

"In Virtue's Cause":  
Synthesizing Classical, Bourgeois, and Christian Ideals of Virtue

in the Republican Thought of Mercy Otis Warren

by

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## ABSTRACT

Virtue was a concept of paramount importance in the American founders' republican thought. Without virtue, there could be no liberty, no order, no devotion to the common good, and no republican government. This dissertation examines the concept of virtue at the American founding, particularly virtue in the political thought of Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814). The most important female intellectual of the Revolutionary generation, Warren wrote passionately about liberty and the beauty of republican ideals. Most important to this study, she consistently advocated the central place of virtue in a free and well-ordered republic.

I argue that Warren incorporates three distinct philosophical threads – classical, bourgeois-marketplace, and Christian ideals – in her conception of virtue. I first analyze how Warren uses each of these three threads of virtue throughout her writings. I then examine how she synthesizes these individual threads into a single, cohesive conception of virtue. I argue that Warren consistently merges these ideals into a conception of virtue that she employs to address three pressing political problems of her day: How to motivate reluctant colonists to seek independence; how to check various forms of corruption spreading among the people; and how to counter corruption arising from commercial growth in the new nation. Modern political theorists often argue that these three threads, especially the classical republican and Christian ideals of virtue, are irreconcilable. My analysis shows that to divorce virtue from Christianity in Warren's conception is to rob it of its corrective vigor within

republican government. I argue that what Machiavelli and Rousseau wrote out of republican virtue Warren writes back in. In Warren's political thought, virtue serves as the foundation for a stable enduring political system, provides the necessary informal ordering principle for the emerging republic, and offers the means by which the new nation could achieve its millennial destiny.

## DEDICATION

For my children, Will, Leigh, Anne, Michael, Laura, Ellen, Kaye, and Matt;

and especially for my husband, Len –

through whose ancestry our children share

Mercy Otis Warren's legacy of virtue and liberty.

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## INTRODUCTION

*They fight in virtue's ever sacred cause.*  
Mercy Otis Warren, *The Group* (1775)<sup>1</sup>

In an age declared to be “after virtue” by one of today’s most celebrated scholars,<sup>2</sup> what could possibly be gained by looking back at a concept generally seen as being irrelevant to contemporary political thought? Why study the concept of virtue at the American founding? If we are to believe the writings of some of today’s most prominent scholars, virtue as a political concept died when the U. S. Constitution was born. Prevailing wisdom holds that the drafters of the Constitution were unconvinced Americans possessed virtue sufficient to sustain the government of the new nation. As the narrative goes, unwilling to rely on the virtue of the people and their leaders (as the republicans of the Revolutionary generation had insisted), the drafters of the Constitution, being pragmatic men of experience and schooled in the science of politics, put their confidence instead in well-designed political institutions as the guarantor of the liberty of the young republic. When we consider the concept of virtue today, we likely see it as the rhetorical fuel for the patriotism necessary to the Revolution, or as the outmoded ideal of eighteenth-century Puritans desperate to stop the inevitable march of reason and the Enlightenment. And yet, for the Revolutionary generation, virtue was the linchpin upon which republican government turned.

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<sup>1</sup> Mercy Otis Warren, *The Group, a Farce* (1776), in *The Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren: Facsimile Reproductions Compiled and With an Introduction by Benjamin Franklin V* (Ann Arbor, MI: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 2002), Act III, Scene 2.

<sup>2</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).



Simply because the concept of virtue *was* so significant in the thinking of the founders it is worth revisiting, not only to pay our debt as heirs to their republican legacy but to understand the role they saw it playing in the unique political system they created. Virtue was a concept of paramount importance to their framework of republican thought. Without virtue, there could be no liberty, no order, and no devotion to the common good. Without virtue the republic could not long endure. With this political inheritance comes an obligation to reconsider the assumptions on which they built our system of government. Virtue defined the founders' vision of a free society. Without the check of virtue, liberty deteriorates into license, the common good is fragmented by individual self-interest, and political power becomes corrupt and tyrannical. Leaders of the Revolutionary generation knew well the history of the ancient Roman republic, blessed with well-designed institutions of mixed government. The people were governed by an objective rule of law. Each citizen dutifully exercised his sovereignty and political liberty, participating in regular elections to hold elected officials accountable and to check potential abuses of power. Rome enjoyed non-dependence on other foreign states and Roman citizens enjoyed republican liberty. Despite being a model republic, it crumbled – in large part because its citizens lacked sufficient virtue. Without virtue the free society is not only unsustainable, it is unachievable to begin with.

Early American republican thinkers saw the need to place in careful balance their competing ideals: liberty and order, freedom and political authority, non-dependence and social interdependence, individual self-interest and the public good.

As Benjamin Franklin famously quipped when asked what kind of government the Constitutional Convention had birthed: “A republic – if you can keep it.”<sup>3</sup> The balance was delicate, precarious, easily toppled by any uneven weighting toward one ideal over another, or by any unchecked growth of influence of one at the expense of the other. Virtue holds the republican vision together, providing what the Revolutionary generation saw to be the only means of maintaining the tenuous balance between republican order and republican liberty.

Virtue is “a key concept in classical republican thought.”<sup>4</sup> Just as virtue undergirds ancient republican thought, the necessity of virtue permeates discussions of republican government in the American Revolutionary political culture. As Gordon S. Wood notes in *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787*, “The eighteenth-century mind was thoroughly convinced that a popularly based government ‘cannot be supported without *Virtue*.’”<sup>5</sup> Americans at the founding understood that “the vital – that is life-giving – principle of republics was *public virtue* ... If public virtue declined, the republic declined, and if it declined too far, the republic died.”<sup>6</sup> James Madison argued in his defense of the new Constitution at the Virginia ratifying convention in 1788: “I go on this great republican principle, that the

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<sup>3</sup> Terence Ball, “A Republic – If You Can Keep It,” in *Conceptual Change and the Constitution*, ed. Terence Ball and J.G.A. Pocock (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 137.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Dagger, *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1997), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 68.

