

# WHERE DID THE FOUNDERS GET THEIR IDEAS?

## America's Machiavellian Moment and the Origins of the Atlantic Republican Tradition

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FOREIGN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE





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# FOREIGN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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## America's Machiavellian Moment and the Origins of the Atlantic Republican Tradition

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After service in the U.S. Army artillery during the Vietnam War, McDougall took a PhD under world historian William H. McNeill at the University of Chicago (1974). The following year he was hired by the University of California, Berkeley, and taught there until 1988, when he was offered the chair at Penn.

His articles and columns have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Commentary*, and other national publications. An unabashed generalist, his books range from *France's Rhineland Diplomacy 1914-1924: The Last Bid for a Balance of Power in Europe* (1978), and *...the Heavens and the Earth: A Political History of the Space Age* (1985), to *Let the Sea Make a Noise: A History of the North Pacific From Magellan to MacArthur* (1992), *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (1997), *Freedom Just Around the Corner: A New American History 1585-1828* (2004), and *Throes of Democracy: The American Civil War Era 1829-1877* (2008), which was chosen by the Athenaeum of Philadelphia as best book of the year by a local author.

His latest book is *The Tragedy of U.S. Foreign Policy: How American Civil Religion Betrayed the National Interest* (Yale University Press, 2016).

## American Myths: The Strange Career of “American Exceptionalism”

What does it mean to speak of American Exceptionalism? If it just means unique, then the claim is unexceptional because no two countries are alike. If it means Americans *believe* their great country is special, then again that’s nothing exceptional because all great nations cherish national myths. If it means Americans are exceptionally virtuous given their devotion to liberty, equality, justice, prosperity, social mobility, and peace, then ipso facto they have also been exceptionally vicious for having fallen so short of those ideals. If it means that Americans are exempted from the laws of entropy because—as Bismarck reportedly quipped—“God looks after fools, drunks, and the United States of America,” then such exceptionalism can only be proven *sub specie aeternitatis*. Indeed, the very illusion that one’s nation is under divine dispensation may perversely inspire the pride that goeth before a fall (“thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God”) or the many bad ends to which reckless adolescents are prone. Finally, if Exceptionalism means that its “indispensable” status renders the United States exempt from the rules of behavior *it makes and enforces on other nations*, then enemies, neutrals, and allies alike are sure to push back.



Alexis de Tocqueville

Hence, “exceptionalism” is more trouble than it’s worth: it either means nothing or altogether too much. But the principal reason to banish the term from *historical* discourse is that the moniker didn’t even exist until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century! No Puritan colonist, founding Patriot, Civil War statesman, 19<sup>th</sup> century poet, pastor, or propagandist ever invoked the term. To be sure, Alexis de Tocqueville called America’s geography exceptional insofar as it was separated from Europe, and German sociologist Werner Sombart thought American society an exception to Europe’s rules in that Socialism had little appeal for workers in the United States. But neither wrote of “American exceptionalism.”

And the first ones who did—Pope Leo XIII in the 1890s and American Communist Jay Lovestone in the 1930s—used exceptionalism as a term of opprobrium. Not until the 1950s did Max Lerner, then Daniel Boorstin and many more authors turn American Exceptionalism into a badge of honor and trace its roots to Puritan New England.

Finally, Presidents John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan made it a benign household phrase in order to exhort Americans to victory in the Cold War. But its malign implications became apparent after the Cold War when Americans pretended their exceptional values and institutions ought to become universal, whether or not other cultures wanted them.

So what if the *ur*-historical claims made for American Exceptionalism amount to a civil religious myth? Don’t the truths they symbolize about Americans’ New World character remain valid? Not really, because common sense tells us New Worlds cannot baptize themselves! Only people from a self-conscious Old World can conjure a New World, which is exactly what happened in the centuries since 1492.

As a British skeptic has observed, “Not even the Puritans were impelled by a unique or exceptional American impulse. On the contrary, they were products of European

education, European culture, European piety, and were engaged in a great European quarrel called the Protestant Reformation.” Some 140 years later, representatives of the American colonies did gather in Philadelphia to reject European rule, but the principles they invoked were “the beliefs of the English Revolution and the Whig tradition, in the English, Scottish, and French Enlightenments, and in the ancient principles of English Common Law – in short, in the core beliefs of a European civilization.”

