people to his own ends through the medium of the medicine-man.”⁵⁰ Mbonga underestimates the bestial prowess of his prey and is overcome.

But as he stands over his prostate foe with drawn knife, “Tarzan the Killer,” as he has described himself, hesitates to kill. “Something stayed the ape-man’s hand for an instant. He wondered why it was that he hesitated to make the kill; never before had he thus delayed.” Tarzan really sees the chief for the first time. He sees the terror in his eyes and the appeal for mercy upon his face. He feels something new: “It was pity—pity for a poor, frightened, old man.”⁵¹ He grants mercy; he does not kill.

As he travels back to the jungle home of his tribe, Tarzan meditates upon these events. What power had stayed his hand to prevent him from slaying his enemy? It was as if a power greater than himself had commanded him to spare the man’s life. This puzzles him, “for he could conceive of nothing, or no one, with the authority to dictate to him what he should do, or what he should refrain from doing.”⁵²

But the next morning even more internal changes are apparent in Tarzan. He begins to see the world around him in a new way. As he awakens in his leafy bower, he is struck by the beauty of an orchid opening to the sun. This process, which he had witnessed a thousand times before, had never sparked the questions that now occur to him. “Where and how, anyway, did they all come from—the trees, the flowers, the insects, the countless creatures of the jungle?” From the contemplation of the wonders of nature springs the idea of the Creator: “Quite unexpectedly an idea popped into Tarzan’s head. In following out the many ramifications of the dictionary definition of GOD he had come upon the word CREATE—‘to cause to come into existence; to form out of nothing.’”⁵³

⁵⁰ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 55.

⁵¹ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 57.

⁵² Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 57.

⁵³ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 58.

These reflections are interrupted by a scream of terror. Rushing to the sound, Tarzan sees Gazan, Teeka's balu, enfolded in the coils of Histah, the snake. In wonderment, he sees Teeka hurl herself upon the serpent in an attempt to save her child, though he knows her tremendous dread of the snake, only to become herself entrapped in its deadly embrace. Tarzan feels the same dread, but he hesitates no more than Teeka to leap upon the foe. After a fierce struggle, Tarzan drives his hunting knife into the serpent's brain.

The battle won, Tarzan once again falls into meditation. Why had he done what he did? Teeka did not belong to him. Her child was no special concern of his. He concludes that some power compelled him to act: "It must be that God made me do these things, for I never did them by myself.... I cannot see Him; but I know that it must be God who does these things."⁵⁴

The definition of the word GOD he had discovered included the descriptor "all-powerful." This Tarzan comes to understand as being able to do what no one else can do: creation out of nothing of the world with all its beauty and provision and the instilling of compelling laws of moral action. He had found God—not as a physical presence as he had originally imagined, but as a spiritual presence and the source of all good things.

Tarzan's search for God is carried on in terms of general revelation, truths that can be known about God through nature and reflection upon it, rather than special revelation, divinely revealed law. Nonetheless, it is in connection to his contemplation of God that his true humanity begins to emerge as well as the capacity for functional, merciful, and meaningful human community.

CONCLUSION

It should be noted that while Burroughs's telling of natural man is more detailed than the social contract theory accounts, it is not more imaginary. Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau are all advancing hypothetical claims about natural man, the historical veracity of which is unprovable and largely unimportant to them. They all carry on the discussion of natural human drives, though they differ in the origins and operations of these drives from Aquinas and each other. Tarzan appears as an amalgam of accounts of natural man. While the drive for self-preservation is strong in Tarzan, as for Hobbes, he is capable of compassion, as for

⁵⁴ Burroughs, *Jungle Tales of Tarzan*, 61.

LOGOS, LAW, AND LONGING: TARZAN AS NATURAL MAN

Rousseau. But Burroughs's presentation of Tarzan is more Aristotelian and Thomistic in his powers of reason and speech as well as a natural disposition towards society. For Rousseau, civilization deprives man of happiness, freedom, and strength through dependence upon others; perhaps he would counsel Tarzan to cease his striving and remain as he is, but that would not make a very good story—or very good politics.

Armies on the March: two poems
(while following the imperial army at Phoenix Flight^d)

Cen Shen

1

With sorrow I reflect upon my life,
Though forty years of age is yet not old.
The moment chaos comes with morning light
The setting sun cannot bring safety back.
Now foreign armies occupy Chang An²,
Wild grasses grow in empty palaces,
Felled trees 'round royal tombs aggrieve my heart³.
The road from Luo Yang to Chang An is gone⁴.

My sovereign now leads armies on the march⁵,
Sprawled out before him, army men and mounts.
Invading foreign beasts still roam the land⁶,
The generals beg to drive them out again.

Just yesterday came news of Xian yang's fall⁷;
The killing swept the city clean of life,
New mountains made of corpses piled high,
The bloodshed swells the rivers 'round Chang An.

The conflict rages through the countrysides,
The cities filled with greedy, vicious beasts.
The villages are empty, no one left,
They leave deserted groves of fruiting trees.

Confucian scholars make their long-term plans,
Yet find no place to bring such dreams to life⁸.
Alone, I grieve the plight of modern men.
I raise my head and weep unto the sky.

2

If early I'd known troubled times await,
In youth I would have set aside my books.
If only I had learned to bend a bow,
I'd shoot the wild invaders in the east!

By chance I joined the royal magistrates,
Not worthy to tread crimson palace steps!
Unable to assist my king in need,
In vain these years have I been called a man!

Hand on my sword, I grieve the way of things,
Through tears lament my unused stratagems.
For battle glory now's too late to hope,
I mourn at whiskers white seen in the mirror.
Thus far I've led a righteous, loyal life,
I dare not shrink away from danger now!

¹ Located in Shaanxi province in northwestern China, near Xi An, it's often written as Feng xiang, but translates to "phoenix flight."

² Chang An, today's Xi An, was the capital city at the time of the revolt.

³ The line refers to five tombs of former emperors that are all located near Chang An. A line from a poem by Li Bai also discusses this, mentioning sadness for the once-beautiful pine and cedar trees surrounding the tombs.

⁴ Luo Yang is another major city in Chinese history, itself having been a capital city at varying points in history, and thus was sometimes referred to as the "eastern capital."

⁵ Refers to Li Heng (titled Tang Su Zong), who is described in The Comprehensive Mirror (資治通鑑) as having seen the revolt coming while he was crown prince, but ultimately unable to stop it. After tactical failures on the part of his father Li Longji (titled Tang Xuan Zong), a year into the revolt, Li Heng took the throne. He reigned from 756-762 A.D.

⁶ The An Shi Revolt was led primarily by the general An Lushan, who was what was then referred to as a "胡人" or foreigner, from areas to the north and west of traditionally "Han" areas.

⁷ The fall of Xian Yang here refers to a failed attempt to retake the capital of Chang An that is said to have cost the lives of more than forty thousand soldiers.