<sup>6</sup> Forrest McDonald, *Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution* (Lawrence, KA, University Press of Kansas, 1986), 70-71.

people will have virtue and intelligence to select men of virtue and wisdom. Is there no virtue among us? To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without virtue is a chimerical idea.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly John Adams argued that “a republic is the best of governments”<sup>8</sup> and “public virtue is the only foundation of republics.”<sup>9</sup> Although Adams is well known for advocating virtue in his political writings, he is but one among a chorus of voices emphasizing the importance of virtue to republican government.

Also among early American thinkers who emphasized virtue is one of Adams’s contemporaries and friends, Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814). Poet, playwright, historian, and political thinker, Warren is the most important female intellectual of the Revolutionary generation. She wrote passionately about liberty, about the beauty of republican ideals, and most important to this study, she consistently advocated the central place of virtue in a free and well-ordered republic. Hers is a concept of virtue designed to stir reluctant patriots to revolution, to check the corruption that threatens republics, and to provide enduring principles to guide both public and private behavior. Her conception of virtue draws upon several philosophical traditions within the colonial context, and weaves together the elements of virtue she believed necessary to the fledgling republic. Appeals to virtue

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<sup>7</sup> James Madison, “Speech in the Virginia Ratifying Convention on the Judicial Power, June 20, 1788,” in *James Madison: Writings 1772-1836*, ed. Jack M. Rakove (New York: Library of America, 1999), 398.

<sup>8</sup> John Adams, “Thoughts on Government” (1776) in *The Political Writings of John Adams*, ed. George A. Peek (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Co. 2000), 484.

<sup>9</sup> John Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, 16 April 1776, *Warren-Adams Letters, Being Chiefly a Correspondence among John Adams, Samuel Adams, and James Warren*, Vol. 2, 1778-1814, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 1, Ch. 18, Doc. 9.

characterized the American founding, and in this dissertation I seek to demonstrate Warren's importance to the development of the concept of virtue within that first republican generation.

Warren was the daughter of a prominent colonial merchant and attorney, Col. James Otis, sister of James Otis, Jr. (credited with the Revolutionary rallying cry, "Taxation without representation is tyranny"), wife of distinguished lawyer and politician James Warren, and mother of five sons. Both she and her husband were *Mayflower* descendants. As a prominent Massachusetts woman she corresponded regularly with John and Abigail Adams, as well as many other political leaders of her day, including Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and others. She was hostess in her Plymouth home in 1772 to a political meeting at which the Committees of Correspondence and, by extension, the American revolutionary movement were born. Warren did not begin writing until she was over 40, with all of her pre-1790 writings appearing anonymously.<sup>10</sup> Yet she was a prolific writer, perhaps best-known as a dramatist and as America's first female playwright. In popular literature she is frequently referred to as "the muse of the Revolution."<sup>11</sup> She is remembered as an important Antifederalist pamphleteer and as the first female historian of the American Revolution through her writing of the two-volume *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*

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<sup>10</sup> Therese Boos Dykeman, *Contributions By Women to Early American Philosophy: Anne Bradstreet, Mercy Otis Warren and Judith Murray Sargent* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd., 2009), 93.

<sup>11</sup> This common moniker is reflected in the biography of Mercy Otis Warren by Nancy Rubin Stuart, *The Muse of the Revolution: The Secret Pen of Mercy Otis Warren and the Founding of a Nation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2008).

*Interspersed with Biographical, Political and Moral Observations*, published in 1805 at age 77. Despite Warren's considerable literary reputation, she is relatively unknown as a poet. A small collection of her poetry was published in 1790, but the bulk of her private poetry remained unpublished until 1981, almost 170 years after her death.<sup>12</sup> She was classically educated as a young woman in much the same manner as the leading men of her age and read widely well into her later years. The introduction to the 1994 re-publication of her *History* labeled her "the most formidable female intellectual in eighteenth-century America."<sup>13</sup>

Yet Warren's considerable reputation as a playwright, pamphleteer, patriot, and historian often overshadows her significance as a republican political thinker. She is among the most important of what I call the Revolutionary generation's "virtue thinkers," even rivaling John Adams with her contribution to the concept of virtue in early American political thought. Warren wrote extensively about republican ideals – virtue, the fear of corruption, the connection between non-dependence and liberty, and the importance of the rule of law. Particularly striking in Warren's political thought is her complex and multifaceted concept of virtue and her understanding of its significance in the political life of the emerging American republic. The theme of virtue permeates her writing before, during, and after the Revolution. It differs from

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<sup>12</sup> Warren's poetry was first published in *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous* (1790), and reprinted in *The Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren: Facsimile Reproductions Compiled and With an Introduction by Benjamin Franklin V*, (Ann Arbor, MI: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 2002). Warren's private poems were published in Edmund M. Hayes and Mercy Otis Warren, "The Private Poems of Mercy Otis Warren," *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 54, No. 2 (June 1981), 199-224.

<sup>13</sup> Lester H. Cohen, "Foreword," in *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution, interspersed with Biographical, Political and Moral Observations* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1994), xvi.

Adams's view of virtue both in content and expression, especially in the use of heroic virtue in her Revolutionary dramas, her insistence on bourgeois or marketplace virtue to check avarice and luxury in the marketplace and in economic matters generally, and her unrelenting insistence on virtue well into the early years of the new republic. As Adams and others of her generation shifted emphasis from virtue to governmental institutions as the mechanism for checking citizen corruption and placing limits on political power, Warren never abandoned her call for virtue. It provided both a powerful animating ideal and the theoretical framework for her political thought.

