

# Thomas Pangle and the Problems of a Straussian Founding

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THE NATURE OF the American Founding is surely one of the most important questions which confronts Americans when they seek to achieve self-understanding. Before considering what and who we are, we must understand what and who we were meant to be. Before considering where we ought to go, we must understand where the Founders of our republic thought we were going. In order to fulfill the Delphic injunction to "Know Thyself," we must first know from whence we come.

Two interpretations of the American Founding and the American regime have vied for prominence in recent decades. On the one hand, the older, liberal thesis deriving from Tocqueville and articulated in its most ambitious form by Louis Hartz has argued that the American regime is and always has been devoted to the liberal principles of democratic liberty and equality.<sup>1</sup> Because of the happy coincidence of America's actualization of the "state of nature" in colonial times, the American Founding could be the simple implementation of Locke's *Second Treatise*. There was no need to overthrow a pre-existing feudal order, and in this consists our felicity, for as Hartz's aphorism puts it, "No feudalism, no socialism." Americans in a sense are trapped inside a liberal consciousness: nothing else is imaginable.

A revisionist thesis articulated most forcefully by J.G.A. Pocock, Bernard Bailyn, and Gordon Wood, however, holds that early American political ideas were derived from an "Atlantic" tradition of "classical republican" thought stretching from ancient models, through Machiavelli, to Bolingbroke, Sydney, and Harrington, and at last to eighteenth-century America. This interpretation places particular emphasis on the connections between revolutionary American ideas and the "Country ideology" of the English Old Whigs in their fight against the centralizing "Court." In this interpretation, crucial elements of the American Founding are "medieval rather than Lockean."<sup>2</sup>

Now, however, Professor Thomas Pangle has offered a third interpretive alternative which seems to draw from both views.<sup>3</sup> According to Pangle, America was founded as a *modern* (liberal) republic. He claims that the disputes over the Constitution and those which emerged in the years immediately following ratification were not so much between visions of "classical republicanism" and "liberalism," but rather were disputes "*within* the liberal tradition" itself.<sup>4</sup> It is clear, however, that Pangle's adversary is not so much Louis Hartz as the partisans of the classical republican thesis.<sup>5</sup> Pangle's argument proceeds from

a careful analysis of the nature of classical republicanism and moves to an interpretation of the Founders' self-understanding, particularly in the text of *The Federalist Papers*. The work culminates with an examination of the thought of John Locke.

### I

Pangle's project seems to arise from a profound ambivalence about the hypertrophy of modernity in contemporary America. His work seeks to discover, in effect, why we have "turned out" this way. He admits at first that "no one can deny. . . important embers of pre-modern thought remained glowing in 18th century America."<sup>6</sup> This rules out the full-blown Hartzian thesis of a *uniformly* liberal tradition in our history. Pangle, however, tends to dismiss these embers as dying flames, lacking coherence and slowly being smothered by a nascent modern spirit, which his reading of *The Federalist* finds to be the deliberate intention of the Founders. In other words, we are so modern now because that is what we were meant to be. His argument consists of two parts: a "corrective" account of the nature of classical republicanism, and the discernment of an opposing modern republicanism in the American Founding. There are problems in both phases of the argument.

A student of the late Leo Strauss, Pangle organizes his account of classical republicanism around a rendering of the ancient conception of "virtue." He argues that for the ancients the character traits of virtue were intended to develop a "coordination of reason and passion in a natural synthesis which transforms both original elements."<sup>7</sup> The cardinal virtues of fortitude, temperance, prudence, and justice were conducive to freedom and security in the political regime, but if they were seen merely as means to such civic ends, they were defective: "civic" virtue, if it remained merely civic, was incomplete. Conse-

quently, the classical discussion of virtue led by its own internal logic to consideration of the moral virtues, ends in themselves or perfections of human life. But even moral virtue proved insufficient, for, according to Pangle, the classical account demonstrates that difficulties arising in the life of the "perfect gentleman" drive us to seek our truest perfection in contemplation. This, Pangle claims, is the authentic center of the classical account of virtue in civil life. Pangle concludes that American republicanism is not classical most especially because of the absence of attention to contemplative virtue(s) in the Founders' organization of and reflection on the American regime.