⁸ At this time, the poet, Cen Shen, had a low-ranking position in the royal court where he could make suggestions and offer strategic advice, but these lines show that his suggestions were not accepted, leaving him once again only able to mourn in private.

Original Poem

行軍詩（時扈從在鳳翔）

岑參

1

吾竊悲此生，四十幸未老。
一朝逢世亂，終日不自保。
胡兵奪長安，宮殿生野草。
傷心五陵樹，不見二京道。
我皇在行軍，兵馬日浩浩。
胡雛尚未滅，諸將慙征討。
昨聞咸陽敗，殺戮淨如掃。
積屍若丘山，流血漲澧鎬。
干戈礙鄉國，豺虎滿城堡。
村落皆無人，蕭條空桑棗。
儒生有長策，無處豁懷抱。
塊然傷時人，舉首哭蒼昊。

2

早知逢世亂，少小謾讀書。
悔不學彎弓，向東射狂胡。
偶從諫官列，謬向丹墀趨。
未能匡吾君，虛作一丈夫。
撫劍傷世路，哀歌泣良圖。
功業今已遲，覽鏡悲白鬚。
平生抱忠義，不敢私微軀。

“Armies on the March”: Introduction and Commentary

Miriam J. Dawson

THE POET, CEN SHEN

The two poems of Armies on the March were composed by the Tang dynasty poet Cen Shen (岑參) sometimes also referred to in Chinese sources by his title, Cen Jiazhou (岑嘉州)¹. Cen Shen’s grandfather and uncle both reached high office in the Tang court, but before his birth, his family fell from grace and was banished from the capital.² Cen Shen successfully passed the imperial examination and held various lower level political offices, as was the ambition of learned men of the era, but he was not a significant political figure.³

Cen Shen is best known for his “frontier poems” about life on the frontier and the realities of war.⁴ Cen Shen himself travelled out to the western frontier to serve as an official at military outposts twice, first from the winter of 749 A.D. to the spring of 751 A.D., and the second time from the summer of 754 A.D. to the spring 757 A.D.⁵ These two poems were written in the summer of 757 A.D.,⁶ after Cen Shen was granted permission to leave his post on the western border to join the efforts to subdue the ongoing rebellion in the east. Thanks to the recommendation of another famous Tang dynasty poet and official, Du Fu, Cen Shen was granted a mid-level position in the court.⁷

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE TURNING POINT OF THE TANG DYNASTY

The An Shi Rebellion from 755 A.D. to 763 A.D. was a massive revolt that ended the glory days of the Tang dynasty empire. Though the Tang dynasty continued to limp on until 907,

¹ In some scholarship that uses the Wade-Giles romanization system (such as Stephen Owen’s *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: the High Tang*), Cen Shen may also be referred to with an alternate spelling: Ts’en Shen. Both refer to the same characters of 岑參 and are pronounced the same, as the “c” in pinyin is used to represent a “ts” sound like that of the original Russian pronunciation of “tsar”. As for the vowel sounds, both “Cen” and “Shen” should rhyme with “Ken”.

² 岑參, 陳鐵民, 侯忠義《岑參集校注》五卷 / (唐)岑參著; 陳鐵民, 侯忠義校注; 陳鐵民修訂. 第1版. 上海: 上海古籍, 2004.

³ 劉學鈔〈從岑參的邊塞詩看唐代的邊疆觀〉. 中國邊政 93 (2013): 1-32.

⁴ 陳濟安〈由高適, 岑參作品探析盛唐邊塞詩中天朝意識與華夷觀念〉 東吳中文線上學術論文 8 (2019): 1-25.

⁵ 岑參, 陳鐵民, 侯忠義《岑參集校注》2004.

⁶ 聞一多〈岑嘉州繫年考證〉(《清華學報》第8卷第2期, 1933年6月)。

⁷ 岑參, 陳鐵民, 侯忠義《岑參集校注》2004.

the power and influence of the court was greatly reduced after the rebellion. The Li family that founded the Tang dynasty was at least partially a mix of Han and other northern ethnic minorities such as the Xianbei. Thus, though often taken to be the ideal representative of the “central florescence” (中華) of typically Han Chinese culture, the Tang dynasty at its height was an expansive multi-ethnic empire.⁸ It readily subsumed and worked with the non-Han tribes at its northern and western borders. Towards the end of the reign of Li Longji (titled Tang Xuan Zong), the original military system that incorporated more ethnic Han troops was falling apart, and increasingly the court relied on foreigners and the troops they recruited to guard the borders of the Empire.⁹ The An Shi Rebellion was led by one such famous example, An Lushan, a foreign general that rose to prominence in the Tang court and found favor in the eyes of Tang Xuan Zong even as he plotted his rebellion.

The An Shi Rebellion was a great tragedy. It was eight years of death and destruction wrought upon the central plains of China. The chaos destroyed the lives of the people and shattered the peace and prosperity that the centralized imperial court of the Tang Dynasty Empire had created. The achievements of the court, whether political, literary, military, or economic, were all stopped in their tracks. The people who survived witnessed a palpable shift from an era of hope, cultural confidence, and great flourishing, into one of decline, which successive emperors managed with varying degrees of success. After the rebellion, for most of remainder of the Tang Dynasty, the central court’s power was largely limited to the areas immediately surrounding the two capitals of Chang An and Luo Yang and some of the relatively undeveloped south, while warlords obedient only in name ruled the rest of the territory, paying taxes (or not) as they saw fit.¹⁰ The sharp contrast between the carnage described in the poem and the cultural and political flourishing just prior to the revolt is part of what makes Cen Shen’s lament so poignant.

⁸ 陳濟安〈由高適、岑參作品探析盛唐邊塞詩中天朝意識與華夷觀念〉

⁹ The lead-up to the rebellion is described in the Song Dynasty historical work *The Comprehensive Mirror*, primarily in scrolls 215–17.

¹⁰ For more on this in English, see Mark Edward Lewis, *China’s Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

SIGNIFICANT THEMES

These two poems capture the poet's complicated reflection on a national tragedy. Cen Shen's shock and disbelief at what his country has become is implied in his descriptions of once-bustling cities being "swept clean of life," once-peaceful villages now desolate and abandoned, and the desecration of the sacred tombs of former emperors. Like any well-bred, educated man of his era, he saw the maintenance of the moral order as his life's purpose, which was to be achieved through participation in politics as a civil official. Yet it was this ambition and the choice of scholarship as his path to pursue it that rendered him unable to assist militarily when the political infighting and negligence of the court led to a bloody rebellion. Additionally, the rebellion would not have been seen only as a political challenge to the state apparatus, but as a threat to the cosmic moral order as upheld by the emperor. Cen Shen's grief was for the death and destruction he witnessed as much as for the loss of moral order that these macabre scenes represented.