Within the constellation of political concepts that Warren employs in her republican thought, virtue is predominant – whether fueling patriotic fervor as the Revolutionary War approached, pointing citizens to sacrificial commitment to the public good, or preserving republican liberty and order under the new Constitution. Still, little scholarship has been devoted exclusively to Warren's political thought or to her concept of virtue. As author of the most recent of these scholarly studies, Therese Boos Dykeman, notes, "A full study of Warren has yet to be written."<sup>14</sup> Here I attempt to present a fuller examination of Warren's political thought, specifically her concept of virtue, and to evaluate her larger significance in the development of American republican thought.

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<sup>14</sup> Therese Boos Dykeman, *Contributions by Women to Early American Philosophy: Anne Bradstreet, Mercy Otis Warren, and Judith Murray Sargent* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 88. Dykeman identifies Jeffrey H. Richards's *Mercy Otis Warren* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995) as a "good start" toward filling this scholarship gap. However, his discussion does not focus on her political thought and provides no in-depth discussion of her concept of virtue.

The concept of virtue holds a foundational place in the history of republican political thought. In his discussion of “republican liberalism” in *Civic Virtues*, Richard Dagger identifies three important threads of virtue within the development of that concept in political thought. Classical republican virtues are those reflected in the heroic societies in the Homeric tradition (military valor, courage, patriotism) and the ancient Roman republic (devotion to the common good, civic engagement, non-dependence, fear of corruption), as well as the four cardinal virtues identified by Plato – wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice – and Aristotle’s depictions of *arête*, or role-related specific excellence. Bourgeois or middle-class virtues are those associated with commonsense, pragmatic values of hard work, frugality, and delayed gratification.<sup>15</sup> Also within the concept of bourgeois virtue is a consideration of what is necessary to maintain republican government within the context of a growing commercial society. I develop this thread of virtue further into what I call “marketplace” virtue in early American political thought. Among the Christian virtues are faith, hope, charity, and respect for and submission to authority.<sup>16</sup> In this dissertation, I evaluate how Warren incorporates these three philosophical threads in her concept of virtue, as well as how she successfully synthesizes these views of virtue from political traditions some would argue are irreconcilable.<sup>17</sup> I then argue

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<sup>15</sup> This element of virtue is developed in the writings of Benjamin Franklin. See Franklin’s writings in *The Autobiography and Other Writings on Politics, Economics, and Virtue*, ed. Alan Houston (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Dagger, *Civic Virtues*, 195.

<sup>17</sup> For example, in his essay “The Originality of Machiavelli,” Isaiah Berlin argues that reconciliation of the ancient pagan and Christian philosophical traditions is impossible. See Berlin, “The Originality of

that Warren's conception of virtue and its place within her republican thought is her most significant contribution to American political thought. From her conception of virtue, we see how Warren develops a concept of republican jeremiad, connects virtue to America's millennial destiny, and establishes virtue as an essential, informal ordering principle within the republican framework of government.

Much scholarship in American political thought in the twentieth century argues that the American founding was influenced by classical thought and specifically by the republican tradition. Built on the intellectual framework of classical republicanism, early American conceptions of virtue incorporate many of these ancient ideals. J. G. A. Pocock in *The Machiavellian Moment* identifies the development of the concept of virtue in early America as rooted in "neoclassical politics." Pocock argues that this classical intellectual framework "provided both the ethos of the elites and the rhetoric of the upwardly mobile, and accounts for the singular cultural and intellectual homogeneity of the Founding Fathers and their generation."<sup>18</sup> This neoclassical formulation of virtue echoed that of the great Roman republics. It was a virtue tradition revived in Machiavelli's Florentine ideal and embodied in Montesquieu's republican spirit, and it would become the founding generation's ideological bulwark against the corruption of British rule. Wood argues

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Machiavelli," in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 25-79. Yet, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that these traditions are compatible in *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). Similarly, Gordon S. Wood argues that the American founders in the Revolutionary years saw no incompatibility in blending these traditions. See his *Creation of the American Republic*, 6-10.

<sup>18</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 507.



similarly that one of the animating intellectual influences (though certainly not the only one) on the formulation of pre-Revolutionary American thought was classical antiquity. American revolutionary writers drew on the works of Aristotle, Plato, Livy, and Cicero, as well as a diverse cross-section of the Western intellectual tradition. Thomas L. Pangle reminds us that “Americans of every rank and station were once prone to speak of politics in terms of virtue.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Pangle notes, “[T]he Founders thought of themselves as in some measure the heirs to a *tradition* of republican reflection on virtue, a tradition originating in Greco-Roman antiquity.”<sup>20</sup>

Yet, early American leaders brought to their political thinking ideas other than those of Aristotle, Cicero, and other ancient thinkers. The intellectual sources of American revolutionary thought “were profuse and various.”<sup>21</sup> Bernard Bailyn identifies among the ideological origins of the American Revolution classical antiquity, Enlightenment rationalism (Rousseau, Voltaire, and Montesquieu), British common law (Blackstone and Coke), English Whig political thought (Sidney, Locke, Milton, Trenchard and Gordon), and New England Puritanism (Edwards, Mather, and Mayhew).<sup>22</sup> Virtue is a theme that flows from and throughout these various traditions in a variety of forms.

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas L. Pangle, “Civic Virtue: The Founders’ Conception and the Traditional Conception,” in *Constitutionalism and Rights*, ed. Gary C. Bryner. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University; Albany, NY: Distributed by State University of New York Press, 1987), 105.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>21</sup> Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 22-54.