Pangle notes in passing that to understand classical republicanism a distinction must be made between ancient political practice and ancient political theory. Yet his "corrective account" of classical virtue relies entirely on the ancient *theoretical* analysis of political life. This approach might be justified if Pangle could show us that the Founders of our regime believed the finest account of ancient republicanism was to be found in the works of Plato and Aristotle, but the Founders almost uniformly deplored the "philosophic spirit," finding it "soft" and unuseful. Their classics were the historians; for the Founders, the "abstractions" of the "closet philosophers" were self-consciously rejected in favor of histories.<sup>8</sup> In Madison's notes on the Convention, for example, the sources most cited by name are Livy, Plutarch, and Tacitus, while John Locke is conspicuously absent.<sup>9</sup> It seems clear that the classical virtue understood by the Founders is not the same as that understood by Pangle.<sup>10</sup> Pangle's correction of the Atlantic republicans' understanding of classical virtue remains thus far unconvincing.

Our objection here is emblematic of a problem which runs throughout Pangle's work; namely, that from the point of view

of the "spirit" or "consciousness" of the Founders, Pangle places too much emphasis on their relationship to the philosophical Greeks and tends to ignore the role played in their thought by austere Roman practice. Pangle writes that "The authors of the *Federalist Papers*, by taking the pen name 'Publius,' seem to announce from the start their identification with the Greco-Roman republican tradition," and then goes on to say on the basis of his "contemplative" or "philosophical" rendering of classical virtue that this apparent agreement is misleading.<sup>11</sup> The problem seems to lie in that deceptively harmless word, "Greco-Roman." While the Greek tradition placed contemplative life at the summit of human perfection, the highest Ciceronian (Roman) virtue was the scholar-statesman's service of the Republic. Furthermore, Pangle claims that the classical republics of Athens, Rome, Thebes, Corinth, Corcyra, Syracuse, and Sparta were all profoundly *urban*, and were known to be such by the Founding generation. While this may be the case with the Greek cities, it is unclear that the same applies to Rome, a fact which has particularly important consequences as we shall see below. And of course, while the political pamphlets of the Founding period abound in Roman pseudonyms, we must look long and hard before we find a writer taking a Greek name. It seems clear that among classical models of republicanism, the eminently practical spirit of *Roman* thought is more the model for the political reflections of the American Founders.

Pangle takes another and more justifiable step in his account of ancient republicanism, however. In this second step he stays closer to the texts of the Founding period. He notes that Publius (Madison) himself directly attacks classical republicanism for its coerced conformity in the way of life of the citizens; such conformity leads to a "tyranny of the major-

ity—led by some 'heroic' demagogue."<sup>12</sup> Notably, this is a cautionary point learned from ancient historians, not so much from ancient theorists, but the more theoretical point is apposite as well. Whereas the establishment of similar tastes and habits in the *polis* was considered a civic virtue by the ancients, a virtue leading to greater "fraternity" in the city, Madison believed this course both unnatural and fraught with dangers. Pangle therefore concludes, "The Americans' talk of the virtues of rural and frontier yeoman life . . . bears . . . an ambiguous relation to the virtues exemplified or extolled by Roman and Greek citizens."<sup>13</sup> Here Pangle is on firmer ground. It is certainly not the case that American republican thought in the Founding period is *nothing* but a revival of even the Roman model. But is it modern?

The decisive figure in Pangle's account of modern republicanism and modern virtue is Machiavelli. He writes that "Above all, the scholars of our day tend to misunderstand the thought, and hence the nature of the influence, of Machiavelli. And this error is decisive."<sup>14</sup> Beginning with Machiavelli, the ends of political life were lowered. The political regime would no longer strive for human "perfection." "Civic" virtue became self-sufficient, no longer in need of correction by higher virtues, either moral or contemplative, which were considered merely "other-worldly." For Machiavelli in particular, Pangle claims, virtue consisted of a dynamic conflict between "spirited" individuals within a regime, each in search of acquisition and glory. The modern republic "liberates" men's passions, but it also controls them by a reasoned set of institutions which rest on the principle of skepticism and wariness, on a system of mutual checks and balances.