Throughout the poem, Cen Shen portrays his life as situated in the larger context of historical realities, and his ambitions as part of a greater civilizational project. Though still deeply personal, the two poems are not expressions of an atomized individual drowning in emotion, but careful considerations informed by the poet's awareness of his specific social status. The frustration and helplessness he feels that his advice is being ignored are more than the dashed hopes of a naive ideologue. His inability to help build a better world is a failure to properly fulfill the social role for which he was raised and educated.

Cen Shen was likely acutely aware that his participation in politics often offered a front-row seat to the making of bad decisions, instead of opportunities for change. From his vantage point of having spent time around the military and in the court, he would have known that it was imperial mismanagement that had sowed the seeds for the rebellion and prolonged the conflict once it broke out. However, even as he laments the myriad of ways things had gone wrong, in *Armies on the March*, Cen Shen does not fall into despair but chooses to remain loyal and devoted to his nation and his emperor. He holds on to his ambitions and remains determined to work to bring moral order to his world in whatever ways he can. His description of carrying a sword demonstrates his recognition of the existential, violent nature of the conflict he faces and his determination to meet it with appropriate force. Hence Cen

ARMIES ON THE MARCH: TWO POEMS

Shen's expressions of grief, rage, and disappointment are also a motivational call to take action, ending in his own resolve to continue no matter the costs or results.

POETRY, FORM, AND TRANSLATION

The poems themselves are written in Tang dynasty era Classical Chinese, composed of lines of two five-syllable couplets. It does not adhere to the famously complex rules about tones that characterize the “new-style” poetry that the Tang dynasty is usually remembered for. The two poems are distinguished through a switch in the rhyme scheme, a feature that I unfortunately could not replicate in this version. Aside from the distinction between the first and second poems, all other paragraph breaks and punctuation are my additions, purely for ease of reading.

Translation is a delicate art in which some aspects are emphasized, others are downplayed, and something is inevitably lost. This was no exception; not every line is a complete rendering of the original wording. This was necessary to stay true to the purpose of the poem as a work of art. As Susanne Langer so beautifully explains in *Problems of Art*, poetry is not a collection of factual statements or a report, but the artistic use of language to create an expressive image. The form of a poem shapes its composition, from the imagery to the sentiments within.¹¹ Any translation that focused on complete, technical linguistic accuracy (if that were possible) would lose the poetic qualities that informed the composition of the original, and thus also the meaning and significance of the original as a work of art, and not a discursive argument. Therefore, in this translation I focused on conveying as much of the core sentiments of the text as possible while keeping with its specifically poetic form and character. To this end, I chose blank verse: the even, ten syllables per line format reflects the original's regulated style, while iambic meter honors English poetic conventions.

So long as the poet's sentiments are intelligible and poetic, this translation will have achieved its end. As the classic work on literature *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (文心雕龍) by Liu Xie emphasizes, the purpose of literature is to convey virtue in a way that is beautiful and moving.¹² Later on, poetry is further described as the art of giving

¹¹ Susanne K. Langer, *Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), Ch. 10: “Poetic Creation.”

¹² 《文心雕龍：原道第一》“文之為德也，大矣...”：“Literature that is virtuous is great...” and “辭之所以能鼓天下者，乃道之文也。”：“The literature that can encourage [literally: drum up] the nations is the literature that contains

voice to one's ambitions and natural sentiments.¹³ This rendition of "Armies on the March" aims to invite the modern English reader to reflect on Cen Shen's response to the tragedy of his time; and to relate to his complex mixture of grief, anger, helplessness, ambition, and final determination to dedicate himself to the cause of restoring moral and political order to his nation.



撫劍傷世路

"Hand on my sword, I grieve the way of things"

the way [of virtue]." Translations are the author's. See Liu Xie, "The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons 文心雕龍 原道第一 Volume 1: The Way Is the Source," *Chinese Notes*.

¹³ 《文心雕龍：明詩第六》：“是以‘在心為志，發言為詩’...詩者，持也，持人情性...” Thus, ‘the ambitions in your heart are spoken into poetry,’ ...poetry is a medium for one’s sentiments and character...” Translations are the author's. See Liu Xie, "The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons 文心雕龍 明詩第六 Volume 6: Clarifying Shi Poetry," *Chinese Notes*.

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A Lawless Republic

Ben Peterson

Review: Josiah Osgood, *Lawless Republic: The Rise of Cicero and the Decline of Rome* (New York: Basic Books, 2025). 384 pp. Hardcover, \$32.00; Ebook, \$18.99.

In *Lawless Republic*, classicist Josiah Osgood performs several services, drawing on Cicero's speeches and writings. He describes Cicero's career in the law and politics, portrays the operation of criminal courts in the late Roman Republic, and details Rome's descent into political violence by way of a turn to lawfare. His arresting thesis: "At the heart of Cicero's story lies a strange irony: the career of Rome's greatest trial lawyer also demonstrates how the rule of law broke down" (14). Osgood's chronicle of Cicero's rise and republican Rome's decline invites reflection on the question of how to act well in a climate of deteriorating constitutional, legal, and political institutions. The question of how to respond to lawfare and departure from constitutional norms is both enduring and especially applicable to our day.

Osgood's story showcases Cicero's mastery of the arena of Roman criminal courts as a *patronus*, or specialized legal advocate. Rhetoric reigned in the courts. Cicero's scholarly treatments of rhetoric, statesmanship, and philosophy, along with his accounts of cases and related published speeches, are the threads Osgood uses to skillfully weave together explanations of these courts and their processes, descriptions of politics in the late republic, and broader reflection on the rule of law and its breakdown. By learning about Roman courts and the political situation in the first century BC, we learn about Cicero, and vice versa.

Instituted to control the behavior of the highest echelon of Roman society, the senators and equestrians (7), the courts were supposed to contain the centripetal forces of class and interpersonal conflict that could easily release violence and civil war, and had in Rome's recent past, during the conflict between Marius and Sulla in the 80s BC. But the courts offered only a thin shield from these forces.

Osgood explains that in the Roman courts, there were far fewer restrictions and rules about evidence and argumentation than we are accustomed to; prosecutors and defense lawyers often built cases on character assassination or inflation, and conflicts of interest were common (81). Personal involvement in cases was welcome; if you nurse a personal grudge

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against someone, you will do a better job of prosecuting him, so the thinking went (69). Trials were not mainly about physical or testimonial evidence, but about the convincingness of lawyers’ narratives, manipulating the feelings of jurors (all of whom were senators until the reforms of 70 BC), and appealing to larger social and political issues (21–22, 30–32, 38, 73).