Alasdair MacIntyre and others note that the concept of virtue has changed over time, depending on political and historical context. Conceptual change goes hand in hand with political innovation, and the American founders were nothing if not politically innovative when faced with the opportunity to design their new republic.<sup>23</sup> The founders' thinking exemplifies this idea of conceptual change, with their understanding of virtue emerging from within their unique historical, cultural, and political milieu. Pocock refers to this phenomenon as "the Americanization of virtue."<sup>24</sup>

While there is little debate about the importance of virtue in the American founding, there remains room for discussion of its meaning. As Lance Banning suggests, "It is possible that we have not precisely understood or have not precisely managed to convey what even early Revolutionaries meant by 'virtue' – early Revolutionaries and their eighteenth-century sources. And if this is so, then we have pushed our pens into a thicket of confusions that might be best cleared away by clarifying the eighteenth-century usage of the term."<sup>25</sup> Warren's concept of virtue is a case in point. Her writings offer a view of virtue that both incorporates yet moves beyond classical republican virtue to encompass both bourgeois values of thrift, hard

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<sup>23</sup> An especially helpful discussion of conceptual change at the American founding is found in *Conceptual Change and the Constitution*, ed. Terence Ball and J. G. A. Pocock (Lawrence, KA: University of Kansas Press, 1988).

<sup>24</sup> See Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 506-532.

<sup>25</sup> Lance Banning, "Second Thoughts on Virtue and Revolutionary Thinking," in *Conceptual Change and the Constitution*, 195.

work, and simplicity, and a deep personal faith and understanding of Christian ideals. She derives her concept of virtue from many differing and seemingly divergent traditions, arriving at what in a letter to John Adams on the eve of the revolutionary crisis Warren calls “American virtue.”<sup>26</sup> It remains unexamined and thus unclear exactly what Warren means by “American virtue” and how these intellectual and philosophical sources specifically influence, inform, and explain her concept of virtue. Second and perhaps more important, it remains to be answered why early American republicans put so much stock and faith in virtue as essential to the perpetuation of the new republic: Why is virtue necessary? What role does it play in the maintenance of republican government? And conversely, what consequences follow if virtue is insufficient or non-existent?

In this dissertation I aim to pull from the “thicket of confusions” a clearer understanding of virtue at the American founding by evaluating the concept as formulated by one of the founding generation’s most important virtue thinkers, Mercy Otis Warren. Her political ideas incorporate classical republicanism and its concept of virtue, but they also reflect a broader “hybrid mixture” of different sources.<sup>27</sup> Warren presents virtue from both a public and private viewpoint, in terms of civic responsibility and personal obligation. She considers in her *History* the virtue exemplified by many of the historical figures in the Revolutionary War. She does this

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<sup>26</sup> Warren to John Adams March 10, 1776, in *Mercy Otis Warren: Selected Letters*, ed. Jeffrey H. Richards and Sharon M. Harris (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 70.

<sup>27</sup> Ruth H. Bloch, “The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America,” *Signs* 1, No. 1 (Autumn, 1987), 40.

as a role-related evaluation, reflecting the concept of virtue (*virtus*) in the Ancient Greek concept of *arête*, or human excellence attached to a specific role or function within the political community. For example, she considered whether military figures were virtuous according to standards of the Homeric tradition. Were they patriotic, brave, and valorous? But she also applies uncompromising moral terms when considering the virtue of an individual's actions and character. Were mercy and compassion extended when the situation merited, or were their military exploits merciless, brutal, and therefore, lacking in virtue? Even military prowess under fire needed to be tempered by universal moral standards. Brutality, cruelty, and senseless violence characterized a soldier of questionable virtue. In her evaluation, military exploits without compassion, mercy, and moderation are without virtue. She applauds the perseverance, simplicity of manners, and dedication of the colonial soldiers. As she applies a standard of virtue in her assessment of the figures of the Revolutionary War, a complex, multi-faceted concept emerges. Throughout Warren's writings we see a convergence of these classical republican, bourgeois, and Christian ideals of virtue into a single conception.

Warren expresses classical republican virtue as patriotic self-sacrifice and constant vigilance against corruption. Throughout her historical and political writings, and in correspondence with respected citizens of her day, Warren is an unwavering advocate of classical republican virtue. This aspect of her conception of virtue embodies an appreciation of the lessons of virtue and corruption derived from the Roman Republic and reflects a concern over what she sees as the dissipation of virtue

in the American character following the Revolutionary War. In her dramatic works, she champions courage, vigor, military valor, and patriotism. Like most classical republicans, the fall of Rome for Warren exemplified the importance of virtue in combating corruption and vice. She reminds the patriotic audience in her play *The Sack of Rome* (1790) to look to that ancient republic “to find the most sublime examples of valor and virtue,” warning that “luxurious vices” have “frequently corrupted, distracted, and ruined the best constituted republics.”<sup>28</sup> She reminds her audience with her characteristic republican flourish: “Empire decays when virtue is not the base, and doom’d to perish when the parts corrupt.”<sup>29</sup> These elements of her political thought seem a resounding echo of the “Machiavellian moment” identified in the American republican tradition. Yet, understanding one element of her concept of virtue fails to reflect its complex combination of other philosophical traditions.

Warren also expresses bourgeois, or what I also term “marketplace” virtue, throughout her writings. Her starting point for placing economic or commercial activities within her framework of virtue begins with an understanding of bourgeois or practical virtue reflected in the practical ethics and common sense values of early Americans. For example, Ben Franklin wrote in *Poor Richard’s Almanac* in 1737, “... there is no happiness then but in a virtuous and self-approving conduct.”<sup>30</sup> His

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<sup>28</sup> Warren, “Prologue,” *The Sack of Rome: A Tragedy in Five Acts*, in *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous 1790*, in *The Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren: Facsimile Reproductions Compiled and With an Introduction by Benjamin Franklin V* (Ann Arbor, MI: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 2002), 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Act V, Scene 3.