In addition, according to Pangle, the modern republic turns human interest toward private life. An essential element of the new understanding of virtue in-

volves the "commercial spirit," and much of the debate about the Founding has revolved around this one issue. To the aristocratic ancients, "trade" was a distinctly inferior occupation, and acquisitiveness a vice. For the moderns, physical security is the ultimate end for man on earth and this security requires property; the expansion of property is therefore a virtue. "Productivity" finds its way into the virtues and becomes perhaps the key virtue. A commercial republic increases property and therefore security both for individuals and for the society as a whole. Furthermore, a lively "private" self-interest not only keeps individuals vigilant in the protection of their rights, but also provides an "outlet" for the "spiritedness" of certain individuals who might otherwise seek *political* glory. This at least is Pangle's account, and he presents us with a number of references to demonstrate that the Founders believed a commercial republic was the American destiny.<sup>15</sup>

Much of Pangle's evidence is persuasive, but a substantial body of contradictory evidence also exists. On its face, of course, the thought that the gentlemen of eighteenth-century America took "the murderous Machiavel" as their model seems stretched. Pangle writes that Locke, Montesquieu, and Hume constitute "Machiavelli's truly great and insightful successors," which is readily admitted. But it also seems most likely that the Founders found Harrington, Neville, and Sydney more congenial and more politically *useful* on this point and on many others.<sup>16</sup> Jefferson, for example, was concerned about the "moral danger in the commercial spirit." In the Notes on Virginia, Query 19, he claims, famously, that

*Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God . . . whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue . . . Dependence begets subservience and venality,*

*suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition.*<sup>17</sup>

Pangle draws attention to the "instrumental" nature of Jefferson's praise for the "virtuous" yeomen to claim for it a modern basis. But Jefferson here speaks of "substantial and genuine virtue." This is a virtue which can remain alive only in a republic which has not left itself entirely to the pursuit of private goals. While this passage is much disputed, it seems clear that Machiavellian *virtù* is not what Jefferson has in mind, for he clearly implies that those who do not "labor in the earth" (the commercial classes?) *are* fit tools for the "designs of ambition." In other words, contrary to Pangle's contention, Jefferson's republicanism simply does not rely on a spirited commercial life to maintain reasoned order and security.

Even Madison seems to have agreed with Jefferson. In the Convention he admitted that, "Viewing the subject in its merits alone, the freeholders of the Country would be the safest depositories of republican liberty."<sup>18</sup> By 1792 his agreement had strengthened. He wrote that "husbandmen" were "the best basis of public liberty and the strongest bulwark of public safety. . . [T]he greater the proportion of this class to the whole society, the more free, the more independent, and the more happy must be the society itself." He goes on to comment that manufacturing interests must be judged by the extent to which they approximate this ideal of the yeoman citizen.<sup>19</sup> This statement by Madison is particularly important as it seems to indicate that he was trying to secure the advantages of commerce while maintaining an agrarian *spirit*.

In his discussion of Jefferson and agrarianism, Pangle notes that ". . . the *classics* favor a citizen body dominated by middle-class farmers whose political

zeal is restrained by the fact that they cannot afford to spend too much time away from their farms."<sup>20</sup> Yet this begins to sound very like the *modern* republicanism which Pangle is at pains to differentiate from the classics. That is, such middle-class farmers are not constantly required to take part in the political life of the *polis*, they are not constantly clamoring for battle, or seeking an heroic demagogue. They live what seems a rather bourgeois existence until called upon to take up arms in defense of their land: these seem very much the goals of the Founders. On the other hand, in all known societies, *urban* life has been necessarily associated with commercial pursuits. If we accept the alternative stated by Pangle that the classical republics were fundamentally urban, then it is difficult to see how he can place such emphasis on the newness of the "spirit of commerce" in the modern, American regime.

