Allegories of America

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According to the first *Federalist* essay, the true significance of American civilization will have been its success at “establishing good government from reflection and choice”: the rationalization of politics in the name of freedom. For Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, as for the eighteenth century generally, the desirability of a society governed according to the deliberations of reasonable individuals was obvious, though grave doubts were entertained about the extent to which such government was realizable. In the twentieth century, however, a growing awareness of reason’s pathologies—the spread of forms of rule intimately linked to the accumulation of knowledge—has provoked many to question the very idea that reason and freedom are necessarily twinned and, hence, to contest the desirability of a rational society.¹ Habermas’s interest in “rethinking the public sphere” is motivated in part by the resulting need to conceptualize other, nonfunctionalist modes of reason and deliberation. New forms must be appropriate to modern contexts of political, moral, and aesthetic practice in which authoritative, transcendent grounds situated outside the purely relative spheres of opinion and communication have been irretrievably lost. Nor can reformulations yield to the Nietzschean or Weberian temptation to erect sheer, arbitrary will as the fundamental ground of practical life.²
Shifting perspective from an isolated subject of objectifying reason to a picture of rationality modeled on dialogue, Habermas conceives of a communicative as opposed to purely functionalist reason. Deliberation among diverse equals is governed by normative ideals (of sincerity, mutual understanding and consensus, and rational defensibility) built into the formal structure of communication itself. He intends communicative reason to ground the concept of a democratic public sphere in which political decisions are shaped by the uncoerced deliberations of equal participants. Such a concept, Habermas believes, does justice to modernity's eschewal of otherworldly, transcendentally obligating imperatives for action while it preserves a place for the philosophical hope, traditionally mortgaged to the transcendental, that reason can guide human affairs to freedom.

Proponents of this normative, Habermasian concept of the democratic public sphere, according to which political legitimacy is measured by the ideal of decisions reached through reasoned debate among equal discursive partners in forums where what matters is the quality of the argument rather than the status or identity of the arguer, have recently had to defend themselves against self-styled "Nietzschean" critics dedicated to debunking them by "unmasking" the very idea of a universal, regulative norm necessarily aligned with pluralistic, democratic practices. Critics of the normative ideal of communicative reason, especially those influenced by Michel Foucault, worry that, under some circumstances, this criterion can entail the imposition of discursive practices that at once establish and conceal the domination of an embodied subject of reason. The criterion of uncoerced consensus, they argue, is not capable by itself of isolating each and every instance of domination, routinization, exclusion, or imposition likely to be destructive of the spontaneous, open, revisionary character we associate with a plural, democratic polity. In particular, it is blind to the necessary limitations entailed by any "regime of truth," no matter how free of coercion and manipulation its establishment may have been, and therefore it cannot serve as the fundamental analytic ground of an emancipatory political theory. Indeed, there can be no such fundamental ground; no assured theoretical perspective or analytic device to replace the irreducibly ad hoc, narrative practice of constructing, in Foucault's
terms, the history of the present. The task of political theory, rather, is “to leave power no place to hide” (his phrase too), not even in the ideal of uncoerced consensus. Because truth is properly in the service of “life,” as Nietzsche formulates it in the second of his Untimely Meditations, life must be allowed to break through even the norm of uncoerced consensus for the sake of previously unrecognized possibilities—if by “life” we are allowed to understand not only those needs or instincts whose repression Freud famously accounted a cost of civilization but, more broadly, the open contingency of spontaneous, value-positing interaction.³

But the question of whether the normative ideal of uncoerced consensus as the ground for a conception of the democratic public sphere can be defended against Nietzschean unmasking easily works to obscure an equally crucial matter. Let us assume that arguments appealing to the idea of an entirely noncoercive, objective practice of discourse can be debunked on the grounds that the Habermasian position relies on an absolute distinction between coercion and consensus, whereas Nietzsche (and Foucault) demonstrate how the autonomous subject of reason is always already subordinated to the very system of constraints that “produces” autonomy. The would-be debunker succeeds all too well owing to the political consequence of unmasking, which is what Peter Sloterdijk characterizes as the cynicism flowing from “enlightened false consciousness,” the insinuation in our political culture of a tacit norm according to which the truth itself is cynically manipulated in public forums for private advantage. When unmasking the pretensions of objective truth or pure reason becomes an official ideology rather than a plebian mode of attack, the result is a political culture in which the claims and actions of public figures are automatically discredited while simultaneously clung to as necessary fictions. This amounts to an apt description of our reigning, fin de siècle, postmodern politics, where political appeals are incredible just because they rely on claims to universality, objectivity, or community that are no longer believable—even though they might not be recognizable as political appeals were they not to make such claims.⁴

If the ironic consequences of the attempt to expose the antipluralist effects of an ideology of reason seem familiar, it is because they
amount to the political version of a dialectic initially identified by Nietzsche and extended by him to characterize European modernity as a whole: reason's commitment to objective truth leads it to undermine its own foundations by discovering the irreducible partiality of the will to truth. The resulting nihilism stems from the fact that the debunker of reason stands, as in Nietzsche's figure from *Beyond Good and Evil*, in the shadow of the dead God: he or she no longer believes in the objectivity of reason but cannot shake off the conviction that objectivity is the only worthy standard of action and judgment. Nowhere is Nietzsche's ambiguous legacy to us less ambiguous than in our political culture's anxious conviction that beneath every proposal or idea claiming general application there is hidden a particular interest or a merely strategic necessity.

The situation described by Sloterdijk yields an apparent dilemma: preserve the normative concept of the democratic public sphere at the cost of betraying Foucault's injunction to leave power no place to hide, or unmask the philosophical ideologies and interests lurking beneath the reasoned search for consensus at the cost of undermining the conditions of democratic political life. To explore some of the contours of this dilemma, I turn to an exemplary historical deployment and unmasking of political reason: the defense of the U.S. Federal Constitution and the anti-Federalist critique of it. That conflict yields alternatives that closely approximate the opposition just isolated between reason and its unmasking. Following it, I hope, will allow us to reflect on the peculiar possibilities and limitations of American constitutional discourses for the project of a "postmetaphysical" understanding of politics.
very same instrument that excites them.”\(^6\) But if the constitutional order itself relies on shrewdness rather than nobility, it would be difficult indeed to find a historical instance of political discourse more faithful to the normative ideal of the public sphere than the defense of the Constitution put forward in the Federalist essays, which carefully eschew appeals to status and identity in favor of rational argument alone.\(^7\) In the opening essay of The Federalist, for example, Publius predicts that the “great national discussion” of the proposed Constitution will let loose a “torrent of angry and malignant passions.” A correct view of the merits of the Constitution can be reached only if the participants in the debate rise above their passions and put aside, for the purposes of political deliberation, “any impressions other than those which may result from the evidence of truth” (p. 5). Publius’s call for the application of enlightened reason to politics is, of course, much more than a response to the ills of American politics during 1787 and 1788; it also expresses an understanding of the modern political predicament. A dynamic society of conflicting interests and individuals supports little in the way of—indeed would seem to undermine—a moral community whose shared ends and commitments might constitute a relatively impersonal foundation for political legitimacy and coherency. Any such standards must, therefore, be discovered by reason guided by experience: in the place of a moral community, political science.