Historians have in fact dug deeply into the political theories of early modern Britain and unearthed the ideas that led, in the fullness of time, to the American Founding. One familiar source is the Bible, especially the Hebrew Republicanism mandated in the book of Deuteronomy and realized during the three centuries after the conquest of Canaan as recounted in the book of Judges. Former Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, Sir Jonathan Sacks, has explained that the Covenant made by the Lord through Moses was a blessing, but also a curse: a blessing if the children of Israel obeyed God’s commandments, but a curse if they turned away to other gods in the Promised Land. “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.... Therefore, choose life, that you and your offspring may live.”

Thus did the Torah establish, for the first time in history, the spiritual principle of free will, but Rabbi Sacks points out that it also established three *political* principles. First, divine sovereignty does not remove human responsibility. Moses warns the people that unless they remain faithful, neither armies nor allies can save them. Second, the Israelites are collectively responsible: the archetype of what the American Founders would call, “We the People.” As Michael Walzer put it in *God’s Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible*, the twelve tribes constituted an “almost democracy.” Third, this political order was centered on God because He was the law-giver. Hence, the Israelites were the first to imagine themselves “one nation under God.”

Rabbi Sacks has also explained why many English scholars in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century suddenly became eager to learn Hebrew and read rabbinical *midrash* literature. They wanted to know whether the Bible ordained monarchy or condemned it, in which case Parliament’s Puritan rebellion against King Charles I in the 1640s was God’s will. In Deuteronomy 17, Moses prophesies that the Israelites will eventually desire a king, and he warns them to appoint only kings chosen by the Lord who adhere strictly to the law. Evidently, therefore, the Lord does permit monarchy. But in 1 Samuel, chapter 8, the prophet is angered when the Israelites demand a king “so as to be like all the nations.” The Lord laments this because it is He whom the people have rejected. Yet, He instructs Samuel to anoint for them a king. In so doing, the Lord established the principle of popular sovereignty—government by consent of the governed. Predictably—as prophesied by both Moses and Samuel—the kings and their subjects in the unified monarchy, then in divided Judah and Israel, apostatize and suffer under a nearly unbroken succession of wicked kings until at last both kingdoms are conquered. Such was the price to be paid by free people who failed to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with their God.

Professor Eric Nelson, in his book *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought*, has studied in depth the supporters of Oliver Cromwell’s republican experiment who pored over these Old Testament texts and their rabbinical commentary. The process was greatly enabled when Cromwell dramatically repealed the expulsion of Jews from England, which dated from the year 1290. For instance, the great poet and statesman John Milton concluded that the Lord permitted monarchy, but nevertheless condemned it as tantamount to idolatry. Algernon Sydney and James Harrington likewise damned monarchy for sacred as well as secular reasons and endorsed republicanism. Moreover, Professor Nelson shows that Sydney and Harrington derived corollaries from their Hebrew Republicanism including a redistribution of wealth inspired





Oliver Cromwell

by the elaborate inheritance laws of the Torah and—most surprisingly—religious toleration.

To be sure, Britain's Puritan Commonwealth did not long survive Cromwell's death. Parliament restored the Stuart king and Anglican Church in 1660. But the ideas survived and partially triumphed in Britain's Glorious Revolution of 1688. A century later, those same ideas inspired colonists such as John Witherspoon, the President of the College of New Jersey (as Princeton was originally known), and Scots Presbyterian who educated James Madison and a host of other American Founders.

All that is deep background to a very familiar event. In 1774, Tom Paine sailed from England to Philadelphia and within 18 months published the pamphlet that persuaded Congress to declare independence. Paine himself was an Enlightenment skeptic who had no use for religion. Yet, the central argument of *Common Sense* was precisely God's prophecies about the evils of monarchy. Paine had lifted the argument directly from John Milton.

Thus, Hebrew Republicanism, filtered through early modern England and transplanted to the colonies, was one familiar source of American institutions and values, and explains why clergymen throughout the colonies—not just in New England—preached revolution from their pulpits, made the Exodus their metaphor,

told Americans they were a new chosen people, and sang with their congregations revolutionary hymn, "To the king they shall sing hallelujah / And all the continent shall sing / Down with this earthly king: no king but God!"