The inappropriateness of a Machiavellian reading of the Revolutionary American idea of virtue is also apparent when we consider the private writings of a number of chief revolutionaries. In a letter to Mercy Warren shortly before the Revolution, John Adams wrote, "Public Virtue cannot exist in a Nation without private, and public virtue is the only Foundation of a Republic." Significantly, he went on in the same letter to assert that "the Spirit of Commerce. . . it is much to be feared is incompatible with the purity of Heart and Greatness of soul which is necessary for a happy Republic."<sup>21</sup> John Adams' kinsman Samuel seems to have had similar thoughts. Writing to James Warren, he claimed,

Virtue is our best Security. It is not possible that any State should long remain free, where Virtue is not supremely honored . . . . He who is void of virtuous Attachments in private Life, is, or soon will be void of all Regard for Country . . . . [P]rivate and public Vices, are in Reality, though not always appar-

ently, necessarily connected . . . .<sup>22</sup>

And in a different region of the new nation, Richard Henry Lee had similar thoughts: "I know there are Mandevilles among you who laugh at virtue, and with vain ostentatious display of words will deduce from vice, public good! But such men are much fitter to be Slaves in the corrupt and rotten despotisms of Empire than to remain citizens of young and rising republics."<sup>23</sup>

Much rests on this point, for the Atlantic republican theorists have offered a comprehensive account in which the English self-understanding, exported to America, was of a "virtuous" or "godly" commonwealth in which virtue was maintained in one (virtuous) "universal" class—in English Country ideology, the men of independent means, the landed gentry. This perspective persisted in England at least to the end of the eighteenth century, for we see it reiterated in Burke. Madison's "republican distribution of citizens" seems to retain much of the substance of this "ideology" with the single exception of its hereditary aristocracy.

This leads us to one final point. Conspicuously absent from Pangle's discussion of the classical virtues is the figure of Cincinnatus, the Roman hero and savior of the republic. Cincinnatus, of course, was the simple Roman farmer (no philosopher) whose fellow citizens in dire military need pressed the dictatorship on him; at the end of his famous and successful command of the republic, he returned again to the plow. This model of *Roman* virtue simply does not conform to Pangle's Machiavellian assertion that "in the classical city, the natural diversity and competitiveness of men were intensified by the inordinate stress on pride, manly self-assertion, and the love of glory."<sup>24</sup> The Roman *ideal*, if not always the Roman practice, was the public-spiritedness and simple piety of the private man, Cincinnatus. That the leading

men in the new American republic should set out together to form themselves into the Society of the Cincinnati speaks volumes about their understanding of the qualities required for republican self-government. Pangle, however, seems to consider this incident nothing more than an "ember" of pre-modern ideology.

The Cincinnati in turn were denounced not because of their ideal of Roman virtue, not because of their veneration of the Roman agrarian hero, but because of their very un-Cincinnatus-like attempt to transform themselves into an hereditary aristocracy. What inspired the Cincinnati was not the "liberated passions" of Machiavelli but an ideal that is in many ways "selfless." What inspired the detractors of the Cincinnati was a (Christian?) revulsion at the unmerited inequality of hereditary status. A consideration of Cincinnatus also reminds us that, among ancient cities, Carthage was urban, Carthage was commercial, and finally, Carthage was decadent and was destroyed by Roman virtue. While the Founders did discern problems in Roman republicanism, the fact of the republic's fall into empire being most on their minds, the vices of a commercial republic were also on their minds. It is far from clear that the exceptions taken by the Founders in their discussion of Roman republicanism constitute as profound a break with the classical tradition as Pangle indicates. On the other hand, as Pangle makes clear, the American founding is not simply classical. But there are not simply two alternatives, ancient and modern republicanism or ancient and modern virtue. Thus, the fact that the Founders' virtue and the Founders' republicanism are not classical does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that it is modern. Pangle is trapped in a false either/or.

## II

We have just argued that Pangle's attempt to discern a modern spirit in the

Founding is not convincing. Still, he is not incorrect in his awareness that the American republic is not *simply* a revival of the ancients. Something is indeed different and new. It remains to discuss one possible alternative to both the classical and the modern spirits.