But is not the political reasoner himself afflicted with passions and interests? Publius addresses this worry by relying on a rhetoric of frankness: “I will not amuse you with an appearance of deliberation,” he announces, “when I have decided. I frankly acknowledge . . . my convictions” (p. 6).\(^8\) That Publius’s prejudice in favor of the Constitution is named and acknowledged is meant to suggest that the reader need not inquire further into Publius’s identity and can concentrate instead on his arguments. Throughout the Federalist essays, Publius returns to the theme that the people must put aside their passions and judge the Constitution according to the test of a disembodied reason, of logical coherence and strict deduction divorced from, as we might put it, the “constitution” (or position) of the subject.

Scholarly accounts of the public debate over the ratification of the Constitution stress the substantive political differences that di-
vided the architects of the Constitution from those who opposed its ratification. Federalists feared the fragmentation and consequent domestic convulsions possible under the Articles of Confederation, while so-called anti-Federalists worried that their liberties would be swallowed up by a large national government. Federalists argued that a weak central government and a system of fragmented state governments would leave America vulnerable to foreign political influence, while anti-Federalists were convinced that a strong national state would be tempted to support overseas adventures and require continuing military conscription to maintain, thus eroding democratic institutions. Federalists warned of the corrupt government that might result from popular demagoguery, while anti-Federalists countered with the tyranny of presidents appointed by "men of parts" in the "aristocratic" Senate. Most generally, while the anti-Federalists placed their faith in civic virtue; local traditions; and small-scale, representative governments whose electorate and political officials are bound together by the similarity of their interests and conditions, the Federalists imagined a rational administrative system that, they hoped, would operate relatively independently of the idiosyncrasies of particular publics, communities, and ideologies and might thus serve for some time to govern a complex, dynamic, rapidly changing, and expanding society.

The scholarly discussion assumes that, though there was disagreement over substantive issues, Federalists and anti-Federalists debated the issues on the basis of a common understanding of what counted as an acceptable political argument, claim, or interpretation. But there is good reason to believe that the anti-Federalists rejected not only the proposed Constitution but Federalist political science as well. Whereas Publius insists on judging the merit of an assertion or argument according to canons of reason that reject ad hominem arguments, some anti-Federalists insisted that, in order to grasp the political meaning of an utterance, one has to take into account the subject of the enunciation as well as the enunciation itself. As "John DeWitt" puts it, "As a man is invariably known by his company, so is the tendency of principles known by their advocates—nay, it ought to lead you to inquire who are its advocates?" For "DeWitt," it would appear, it is not sufficient to dissect the arguments of the Feder-
alists, because such an approach relies on a separation of reason and passion which is fatal to genuine political understanding, where discourse, passion, and reason are intimately connected and cannot be separated, even analytically. Pure reason, applied to political speech, yields naïveté; political wisdom begins by placing political speech in the context of a passionate interpretative agon. This necessitates studying the motives of the speaker, which reveals, for “DeWitt,” “ambitious men . . . who openly profess to be tired of republican governments” (3:25). With this in mind, “DeWitt” suggests reading the Constitution with the suspicion that it harbors “aristocratical tendencies,” which he proceeds to locate in the way in which the House of Representatives alienates elected officials from the people and is subservient to the Senate and presidency.

We thus find two models of political reason, two hermeneutic approaches to the interpretation of political claims and proposals: one based on suspending local points of view and dedicated to attaining a perspective in which particular passions and interests are subordinated to the universal perspective of reason; another in which the political meaning of a discourse is accessible only through the tangled passions, motives, and interests of the speaker. The presence of these two models suggests that the dispute between Federalists and anti-Federalists ought not to be understood solely in terms of such controversies as the differences over the interpretation of Montesquieu, alternative conceptions of representation, or the question of republican virtue. Also to be considered is the “metatheoretical” problem of how political proposals are to be understood, analyzed, interpreted, and evaluated. Debating that problem gave expression to a “hermeneutics of suspicion” that not only rejected the possibility of a disengaged, theoretical understanding of politics but regarded the latter as, at best, a naive and untrustworthy guide for political deliberation and, at worst, a mask for baser, “human, all-too-human” motives and interests.12

Viewed in this light, the ratification debate takes on a distinctively contemporary significance, and the anti-Federalists can be made to enter contemporary debate, not only (as has been recognized) about the character of American democracy and the role of a powerful state but also about the nature of political reason and the scope and limits
of unmasking critiques. Political theorists and historians of political thought have pointed to the perennial importance to American political thought of anti-Federalist reservations about distant central government and impersonal political machines. But attention to the ways in which anti-Federalists scrutinized and assessed the claims and arguments surrounding the Constitution reveals a preoccupation with the implication of the subject in the utterance of political judgment. The anti-Federalists took issue not only with the national state designed by the Founders but with the latter’s vision of a rational political science as well. They argued not only that the proposed national government was dangerously “aristocratical” but that the way in which it was presented and defended was unfaithful to the peculiar demands of political analysis and judgment. Or rather—as they rarely made such arguments explicitly—much of their analysis of the Constitution rests on such considerations. A reconstruction of anti-Federalist hermeneutics will serve to illuminate the meaning of claims about a “reasonable” state founded in something more durable, and allegedly more admirable, than the idiosyncrasies of embodied and contested identities.

For the Founders, establishing a novus ordo seclorum required a rigorous frankness, a new honesty about human motives, about the uncertainties of knowledge and the intractability of an irreducibly (though not entirely) self-interested human nature. In return for honesty, however, a measure of order could be brought to the analysis of human affairs. As Morton White argues, Publius opposes the notion of apodictic certitudes or exact knowledge in the field of politics; such was the almost exclusive reserve of the natural sciences and mathematics alone. But this does not mean that he eschewed the possibility of a more rational method for thinking about politics or that he felt the need to defer to traditional wisdom on such matters. In fact, Publius argued for a political science, and The Federalist follows such a logic.