That's the familiar source. But there was another, far less familiar one. A source which many republican philosophers of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries consciously suppressed lest they repel their audiences. That second source was such a surprise to historians that they did not even stumble on it until after World War II. That second source was born in southern Europe, Catholic Europe, and seemed the antithesis of Biblical morality. That second inspiration for the English Commonwealthmen was the notorious observer of Renaissance statecraft and founder of modern political science, Niccolo Machiavelli.

Everyone knows his essay *The Prince* because it's short, provocative, and highly quotable: what the French call a *succès de scandale*. In it, Machiavelli seemed to advocate arbitrary rule, ruthless tactics, deceit, brute force, and the principle that the ends justify the means. He had no use for established religion except as a sedative for the lower classes and believed moral corruption necessary for political success. The kindest label given to him is realist. The worst is monster. In England, he was so notorious that "Old Nick" even became a sobriquet for the devil. Later, we shall challenge that stereotype. But first, allow me to take you on a tour of a city some of you probably know well, but which I only came to know four years ago when I gazed into a distant mirror.

## Distant Mirrors

### *The Medieval as Modern*

In 1978, Barbara Tuchman wrote a book called *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14<sup>th</sup> Century* in which she described the crises that wrecked the High Medieval Era. They included bubonic plague, which killed a third

to a half of all Europeans, the Hundred Years War between England and France, the terrible Muslim onslaught of the Ottoman Turkish Empire, the crisis of religious authority born of a papal schism, and more. And by “distant mirror,” she meant to imply that the 1970s reflected similar existential crises.

I thought Tuchman’s analogy overwrought. The Vietnam War, Arab oil embargo, stagflation, and Watergate were certainly bad, but hardly equivalent to those Medieval calamities. Nevertheless, over my long career, I have come to appreciate “distant mirrors” because the High Medieval Era also reflects so much that we value today and flatter ourselves to think of as “modern.” Consider this list of things whose roots lie in the Middle Ages: the rule of law, English Common Law, the separation of church and state, limited monarchy, parliamentary government (Magna Carta, recall, dates from 1215), the first universities founded in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, Natural Rights (the first expression of what we call human rights), rural and commercial capitalism, all sorts of technological breakthroughs from the mouldboard plow and mechanical clock to the waterwheel and the printing press, and the restless, curious, ambitious spirit that moved Europeans to build ocean-going ships and start to map the world.

We only think of the Medieval era as stagnant, superstitious, and brutal because Renaissance humanists imagined their own era a rebirth of ancient Greece and Rome, hence they dismissed the Medieval millennium rather than admit the obvious fact that the Renaissance itself had grown out of it. The Puritan John Adams, who had no affection for the Catholic Church, grudgingly granted that fact when he wrote that somehow “people in the middle ages became more intelligent in general.”

### *La Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia*

The distant mirror also reflects exquisite beauty, which is something I learned when I finally accompanied my wife Jonna on a journey to Italy. I say “accompanied” because

she did all the logistics and planning and I just followed her lead like a joyful dog out for a walk. Everything about Italy—the history, art, architecture, scenery, and cuisine—was sublime. But, for me, the capstone was Venice.

Americans take pride in having lived under their Constitution for 230 years. The British have lived under their unwritten Constitution for 330 years. But did you know that the “most serene republic of Venice” lasted over a thousand years, from the 700s until 1797, when that brigand Napoleon abolished it. Imagine peering into churches built 400 or 500 years before Columbus discovered America!

The islands in the lagoons at the northern edge of the Adriatic Sea were first settled by refugees of the Lombards, one of the barbarian tribes that overran ancient Rome. Then, Venice was reinforced by the Lombards themselves as they fled from the Frankish armies of Charlemagne who invaded Italy around the year 800.

For a few centuries, the colony’s politics were turbulent, but the creative Venetians took advantage of their unique geography to consolidate a city-state devoted to sea power, aggressive commerce, and precocious republican institutions to preserve their liberties. Their leader was an elected duke, or Doge, who served for life under a sacred pledge not to abuse his powers. And as the centuries passed, his executive powers came to be checked and balanced by a Senate, a Great Council, an executive Council in charge of war and diplomacy, and special councils for other functions including a secret bureau for internal security and another for naval construction and recruitment.