The alternative we have in mind might best be called a Protestant (or Augustinian?) republicanism. As Sam Adams commented in a letter in 1780: "I love the people of Boston. I once thought that City would be the *Christian* Sparta. But Alas! Will men never be free! They will be free no longer than while they remain virtuous."<sup>25</sup> Adams' American Sparta would be Christian; we might use a commonplace of our century and call it, like the chapel at most private American universities, "non-denominational Protestant." In the new Protestant republic, men are free as they are virtuous. This virtue is not the haughty aristocratic magnanimity of the ancients, nor is it the acquisitive self-regarding *virtù* of the Machiavellian moderns. Nor indeed is this virtue the hierarchic piety of the Catholic Old World. What Pangle "misses" in his attempt to account for the spirit of the American Founding is the revolution in thought which had already taken place before the Founders and, indeed, *before Locke*: Christianity in general and the Protestant Reformation in particular.

The late Canadian political philosopher George Gant speaks of the North American "primal," a decisive experience which shapes the self-understanding of a people:

For us . . . [i]t was the meeting of the alien and yet conquerable land with English-speaking Protestants. Since the crossing of the ocean we have been Europeans who were not Europeans. But the Europeanness which remained for us was of a special kind, because Calvinist Protestantism was itself a break in Europe—a turning away from the Greeks in the name of what was found in the Bible.<sup>26</sup>

In contemporary political thought much is said about the making of the "self." Pangle's discussion of a "spirit" in modern republicanism, organized as it is around a rendering of ideas of virtue and human nature, constitutes a partial account of an American Revolutionary "self." Grant, however, opens for us a route to understanding these Revolutionary selves at a deeper level. His method has the additional advantage of "solving" a number of the puzzles which arise if we follow Pangle and interpret the Founding as a self-consciously modern act.

Grant does not deny that the American regime is something new. But Grant goes further than Pangle by providing us with reasons for the acceptance or "reception" of such modern political ideas by God-fearing, "greatly-awakened" American Protestants who most assuredly did not see themselves in the company of "the murderous Machiavel." Protestants were amenable to "modern" ideas because

The absence of natural theology and liturgical comforts left the lonely soul face to face with the transcendent (and therefore elusive) will of God. This will had to be sought and served not through our contemplation but directly through our practice. From the solitude and uncertainty of our position came the responsibility which could find no rest. That unappeasable responsibility gave an extraordinary sense of the self as radical freedom paradoxically experienced within the predestinarian theological context.<sup>27</sup>

A Protestant republic would necessarily differ from that of the classical world. For the Protestants, the prideful fame and glory of the ancient hero could not serve as an ideal. Private virtue would be stressed, together with the wary realization that the ambition and pride of sinful fallen man would pose a perennial danger to civic peace.

Protestantism "rediscovered" even as it transformed the older Augustinian un-

derstanding of Christianity, replacing the "theocratic" political order which had developed during the Middle Ages with one in which the relationship of the individual soul to God is not mediated by political life and an intermediary church. While Machiavellian *virtù* drives the moral and contemplative virtues from secular/political life, Protestantism displays the Christian moral virtues at a tremendous intensity. In a strange way, even the contemplative virtues are carried over in a radical transformation: an "inward" way which makes of these virtues a "way of living" which is not a "way of life."<sup>28</sup> And this is a vital distinction, for in Protestant Christianity, "the candle of the Lord burns in every man." With such a spirit, the inequality of the ancients is as impossible as the immoralism of Machiavelli. In other words, in a Protestant republic the old Greek virtues would not be jettisoned, but they would be transformed in light of the teaching of Biblical Christianity.<sup>29</sup>

The Protestant self is radically aware of human sinfulness and the impossibility of salvation save by grace. To such a mind, virtue cannot be understood as human "perfection," for that would be tantamount to Pelagianism. The ends of political life are consequently lowered precisely as the inward life of the spirit is exalted, resulting in a "domestic" spirit with a lively consciousness of freedom. We are not suggesting that Weber's secularization theory is correct, though Pangle's criticisms of Weber indicate that he has not thought deeply about the ways in which secularization can be understood. What we are suggesting is that the Founding spirit is best understood as an "attempt" at classical (Roman) republicanism carried out by English-speaking Protestants.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the Founders' republicanism is so peculiar because, as a formal theory and plan of government developed originally by and for Pagans, it sits awkwardly atop the deepest assumptions about human na-

ture held by a people for whom Protestant Christianity is like gravity—so all-pervasive that it is beyond conscious reflection.