Although it is a commonplace that the Federalist’s defense relied on “reason,” the specific strategies have, however, been less carefully scrutinized. Men and women of the previous century could refer to a deity personally engaged in the affairs of the world as the
basis for their understanding of legitimate government, of course; but eighteenth-century Americans' thought tended to replace the Divine Contractor with an image of God as the Grand Architect—in Newton's terms, the uncaused first cause. "The business of natural philosophy," he proclaims in his *Opticks*, "is to argue from phenomena and deduce causes from effects 'till we come to the very first cause, which is not mechanical." God is now a *Deus absconditus*, not only not immanent in the universe but no longer even within ear-shot of mortal man. Newton explains the operation of bodies as if the universe were a mechanism: rational understanding means picturing the universe as a machine whose parts function according to regular (hence predictable) routines. But although the mechanistic philosophy risks the celebrated and bemoaned disenchantment of the world, it also serves to bring one closer to God than ever was possible through the unreliable and degraded script of the Bible. Whereas the Bible offers God's revelations only through the finite and corruptible language of men, the motions of the heavenly bodies display God's revelation in utter purity. To the extent that natural philosophy could discover the nature of that original revelation, it could claim to be a more reliable guide to the deity than the Bible itself. Thus while Newtonians objectified the universe as a mechanism, they brought the knower closer to God. Moreover, enlightened political science also suggested a revision of the doctrine of *imitatio Christi*, the idea that the Christian should strive to live his or her life on the model of Christ's. Now the model deity was the Grand Architect, the builder of the perfectly balanced and regulated machine. Accordingly, the Founders would *design* a Constitution for the ages. As Woodrow Wilson puts it, "The makers of our Federal Constitution constructed a government . . . to display the laws of nature. Politics in their thought was a variety of mechanics. The Constitution was founded on the law of gravitation."

In Newton's "method of analysis," one begins with a small number of simple, fundamental propositions that are then combined to form more complex hypotheses that can explain phenomena. The method of analysis is guided by experiment, that is, by observations made under precisely controlled conditions and referred to publicly accessible information and experience. If experiments yield data at
variance with the hypotheses, the latter must be revised. Publius's rational demonstration of America's need for a stronger, more "energetic" national government follows the method of analysis closely. Thematically, the defense of the proposed constitution begins (significantly enough, from the perspective of the last half of the twentieth century) with an argument from national security: America must be united under a strong national government because only the unity of a powerful national state can preserve the security of the people in the face of two threats, foreign attack and civil war. America's celebrated commercial energy will threaten European nations, tempting them to exploit differences and divisions among the States in order to slow the American economic juggernaut, and rivalries and mutual suspicions on the part of the States themselves will result in civil war. The presentation and defense of this thesis follows the Newtonian approach of rational deduction and experimental verification. The necessity of a strong national government is first shown to follow from a generalization of observations of human affairs. The vision, in essence, is Hobbesian: individuals love power and will devour one another in its pursuit unless restrained by a strong authority, whether that of their own reason and will or of the state. However strong may be current feelings of unity owing to the Revolutionary War, we can be certain that such sentiments will eventually give way to conflict between the States (Fed., p. 28). Thus the prevention of civil war demands a strong central government.

Just as the states must be regulated by a strong national government in the interest of peace, so must the national government be powerful in relation to the rest of the world, in order to deter aggression (pp. 18–19). If it is human nature to act to obtain what one wants, nations, being made of individuals, act on the same basis; war is therefore an ever-present possibility. And as we have seen, war against America is likely to be especially attractive to foreign nations because it is inevitable that America will become a major economic competitor. The only way to deter foreign ambitions is through a strong military deterrent, which in turn requires an effective, independent national government for its coordination and deployment.

Publius, then, proceeds first by deducing conclusions from generalizations about observations: nations, like individuals, are by nature
greedy, resentful, suspicious, and fearful, and resort to war to get what they want; protection from them requires a strong government. The deduction is then strengthened by introducing confirming observations from the historical record. In Federalist No. 4, the history of Greece provides evidence for the thesis that neighboring states without a central authority are likely to consume one another in conflict. And in Federalist No. 5, Great Britain is invoked: so long as she was divided, internal wars prevented her from achieving a position of world power. The resort to world history is analogous in political science to experiment and observation in natural philosophy. In The Federalist, political regimes and policies are a series of experiments that, by their success or failure, validate or disprove the principles they express. Precisely because reason and history coincide only rarely, historical evidence is an effective proof text for rational deliberation on the best polity: regimes that destroy themselves invalidate the principles on which they are established; those that flourish strengthen the principles on which they are based. The example of Britain serves both scientific purposes: so long as she remained divided, Britain lacked influence; after her unification, she was able to resist foreign domination and become a major world power.

Only when a combination of rational deliberation and scrutiny of the historical record supports a particular conclusion can one look for additional verification in popular opinion: “It has until lately been a received and uncontradicted opinion, that the prosperity of the people of America depended on their continuing firmly united, and the wishes, prayers and efforts of our best and wisest Citizens have been constantly directed to that object” (pp. 8–9). But lately, unscrupulous politicians have worked a change in public opinion; thus the necessity for rational deliberation and historical discrimination to determine who is correct. Upon deliberation, Publius concludes that the people, not the politicians, are right: “I am persuaded in my own mind, that the people have always thought right on this subject, and that their universal and uniform attachment to the cause of the Union, rests on great and weighty reasons” (p. 12). We thus have three terms: popular opinion, the results of rational inquiry, and views promulgated by unscrupulous politicians who seek to lead the people away from settled beliefs by appeals to vanity and fear.
Popular opinion and reason agree in this case, to the disadvantage of the politicians, who constitute the greatest danger to security when they appeal to the passions of the people. The right model of the relationship among the people, their leaders, and reason is shown in the people’s reaction to the pronouncement of the Continental Congress in 1774. The people realized that the delegates were in a better position than they to judge and so deferred to their advice: “These and similar considerations then induced the people to rely greatly on the judgment and integrity of the Congress; and they took their advice, notwithstanding the various arts and endeavours used to deter and dissuade them from it” (p. 12).