Osgood shows Cicero putting the art of rhetoric as he laid out in *De inventione* (31, 46–47) into practice, beginning with his first case defending Sextus Roscius against the charge of parricide. Instead, Cicero sought to pin the crime on powerful people running a real estate swindle (47–48), flipping the tables. Cicero’s use and mastery of the trial as a venue of legal and political contestation reveals much—good and ill—about Cicero’s character, including his skill, ambition (49, 52, 54–55, 312), and courage. He showed skill and courage in prosecuting Verres, a senator, for extortion, but he was also willing to defend Marcos Fonteius, who was probably guilty of the same sorts of abuse of power. He showed no qualms about appealing to ethnic stereotypes to tarnish Gauls’ testimony (107, 115–16). In general, he learned to heap calumny on those he was opposing and to poke holes in cases against his clients, even when they were sound.

If verbal combat in the courts was unregulated, the arena of politics was no different—and in that arena, words ultimately gave way to physical violence and tyranny during Cicero’s lifetime. Cicero’s accomplishments in the forum where trials occurred and his reputation for eloquence and rhetorical brilliance underwrote his rise to the consulship as a so-called new man.

During his consulship in 63 BC, Cicero used his talents as a lawyer and rhetorician, as well as ingenuity, to obstruct Catiline and his co-conspirators’ attempted insurrection. He also, with the help of Cato, successfully lobbied for immediate execution without trial, not exile or lifetime imprisonment as the penalty. One of Osgood’s most interesting observations is that none other than Julius Caesar demurred from the Senate’s decision to vote with Cicero and Cato, and his point that “it almost certainly would have been more prudent to follow Caesar’s recommendation of life imprisonment for the conspirators caught in Rome” (176).

Osgood credits Cicero for seeking to preserve elections and Rome’s republican institutions against the slide to outright tyranny under Caesar and Antony, thwarting the Catiline conspiracy, and preferring to settle political disputes in the courts and by deliberation in the Senate rather than through mob and interpersonal violence. He ultimately paid for his

opposition to Marc Antony in the *Philippic Orations* to the Senate, whom he charged with extending Caesar's tyranny, with his life. But Osgood criticizes Cicero for refusing to countenance the claims of the least well-off in Roman society, and for supporting political violence himself, contributing to the Republic's slide into lawlessness, civil war, and dictatorship (310).

Cicero, an avowed defender of the rule of law, helped set Rome on a course of renewed political violence, of abandoning law as the guarantor of justice, security, and order. After supporting the execution of the conspirators, he later justified the use of gangs and the murder of his enemy Clodius (215). He even placed his vaunted defense of the natural law to use justifying Clodius's murder (278). He celebrated Brutus and his supporters' assassination of Caesar and thought they should have gone further (282). Even if each instance of extralegal violence Cicero supported was justified—which is highly dubious—the point is that each move toward extralegal violence between contestants for power and position fueled and helped to justify the next. And Cicero played in that game.

Cicero (through Scipio) begins *The Republic* with a defense of the active political life, as opposed to the purely contemplative life. "Nature," he says, "has given to mankind such a compulsion to do good, and such a desire to defend the well-being of the community, that this force prevails over all the temptations of pleasure and ease."¹ Moral excellence must be put into practice, and there is no activity that brings one closer to the divine than founding or preserving states.² At times, Cicero did forego ease and pleasure to serve the Roman Republic, but Osgood argues that Cicero's practical political life included a dangerous streak:

In their pursuit of their own ambitions, Roman politicians were increasingly ignoring customary and legal restraints on power.... Cicero himself ... showed a willingness to disregard laws when he thought them unjust or inconvenient. Perhaps there are times when one needs to obey a higher law than the laws of men. But as the escalating rancor and violence in Rome shows, there is a grave danger to civil society when that attitude becomes common. Cicero had helped to bring on forces that would ultimately kill him and destroy the Republic (279).

¹ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *The Republic* in Cicero, *The Republic* and *The Laws*, ed. Jonathan Powell and Niall Rudd, trans. Niall Rudd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.

² Cicero, *The Republic*, 4.

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If Osgood is right, a simple picture of Cicero as a man who tried nobly but failed to save the republic is mistaken.

The more complicated picture Osgood paints of Cicero is of an ambitious politician who, while advancing a lucrative political career in a legal and political system that rewarded dishonesty, demagoguery, and ruthlessness, left a record of eloquence and occasional courage in defense of the rule of law and republican institutions. That man, though, played his own part in the abandonment of those principles and institutions as he sought his place in the Roman pantheon of power.

Students would do well to pair a study of Cicero’s books and speeches with Osgood’s account of his legal and political career. Osgood provides background and details, such as can be gleaned from Cicero’s writings and speeches, of several of his major cases and political wrangles. Helpfully, Osgood also steps back throughout the book to draw out larger lessons about the rule of law and the enduring challenge of responding to crises, threats, and emergencies, in a way that preserves lawfulness. Cicero’s career raises the question of how to act well, and how to preserve institutions when others are not playing by the rules. Perhaps his life also offers a warning for those who would break rules or engage in retaliatory lawfare to save our republic.

Ben Peterson

Ben Peterson is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Abilene Christianity University.

Principled Founders

Peter Cross

Review Essay: *The Declaration of America: Our Principles in Thought and Action* by Richard Ferrier (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2023). 206 pp. Paperback, \$22.00.

Those who know principles are philosophers; those who know particulars are experts; those who bring them together are statesmen. The wisdom of the philosopher is made potent and the knowledge of the expert is made beneficial through the sagacity of the statesman. Statesmanship recollects the past, acts with wisdom in the present, and so fosters better things in the days to come. It requires experience, but more than experience. It knows the loves and the character of the political community that it shepherds, and it keeps that community faithful to what is good in its founding (100).

With these words, Richard Ferrier offers what may be the guiding light for *The Declaration of America: Our Principles in Thought and Action*. They present Ferrier's image of the statesman, and the instances of "Declaration Statesmanship," that is, "American statesmanship, in its noblest moments" (100) frame the work. But these words also reflect Ferrier's own aspiration. Readers seeking groundbreaking new scholarship on the American Founding will not find any here. In place of new discoveries, Ferrier attempts to imitate the statesman by uniting the expertise of prior scholars with the great philosophic and theological principles of the West. The result is "a study of the meaning, truth, and power of the principles of the American Republic" (7) written for a "general audience" (1).¹ Yet the book's aim is not merely theoretical. At its core, Ferrier's work is statesmanlike: he seeks to persuade his reader to "take his principles and form his sentiments from those expressed in the Declaration of Independence" (1). This patriotic goal is formidable, requiring both a deep mind and rhetorical skill, especially when attempted in merely two hundred pages. Still, Ferrier's work is well-suited to inspire young Christians formed by a classical education to begin understanding—and remain faithful to—what is good in the American Founding.

¹ Ferrier himself acknowledges that the work uses much of the content of a high school textbook and curriculum he co-wrote 20 years previously (1).

