

a major barrier for similar endeavors. However, this high potential for major project cost overruns may provide an opportunity for lower cost, more easily managed, no-carbon-footprint SNR projects to be undertaken on U.S. soil in the next decade. Where Bryce's energy source choices may succeed is with unplugged and low-watt countries, where economic growth is paramount, but natural gas and SNR furl facilities could be a winning combination that trumps the anti-hydrocarbon "green" ideology in the coming years.

A further example of the rush to renewable energy sources can be found in President Joe Biden's plan for a "Clean Energy Revolution," which includes installing 500 million solar modules in the United States over the next five years at a cost of \$40 billion per year. In Biden's world of "Clean Energy," hydrocarbons (including natural gas) and uranium need not apply for federal government support. The next four years could be a turning point for how electricity is to be fueled in America, if not all high-watt countries, over the coming decades.

Thomas A. Hemphill  
University of Michigan-Flint

### **First Principles: What America's Founders Learned from the Greeks and Romans and How That Shaped Our Country**

Thomas E. Ricks

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Classics, the study of the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations, is today a niche subject studied by a diligent yet small circle of people. The ancient world is increasingly alien to the modern mind. But this was not always the case. For a long time, classical thinkers were revered as excellent sources of wisdom on both political and moral subjects. Classical writings were studied for centuries within the Western world, but few places could match the intense adoration of the ancient world that the American revolutionaries cultivated in the 18th century.

After the election of Donald Trump in 2016, stunning pundits and statistical gurus alike, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author Thomas E. Ricks contemplated the same question many generations of Americans have grappled with: What are our values as a nation? To answer this question, mirroring the American revolutionaries,

Ricks returns to first principles by examining the classical sources from which the Founders gleaned some of their most hallowed ideas about our duties toward our fellow citizens and our nation as a whole.

*First Principles* offers an important corrective to a common narrative of the American Revolution. When libertarians and classical liberals discuss the American Revolution's intellectual blueprints, John Locke often dominates the discussion. Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* informed the Founders on questions of resistance to tyrannical authority, the principles of natural law, and the justification of private property. But Locke was not the only thinker in the Founder's intellectual arsenal. At times, this intense focus on Locke and Enlightenment thought, in general, obscures the classical tradition's role in providing both moral and political models to follow. The writings of Thucydides, Tacitus, Livy, Sallust, Polybius, Plutarch and, above all other ancients, Cicero, were constantly cited by the Founders to argue in favor of an Enlightenment-informed republicanism. In tandem with political writings, figures of moral exemplarity were often praised as models to emulate. Larger-than-life figures such as Cato, Brutus, Epaminondas, Aristides, Phocion, and Cincinnatus all loomed in Americans' minds. Though these names might not be familiar to the educated modern American, there is no question 18th-century Americans were acutely aware of the ancient past, or at least the chunks of it they found particularly pertinent.

Scholars such as Caroline Winterer, Carl Richards, and Michael C. Hawley have done a great deal to illustrate just how pervasive the example of Rome and Greece was in the revolutionaries' minds. Their works are of an academic nature, however, while Ricks focuses on the interested layperson. Ricks' main goal is not to argue for a radically new interpretation or particularly novel vision of the Founding and classicism. Instead, he aims to raise the awareness of the average American of ideas, attitudes, and even vocabularies that have fallen out of fashion but ought to be revived to rejuvenate and improve our understanding of the ideas that form the moral core of America today.

Ricks shows the pervasive influence of the ancient world on a huge variety of revolutionary figures, but *First Principles* focuses mainly on the first four presidents of the republic, Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and Madison. At a time when the future seemed desperately uncertain, each of these figures returned to the wisdom of the ancients to try to make sense of the rapidly changing world in which they lived.

Schools and colleges mirrored their colonial counterparts in Britain by focusing heavily on classical writings and ancient languages. Children at a young age were expected and required to understand the classical world by reading a wide variety of classical authors. College entry requirements often required an applicant to translate passages of authors like Cicero. School and college curricula contributed toward what the scholar Carl J. Richards calls “the classical conditioning” of the Founders. Throughout the early chapters Ricks shows us how each president came into contact with thinkers and ideas that would change their lives.

But not every American had years of schooling. Many, such as George Washington, did not have the privilege of spending their youth studying the ancients. Despite this, the ancient Greek and Roman worlds were familiarized, discussed, and interrogated by those without formal education like Washington. The culture of classicism had such pervasive influence that even those without formal schooling could conjure a few parallels and references.