The crucial point here is that in Publius’s method of political science, popular opinion is never decisive. If it agrees with rational inquiry, such agreement may be taken as another indication of the likely truth of the latter: an opinion that is durable, long lasting, and in accord with reason is probably based on experience and judgment, not passion. The status of popular opinion in Publius’s science of politics thus nicely allegorizes the constraints placed on the direct expression of the general will in the Federal Constitution.

Although scholars such as Morton White are surely correct to emphasize that Publius rejects the idea of a knowledge of politics as certain as that which science gives us of natural laws, then, Publius does nonetheless appeal to the model of scientific reason in the staging of his political reflections. Equally important, as Albert Furtwangler has shown, is that Publius solicits the attentions of a public inclined to be convinced by the sober reflection and cool logic he so masterfully deploys and thus offers a model for political debate for a public ready to be guided by “candor.” Accordingly, Publius urges his readers to control their appetites and subdue their passions in order rationally to decide the question of the new constitution. Federalist political science emphasizes cool logic, clear and unambiguous assertions, solid argumentation, and above all political claims that appeal to a disembodied reasoner striving to objectify his world rather than to immediate passions and affections, which are necessarily narrowing and parochial. Disembodied reasoners are exactly what the anti-Federalists refuse to be; they also discover signs of passion in the body—that is, in the language and Constitution—of Federalist reason itself.
Suspicion is a virtue.

—Patrick Henry

When Publius employs mechanical metaphors or those drawn from mechanistic sciences, they are typically introduced self-consciously, flagged as metaphors whose fictional status is insisted upon. Publius takes care to maintain a finely articulated distance from any idea or proposition he entertains, and the effect conveyed is that of a subject of purely formal reason, committed dogmatically to no hypotheses in particular, accepting beliefs only after they have been carefully scrutinized and found worthy of acceptance. The discourse of the “disengaged subject of reason,” as Charles Taylor has named that figure, enables Publius to speak as the citizen of a national state, concerned not with the parochial problems of a Maryland or Massachusetts but with the country as a whole, not only at the present moment but in the future; and with the human destiny as such, not with late eighteenth-century Americans alone. Only rarely does Publius enter into the fray to deal with local or partisan issues, or even to rebut specific criticisms; rare exceptions almost always take the form of footnotes or asides.

In contrast to the cool, unruffled, earnest but distanced tone of the Federalist essays, the attacks of the anti-Federalists are often driven home with the aid of sarcasm, satire, irony, and hyperbole. It is true that, like Publius, anti-Federalists typically expressed a conventional distinction between excessive passion, which led men astray and prevented sound thinking, and reason, which must be sovereign. They did not wish their criticism to be taken as personal attacks against individuals and, like Publius, called for “candor” in the public debate over ratification. Rarely did anyone go as far as Rawlins Lowndes of South Carolina, who attacked “the depraved inconstancy of those who pant for change.” “A [Maryland] Farmer” goes some length to deny any such feelings: “The Farmer took the liberty to condemn and to expose the doctrines and errors of Aristides [pseudonym of Alexander Contee Hanson]; but with charity he imputed his opinions to defect of judgment, or want of information. . . . The Farmer
could not possibly entertain any personal resentment against Aristides” (5:85). Like Publius, many anti-Federalists expressed a sense of the historic nature of the decision over the Constitution, and they echoed his call for reason and deliberation. According to Samuel Chase, for example, “The question is the most important that ever came before an assembly for decision. It involves the happiness or misery of millions yet unborn. The decision requires all the consideration that the utmost exertion of the powers of the mind can bestow. The present and future generations will bless or execrate us. We [are] at a solemn crisis—and the magnitude of the subject requires that it should be deliberately considered and fully considered with temper and moderation.”

But despite his lack of personal resentment toward Aristides, the Farmer insists on referring to aspects of Aristides’s temperament and personality to shed light on the political meaning of his arguments and claims, speculating that Aristides’ “fancied superiority, and insolence of office” is at the bottom of Aristides’ claim that the Farmer’s opposition “proceeded from his desire to pay court to a gentleman who lately held the highest office in the State.” The Farmer goes on to suggest that Aristides revealed his true identity to the public because “his vanity prompted him to believe, that his character would carry respect and authority” (5:87–88). Aristides’ vanity and arrogance are not without substantive significance, however, because the burden of the Farmer’s criticism is to refute Aristides’ view that a bill of rights has the status of a grant of rights from a sovereign—an understanding that, the Farmer stresses, is shared by no one but “the prostituted, rotten Sir Robert Filmer” (5:5). By connecting vanity, arrogance, and love of power with claims that can appear consistent with a larger doctrine meant to justify the divine right of kings and a patriarchal state, the Farmer succeeds in bringing out latent shades of meaning, implication, and political significance in the fragmentary assertions of his interlocutor.

Anti-Federalists commonly noted that some of the greatest anxiety about popular rule, and the greatest enthusiasm for the way in which the Federal Constitution might impede direct popular participation in government, came from the most privileged individuals in the community. The Farmer again: “Is it not strange to hear the
Governor of Connecticut, gravely asserting in their convention, the novelty of government by representation, and pinning all his hopes of our future happiness, and exemption from evil on this new discovery! And yet the Governor of Connecticut is not only one of the worthiest of our citizens, but rather of uncommon information in a country, where very few are so independent in their fortunes as to afford much time to study” (5:22). More than sheer resentment was at issue, however; a variety of subjective characteristics of its defenders were claimed to reveal essential truths about the Constitution they defended. Refuting the objection “Merchants are for it,” Samuel Chase noted, “Ans. consider them. Birds of passage.” At issue here are instability and opportunism, not power, though Chase also answered the question “Why not another convention?” by asking, “Who is violent for it—Ans. Rich men and speculators and office hunters” (5:17).