By the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Venice fashioned a thalassocracy—a maritime empire—throughout the Adriatic and eastern Mediterranean and pioneered trade routes to northern Europe, the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire, Persia, and thanks to Marco Polo, China!





La Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia

This surprisingly modern commercial republic in the midst of Medieval Europe grew immensely wealthy thanks to its shrewd Doges, Councils, and merchants, and thanks to the intelligence gathered by permanent embassies stationed abroad (a Venetian invention). Venetians outfitted the Crusades and claimed the lion's share of the plunder. Venetians monopolized the spice trade. Venetians patronized exquisite art, music, and public works. But perhaps their most achievement was a highly developed *civil religion*. Venice was nominally Roman Catholic, but was able to defend its liberty against the pretensions of the Popes and Holy Roman Emperors. Venetians were also receptive to anyone contributing to their economy, including Muslims, Jews, Greek Orthodox, and later Protestant Germans, Britons, and Dutch.

What Venetians really worshipped was the city itself, symbolized by its patron saint, Mark the Evangelist, whose very bones a Venetian expedition, in the year 828, purloined from

a crypt in Alexandria, Egypt. According to legend, the raiders smuggled the relics past Muslim officials by stuffing them inside a shipment of pork. The iconographic symbol for St. Mark is a winged lion, which one encounters all over Venice to this day. The city fathers honored the Catholic Church calendar, but also celebrated civic triumphs with feasts, carnivals, and liturgies. The Doge's palace is a treasury of frescoes and sculptures displaying the glorious history of Venice and celebrating its republican virtue.

The *Sala del Maggior Consiglio* is the largest room in Europe. There, the Great Council's 1,500 members convened in a spirit of equality under a frieze round the ceiling made up of busts of the first 76 doges. The grand fresco by Tintoretto was supposed to depict the coronation of the Virgin Mary as Queen of Heaven, but Tintoretto's son, who completed this largest painting in Europe, changed the theme to "The Virgin Mary Interceding with Christ On Behalf of Venice." Still more





The Battle of Lepanto

frescoes pay obeisance to Neptune and Mars, the Classical gods of the sea and of war, as if the Venetians were hedging their bets.

The Doge's palace and St. Mark's Basilica are quite literally joined at the hip, a proud expression of the civil religion.

In war and diplomacy, the Venetians shunned entangling alliances except in emergencies when they organized coalitions. The most famous of them was the Holy League, whose combined fleets routed the Ottoman Turks in the 1571 Battle of Lepanto. But Tintoretto, forgetting the other members of that coalition, commemorated the battle with his allegory entitled "The Triumph of Venice."

Alas, by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Venice was beginning to suffer the effects of the dire historical trends that hurled it into a long, languid decline: the Ottoman conquest of Byzantium in 1453, the Spanish and Portuguese discoveries of sea routes to America and India in the 1490s, the perennial wars ravaging Italy following invasions by France and the Empire after 1494, and the rise of national monarchies in Spain, France, and England. It speaks to the credit of Venetian institutions, civil religion, and artistic genius that the city's brilliant sunset lasted all the way down to the French Revolution.

### *The Machiavellian Moment in England*

What has that distant mirror to do with England, much less the United States? A surprisingly good deal, it turns out, and not only because they came to resemble the Venetian commercial republic in many ways...

... but also because of what J. G. A. Pocock described in his 1975 classic *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*. In it, he argued that the modern political theory of 18<sup>th</sup> century America mirrored that of 17<sup>th</sup> century England, which in turn mirrored that of 16<sup>th</sup> century Italy. Pocock drew on the writings of Renaissance figures such as Francesco Guicciardini, but especially Machiavelli's long and serious treatises such as *Discourses on Livy* and *Florentine Histories*, written between 1510 and 1530. Pocock meant to educate English readers on the *real* Machiavelli, the brilliant and brutally honest student of politics whose purpose was not to advocate cruelty and deceit, but to describe, empirically, how real princes behaved in the real world. And if most were amoral in their pursuit of power and wealth, then it behooved high-minded princes to do likewise in defense of their subjects' liberty and well-being. To be sure, Machiavelli was hostile to the Christianity of his day, but that isn't surprising given the



Papacy had plummeted to its decadent nadir during the Renaissance. But his purpose in separating moral judgments from the facts of political life was simply scientific.