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other writings on Politics, Economics, and Virtue*, ed. Alan Houston (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 68-9.

table of virtues, although not exhaustive, is representative of bourgeois or common-sense virtue: temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility. But as a republican writer, Warren is concerned about avarice and luxury in the larger economic realm, especially as America became a wealthy and prosperous nation. To this concept of bourgeois virtue she adds checks on the vices of commerce – fair dealing in contracts, contentment with moderate levels of material goods, self-denial, delayed gratification, and a focus on economic growth that benefits the community rather than enriching the individual. Although this list of bourgeois virtues overlaps both the classical and Christian conceptions of virtue, it is a distinct thread in that it relies on reason rather than revelation, and is rooted in practical living and the American experience rather than a look to past republics. It provides a model of habits that lead to virtuous living, especially as the temptations of wealth and luxury grow. This concept of practical virtue was appealing to the eighteenth-century American mind because it developed the “ancient idea of habit into a truly effective tool for behavioral change.”<sup>31</sup> Warren regularly employs this thread of virtue in her writings, offering common-sense, motherly advice to her young adult son Winslow, warning him against idleness and profligacy, and similarly in her *History* when she applauds the resolution of the Revolutionary soldiers and praises the simplicity of American life.

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<sup>31</sup> Norman S. Fiering, “Benjamin Franklin and the Way to Virtue,” *American Quarterly* 30, No. 2 (Summer, 1978), 202.

Finally, Warren brings a Christian thread to her conception of virtue. Her deep personal faith provides an important source of private virtue that is reflected in her public expressions of virtue. Warren sees the power and truth of God as an essential check on personal vice. She also recognizes human reason given by God as another powerful protection of virtue and a moral guide for correct – or virtuous – behavior. This Christian thread in her political thought has many potential sources, including her deep New England Puritan roots and lifelong experience in two of the earliest Congregational churches in America. But Warren’s religious beliefs are not limited to private life; they also inform her concept of virtue, her republican framework, and her overall political philosophy.

This introduction presents a brief sketch of Warren’s concept of virtue, but it leaves many questions unanswered and deeper aspects of her thought to be explored in later chapters. Presenting a fuller understanding of Warren’s concept of virtue and its significance in American political thought is the primary objective of this dissertation.

### **Organization and Overview**

Before a concept within political thought can be evaluated, a larger theoretical context must be established. Mercy Otis Warren’s conception of virtue falls within a much larger discourse of political concepts in republican political theory. Chapter 1 looks at the history of virtue as a concept and its significance in republican thought. This provides the groundwork for my view that Warren draws from universal aspects

of the concept of virtue, and then adapts her concept to the prevailing political circumstances and her republican ideology. In her concept of virtue, she conserves elements of an inherited virtue tradition, but also creates a unique concept reflecting her political, religious, and intellectual context. A significant portion of this chapter will consider predominant views of virtue at the time to evaluate what other early American political thinkers had to say about virtue. Among these perspectives will be the two very different views of virtue of John Adams and Ben Franklin. The goal of this chapter is to describe the virtue landscape Warren both inherited and inhabited.

The dissertation will then turn specifically to the life and thought of Mercy Otis Warren. Chapter 2 introduces Warren, sketching her biography then delving into the various intellectual influences in her life. She was remarkably well-read for a woman of her day and was immersed in an eighteenth-century Massachusetts highly charged with competing intellectual, political, and theological ideas. This chapter takes a closer look at what she read, based in large part on the profuse literary references in what she wrote. I pay careful attention to patterns in that reading dossier: What types of works most appealed to her? What works did she cite most often? I also consider her context and the intellectual influences around her. What was her family ethos? The church was a central feature in early colonial life. What teaching did Warren receive while attending West Parish Congregational Church in Barnstable and later in Plymouth's First Church? This sets a foundation for further exploration of her political thought and concept of virtue: What parts of her long faith tradition did she translate into her political thought? What was valued within her



community? What were the influences in colonial Massachusetts, and how were they reflected in Warren's writings and thought? Historical scholarship paints a rich picture of colonial Massachusetts and helps to identify important intellectual influences on Warren.

Warren had a well-developed republican ideology. Chapter 3 reconstructs the framework of her political thought, focusing on her fundamental assumptions, as well as the principles and concepts that animate her republican vision. This analysis identifies the theoretical context for understanding the importance that she places on republican virtue and serves as the reference point for evaluating her development of virtue as a concept. This chapter will move from evaluating the overall political thought she develops throughout her writings, to a more specific consideration of how this informs her Antifederalist opposition to the new constitution. Here the focus is the intersection of her republican ideals and praxis, or political practice. The specifics she offers in *Observations on the New Constitution* help us understand what form her republican vision would take.

Chapters 4 through 6 present a detailed evaluation of Warren's conception of virtue, with one predominant thread explored in each chapter. Warren embraces aspects of Roman virtue, but also emphasizes common-sense middle-class values and a commitment to her Puritan beliefs. Chapter 4 looks at classical virtue in her writing. Chapter 5 evaluates the development of bourgeois virtue necessary to an emerging commercial context and considers whether Warren is able to adapt her conception of

virtue to meet the commercial challenges that she identifies in the young republic.

Chapter 6 presents the Christian thread in her virtue thinking.

This three-thread analysis is helpful in understanding the richness and complexity of Warren's conception of virtue, and shows how her conception is unique in republican thought. Still, it is important to note that this is only an analytical tool. Warren herself made no such distinction between these threads of virtue, nor did she consciously synthesize or weave these threads together. In this analysis I offer an explanation of what Warren was doing with her conception of virtue. From our modern perspective, we identify tensions within her conception of virtue, especially between classical and Christian virtue. But what may be a problem for us was not a problem for Warren. Looking back at her conception of virtue allows us to identify and categorize these individual threads and influences, but Warren never drew such distinctions nor does she identify problematic tensions between the threads or intellectual traditions. The analysis of her conception of virtue in these chapters provides the basis for three arguments in the three succeeding chapters about the conception<sup>32</sup> of virtue in Warren's republican political thought:

1) Warren employs these three predominant threads of virtue into a coherent, unique conception of American virtue at the Founding. In an analysis of Warren it becomes clear that to divorce virtue from Christian beliefs and religion is to rob it of