Kendall and Carey have advanced a thesis along these lines. They argue on the basis of a close analysis of important documents in early American history that Americans have been conscious of themselves as a “virtuous people.”<sup>31</sup> Originally this virtue attached to Americans as Protestant Christians fleeing the church establishments of Europe. Later, as successful revolutionaries, this purely religious virtue was synthesized with a pride at bringing about in secular time a *novus ordo seclorum*. Even though pride was the basis of all sin, this shared patriotic pride rested at the core of American society. As Pangle observes, even “Jefferson and Madison [feared] the corruption, loss of fraternal homogeneity, and dilution of attachment to American traditions that they [saw] attendant on the influx of foreign immigration” anticipated in Hamilton’s Report on Manufactures in 1791. Such apprehension is *not* the attitude of modern republicans, content to build their polity on reasoned laws restraining otherwise liberated passions. Such apprehension *is* the proper attitude for those who have constructed a state which relies in the end on the maintenance of a certain virtue in the society from which it is drawn. While Kendall and Carey’s reading is almost certainly overstated, it does lead us to the important realization that this distinction appears in the reflections of the Founders between what we have come to call the State and the Society.

If America were peopled by virtuous citizens who adhered to the (inward) “faith of [their] fathers,” the faith that had been purified of the corruptions of Romanism, then the thing to be feared was the intrusion of the state into this godly society, the intrusion of the temporal powers into “private” life. Given this

“virtuous people,” government must be minimal. James Wilson has called government the “scaffolding of society,” and has suggested that, were it not for the sinfulness of man, the scaffolding could be removed entirely.<sup>32</sup>

But beyond sentiments based on experience, there are also compelling theoretical reasons for this reliance on a virtuous society. In the life of a state, a time may always come when individuals are called upon by their society to defend the common good, perhaps to the death. At that point, if the state is dedicated to Hobbesian individualism, it can only expect a Hobbesian response from individuals: running away. For the classics, patriotism was located somewhere between friendship with a specific individual and altruism, the love of all mankind. Aristotle saw this kind of patriotic “friendship” as a vital element in all republics, a friendship arising from a sense of shared fate and common history.<sup>33</sup> The fact of a “large Republic” therefore presented a theoretical problem for the Founders. At one level, this was addressed by Madison’s countering of ambition with ambition. But at the same time, we find more than ample expression of a patriotism in the American Founding which is of a new form. A “large Republic” required a larger patriotism, and this seems to have been supplied by the “Messianic liberalism” of which Hartz says so much. In order for the fellow-feeling to be sufficient in a large republic, it had to be in some respects universal or universalizable. What Hartz misses is the relationship of “Messianic liberalism” to what we might call “Messianic Protestant polity.”

What emerges from Pangle’s “modern” interpretation of the American Founding is in many ways a remarkably traditional view of the “authentic” American spirit, one which returns us to an interpretive tradition which began after the Civil War. That is, as most post-bellum

renderings of the Founding have contended, the "true" America was the one which destroyed slavery and not that which as one of the first major legislative projects of Congress passed the Alien & Sedition Acts. The true America was the America that would *inevitably* develop into a land where disputes could only be about the expansion of rights, and where the only respectable position would be favoring such expansion. It was not the America which had established churches in some states as late as the 1830s. The true America was that in which the Mayflower Compact would be read as a Lockean social contract rather than a theocratic Puritan covenant—thereby ignoring the very pious words which form the bulk of the Compact.

But as we have seen, there is more than this in the American Founding and in the American spirit. Pangle should ask himself why it is that nearly two centuries after the American Founding, a Roman Catholic needed almost to renounce his faith in order to reach Presidential office, whereas in "traditional" England, a Jewish convert to Anglicanism could in the mid-nineteenth century rise to Prime Ministerial office while boasting of his Jewish heritage. Pangle should ask why, if the American spirit is modern, the American people remain the most church-going population in the industrialized world. There is much in the historical complexity of America that is elusive if we limit ourselves to political philosophy.