What is more, Machiavelli did not mean the word “prince” to imply a dynastic ruler, but anyone in charge of a state, be he a nobleman like the Duke of Milan, a plutocrat like Lorenzo di Medici, or a military *condottieri* like Francesco Sforza. Indeed, he preferred that princes, whatever their background, be men of *virtú*, that Renaissance ideal which meant, not Christian virtue, but ancient Roman ideals such as manliness, energy, guile, and courage. And Machiavelli insisted that princes—as opposed to tyrants—use their power on behalf of “the common good.” In his *Discourses on Livy*, that ancient chronicler of the rise and fall of the Roman Republic, he made it clear that he preferred republican government. And that preference made it imperative for him to learn, from the histories and discourses of Classical Greece and Rome, why republics so often succumbed to tyranny, anarchy, or conquest, or aborted in the manner of Renaissance Italy’s ephemeral republics. And his voyage of discovery—Machiavelli likened himself to Columbus—taught him surprising things including the positive value of factionalism because creative competition among rival parties and interest groups fostered a division of powers and checks and balances. He thus considered it healthy for a state to contain plebeian or populist factions opposing patrician or princely factions, and he welcomed the occasional tumults that resulted because they inspired the reforms periodically needed to rejuvenate a republic. He advocated an independent judiciary. Finally, he promoted commercial and military expansion because he discovered the wellsprings of republican politics to be popular greed and fear.

Now, Machiavelli and Guicciardini were both natives of Florence. But you will not be surprised to learn that for both the ideal, model republic was Venice. And by “Machiavellian moment,” Pocock referred to a historical conjuncture when the founders of



Niccolo Machiavelli

a new republic confront the question of how to build institutions capable of enduring, like those of Venice, for centuries.

Machiavelli’s reputation was besmirched during his troubled life—among other things, he suffered torture and exile—and it only grew even worse after his death. The Catholic Church banned his books. Protestants reviled him because he denied natural rights and advocated republicanism on strictly utilitarian grounds. That is, he believed that people preferred liberty, not because they valued its intrinsic dignity or had any natural right to it, but simply because it worked: “Cities have not grown either in dominion or riches when not in a condition of liberty.”

But for that very same reason, Machiavelli’s science of politics lived on among practical men intent on propagating and preserving conditions of liberty. So it was, a century later and half a continent away, when a Parliament declared its king a tyrant, waged civil war against him, cut off his head, then founded a republic in 1649, that England faced its own Machiavellian moment.

The leader of the Parliamentary army, Oliver Cromwell, claimed his purpose was to establish a godly Commonwealth, but he, in fact, exploited power in the manner of a Machiavellian prince to make himself Lord

Protector, in effect a military dictator whose regime oppressed the English and crushed the Irish and Scots. Yet, the Commonwealth did create space for republican thought to flourish and into that space rushed such creative thinkers as Marchamont Nedham and James Harrington, whose greatest works, *The Excellencie of a Free State* and *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, were both published in 1656. They restated, refined, and adapted Classical Republican ideas about liberty emerging from the tensions between patricians and populists, the importance of mixed government and checks and balances, and the value of tumults, commerce, and war. They also cited Machiavelli as their principal source. Harrington's utopia described in *Oceana* was especially influential—only it wasn't utopian. It was the Venetian republic with English characteristics, in which a natural aristocracy expertly trained in commerce, science, and law governs the republic in the best interests of all. Harrington explicitly wrote that nowhere else is there “so undisturbed and constant a tranquillity and peace ... as in Venice” because civil perfection “hath no pattern in the universal world, except that of Venice.” And the purpose of his *Oceana* was to design an “immortal Commonwealth” that would not decay.

Of course, Harrington's grand design was never attempted because the English people and Parliament grew weary of Cromwell's authoritarian zeal and restored the Stuart monarchy after his death.