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<sup>32</sup> In political thought, a distinction is drawn between a political concept (such as justice, freedom, virtue, citizenship, and others) and individual conceptions of a given concept (the concept of justice can be specified as conceptions of distributive, commutative, or retributive justice). For a discussion of the distinction between political concepts and political conceptions, see Gerald F. Gaus, *Political Concepts and Political Theories* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 30-32.

its corrective vigor within republican thought. Clearly Warren marries virtue and Christianity in her conception of virtue, and her thinking represents a reconstruction of virtue after Machiavelli. I argue here that what Machiavelli wrote out of republican virtue Warren writes back in. She unapologetically marries classical republican ideals and her Christian religion and finds no contradiction in her synthesis of the three threads: classical, Christian, and bourgeois. Here I will consider the mechanisms for Warren's conception of virtue: The home and family as inculcators of virtue in children, elected leaders as models of virtue, and citizenry and self-government as expressions of virtue. Her conception of virtue is not limited to political life, but includes private and other aspects of public life as arenas for virtue.

2) For Warren, virtue is a fundamental ordering principle of public and private life. The preeminent place of virtue in her republican thought permeates her writings. Her appeals to citizens leading up to the Revolution resound with calls to virtue. Her evaluation of the Revolutionary War is sifted through her conception of virtue. Her hopes for America's future can only be realized by citizens acting virtuously in their public and private lives. In this way, virtue is for Warren the fundamental ordering principle for American society. Within this context of republican order, Warren also conceptualizes virtue as the necessary condition for political liberty and as the preeminent concept within the constellation of republican ideals. Here I argue that for Warren virtue makes other connected republican concepts possible. Political life without virtue devolves into tyranny. Commercial activity predicated solely on self-interest and accumulation unchecked by virtue leads to avarice, corruption, and the

eventual demise of the republic. Private life without virtue leads to personal ruin.

Ultimately, both order and liberty are impossible without virtue.

3) Finally, in Warren's thinking, America will be unable to achieve its millennial destiny without virtue. Chapter 9 considers Warren's millennial themes within the larger context of American millennialism, from that offered at the time by religious figures to contemporary scholars, including Ruth H. Bloch in *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought: 1756-1800*, and others. Warren's republican vision is animated by political possibility and political promise – both of which can only be realized with virtue. For Warren, virtue is essential to understanding America's past, its Revolutionary present, and to achieving its glorious republican destiny.

The concluding chapter places Mercy Otis Warren within the centuries-old republican tradition and considers the importance of her thinking within her unique political context and within the life of the American republic after the founding. Upon reconsidering her political thought, a vindication of Warren's insistence on virtue is warranted. Looking back, is it possible that Warren's arguments against the institutions and constitutional arrangements in the new U.S. Constitution were prophetic in identifying the political problems that would arise in the life of the new republic? Also important to consider is whether her concept of virtue is relevant to today's political debates and problems. In other words, does virtue still matter? After reflecting on Mercy Otis Warren's life, thought, and virtue writings, what can we learn, what can we take forward, and what merits a closer look? Have we as a nation

moved beyond our need for virtue? What are the implications if we remain a political society “after virtue”? Is it possible that our need for virtue is even greater now than when Warren reminded readers during the Revolutionary War that “virtue *only* made them brave and free”?<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Warren, “The Genius of America weeping the absurd Follies of the Day,” in *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, 247 [italics added].

## CHAPTER 1

### What Is Virtue?

*[G]ive me but virtue,  
That sun-shine of the soul—enough—I'm happy.  
Rapatio, *The Adulateur*<sup>34</sup>*

For the American Revolutionary generation, virtue was a prerequisite for republican government. They believed that “indeed, the very existence of a republic depended upon the people’s virtue.”<sup>35</sup> Early American republicans, from John Adams to Thomas Paine to Benjamin Franklin, pointed to the need for virtue among the citizenry and its political leaders. Virtue made possible an escape from foreign tyranny, and once independence was achieved, it provided the means to resist encroaching corruption and ultimately for sustaining the republic. “The concept of virtue ... was republicanism’s integrating force.”<sup>36</sup> The Revolutionary generation envisioned republicanism as the ideal form of government for their new nation and virtue its sustaining spirit. Virtue provided an essential check against the persistent threat of corruption. Only with virtue could tyranny be overthrown and republican government established and sustained. As a leading Revolutionary intellectual, Mercy Otis Warren embraced the concept of virtue as her predominant political ideal throughout her writings and her lifetime.

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<sup>34</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur, a Tragedy*, in *The Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, Act III, Scene 2.

<sup>35</sup> Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 92.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Vetterli and Gary Bryner, *In Search of the Republic: Public Virtue and the Roots of American Government* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996), 47.

Warren and her fellow republican Revolutionaries drew from a long tradition of virtue within republican thought, dating back to ancient Greece. The career of virtue as a concept is our starting point for understanding the early American view of virtue and Warren's place within that tradition. The career of the concept of virtue spans the history of political thought, and important traditions and conceptual developments during that history informed and shaped Revolutionary American virtue and Warren's conception of virtue; specifically her view of the classical heroic and Aristotelian views; the Christian view of virtue beginning with the rise of Christianity, developed within the classical synthesis of the writings of Aquinas during the twelfth century and carried in Christian thought in the early American years; the challenges to Christian virtue in the neo-republican writings of Machiavelli; and the transformation of virtue in the seventeenth century in the English commonwealth or country tradition.<sup>37</sup> Virtue in the early American context reflects in varying degrees these many intellectual traditions. But also important for the evaluation of Warren's conception of virtue is a consideration of important variations and representations of these virtue themes within the early American context. These variations are reflected in John Adams' republican virtue, Benjamin Franklin's practical virtue, and discussions of virtue in Warren's Congregational context. Within this discussion of virtue, I identify points of commonality and divergence within Warren's conception of virtue. I argue that what makes Warren's concept of virtue most unique in American republican thought is her synthesis of

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<sup>37</sup> The term "country ideology" is generally attributed to the writings of J.G.A. Pocock, specifically his development of this ideological tradition in *The Machiavellian Moment*, especially pp. 406-409.

three threads of virtue thought: classical, Christian, and bourgeois virtue. I argue that by incorporating these three predominant threads of virtue Warren conserves essential elements of an inherited virtue tradition, but also modifies the concept of virtue to address the specific problems arising in her political, religious, and intellectual context. Warren offers virtue not only as the foundation for a stable, enduring political system, but also as a powerful ordering principle for an emerging republic.