Washington was one of the least educated among the Founders. Ricks recounts a story in which John Adams even pondered if he was illiterate because he was so unimpressed by his intellect. Despite these barbs to his lackluster education, Washington, like many others, was enamored with the greatest classical heroes transmitted through Plutarch. In his youth, he was inspired by Julius Caesar’s skill as a commander. But after experiencing the harsh realities of war and defeat, Ricks argues that Washington opted for the strategies of the Roman general Fabius during the Revolutionary War. When Rome was invaded by the famed Carthaginian general Hannibal Barca in the 3rd century BCE, the Roman army experienced numerous defeats. Fabius opted for a strategy of harassing the Carthaginian forces and avoiding open battle. This strategy whittled down the Carthaginians, essentially nullifying the gains they had made after three astounding victories. In the same manner, Washington did not give the British an open battle, opting for harassment and skirmishing as he knew the limitations of his army’s capabilities.

Later in life, Washington would yet again be moved by classical example to yield the continental army to Congress. Washington was consciously casting himself in the mold of Cincinnatus, another famous Roman general from the 6th century BCE, who, after being granted dictatorial power by the Roman Senate to deal with an invading force, quickly relinquished his power and returned to his humble

farm. In much the same manner, Washington consciously followed in the footsteps of Cincinnatus. Ricks makes it clear that in a hypothetical world without classical examples such as Cincinnatus, Washington's life and legacy would likely have been drastically different.

Unlike Washington, who learned in part through cultural osmosis, John Adams was an extraordinarily studious and well-learned person. But Adams did not have the military mind or attitude of Washington. Instead, his classical hero was Cicero, the Roman statesman, orator, lawyer, and philosopher who struggled to preserve the dying Roman republic of the 1st century BCE. Both Adams and Cicero were new men to the political scene and could not rely upon a lofty legacy. In Cicero, Adams found a lifelong partner he could constantly revisit at times of great turmoil. Throughout his life, Adams would not only quote and cite Cicero but even mimic his strategies while practicing law and defending clients such as the soldiers of the Boston Massacre. Ricks shows how Adams returned to Ciceronian principles and narratives throughout his life, writing that "when we seek to understand John Adams, it always helps to look to Cicero."

Unfortunately, Ricks crucially neglects to cover in much detail Adams's *A Defence of the Constitutions of the Government of the United States of America*, an admittedly unwieldy and awkward three-volume work refuting the unicameralism of the French thinker Anne Robert Jacques Turgot. *Defence* is mostly made up of quotations from a plethora of authors in the Western tradition. Because of its cumbersome nature, few read it today besides scholars. But Adams's *Defence* was a rare extensive and complete expression of republican values that the erratic pamphlets of the era could rarely match. Eminent historian Gordon Wood even refers to it as "the finest fruit of the American Enlightenment." *Defence* did a great deal to solidify bilateralism as a staple of American politics. Today, of all the states, only Nebraska has a unicameral legislature, a testament to Adams's influence. It is hardly surprising that Ricks only briefly deals with *Defence* in favor of discussing Adams's presidency. Still, it is a missed opportunity to bring a seminal yet almost forgotten work to prominence.

Many Americans prioritized Rome's example over Greece, but Thomas Jefferson stood out because of his unique commitment to Greek ideas, rejecting the Ciceronianism of people like Adams. Though Jefferson was enamored with Roman historians such as

Tacitus, he stands out for his thorough commitment to the Greek philosopher Epicurus, who developed a philosophy premised on the avoidance of pain. Similar to the romanticists of the 19th century, Jefferson was inspired by the Greeks to affirm the importance of feelings, emotion, and passion. As Ricks aptly points out, however, this often led to Jefferson ignoring reality, especially his hypocrisies.

Ricks argues that Jefferson's Epicureanism could have both positive and negative outcomes. On the one hand, Ricks shows how Jefferson's Epicureanism animates the Declaration of Independence, one of the most important documents of the Revolution but also an inspiring affirmation that "all men are created equal." Ricks explains that the Declaration, despite being considered deeply Lockean, also represents "a garden of Epicurean belief." Yet Ricks argues that Jefferson's Epicureanism and Romanticism allowed him to advocate for equality yet practice and benefit from slavery, the most extreme form of inequality imaginable. Ricks ponders that Jefferson's Epicureanism gave him the justification of receding into oneself to find happiness, allowing him to ignore or at least rationalize his political contradictions.