Ferrier's principal claim is that "the Declaration founded America and gave it its fundamental principles" (6). Just as "you could say that the founding principle of the marriage ... is contained in those vows and the ceremony surrounding them on that special day in which the marriage was made," so too "the Declaration states that we are one people" and provides the principles of the Republic, to which the American people, through their representatives, pledged their lives, fortunes and sacred honor (4-5). It is a familiar Lincolnian thesis, developed most prominently by Harry Jaffa and his disciples.² Yet, in Chapters 1-6, Ferrier is at his best making the case in his own voice, focusing on the history and principles surrounding the Declaration and the governments that spring from it during the Founding era. Ferrier does not paint the Declaration as the radical assertion of the individual's right to be the moral arbiter of truth and justice, as many secular liberals would have us believe.³ Rather, Ferrier consistently roots the Declaration's teaching in natural law, the source of "the three central ideas of the Declaration" (33): universal human equality, God-given inalienable rights, and the necessity of government by consent. Equality rests on a shared rational nature that gives every person "equal access to the natural law" (40), that is "the reasonable plan for human life" (28). Because of this access, men have a natural duty, owed to God, requiring that they live according to that plan. And because this access is common, all men have natural rights, that is, the moral claims, to the free exercise of their natural faculties for fulfilling those duties.⁴ Thus, "all men are by nature equally free and independent,"⁵ and just government arises only when they consent to unite for safety—"the defense of their natural rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"—and happiness—the "blessings of liberty" including "fulfillment of duty, honor and justice" (74). In short, the Declaration's three chief ideas, according to Ferrier, paint an image of the goals that American society will seek to achieve in its political life. It is, in Jaffa's words, a statement of

² See Harry V. Jaffa, *Equality and Liberty: Theory and Practice in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), vii. It is unlikely, therefore, that Ferrier will convince those already familiar with and critical of Jaffa's arguments. Disciples of Willmoore Kendall and George Carey, for example, are likely to criticize Ferrier for peddling "Lincolnian heresies" overemphasizing the importance of equality at the expense of the "basic symbols ... the representative assembly *deliberating* under God; the virtuous people, virtuous because deeply religious and thus committed to the *process* of searching for the transcendent truth" (Willmoore Kendall and George W. Carey, *The Basic Symbols of the American Political Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 88, 154).

³ See *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833, 851 (1992).

⁴ See Theophilus Parsons, "The Essex Result," in *American Political Writing During the Founding Era, 1760-1805*, ed. Charles S. Hyneman and Donald S. Lutz, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1983), 1.487.

⁵ Philip B. Kurland and Ralph Lerner, eds., "Virginia Declaration of Rights," in *The Founders' Constitution*, 5 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1987), 1.6.

“the natural order of (natural) wants directed towards their corresponding natural ends, that constitutes the architectonic principles of a society arising out of compact, properly understood.”⁶

This interpretation is reinforced by Ferrier’s emphasis on “experience, reason, and religion” (18) as the primary influences inspiring the Declaration. Ferrier points out that, by the experience of “more than a century of local self-government” (18), the minuteman Captain Preston and others had the confidence to justify resistance, saying, “We always had governed ourselves, and we always meant to. They didn’t mean we should” (14). But “to live as we’ve always done” is not a complete answer to the question “why declare independence?” Rather, Ferrier carefully shows that that “[roots] both Biblical and rational” grounded the political practices learned and loved on account of American experience (27). Drawing on the writings of Calvin Coolidge, colonial-era Protestant ministers, and Catholic scholastics, Ferrier argues that the American people found in Scripture “the seeds of a political teaching offering political happiness based on the free consent of the equal men who form their own government in accord with (God’s) natural law” (36). But, while Scripture provided the seeds, reason cultivated them. Thus, Ferrier also leads his readers through selections from Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, and Sidney to manifest a steady, coherent development of the political ideas of equality, natural law, natural rights, and government by consent, all rooted in human nature and natural justice.⁷ In doing so, Ferrier wisely avoids setting these influences against one another. For the Founding generation, experience, faith, and reason were complementary, not contradictory. Unlike French revolutionaries, who sought the “murder of God” and the construction of a political order devoid of organized Christian faith, John Adams and other American founders asserted unequivocally, “it is Religion and Morality alone, which can establish the principles upon which Freedom can securely stand.”⁸

⁶ Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 50.

⁷ Ferrier’s inspiration for this section is Jefferson’s famous claim that “(the Declaration’s) authority rests on the harmonizing sentiments of the day, whether expressed in conversation, in letters, printed essays, or in the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney” (37). While Ferrier acknowledges that these four thinkers may not agree on all political philosophical principles, nor constitute an exhaustive list of the influences on the American Founding, he claims that the study of their thought helps to manifest how “our founders saw these authors, both philosophical and sacred, as pointing to a common teaching, of human rights and natural law, of the dignity of man and political life, and of the possibility of just, free, republican government, based upon the consent of the governed” (47).

⁸ Marquis de Sade and John Adams, quoted in Robert R. Reilly, *America on Trial: A Defense of the Founding* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2020), 277, 284.

America, like any marriage, has had its ups and downs, as her people have struggled to live out the ends pledged in the Declaration, and have often required reminders of their founding oath. For this reason, Ferrier structures the remainder of his book around “the greatest instances of Declaration statesmanship” (168) after the Founding, moments when statesmen defended the Declaration’s chief ideas against grave threats. Given this framing, it is not surprising that most of the book’s remaining pages focus on the trials of equality.

Ferrier begins with slavery, equality’s first great threat. After providing the history of the institution from the Founding to the eve of the Civil War (Chapter 7), Ferrier’s focus turns to Abraham Lincoln, who “faced the task of breathing new life into the founding principles when they were in danger of expiring” (168). In Chapter 8, the book’s longest chapter, Ferrier argues that Lincoln met that challenge in word and deed, culminating in the Thirteenth Amendment’s abolition of slavery. Lincoln’s victory, however, was not complete according to Ferrier, until the former slaves and their posterity secured citizenship, with all its privileges and immunities. Chapter 9 focuses on this development, beginning with Reconstruction, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and the attempts to nullify these acts through Jim Crow. Ferrier concludes the chapter by discussing “the statesmanship of the civil rights movement,” the response to Jim Crow laws culminating in the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of the 1960s. With these laws in place, Ferrier claims that, “the people had every reason to believe that they had set an unalterable course to make their laws reflect the Declaration principle of equality, and the Judeo-Christian principle of brotherhood” (170–71).

In the book’s closing thirty pages, Ferrier turns from equality to character and culture. In “Chapter 10: A People Worthy of the Declaration,” Ferrier provides a Tocquevillian analysis of the American character necessary for fulfilling the Declaration’s ends—personal self-government, courage, prudence, political freedom, civic education, and religious disposition. These elements of character, Ferrier claims, are under assault from “The Dangers to Freedom in Our Time”—the assertion of a radical licentious liberty, the rejection of traditional marriage, corrupted educational institutions, and the banishing of God from the public sphere (Chapter 11). Hence, “we Americans today sense that something is wrong, deeply wrong” with our republic (200). Yet, Ferrier remains hopeful, concluding that “we are not altogether lost as a people. We have only to recall what made us a people, and to make

it shine in our speech, in our deeds, and in all our lives.... [W]e need only once again live by the Declaration of Independence” (201).