One of the clearest expressions of unwillingness to forgo ad hominem arguments is found in the speeches of Patrick Henry. “Suspicion is a virtue,” he argued, “as long as its object is the preservation of the public good. . . . Guard with jealous attention the public liberty. Suspect every one who approaches that jewel.” For Henry, reason can be a source of dangerous ambiguity in governments and constitutions; an overly “reasonable” government may be one in which a justification for tyrannical policies is always available. Before Charles I, the rights of Englishmen were ill defined, so that “power and privilege then depended on implication and logical discussion.” Clarity and simplicity are to be valued more highly, in politics, than reason; otherwise rulers will utilize the ambiguities in complex laws and traditions to usurp power. Another anti-Federalist, writing under the name of “Denatus,” echoes that view: “The aristocrat, makes a parade of bombastical wisdom, says the landmark was not evidently fixed upon the face of the ground, but only the ideal—The people seem satisfied—He studies their imbecility, and moveth the landmark a little farther” (5:18). And Melancton Smith finds that the proponents of the Constitution are themselves “suspicious” of the motives and intentions of their countrymen—and dedicated to spreading such suspicions: “Why . . . are we told of our weakness? Of the defenceless condition of the southern parts of our state? Or the exposed situation of our capital?” (p. 321). Scrutiny of motives
and dispositions is all the more important because, even if one sincerely wishes to be frank and honest about one’s prejudices, that is impossible. “Men are apt to be deceived,” writes “Cato,” “both with respect to their own dispositions and those of others. Though this truth is proved by almost every page of the history of nations, to wit, that power lodged in the hands of rulers to be used at discretion, is almost always exercised to the oppression of the people, and the aggrandizement of themselves; yet most men think if it was lodged in their hands they would not employ it in this manner,” though they are frequently wrong (p. 331).

“John Dewitt” also insists, as we have seen, on the necessity of knowledge of the speaker for a true comprehension of the political meaning of his utterances. The representatives at the Constitutional Convention, he notes, “were delegated from different States, and nearly equally represented, though vastly disproportionate both in wealth and numbers. They had local prejudices to combat, and in many instances, totally opposite interests to consult. Their situations, their habits, their extent, and their particular interest, varied each from the other. The gentlemen themselves acknowledge that they have been less rigid on some points, in consequence of those difficulties than they otherwise should have been” (p. 193). “DeWitt”’s suspicions lead him to discover that the Constitution makes no genuine provision for popular representation—that “this blessed proposed Representation of the People, this apparent faithful Mirror, this striking Likeness, is to be still further refined, and more Aristocratical four times told.” As for the security of the people, “They have none. Nor was it intended by the makers that the should have.... They do not design to beg a second time. Knowing the danger of frequent applications to the people, they ask for the whole at once” (p. 316). Candor, for many anti-Federalists, did not preclude suspicion; for Henry, as we have seen, it could be a virtue. Taken together, these fragmentary comments suggest both a picture of the Constitution very different from the one Publius presents and an approach to deliberation over political affairs strikingly at variance with Publius’s. In that picture, Publius and his Constitution do not present the aspect of a pristine and balanced machine, amenable to rational explanation. Again and again, their suspicions lead anti-Federalists
to discover in the Constitution and its defense particular interests, potentially tyrannical powers or tendencies, and local prejudices where only sheer law should be.

4

It is only the superficial qualities that last. Man’s deeper nature is soon found out.

—Oscar Wilde

An essential strand of American political interpretation and judgment, then, relies on the strategy whose dialectic and dilemmas I isolated at the outset of this chapter: unmasking the particularity of desire beneath the professions of dispassionate reason. Viewed from that angle, the anti-Federalist suspicions indeed issue in an “unmasking” of the Law of the Constitution, namely, that Law which insists on appearing as pure, neutral, impersonal, and dispassionate. Publius’s national government resembles nothing so much as the Freudian superego, that seemingly “other” voice of reason and duty: in Publius’s optic the national government brings to bear order, dispassion, deliberation, and sobriety on the passionate, brittle, unpredictable state governments.29 If Publius presents the Constitution (and his explanation of it) as an embodiment of a superegoic Law, however, it is not surprising that anti-Federalists could so easily identify moments at which the Law’s universality is vitiated by the particular. There is an ineluctable aspect of the particular, and even more tellingly of desire, to the Law itself: the pleasure taken by the subject of the Law in arresting the desire of others.30 Because the Law cannot be pure, disembodied duty, but invariably betrays a positive pleasure in doing or enforcing duty, there is found, in Slavoj Zizek’s terms, a smear on the pure body of the Law which indicates the sadistic pleasure taken in limiting the actions of others. Indeed, it is precisely such marks of pleasure that must be concealed if the Law is to appear as universal and above the fray. Just such a work of concealment is what Federalist reason cannot acknowledge but what the anti-Federalist hermeneutics of suspicion strives to articulate.
It does so, as we have seen, by emphasizing the subject of the political utterance, insisting that the meaning of political speech requires attention to what the speaker is doing when he speaks. In Zizek’s (Lacanian) terms, anti-Federalist hermeneutics thus attends to the “subject of the enunciation” as well as the “subject of the statement.” Every utterance, according to Zizek (and Lacan), possesses a double register: it makes a claim about some state of affairs, and it issues a tacit communication to the other about how the speaker wishes to be recognized; it attempts, that is, to establish a certain relationship between subjects. As there is no guarantee that these two dimensions of the speech act will be in harmony, it is possible for the subject of the statement to come into conflict with the subject of the enunciation. In effect, Publius insists that, for the purposes of debating the merits of the Federal Constitution, he be treated as the subject of a statement only, and in this way he hopes to efface the “smear” of enjoyment on the pure body of the Law. The anti-Federalists insist on taking him also as the subject of an enunciation, that is, as one who, in insisting on these constraints, attempts to establish a relationship with the listener. In insisting that subjectivity be “bracketed,” then, just what demand is being enunciated? Simply that he be taken as the bearer of pure, dispassionate, universal Law for another, as Publius represents himself to be. But that formulation already contradicts itself by betraying the desire to represent the Law to another, the pleasure taken in enforcing the terms of reason. Using Zizek’s language again, anti-Federalist hermeneutics brings to light the obscene elements of American constitutional discourse. For suspicious anti-Federalists, Publius’s rigid distinction between reason and passion is necessarily disingenuous to the extent that it conceals the national/rational state’s passion to control and administer the passions of others and, indeed, to reduce politics to control and administration.