### The Career of the Concept of Virtue

“‘Virtue’ is a word with a long history and a great many meanings.”<sup>38</sup> The use of the word dates back to the Latin word *virtus*, meaning “moral strength, manliness, valor, excellence, worth,” and even earlier, tracing its origin to the Latin root *vir*, meaning “man” or “hero.” From these earliest sources we derive our words “virile” as in “virility” and “virulent,” as well as “virtuous,” a term today often associated with female purity or chastity.<sup>39</sup> The ancient republicans employed virtue in two ways. The first view of virtue in the classical sense is seen as heroic virtue or what Alasdair MacIntyre calls “virtues in the heroic societies.”<sup>40</sup> Reflected in the epic writings of Homer and later in those of Virgil and Ovid, *arête* or excellence was associated with

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<sup>38</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 41.

<sup>39</sup> Generally speaking, the term virtue as employed in the republican sense at the founding did not include a gendered form of virtue. Early republican writers were concerned about virtue becoming “effeminate” rather than manly. Warren does present a gendered view of virtue in two later dramas, *The Sack of Rome* (1790) and *The Ladies of Castile* (1790), and in her personal correspondence with women, but gender does not constitute a significant element of her political concept of virtue.

<sup>40</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 121. See MacIntyre for a helpful discussion of the history of the concept of virtue.



military prowess, courage, patriotism, and willing self-sacrifice for one's city-state or country. The term *arête* also was reflected in athletic excellence, often recognized and rewarded in public games or competitions. Performing in an excellent way was seen to contribute to the maintenance of community and, as it developed, the polis.

Women were most virtuous in demonstration of pre-marital chastity, fidelity toward their husbands, their families, and their community. Heroic virtue established a shared or universal standard by which soldiers could be judged according to ideals of courage. The virtuous soldier gained fame and respect within the community and eternal glory through the epic retelling of his or her courageous exploits. In these pre-Christian societies, exploits of heroic virtue were the means to achieving immortality. In this sense of virtue, "A heroic man is what he does."<sup>41</sup> Or as MacIntyre explains further: "To judge a man is therefore to judge his actions. By performing actions of a particular kind in a particular situation a man gives warrant for judgment of his virtues and vices; for the virtues just are those qualities which sustain a free man in his role and manifest themselves in those actions which his role requires."<sup>42</sup>

This concept of ancient virtue reflects a complex constitutive relationship between virtue and the social structure of the ancient polis. *Arête* or virtue both defined and sustained the heroic society and also was defined by that society itself.

In the second view, Aristotle and the classical Greek philosophers defined more widely the notion of *arête* as moral excellence, and it began to be translated as

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<sup>41</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 122.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

“virtue.” Employing a role-related view of virtue, a citizen who demonstrated excellence in a craft or public endeavor possessed virtue. In this broader role-related concept, virtue referred “to the disposition to act in accordance with the standards and expectations that define the role or roles a person performs.”<sup>43</sup> In the classical sense, virtue was typically placed within the public or civic realm, giving rise to the term “civic virtue.” A virtuous citizen participated in the affairs of the polity, considered the *res publica* or common good ahead of self-interest, and was knowledgeable in political matters. Those who did not participate were *idiotes*, or in common parlance, idiots. Unlike the narrower role-related virtue of the heroic Greek societies, in this later stage of Greek political thought virtue was “strikingly detached from that of any *particular* social role”<sup>44</sup> and standards of virtue applied more widely to all citizens. From this broader definition arose a constellation of terms associated with virtue: wisdom, courage, temperance, justice, (the four cardinal virtues), and friendship.

In Aristotle’s view, virtue was a possession gained through experience, reinforced by habit, and exercised by the good citizen. It needed to be inculcated and habituated, both taught and practiced. Virtue is both constitutive and city-state specific. For example, the constitution and political institutions of Athens both created and required a certain type of citizen, who in turn engaged in a specific expression of virtue. What constituted a good or virtuous Athenian citizen was different from a Spartan citizen or a Cretan citizen. Pericles’s *Funeral Oration* (430

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<sup>43</sup>Dagger, *Civic Virtues*, 14.

<sup>44</sup>MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 132.

B.C.) offered a famous view of Athenian virtue. Its citizens were well-trained and courageous in battle, yet were well-educated and lovers of beauty. They were dedicated to public service and eschewed private interest. Athenians make friends “by conferring, not by receiving favors.” Athenians have “a peculiar power of thinking before we act and of acting too, whereas other men are courageous from ignorance but hesitate upon reflection.”<sup>45</sup> Pericles further applauded the virtue of his fellow citizens: “An Athenian citizen does not neglect the state because he takes care of his own household; and even those of us who are engaged in business have a very fair idea of politics. We alone regard a man who takes no interest in public affairs, not as a harmless, but as a useless character; and if few of us are originators, we are all sound judges of a policy.”<sup>46</sup>

Athenian virtue drew little distinction between civic virtue and private character: a good citizen must be a good man, and a good man a good citizen. In this constitutive view of virtue, the form of polity both demands and creates the requisite virtue in its citizens. In this Aristotelian view, civic virtue referred to the excellence of a citizen in his role as citizen. In this classical context, “Someone exhibits civic virtue when he or she does what a citizen is supposed to do.”<sup>47</sup> The concept of virtue was closely related to the shared view of human *telos*, or purpose. The Athenian view of *telos* was reflected in their idea of *eudaimonia*, often translated as “happiness,” but

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<sup>45</sup> Pericles, “Funeral Oration,” in Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., revised, vol. 1, translated by Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), II.40 [spelling modernized].