But again, the Classical Republicanism largely inspired by Machiavelli did not die. On the contrary, it stormed back forcefully during the Restoration in the works of philosophers such as Algernon Sydney, whose *Discourses Concerning Government* of 1680, was an assault on monarchy so brazen that it cost him his life. Rather more prudent was Sydney's contemporary John Locke. He skirted charges of treason by fudging his opposition to monarchy and then coming to terms with a limited, constitutional monarchy in his *Two Treatises on Government* of 1689. Those

were the famous books written to justify the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Locke was also discreet in that he never revealed how profound Machiavelli's influence had been on his thought. He was in fact an avid collector of the Florentine's writings, studied them with great care, shared his antipathy toward religious moralizing, and diverged from Machiavelli only insofar as he favored peaceful commerce rather than martial expansion.

But Machiavelli got that right as well: popular regimes are just as belligerent as autocratic regimes. For the so-called Glorious Revolution defended by Locke was in fact an inglorious coup d'état by a war party in Parliament and the Army who called themselves Whigs. They drove James II into exile for the crimes of baptizing his son a Catholic and emulating Louis XIV's absolute monarchy, but also for the crime of pursuing peace with France rather than war. So the Whigs invited James's Protestant daughter Mary and her husband, the Dutch stadtholder William of Orange, to reign over England, where they promptly declared the first in a long line of what American colonists came to call the French and Indian wars.

However, the Whigs did have an ambitious domestic agenda of a decidedly Republican cast. Between 1689 and 1707, they established Parliamentary supremacy over the crown, the Bill of Rights, the Act of Succession banning Catholics, the Act of Union with Scotland, and the Bank of England to fund a floating national debt to finance Britain's imperial wars.

Over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, those institutions made Britain the world's greatest power. Moreover, it was during that century that the intellectual movement called the Enlightenment spread throughout Europe and across the ocean to the quickly maturing American colonies. The hyper-rational, social-scientific character of Enlightenment thought meant that the influence of sectarian religion was sharply circumscribed by comparison to the era of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and, in such a climate, it isn't





Tricks, / Was, by their happy Influence, / Made Friends with Vice: And ever since / The worst of all the Multitude / Did something for the common Good."

Viscount Bolingbroke, in his 1738 classic *The Patriot King*, even reconciled monarchy with republicanism when he admonished kings to imagine themselves the nation's chief executive on behalf of the public interest. Delegates at the Constitutional Convention had that book much on their minds while designing of the office of President of the United States.

Which brings us at last to America. So far, it would appear that I fully endorse Pocock's thesis about the direct reflections of 16<sup>th</sup> century Florentine thought on 17<sup>th</sup> century English ideas and 18<sup>th</sup> century American ones. In fact, I do not because various intellectual historians have challenged Pocock since 1974. One of the most prominent, Hillsdale College Professor Paul Rahe, summed up the their findings as follows: while they all agree with Pocock that Machiavelli had considerable influence on later British and American thought, they believe the cause-and-effect connections between his Machiavellian moments are too direct. They caution that historical actors should not be read as semi-conscious speakers of someone else's political language, but as fully conscious agents for whom Machiavellian insights, while important, must be weighed alongside other sources as well as their own experiences.

In any case, Machiavelli's legacy was bound to become diffuse over the 250 years separating Renaissance Florence from colonial Philadelphia.

Finally, we must remember that men such as Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Adams were not abstract theorists like Harrington, Sydney, or Locke. Rather, they were statesmen-practitioners engaged in designing real institutions they hoped would foster justice as well as liberty

surprising that Machiavelli became even more influential, if not more respectable. The French Baron de Montesquieu, the Scotsman David Hume, and the American Benjamin Franklin were just a few of the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophers who postulated that human nature was imperfect and immutable and that Christian virtue was a fragile foundation on which to build a republic. Rather, republican durability required precisely those sturdy institutions the British Whigs had built up, indeed institutions that resembled Venetian ones so closely that Montesquieu even called Britain "a republic in monarchical disguise."