Unmasking the duplicities of others, however, entails its own duplicities and self-delusions: the strenuous attempt not to be duped, to sharpen one’s vision so as to penetrate all masks and disguises, does not succeed without its own epistemological costs. Punning on Jacques Lacan’s nom-du-père, Zizek formulates these costs by explaining “How the Non-duped Err” in conferring upon publicly constructed identities the status of unreal fictions:
We effectively become something by pretending that we already are that. To grasp the dialectic of this movement, we have to take into account the crucial fact that this “outside” is never simply a “mask” we wear in public but is rather the symbolic order itself. By “pretending to be something,” by “acting as if we were something,” we assume a certain place in the intersubjective symbolic network, and it is this external place that defines our true position. If we remain convinced, deep within ourselves, that “we are not really that,” if we preserve an intimate distance toward “the social role we play,” we doubly deceive ourselves. (Pp. 73–74)

“The final deception,” according to Lacanian theory, “is that social appearance is deceitful, for in the social-symbolic reality things ultimately are precisely what they pretend to be,” Zizek concludes. The symbolic order in which one’s public identity is constructed is not unreal; to assume that it is, or that there is a “real” identity hidden behind it, are equally pernicious errors.31

A related desire to affirm the distinctive reality of identities formed in public motivates Hannah Arendt’s insistence on the distinction between wearing a mask that differs from your “self” and simple hypocrisy:

For Machiavelli, the one-who-is and the one-who-appears remain separated, albeit not in the Socratic sense of the two-in-one of conscience and consciousness, but in the sense that the one-who-is can appear in his true being only before God; if he tries to appear before men in the sphere of worldly appearances, he has already corrupted his being. If, on the scene which is the world, he appears in the disguise of virtue, he is no hypocrite and does not corrupt the world, because his integrity remains safe before the watchful eyes of an omnipresent God, while the virtues he displays have their meaningfulness not in hiding but only in being displayed in public. No matter how God might judge him, his virtues will have improved the world while his vices remained hidden, and he will have known how to hide them not because of any pretense to virtue but because he felt they were not fit to be seen.32

Wearing a mask that differs from your self is not hypocrisy because public identities have a life of their own; they do not merely “express,” and are not reducible to, a private self or ego. If the anti-
Alle gories of America

Federalists accuse Publius of wearing the mask of reason, then, we might justifiably conclude of them that they err in the manner of the non-duped. Publius is “pretending,” but it is impossible, or at least risky, to pretend in public because one might always become what one appears to be. Indeed, Furtwangler speculates that precisely this was at work in the invention of Publius as an authoritative voice on the Constitution:

In defending this new Constitution, Hamilton and Madison . . . began to explain it to themselves. Neither author was completely satisfied, or even tolerably hopeful, when he left the Convention. As a result, the act of writing a defense of the Constitution was an exercise in self-contradiction—or perhaps better said, self-persuasion. The task imposed on Publius required Hamilton and Madison to review the Constitution, to go over it once more in a spirit of candor, looking for strengths rather than defects.

What emerged from that task was a public persona—“Publius”—quite different from any that Hamilton or Madison might ideally have imagined for themselves; but in this reading, Publius is a mask, an acknowledged fiction, not a disguise. Indeed Arendt emphasizes the American revolutionaries’ “Roman” awareness not so much of privileged historicopolitical models they might emulate but of the dependence of revolutionary political activity in the modern period on modeling, emulating, and generally appearing on the stage of the political world in a character not necessarily identical to one’s private, personal self. From this perspective, Publius, the persona of the disembodied, dispassionate reasoner calmly surveying America’s past, present, and future, cannot be unmasked—not because he wears no mask but because there is no question of his dissembling that he is masked.

Pace anti-Federalist suspicions, then, we ought perhaps to read Publius’s frank avowal of prejudice as a declaration that he cannot in fact be the dispassionate, reasoned observer he nonetheless emulates; ought to read it, that is, as the Lacanian or Zizekian mark of the non-coincidence of the subject with itself. But let us here return to the dilemma with which this chapter began: choosing between unmasking the “stain” of desire beneath the veneer of dispassionate reason


at the cost of degrading as “human, all-too-human” the practice of a nontranscendental politics based on discourse rather than on transcendental grounds, or taking the mask of reason at face value, as it were, at the cost of furnishing power a hiding place. Publius’s frank role playing eludes both this dilemma’s horns because the dilemma assumes a certain intolerance for fiction that Publius does not share.

Merely adopting an attitude that avows and tolerates the fictional quality of the roles and personae necessarily assumed by the political reasoner may not, however, be sufficient to hold at bay the corrosive dialectic of unmasking. Habermas, for example, acknowledges the artificial, fictional, counterfactual, “aesthetic” character of democratic political activity: such discourse proceeds under the sway of norms, rules, and constraints having a purely discursive, nonmetaphysical status. Habermas sees such artifices—in particular that of uncoerced consensus, or “rationally motivated agreement”—as “idealizing assumptions” essential to preserving the openness or contestability of the prescriptions governing practical life, prescriptions whose force lies solely in the extent to which their claim to validity can be rationally defended: “Communicative reason finds its criteria in the argumentative procedures for directly or indirectly redeeming validity claims to propositional truth, normative rightness, subjective truthfulness, and aesthetic harmony.”

Such is the bedrock of our intuitions regarding the legitimacy of procedural or formal democracy as a political community characterized by its participants’ commitment to the democratic way of life rather than to a single, substantive good or goal, no matter how universal or “true.”

But for Habermas, such idealizing assumptions have the status of “presuppositions that the participants themselves have to make if communicative action is to be at all possible” (p. 197), even though these same participants know that “their discourse is never definitively ‘purified’ of the motives and compulsions that have been filtered out” (p. 323). Freedom, absence of coercion, and rational motivation, then, are all only “counterfactually” assumed by the participants; that is, the ideally constituted democratic political life remains, strictly speaking, fictional. In Habermas’s theory, the stains of unreason, coercion, and inequality that inform actual discursive
political practice will not wash; so long as his idealizing assumptions remain ideals, they render democratic political practice into a merely imaginary activity. As a result, they are powerless to immunize democratic politics against the nihilistic consequences of the true world becoming a fable, that is, the world as mere discourse, as it must appear to those who act in the shadow of the dead god of theoretical truths and critical ideas.

As noted, Habermas’s conception has come under attack for the way in which it elides certain forms of distortion or unreason in its very commitment to the counterfactual bracketing of status and identity for the purposes of reasoned political argumentation. Nancy Fraser, for example, responding both to feminist and Foucaultian concerns, argues that such bracketing reflects a masculinist understanding of rationality, and she calls for a rethinking of the public sphere that makes room for the expression and celebration of diverse, embodied, classed and gendered discursive styles.37 Jean-François Lyotard, for his part, proposes an ideal of multiplicity and difference (rather than traditional reason’s identity and consistency) to guarantee and regulate the diverse and contending discursive arenas of postmodern society.38