The laudable features in Ferrier’s argument are accompanied by compelling prose. Ferrier writes clearly and energetically, without sacrificing precision. The historical sections serve a well-balanced cocktail of anecdotes, facts, and narrative to animate the past. Tensions between colonists and the crown come alive as he charts the course from the Stamp Act of 1765 to the Declaration of 1776, mixing details on taxes and coercive acts with recounted conversations among the men who lived the crisis. When the work turns to the philosophers and theologians of the Western Tradition, Aristotle, Locke, and others become accessible to readers unacquainted with their major works. As for the great acts of “Declaration Statesmanship” that frame the work, Ferrier largely lets the statesmen themselves do the heavy rhetorical lifting. Whereas contemporary writers often assume familiarity with the Declaration, the Constitution, and the speeches of Lincoln and others, Ferrier invites readers to consider these texts directly—often at length—before offering analysis. One has the sense of standing at Independence Hall or the U.S. Capitol, hearing the great statesmen speak for the first time, while Ferrier, in the aftermath, offers his concise defense of the truth in their words. Employing such methods makes for engaging reading, but more importantly encourages readers to judge Ferrier’s interpretation against the words themselves.

Ferrier somehow manages to accomplish all these goals in 202 large-print pages, an impressive achievement. Such brevity on long-debated issues, however, inevitably leaves certain questions unanswered. *The Declaration of America* is no exception. Ferrier’s focus on the abstract purposes of the Declaration, particularly equality, comes at the expense of sustained consideration of the form of the American regime—the concrete arrangement of its institutions and the threats now confronting it. It would be wrong to say that Ferrier ignores these concerns entirely. He spends some effort praising the Constitution’s republican form of government—a limited federal government utilizing separation of powers and checks and balances to protect against tyranny, while leaving most powers to state and town governments “adequate for most of the purposes of daily life” (64)—and his closing chapters show a concern for the American way of life and the threats it faces. Yet, there is little consideration of the transformation of American political institutions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and the role these transformations play in bringing about the threats Ferrier wisely

perceives. Little mention is made of the Progressive-era critique of the founders' constitutionalism,⁹ or its culmination in the modern "Administrative State," where unelected bureaucrats and judges—largely concentrated in Washington D.C.—increasingly claim authority over the minutest details of American life.¹⁰ Nor does Ferrier examine the effects of sustained mass immigration without adequate cultural and political assimilation. After over a half century of such migration, is it still accurate to say we are one people with a common founding? Can we preserve our way of life simply by recalling what made us a people before, when the political institutions themselves no longer clearly reflect the republican self-rule the Founders established? Such questions bear directly on contemporary threats to liberty, and remain largely unaddressed. Readers attentive to them may therefore prove more pessimistic than Ferrier appears to be.

But, to quote Abraham Lincoln, "public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it, nothing can succeed. Consequently, he who molds public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions."¹¹ We live in a country where some Christian influencers reject the principles that the Declaration espouses. It is not just Nikole Hannah-Jones and the 1619 Project that wish to undermine the founding myth of 1776. Patrick Deneen and others attempt to convince their readers that the founding philosophy "has failed—not because it fell short, but because it was true to itself."¹² If such open attacks upon the Declaration's principles sway the sentiments of those who should be the Declaration's natural allies, how can we hope to address the other real questions and challenges, mentioned above? Ferrier may be right that reviving patriotic sentiments towards the Declaration's principles—especially in Christian youth—is a prerequisite for dealing with contemporary challenges. *The Declaration of America* is a serious and accessible attempt to do so for a general Christian audience. An open-minded reader should come away with more appreciation for the Founding Fathers and the principles they articulated. Applying those principles to the problems of today might require "wise statesmanship" beyond the scope of

⁹ "We are not bound to adhere to the doctrines held by the signers of the Declaration of Independence." Woodrow Wilson, quoted in Ronald J. Pestritto, *America Transformed: The Rise and Legacy of American Progressivism* (New York: Encounter Books, 2021), 17.

¹⁰ See Pestritto, *America Transformed*, 177–241.

¹¹ Quoted in Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 309–10.

¹² Patrick J. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 3.

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Ferrier's work, a fact that he possibly acknowledges by closing his work with a question: "What should we, the citizens, do now?" (202) Yet, that wise statesmanship presupposes the principles he defends. In that sense, his work remains a worthy beginning upon which the patriotic citizen may build.

Peter Cross

Peter Cross is Tutor (Professor) at Thomas Aquinas College, Northfield, Massachusetts.

Calvin Coolidge Between Conservatism and Progressivism: Revisiting Tacoma's "Burkean Americanist" Thesis

Marisol Balderas

Review: *The Political Thought of Calvin Coolidge: Burkean Americanist* by Thomas J. Tacoma (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020). 260 pp. Hardcover, \$117; Ebook, \$93.60.

Thomas Tacoma's book *The Political Thought of Calvin Coolidge: Burkean Americanist* seeks to define Calvin Coolidge's political thought as reverent of but distinct from that of the American founding and critical of the Progressive era even while influenced by it. Tacoma argues that Coolidge was a conservative who deeply valued the achievements of the American founding and the Constitution and fiercely defended them against their opponents. However, he suggests that Coolidge's defense of the founding was not grounded in the true principles of the American founding as the founders understood them. While Coolidge appreciated the founders' contributions to civilization and their dedication to living in accordance with transcendent truths about human nature and government, he neither adhered to nor appealed to their abstract philosophical claims about natural law and natural rights.

Additionally, though Tacoma admits Coolidge is not a historicist, he asserts that much of Coolidge's rhetoric is very similar to the historicist rhetoric of the Progressives. To make this case, Tacoma traces much of Coolidge's political thought to the influence of the neo-Hegelian Amherst professor Charles Garman, most notably in his understanding of the law of service in social relations, which appears to be somewhat in accord with the Social Gospel movement. He further argues that while Coolidge's speeches contain plenty of references to the founding fathers and the Constitution, Coolidge never seriously discussed their philosophical arguments, opting instead to extol the founders' contributions to civilization and progress. This rhetoric about civilization, Tacoma contends, is derived from Coolidge's other Amherst professor, Anson D. Morse, who spoke of the steady advancement of civilization towards freedom. Although unlike some progressive historicists, Morse believed that regression was possible.