Almost a generation removed from the previous three presidents, of all the Founders James Madison boasts possibly the most complex and nuanced engagement with the ancient world. From a younger generation and educated at the comparatively cosmopolitan College of New Jersey (Princeton), Madison had a respect for the ancients but was not as enamored as Washington, Adams, or Jefferson. He saw that the ancients, just like the moderns, are susceptible to error. Madison did not merely cite the ancients as a hallowed authority but also questioned and probed classical virtue's fundamental limits.

In his speeches at the Constitutional Convention and in the *Federalist Papers*, Madison displayed a deep understanding of Greek and Roman political institutions. During the Constitutional Convention, when discussing the importance of a strong central government, Madison buttressed arguments with examples of the Greek leagues and federations of the 4th century BCE. In the *Federalist Papers*, Madison made many references to the classical world, and with good reason, he saw a direct parallel between the failure of Greek leagues such as the Amphictyonic League and America's situation. Madison accepted the limitations of human nature and worked toward synthesizing classical political models with emerging accounts of self-interest provided by authors like Adam Smith and Bernard

Mandeville. As Ricks points out, the word virtue appears more often than even liberty in Founding era writings. Madison breaks with his contemporaries and classical predecessors by building a system that did not rely upon the often shaky foundations of virtue.

Ricks explains that, although the 1780s represent the zenith of classical influence, this position was starting to rapidly erode by the 1790s. The dynamic and pluralistic society America became meant elites lost their sway and ability to influence how the average citizen felt. Industrial society made educating children in classics seem to be an elitist and ultimately ornamental practice that was to be subsumed by more practical curricula. By the 1800s, classicism began to manifest itself not on the side of freedom but on the side of slavery as Southern plantation owners used the classical past to justify contemporary chattel slavery. And from that point onward, studying the ancients would never regain the cultural sway and status it held during the Revolutionary period.

A minor gripe is that Ricks, at times, sacrifices extensively discussing the ancients in favor of a historical narrative that, while very readable and enjoyable, can often lose sight of the book's original aim: to illustrate the level of influence that the ancients had on the leaders that founded the nation and the type of nation that they founded. This is probably most prevalent in the chapters about Washington, which are mostly based around military history, Rick's home turf as a writer. Though fascinating, sections such as these often veer somewhat from the main thrust of the book.

But despite any criticisms, Ricks must be commended. He has successfully adapted what is usually a niche and highly academic subject into a highly readable and compelling illustration of the Founder's most hallowed heroes. For libertarians and classical liberals who admire the ideas of the Founding, there is a great value in reading *First Principles*. While Ricks corrects the overreliance on Locke to explain the intellectual milieu of the Founders, he also impressively never falls into the trap of overemphasizing the classics. At all times, he tempers the classical influence by discussing the importance of Enlightenment thinkers, especially those of Scottish extraction. Ricks points to figures like Thomas Paine and Alexander Hamilton, who were much more skeptical of the applicability of principles derived from a long-gone age. And Ricks doesn't overvalorize the ancients, writing that "the more we grasp the influence of the Greco-Roman world on the Revolutionary generation, the better we

will understand them and their goals, problems, fears, and mistakes.” The classical world brought with it much baggage, for example how the slavery of the Greeks and Romans helped the Founders rationalize their holding of slaves while speaking of the virtues of liberty.

Today, public buildings are classical in style, but within them, the principles that animated the American Republic’s creation are often lacking. For anyone who wishes to understand not only how America came to be but also where it may be headed, *First Principles* is an excellent start on this pilgrimage.

Paul Meany  
Cato Institute

### **Recovering the Liberal Spirit: Nietzsche, Individuality, and Spiritual Freedom**

Steven F. Pittz

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Liberalism, in the classical sense, has always suffered from a miasma of critics who claim they know better. Even as respect for the dignity of the individual, and the political and economic liberty it engenders, grew as a cultural and governing force producing the great fruits of prosperity and peace, communitarians of the left and right grumbled that something was rotten at its core. Liberalism might be good for the pocketbook, and it might be good for the hedonist, but it’s bad for the soul. Its riches and lifestyle options, in other words, come at a spiritual cost. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?

Defenders of the liberal project have typically responded by doubling down on the twin benefits of wealth and choice. It’s better for people to be richer, and nothing gets us richer faster than free and open markets. It’s better for people to be free to author their own lives, and nothing enables that more than getting the coercive might of government out of the way—and also having some extra spending money. But that’s, in a sense, merely restating the anti-individualist, pro-communitarian case. For the kind of person who believes man’s telos is more expansive than “survival” or “happiness” and instead involves being a very particular sort of person, saying that liberalism expands choice and the resources to it is a knock against it, not a fact in its favor.