Characteristic of such suggestions, however—including, surprisingly, Lyotard’s—is that each takes the form of proposing a candidate for a critical idea to regulate a practice. In other words, all partake of the theoreticist grammar that Lyotard himself calls “pious”: all formulate theoretical ideas that are then invoked to judge and shape actual political practice (see the Introduction). In this respect at least, and despite the fact that these proposals are typically formulated in response to the Foucaultian concern that the Habermasian position offers power a place to hide, Foucault’s approach to thinking about political practice is very different; for he attempts to dispense with the question of an ideal situated outside and regulating practice even in its Habermasian version of formal conditions of communication. To be sure, Foucault at times does seem to endorse something like the Habermasian approach, as in his comment that consensus is “a critical idea to maintain at all times: to ask oneself what proportion of nonconsensuality is implied in... a power relation, and whether that degree of nonconsensuality is necessary or not, and
then one may question every power relation to that extent." More often, however, Foucault attempts to distance himself from an approach that would tie democratic political practices to the necessary assumption of a critical, regulatory ideal, as in this statement:

In the serious play of questions and answers, in the work of reciprocal elucidation, the rights of each person are in some sense immanent in the discussion. They depend only on the dialogue situation. The person asking the questions is merely exercising the right that has been given to him: to remain unconvincing, to require more information, to emphasize different postulates, to point out faulty reasoning, etc. As for the person answering the questions, he too exercises a right that does not go beyond the discussion itself; by the logic of his own discourse he is tied to the questioning of the other. Questions and answers depend upon a game—a game that is at once pleasant and difficult—in which each of the two partners takes pains to use only those rights given him by the other and by the accepted form of the dialogue.

Politics, for Foucault, is not an idea to be clarified and instantiated but a practice—better, a complex of practices—to be celebrated, feared, preserved, changed, contributed to, or resisted, as appropriate. If the piety of theory plays into modern cynicism and nihilism by constituting the public sphere, willy-nilly, as a site of illusion or deception or parody, Foucault seems to recommend that we not judge democratic politics by measuring it according to an ideal. Rather, he would have us value it by contributing to its preservation and vitality, and conceive democratic political deliberation not as a fictional approximation or pretense but as the actual realization of whatever capacity we have to speak and act. To do otherwise, he fears, is to risk falling into the resentful Socratic project of "correcting existence," as Nietzsche characterizes it in *The Birth of Tragedy*. If the political as participation, deliberation, display, or agonism is to persist, it will be because it is interesting enough, seductive enough, to win the loyalty of its participants. For Foucault, political life begins and ends as a "this-worldly" practice; its entire value lies in the fact that it is practiced, not in the extent to which it realizes an ideal.

In his insistence on treating politics as a practice rather than as an obligating idea, Foucault's attitude resembles Arendt's convic-
tion that the value of political action is inherent in its performance. Employing Nietzsche’s most characteristic trope, Arendt expresses this point by reversing the Platonic hierarchy that, for Lyotard, constitutes piety: we uphold the ideal of equality, she asserts, not because its truth obligates us to do so but “because freedom is possible only among equals, and we believe that the joys and gratifications of free company are to be preferred to the doubtful pleasures of holding dominion.” Like Foucault, Arendt stresses the erotic appeal of political action, its seductiveness as a way of life. The “actual content of political life,” she writes, is “the joy and gratification that arise out of being in company with our peers, out of acting together and appearing in public, out of inserting ourselves into the world by word and deed, thus acquiring and sustaining our personal identity and beginning something new” (p. 263). Finally, Arendt insists that politics—as freedom, that is, as democratic deliberation—is nothing but a practice or performance: “Men are free—as distinguished from possessing the gift for freedom—as long as they act, neither before nor after; for to be free and to act are the same.” For that reason, “the phenomenon of freedom does not appear in the realm of thought at all” (p. 145). For both Arendt and Foucault, what the former calls the “element of coercion” that truth carries with it is dangerous, not so much for the forms of rulership or domination it elides, as for the nihilistic energies it organizes when the imperative to “correct existence” necessarily issues in the baleful conclusion that existence is always incorrect.

Publius’s role of disembodied reasoner, his references to a “new science of politics,” and his reliance on metaphors drawn from the motions of planetary bodies are commonly adduced as evidence of the idea that the operation of American Constitutional government is grounded in nature’s own laws of motion as discovered by Newton. Paradoxically, this appeal to Newtonian science has the effect of offering mythical reassurance, because the citizen can feel that his political system is modeled on heaven itself. What greater or more powerful
obligating idea could there be, after all, than scientific truths expressive of the immutable, eternal cycles of nature?

The anti-Federalist hermeneutics of suspicion, however, urges us to examine the constitutional order as an earthly, passionate, this-worldly regime. Margaret C. Jacob has stressed the connection between paganism, pantheism, and radical republican thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, noting “the tendency on the part of republican thinkers to explain the ordered universe not by reference to an imposed, supernatural order, administered as it were by God’s self-styled representatives, kings, oligarchs and the like, but by recourse to the notion that spirit lives in nature, in people as in all objects.” Extending back to the Hermetic and Neoplatonic tradition, she writes, this pantheistic dimension, by the early eighteenth century, “had become central to the way thinkers operating in a republican tradition formulated their arguments for a secular order decreed by the interests and necessities of ordinary men in search of a balanced and representative system of government.”

Jacob appeals to convictions held by those whom Lyotard refers to as the “lesser Greeks”: that the world is a complex and ambiguous whole to be negotiated and balanced, not an ideal truth to be known and realized. In Lyotard’s “pagan” view, the world is characterized by a multiplicity of powers and vitalities, none of which has the final say and whose specific capacities, interests, and proper sphere of influence is always at least somewhat in doubt.

The pagan character of the Constitution is to be found in the doctrine of overlapping responsibilities, or “mixing powers,” among the three branches of government as a way of securing independence without relying on mere “parchment barriers.” As Jeffrey Tulis explains, although “powers were separated and structures of each branch differentiated in order to equip each branch to perform different tasks,” so that “each branch would be superior . . . in its own sphere and in its own way,” nevertheless, “the three objectives of government—popular will, popular rights, and self-preservation—are mixed twice in the Constitution: they are mixed among the branches and within each branch so that each objective is given priority in one branch.” Tulis rejects two influential interpretations of the separation of powers: one that regards the branches as strictly separated
according to function and another, more plausible theory that the Constitution simply mandates a plurality of power centers to ensure that no one center dominates the regime. In fact, each branch is designed so as to be especially suited to a particular function or functions, but each is also concerned with the “specialties” of others (as in Congress and the presidency, both of which are concerned with national security). The result is a dynamic constitutional polity in which the borders separating one branch from another are continually made the subject of agonistic contestation: “The founders urged that ‘line-drawing’ among spheres of authority be the product of conflict among the branches, not the result of dispassionate legal analysis” (p. 43).