Nevertheless, Tacoma correctly identifies many instances where Coolidge's political thought seems to be consistent with the American founding, if perhaps via a slightly different

avenue. For example, Coolidge's convictions about equality and individual rights are fully consistent with the founders' political thought, even when he traces their origin to the American colonists' religious convictions. Instead of exploring the origins of these convictions in depth, however, Tacoma tends to rest on the assertion that the underpinnings of Coolidge's political thought are fundamentally different from the Founding. This serves Tacoma's broader thesis, which is that Coolidge's reverence for American institutions and traditions of republican government makes him a "Burkean Americanist," i.e., a conservative who regards American institutions more for being well-established and proven sound than for the abstract theory underlying them. In doing so, Tacoma implies that Coolidge's defense of the founding was too weak to resist the attacks of Progressivism, by which Coolidge himself was influenced to some degree. The argument is well-articulated, but one could reply that Coolidge's repeated emphasis on equality and the importance of living according to eternal laws is consistent with the core of the natural law political philosophy of the founding.

Tacoma's book begins by identifying the key tenets of Progressivism. He demonstrates that the Progressives "self-consciously rejected the principles and institutions of America's founding regime" (1). The Progressives had great faith in historical development and human evolution, holding that the progress mankind had made since the American founding had rendered many of its constitutional features obsolete. Tacoma explains that the Progressives were influenced by several different schools of thought: the Historical School, Pragmatism, Social Darwinism, Positivism, and the Social Gospel movement. These schools of thought afforded Progressives a set of common beliefs, like the historical contingency of truth, faith in human progress, a conviction that American institutions were outmoded, a new understanding of political leadership, more confidence in direct democracy, and a belief in government by expert administrators (12). These beliefs all denied the idea that there can be anything right by nature. While Tacoma correctly notes that Coolidge's political thought is far removed from these tenets and is much closer to those of the founders (23), he holds that Coolidge himself was influenced by his progressive college professors at Amherst. Coolidge's political ideas were "influenced by progressive, pragmatic, or social gospel thought" (23).

Tacoma argues that Coolidge drew many political lessons from his favorite professor, Charles E. Garman. Garman taught his students that man is not merely a material but also a spiritual being, and this was the foundation for his individualism. The individual has a duty

to seek his self-improvement and self-realization, and this means he has a measure of dignity that cannot be exploited by industry (33). From this teaching, Coolidge learned that man improves himself through his relations with others, for he has obligations to others. This is also why Coolidge repeatedly emphasized Garman's teaching on the law of service. And like Garman, Coolidge believed that the state and the individual have reciprocal duties to each other (34-35). However, in spite of Tacoma's characterization, these ideas were not fundamentally at odds with the founding. They neither contradicted the founders' belief in individualism, nor asserted that human nature is constantly evolving or that American institutions are deeply flawed and inadequate to address new conditions.

Professor Anson D. Morse's views about civilization, argues Tacoma, also had a significant impact on Coolidge's political thought. For evidence, Tacoma points out that many of Coolidge's historical references were the same as those which Morse used (29). Morse believed civilization is a process of perfecting mankind, but contrary to the historicism of the Progressives, he believed "de-civilization," or regression to a more ancient time in history, was always a possibility (27). In Coolidge's understanding, the American founding historically provided the principles (like rule of law and individualism) that would allow civilization to advance and humanity to progress.

While Coolidge was undoubtedly influenced by the ideas of his Amherst professors, his political thought was very much his own and developed further over the course of his long political career. Moreover, there is evidence that it was influenced by the founders' own ideas as well as their reverence for the Constitution. This is something Tacoma always recognizes even as he qualifies it by pointing to Coolidge's more heterodox sources. Tacoma's main point is that Coolidge largely avoided speaking in abstract philosophical terms. At a time when America's founders and constitutionalism were under assault by the progressives, Coolidge sought to remind Americans of why the founding ought to be held in high esteem and why the Constitution ought to be preserved. Tacoma writes, "Coolidge provided his audiences with a coherent sense of the nobility of the American founders, a defense of the republican government they created"; it was, "in his own terms, a vindication of the Declaration and Constitution" (66). But this returns the reader to the difficulty of how Coolidge's rhetoric related to his principles.

Tacoma strongly implies that Coolidge's defense of the Declaration and the Constitution was insufficient in that it tended to skirt appeals to abstract natural law philosophy, even as he held to the same convictions that were their natural outgrowth, i.e., equality and individual rights. Coolidge viewed these ideas as a derivation of the commonly held religious beliefs of the founding era: "These principles were, for Coolidge, always rooted in the Protestant heritage of the nation, not in the political philosophy developed by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century natural law philosophers" (66). However, in keeping with the founders, and in contrast to the Progressives, Coolidge held that these principles which undergirded the Declaration and the Constitution were indeed eternal and unchanging. He merely chose to stress that they were accessible through a historical religious faith rather than abstract philosophy. For Coolidge, "the novelty of the Declaration was in recognizing these eternal principles in politics, giving them life on a grand scale in America" (76).

There is evidence that Coolidge's political principles were more than just consistent with the founding, but that they too included an appeal to natural law. For example, he makes it clear that equality and individual rights inhere in man by nature and are always the same. In *Have Faith in Massachusetts*, Coolidge proclaims that there is an eternal law, from which man's equality and rights stem, for "Men do not make laws. They do but discover them," and they ought to "rest on the eternal foundation of righteousness."¹ Moreover, Coolidge asserted that equality and "inalienable rights" were "final," irrespective of what custom might dictate—in other words, they were logically defensible truths.² He argued that during the founding, these principles were finally recognized as more important than custom, leading to a growing acknowledgment of man's equality. Coolidge said, "Custom was giving way to reason. Class and caste and place, all the distinctions based on appearance and accident were giving way before reality."³ Reality was discovered when men questioned senseless customs or "distinctions which were temporal to those which are eternal," allowing them to exchange the sovereignty of kings or aristocrats for the "sovereignty and nobility of all men."⁴ By looking to reality or nature, Coolidge argued, the founding generation was able to recognize

¹ Calvin Coolidge, "Have Faith in Massachusetts," in *Have Faith in Massachusetts: A Collection of Speeches and Messages*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919), 4.

² Coolidge, "The Inspiration of the Declaration," in *Foundations of the Republic: Speeches and Addresses* (Reprint: London: Forgotten Books, 2015 [1926]), 451.

³ Coolidge, "Address at Roxbury Historical Society Bunker Hill Day," in *Have Faith in Massachusetts*, 116.