### III

Finally, something must be said directly about the general difficulties a Straussian perspective must encounter in an account of actual historical making such as the American Founding. Strauss and his students have taken a firm stand against historicism and the historical school. They have sought to read great thinkers as they understood themselves and they have argued that the greatest philosophi-

cal minds have reached a level of self-awareness which allows them to transcend the temporally-determined opinions of their time. But to read *The Federalist* without context or in highly selective context, when we well know many of the quite mundane issues and opinions to which it is addressed, runs the particular risk that it makes it more plausible to read into the work the issues of today. We agree with Pangle that we should indeed take seriously the thought "of the most far-sighted Founders," and that we should not force that thought.<sup>34</sup> Pangle's treatment, however, while it does not force his sources "into Procrustean 'paradigms'" of Country ideology or class-consciousness, does seem to force the Founders (at least the most "far-sighted" of them) into the modern side of the dispute between the ancients and the moderns.

Even when Pangle does address historical "context," his interpretation is decisively influenced by his context-free reading of *The Federalist*. But unless Pangle is a closet Hegelian, he must admit that historical action such as regime-founding is the conjunction of reflection, passion, interest, and accident. While Strauss's hermeneutic may be justifiable when addressing the purity of a great text of political thought which is the work of one mind, history is never so pure and is not the product of one mind. Given a concrete historical experience, a quasi-Straussian exercise such as Pangle's seems more rather than less likely to force the text and to misinterpret events.

Our critical discussion of Pangle's thesis has one final implication for any Straussian perspective on actual examples of regime-founding or historical making. Strauss focused his efforts on political philosophers, and defined that term to exclude "political theologians." In most of Strauss's work, and even more in the work of his students, the role of

"theologians," spinners of "opinion," in the history of thought is downplayed. But if our arguments have merit and if some members of the Straussian school insist on extending their view beyond texts of political thought to historical matters, then they must expand their horizons to include a serious discussion of, among other things, "purely" theological matters—for it may be precisely in theology that the "self" and the "spirit" of a regime are most deeply formed. This blindness to the work and influence of the theologians in history causes a scholar like Pangle to see even in the Old Whig tradition (the Country ideology) the work of Locke rather than to see in Locke himself an heir to Saint Augustine and the Protestant Reformers.

As Oscar and Lilian Handlin have pointed out, the influence of words and ideas on historical action remains a perplexing puzzle: "... only a close examination of texts and precise exploration of the linkage to actuality will clarify the relationship of words to acts."<sup>36</sup> Pangle's book represents a deep exploration of Locke which offers us several new insights into the thought of that great man; in the future, thanks to Pangle, we may hear less about "Lockean liberalism" and more about "Lockean republicanism." This is a substantial contribution. But it remains far from clear that Locke was the decisive "spiritual" influence on the American Founding. At the deepest level lies, again, the problem of Protestant Christianity, precisely because many of the arguments Pangle adduces against Max Weber's secularization thesis have the peculiarity of being powerfully apposite for Pangle's own position. Pangle asks rhetorically,

[W]as Christianity the dominant or defining element in [the Founders'] thinking? Or were they not rather engaged in an attempt to exploit and transform Christianity in the direction of liberal rationalism? Does their "Christianity" not look

more plausible to us only because they succeeded so well in their project of changing the heart and soul of Christianity?<sup>36</sup>

We must ask in return, was a conscious aspiration to be modern in their political thought the dominant or defining element in the Founders' thinking? Or were they not rather engaged in an attempt to exploit and transform classical republicanism in light of the understanding of the "self" developed within Protestant Christianity? Did not a "modern" republican project look more plausible to the Founders, and indeed to *Locke himself*, only because Protestant Christianity had succeeded in changing the heart and soul of the political things?

The hidden assumption behind Pangle's attempt to "apply" a Straussian perspective to an historical example of political making is that, ultimately, Athens is more profound *and* more powerful than Jerusalem. Strauss himself was by no means convinced that this was the case; Thomas Pangle is more audacious.

1. Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York, 1955). 2. J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavelian Moment* (Princeton, 1975), 546. See also Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967) and Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (New York, 1969). 3. Thomas Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism. The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke* (Chicago, 1988). Hereafter, *Spirit*. A condensed form of his argument can be found in Pangle, "The Federalist Papers' Vision of Civic Health and the Tradition out of which that Vision Emerges," *Western Political Quarterly* vol. 39 (December 1986), 577-602. Hereafter, *WPQ*. 4. Pangle, *Spirit*, 38. 5. After critiquing Hartz, Pangle writes that the "errors which result from Hartz's impressionistic, careening sweep through the complex materials of historical interpretation do not entirely vitiate his thesis." He also says of Hartz that due to his reading of Tocqueville, he was able more than most "...to appreciate the modernism that has been the chief inspiration of American republicanism from its beginnings..." *Spirit*, 27. 6. Pangle, *WPQ*, 580. 7. Pangle, *WPQ*, 586. 8. M.E. Bradford, *A Better Guide Than Reason* (LaSalle, 1979), 4. Bradford's refer-

ence is Richard M. Gummere, *The American Colonial Mind and the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963). 9. Bradford has made this point repeatedly, most forcefully in "A Teaching for Republicans: Roman History and the Nation's First Identity," in Bradford, 3-27. 10. Even Jefferson, the most philosophical of the Founders, considered history more important than philosophy in his plans for the curriculum at the University of Virginia. 11. Pangle, *Spirit*, 43. Pangle uses an identical sentence in *WPQ*, 582, however here he explicitly claims to be considering the possibility that the Founders were seeking a "Rebirth of Roman republicanism." (italics mine) Still, Pangle's understanding of "Roman" republicanism is decisively informed by his reading of the Greeks. 12. Pangle, *Spirit*, 46. 13. Pangle, *Spirit*, 34. 14. Pangle, *Spirit*, 30. 15. Pangle, *Spirit*, 89-111, 177-123. 16. Pangle, *WPQ*, 588. 17. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1784), in Philip B. Kurland and Ralph Lerner, eds., *The Founders' Constitution*, vol. I: *Major Themes* (Chicago, 1987), 18.16. Hereafter, *TFC*. 18. Quoted in Pangle, *Spirit*, 103. 19. James Madison, *Republican Distribution of Citizens* (5 March 1792), *TFC*, 18.28. 20. Pangle, *Spirit*, 102. Italics mine. 21. John Adams to Mercy Warren (16 April 1776), *TFC* 18.9. 22. Sam Adams to James Warren (4 November 1775), *TFC* 18.6. 23. Richard Henry Lee to Henry

Laurens (6 June 1779), *TFC* 18.12. 24. Pangle, *Spirit*, 46. 25. Sam Adams to John Scollay (30 December 1780), *TFC* 18.14. 26. George Grant, "In Defence of North America," in *Technology and Empire* (Toronto, 1969), 19. 27. Grant, 23. 28. The contemplative virtues are in a sense "collapsed" into the moral virtues. This perhaps accounts for the "anti-intellectualism" of American life. 29. Pangle himself admits that the old virtues were not simply jettisoned but rather "infused with a new spirit and expressed in a new practice," (*WPQ* 595), but his inattention to the teachings of the Protestant theologians causes him to "miss" Calvin and see only Machiavelli in early American thought. 30. Locke no doubt plays a key role in such a project; Pangle's error is to read Locke in light of Machiavelli rather than in light of Calvin and the English reformers. 31. Willmoore Kendall and George W. Carey, *The Basic Symbols of the American Political Tradition* (Baton Rouge, 1970). 32. Quoted in Pangle, *Spirit*, 123. 33. See Charles Taylor, "Cross Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate," in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, Nancy L. Rosenblum, ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), especially 170-174. 34. Pangle, *WPQ*, 581. 35. Oscar & Lilian Handlin, "Who Read John Locke? Words and Acts in the American Revolution," *The American Scholar*, Autumn 1989, vol. 58, no. 4, 556. 36. Pangle, *Spirit*, 21.