In 1705, the Dutchman Bernard Mandeville observed those institutions and wrote a satire *The Fable of the Bees*, describing the Machiavellian modes by which Whigs pursued parliamentary, commercial, and imperial power:

"Thus every Part was full of Vice, / Yet the whole Mass a Paradise ... And Vertue, who from Politicks / Had learn'd a Thousand cunning



and prosperity. That moral imperative precluded a wholesale adoption of the Florentine's system. Indeed, Washington, however realistic his statecraft in war and peace, displayed a character the very opposite from that of a serpentine Machiavellian prince. Nevertheless, the years between the summoning of the First Continental Congress in 1774 and the ratification of the Constitution in 1789 were assuredly another Machiavellian moment in that earnest men deliberated on how to craft a republic that might endure like the Venetian.

For instance, the Founders all saw the wisdom of such Machiavellian notions as separation of powers, checks and balances, an independent judiciary, sacrosanct private property, robust commerce, and political tumult. Recall that Jefferson wrote, "I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical." Jefferson and Madison never admitted to having Machiavellian ideas, but they were influenced by people who did, such

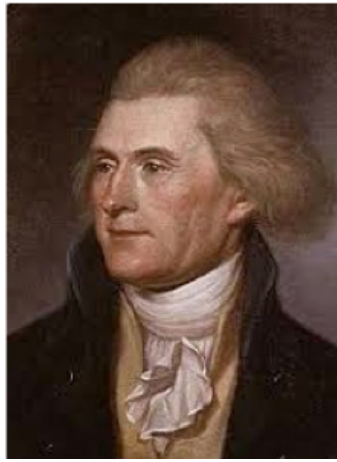
as Sydney, Locke, Montesquieu, and Hume, and their libraries contained Machiavelli's works. For Madison, Machiavelli had been assigned reading at Witherspoon's college, and one of his most trenchant contributions to the Constitution—the celebration of political factionalism—was an especially Machiavellian insight. On the other hand, Madison's abhorrence of war was certainly not Machiavellian, but his arch-rival Hamilton thoroughly agreed with the Florentine's observations that republics are warlike and that successful ones need an energetic executive ready and willing to prepare for war.

No American devoted more thought to the Florentine's writings than John Adams. He not only studied his works, he quoted extensively from the *Discourses on Livy* and *Florentine Histories* in own *Defense of the Constitutions of the United States of America* published in 1788. Moreover, Adams drew heavily on English Commonwealthmen such as Nedham and Harrington, whom he also discussed at some length in the *Defense of*





John Adams



Thomas Jefferson



James Madison

*the Constitutions*. Needless to add, the New England Puritan also critiqued Machiavelli on various constitutional points and broke with him entirely on moral questions. Adams, like Washington, believed religious faith to be an indispensable buttress for a healthy republic, and he obviously thought it possible to fashion a republic through collective reflection rather than princely force and deceit.

And therein lies the most trenchant critique of Pocock's thesis, because the American Founders, while eminently practical men and exponents in most cases of the Scottish Enlightenment's Common Sense philosophy, were not simply utilitarian, which brings us full circle back to the Bible. In his classic *The Roots of American Order*, historian Russell Kirk explained that while the U.S. Constitution owed little to the example of the Israelites recounted in Deuteronomy and Judges, the American moral order could not have existed without it. He noted that in John Adams's corpus of works, which drew so heavily on Machiavelli's studies of Greece and Rome, one finds no account of Israel and Judah. Yet, Adams understood their true import. In 1809, he wrote, "I insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize men than any other nation. Even if I were an atheist who believes that

all is ordered by chance, I should believe that chance had ordered the Jews to preserve and propagate to all mankind the doctrine of a supreme, intelligent, wise, almighty sovereign of the universe, which is the essential principle of all morality, and consequently all civilization."

So what is it we find when we study the origins of the Atlantic Republican tradition? We find that American institutions derived from a Classical Republicanism leavened by Hebrew Republicanism; a Machiavellian body quickened by a Biblical spirit; a civil government inspired by a civil religion.

I therefore agree with Professor Rahe that while no American Founder adopted Machiavelli's ideas without at least some reservations, the Founders and those who came after them nevertheless owe Machiavelli a very great debt. Rahe concludes: "To sort out the character of the American Revolution ... one would do well to begin with the astonishing wave of political speculation that took place in the English revolution, which itself was a product of that great revolution initiated in 16th century Florence ... by the sage after whom the devil himself came to be called "Old Nick."

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