⁴ Coolidge, "Address at Roxbury Historical Society Bunker Hill Day," in *Have Faith in Massachusetts*, 116.

rights more fully than had been possible under English law, particularly when they began regarding all human beings as inherently equal. It was then that “the unequal in quantity became equal in quality.”⁵

Coolidge did not say that this discovery of nature was without conditions. He pointed out that these ideas had developed in America because the people who settled it were from a certain social stratum; moreover, their deep Protestant convictions (and desire to practice them) included a rationalism that directed adherents to see God in the works of nature. According to Coolidge, Americans had “wanted to escape from the rule of a force imposed from without and live in accordance with the light of reason which comes from within.”⁶ While he recognized that Americans had been influenced by custom and experience, they rightly rejected the old and unnatural system of “class and caste,” letting “slip their grasp upon conventionalities that they might lay a firmer hold upon realities.”⁷ These realities, the doctrines of equality and natural rights, he fully believed to be true and enduring in the same manner the founders understood them. Thus, Tacoma’s thesis of Coolidge as a Burkean Americanist may hold when analysing Coolidge’s deference to tradition, but there is room to disagree with his characterization of Coolidge’s political thought as fundamentally different from that of the founding.

Though Tacoma argues that Coolidge, like Burke, saw that natural rights misunderstood could be a threat to established order, Coolidge did defend the American founders’ natural rights and natural law against Progressivism (xviii). Like the most prominent founders, even the conservative John Adams, Coolidge thought that natural rights could be discovered in nature and discerned by reason because they had a basis in nature and reality, not merely in English tradition or custom. Coolidge did stress that the Americans had been contending for old rights under the English constitution—the American Revolution was inherently conservative—but he also noted that no other country had ever recognized the notion of inherent rights, and especially equality, to the same extent. Rather than a departure, Coolidge’s principles harmonize the natural law accessible to reason with the religious doctrines of the Puritans and colonial clergymen who urged Americans to recognize and accept it long before the revolution.

⁵ Coolidge, “Address at Roxbury Historical Society Bunker Hill Day,” in *Have Faith in Massachusetts*, 117.

⁶ Coolidge, “Great Virginians,” in *The Price of Freedom*, 181.

⁷ Coolidge, “The Destiny of America,” in *The Price of Freedom*, 335.

Knowledge and Place

Jacob Hiserman

Review: *Knowledge Towns: Colleges and Universities as Talent Magnets* by David J. Staley and Dominic D.J. Endicott (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2023). 415 pp. Hardcover, \$34.95; Ebook, \$34.95.

This book caught my attention for one reason: I am a higher education historian fascinated by proposals for reforming colleges. Staley and Endicott entered that conversation with *Knowledge Towns*. Between its covers, they give a creative solution: college towns need to reinvent themselves using a strategy they call “the knowledge town.”

For the co-authors, such a place has two parts: “talent magnet” and “knowledge enterprise.” One premise unites both parts: “modern society” prizes “knowledge work”—jobs which center on the use and/or creation of “information technology” such as software development, the digital cloud, smartphones, broadband, and computers (17). These are largely remote work positions. Staley and Endicott define a “talent magnet” as a community that intentionally attracts “knowledge workers” who will live and work in their town and invest in it. They cover twelve ways to forge a “talent magnet” in the first chapter before turning to the “knowledge” component of the town in chapter two. This “knowledge enterprise” revolutionizes every facet of traditional town and gown relationships along the lines of the twelve marks of a “talent magnet.” For example, Staley and Endicott speculate that students at one of the tiny microcolleges (a college with a couple of professors and approximately twenty students) in the “knowledge enterprise” will learn about how beef gets onto their plate as well as how local rewilding can change that—all while dining in the microcollege’s eating hall.

Staley and Endicott further interweave their sustainability and town-gown threads in the third chapter, which shows that one of six “archetypes” for a “knowledge town” is reshaping a town and gown relationship to meet contemporary needs. They chose Defiance, Ohio, a small midwestern farming community with an extant liberal arts college (Defiance College) and community college (Northwest State Community College), but also a highly polluted river (the Maumee) in the middle of the town. According to the authors, the town of Defiance

could use global sustainable and regenerative farming practices, link up with agricultural tech and consulting firms, and partner with Defiance College to create a new agricultural college. That would provide a healthy future for the region’s now-poisoned farmland. Lastly, Staley and Endicott provide practical suggestions for how a variety of local and collegiate leaders can transform their areas and institutions into “knowledge towns” in chapter four. The pair closes the book with a brief synopsis of the issues the “knowledge town” will tackle.

In *Knowledge Towns*, Staley and Endicott provide a way to keep the traditional humanities curriculum in the “knowledge enterprise” (88–89). Readers of this journal will find that laudable. Additionally, the authors retain some salutary discussion of a concept akin to the common good. In their chapter on archetypes, they state a “settlement” archetype should include a “town purpose strategy” based around the “common interest” of all in the community (124). They also see a possibility for moral character—nay even virtue—to become the litmus test of a community leader. Staley and Endicott hope that town managers will choose citizens to lead specific projects for the “knowledge enterprise” not because of their “qualifications, titles, or wealth” but due to “their ability to lead and inspire” (174). People concerned with preserving the land they live on will find the sections of each chapter on small-scale rewilding, regenerative agriculture, and ecological protection to be a boon to their efforts. Finally, those who love the places they inhabit will also take encouragement from Staley and Endicott’s constant call for decentralized, local leadership, planning, and pooling of resources for almost every part of their twelve-point strategy. This puts *place* first and allows the *almost* organic cultivation of the “knowledge town” from the local ‘soil’.

Yet, it is not *fully* organic in the *Knowledge Towns*. This is because Staley and Endicott give an overly optimistic evaluation of technology’s role in the “knowledge town.” They make large claims such as “where tech leads, mainstream businesses will generally follow,” that are substantiated by thin evidence such as 29 percent of workers desiring to work from home five days per week in one PricewaterhouseCooper study (4). One of their main premises, “Act local but harness the cloud” (18–19, 202), accompanies their cry for plans that include the “bionic worker” and the emigration that powers “talent magnets” in tech sector jobs (3–4, 18). Staley and Endicott provide little-to-no moral evaluation of this strategy or its potential human costs. Will the relationship between the “bionic worker” and human worker be just? How might an emphasis on the cloud crowd out the local, especially when local people do

not control the cloud or its services? Staley and Endicott also failed to account for the viability of “knowledge enterprises” when competing with state universities. Will “knowledge enterprises” draw enough local and extra-local capital to compete with the monies a state university system draws from a state government and grants? These are questions those who use Staley and Endicott’s blueprints should consider.

Lastly, the authors spend a good bit of ink on reimagining dying (and dead), denominationally rooted colleges as integral pieces of a “knowledge town” (123, 132, 135–39, 198–99). They omit the original, spiritual commitments of those colleges from their plans for reinventing those institutions. This may strike readers of this journal as a major flaw. Religious traditions have often been a key part of creating and sustaining a community. Overall, Staley and Endicott provide some excellent ideas for making *places*, but readers who prize the Ciceronian Society’s core principles will want to reflect more carefully on *which* plans in *Knowledge Towns* to use to revitalize their locales.

Jacob Hiserman

Jacob Hiserman is an instructor at the Pontifical College Josephinum and teaches humanities at Thales Academy, Rolesville