Line drawing, though regulated by the architecture of the Constitution, is passionate, open, and dynamic. There are no formulas for resolving disputes, only power and contestation, or, in Lyotard’s (Wittgensteinian) terms, the invention of new moves in the constitutional language game. From this perspective, the “reasonable” constitutional order, smeared or not with obscene enjoyment, gives way to an order of multiple, warring gods negotiating and renegotiating their always already impure, always already violated spheres of influence. Lyotard defines this kind of paganism as a political regime in which “there is always some talking to be done” because there are no fixed criteria from which a conclusion can be reached, “no stable system to guide judgments.” Although “a society that must decide what is obligatory” is the essence of postmodernity, such a condition was first articulated by the Greeks, whose mythology lets us see “a society of gods that is constantly forced to redraw its code.” In offering his definition of postmodernity, Lyotard only echoes Max Weber’s evocation of an enigmatic, “disenchanted” paganism as characteristic of modernity:

We live as the ancients did when their world was not yet disenchanted of its gods and demons, only we live in a different sense. As Hellenic man at times sacrificed to Aphrodite and at other times to Apollo, and, above all, as everybody sacrificed to the gods of his city, so do we still nowadays, only the bearing of man has been disenchanted and denuded of its mystical but inwardly genuine plasticity. Fate, and certainly not
“science,” holds sway over these gods and their struggles. . . . Many old gods ascend from their graves; they are disenchanted and hence take the form of impersonal forces. They strive to gain power over our lives and again they resume their eternal struggle with one another.52

With the demise of the holistic world view established by Christianity and the separation of science, art, and morality into autonomous and incommensurables inquiries, we are placed once again in a “pagan” universe—one in which a plurality of forces struggle with one another, defining and redefining boundaries and experiences in a never-to-be-settled, open, and unpredictable encounter.

The Federal Constitution establishes a political arena for a “pagan” encounter of warring gods redefining their powers as they struggle. In this respect, the anti-Federalists are decidedly “modern” or “classical,” whereas the Federal Constitution would already be postmodern, in Lyotard’s terms. Following Montesquieu, anti-Federalists insisted that republican government flourishes only when based in a small community united by shared practices and understandings. As “Brutus” observes,

In a republic, the manners, sentiments, and interests of the people should be similar. If this be not the case, there will be a constant clashing of opinions; and the representatives of one part will be continually striving against those of the other. This will retard the operations of government, and prevent such conclusions as will promote the public good. If we apply this remark to the condition of the United States, we shall be convinced that it forbids that we should be one government. The United States includes a variety of climates. The productions of the different parts of the union are very variant, and their interests, of consequence, diverse. Their manners and habits differ as much as their climates and productions; and their sentiments are by no means coincident. The laws and customs of the several states are, in many respects, very diverse, and in some opposite; each would be in favor of its own interests and customs, and, of consequence, a legislature, formed of representatives from the respective parts, would not only be too numerous to act with any care or decision, but would be composed of such heterogenous and discordant principles, as would constantly be contending with each other.53
An independent and energetic government, for “Brutus,” one capable of decisive action in the public interest, must be grounded in a set of shared practices, customs, and interests serving to unite a community. Sovereignty, for “Brutus” as for the tradition, implies indivisibility, unity, and above all univocity. For Publius, that kind of “organic” unity is precisely what is to be undone by the Federal Constitution, which substitutes for it warring powers establishing domains vis-à-vis one another in the absence of fixed criteria. Resorting once more to Lyotard, we might say that “Brutus” is a classicist who insists that a legitimate legislator must assume the position of “an author who can write while putting himself at the same time in the position of a reader, being able to substitute himself for his own reader, . . . whereas in what we call modernity”—what Lyotard will come to call postmodernity—“he no longer knows for whom he writes. . . . When you cast bottles to the waves, you don’t know to whom they are going.”

Are we to conclude, then, that American constitutional politics—politics as the continual renegotiation of “essentially contested” boundaries—is an adequate institutional expression of a purely performative, postmetaphysical politics? That would chime with Richard Rorty’s attempts to imagine a postmetaphysical liberalism based on a pragmatic attachment to liberal democratic practices rather than on theoretically grounded principles of justice or morality:

Democratic society can get along without the sort of reassurance provided by the thought that it has “adequate conceptual foundations” or that it is “grounded” in “human reason.” On this [pragmatist] view, the most appropriate foundation for a liberal democracy is a conviction by its citizens that things will go better for everybody if every new metaphor is given a hearing, if no belief or desire is held so sacred that a metaphor which endangers it is automatically rejected. Such a conviction amounts to the rejection of the claim that we, the democratic societies of the West, know what we want in advance—that we have more than a tentative and revisable Grundrisse for our social projects.

It would also chime with Foucault’s and Arendt’s attempt to value politics for its performative rather than its ideal character. In the
“pagan” view of the Constitution that I have adumbrated, the Constitution just is that “tentative and revisable Grundrisse” of which Rorty writes. The problem with that view, like the argument that the Constitution is “already” pagan, is that American politics has rarely, if ever, been able to do without metaphysical reassurance. Consider, in this context, the following passage from The Federalist: “It has been frequently remarked, that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not, of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend, for their political constitutions, on accident and force.” In Publius’s argument, the American nation is presented as the test of a thesis, a proof in a rational demonstration. If history, as Publius utilizes it, is a series of experiments putting various theories of government to the test, America must be the most far-reaching and profound test of the modern idea that governments can be designed by individuals not cobbled together by accident or force.

In this view, the Federal Constitution perpetuates the legacy of the the Puritan ecclesiastical polity: America is not only the story of Americans but an attempt to prove a thesis, to demonstrate something to the world public. Eighteenth-century America may no longer be a manifestation of God’s grace, but it is the conclusion to a syllogism of sweeping applicability, a publicly visible proof of the viability of what Jacob Burckhardt, in another context, characterized as the emergence of “a new fact . . . in history—the State as the outcome of reflection and calculation, the State as a work of art.” Publius’s figuration suggests a desire to see America as a logic, as the necessary, determined, predictable outcome of true premises about human interaction. It is, in other words, an ideological discourse in Arendt’s sense, an expression of piety in Lyotard’s: an attempt to align the meaning and worth of the human world with the coercive regulation inherent in the logical development of an idea or the sheer givenness of a fact. That is, it is a practice governed by a critical idea, one which, in this case, achieves an authentically national (indeed, given America’s missionary self-understanding, veritably world-historical) dimension.