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, II.40.

<sup>47</sup> Dagger, *Civic Virtues*, 13.

more accurately thought of as human flourishing. In classical republican thought the antithesis of virtue is corruption, an ever-present threat to the stability of republics. Corruption eroded the community and citizen virtue, threatening the very framework and existence of the polis. As Pericles reminded his Athenian audience, virtue demanded dedication to the good of the polis, to the point of men sacrificing their lives for the republic. Luxury, apolitical apathy, self-interest and other vices threatened the survival of the Athenian city-state. Corruption advanced personal interest at the expense of the *res publica*. Virtue, then, was the expectation that all members of the republic are mindful first of the good of the whole.

The classical emphasis on patriotic or manly virtue is clear, yet some historians argue that the Greek tradition “also included a concern for ‘moral virtue,’ which was to include, yet surpass civic virtue.” For example Richard Vetterli and Gary Bryner note, “Aristotle’s discussion of the man imbued with ‘greatness of soul’ describes a personal virtue ... Ultimately, a life of virtue produces a life that subordinates human concerns to the divine.” This emphasis on moral virtue “was of primary importance for the assimilation of classical ideas by Christian political philosophers.”<sup>48</sup> Cicero made explicit this moral element, connecting virtue to natural law derived from a universal or divine source. Any conception of the good considers how a person should behave and why. Aristotle’s ethics established a moral or ethical standard by which individuals participated in civic duties as citizens and governed themselves in private life.

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<sup>48</sup> Vetterli and Bryner, *In Search of the Republic*, 20-21.

Although the ancients had no access to an explicitly Christian conception of virtue, a merging of the supernatural or eternal within their concept is evident. A case in point is the thinking of pre-Christian political thinker Cicero.<sup>49</sup> While Aristotle's view of man within political society pointed to an early conception of natural law emphasizing the pursuit of knowing a pre-existent and objective good discoverable through reason,<sup>50</sup> it was not until the writings of the Stoics, particularly those of Cicero, that this conceptualized view was connected to virtue and natural law. Cicero's understanding of natural law informed his views of morality and civil law, allowing him to rationalize and universalize the early conception of virtue.

To understand Cicero's conflation of virtue and natural law a good starting point is Cicero's definition of the law in *The Republic*:

... law in the proper sense is right reason in harmony with nature. It is spread through the whole human community, unchanging and eternal, calling people to their duty by its commands and deterring them from wrong-doing by its prohibitions. When it addresses a good man, its commands and prohibitions are never in vain; but those same commands and prohibitions have no effect on the wicked. This law cannot be countermanded, nor can it be in any way amended, nor can it be totally rescinded. We cannot be exempted from this law by any decree of the Senate or the people; nor do we need anyone else to

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<sup>49</sup> Tracy F. Munsil, "The Ciceronian Conflation of Law and Morality within the Context of Natural Law – and Why It Matters," 22 Oct. 2007, unpublished paper.

<sup>50</sup> Aristotle distinguishes between natural law and conventional law in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book V:7.

expound or explain it. There will not be one such law in Rome and another in Athens, one now and another in the future, but all peoples at all times will be embraced by a single and eternal and unchangeable law; and there will be, as it were, one lord and master of us all – the god who is the author, proposer and interpreter of that law.<sup>51</sup>

This passage is worth a closer look if we are to understand Cicero's conception of natural law or *ius naturale* and its role as a universal standard for human law and virtue. First, Cicero equates "law in the proper sense" (often translated as "true law") with "right reason" rooted in and in harmony with nature. Like Plato and Aristotle before him, Cicero believes that man is distinct from other creatures because of his ability to reason. In this way, Cicero views man as "a sharer in reason; this enables him to perceive consequences; to comprehend the causes of things, their precursors and their antecedents."<sup>52</sup> Cicero sees man as able to reason with foresight as well as capable of understanding the consequences of his action, thus identifying man as capable of making moral decisions within the bounds of natural law. In his account of the nature of man, Cicero also notes that "the search for truth and its investigations are, above all, peculiar to man."<sup>53</sup> As we see here and throughout his writings, the existence of objective truth discoverable by man through reason forms the foundation

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<sup>51</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *The Republic*, in *The Republic and The Laws*, trans. Niall Rudd (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1998), III.33.

<sup>52</sup> Cicero, *On Duties*, in *Cicero: On Duties*, ed. Miriam Tamara Griffin and E. Margaret Atkins (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), I.11.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, I.13.

of Cicero's conception of the natural law. We see in this also a defining interrelation between the law of nature, the nature of man, and virtue, with both the nature of man and morality being derived from and informed by the natural law.

According to the definition of "true law" from *The Republic*, Cicero presents natural law as an objective, immutable standard of truth that is known through man's reason. It is not limited to one best form of political society or constitution, nor is it found in only one location. Rather it is "spread through the whole human community, unchanging and eternal."<sup>54</sup> This immutable and eternal character places "true law" or the natural law outside the reach of the political machinations of man, beyond the rule of tyrants and despots, and beyond the emotional sway of public opinion. As Cicero notes, "This law cannot be countermanded, nor can it be in any way amended, nor can it be totally rescinded."<sup>55</sup> Natural law exists as objective truth to be discovered by man through reason. Likewise, the law of nature is universal, applying to all men at all times and in all situations and locations. As Cicero states, "There will not be one such law in Rome and another in Athens, one now and another in the future, but all peoples at all times will be embraced by a single and eternal and unchangeable law."<sup>56</sup> For Cicero, natural law is the truth man is peculiarly suited to seek through his reasoning capabilities. Natural law is something discovered by man, not created by him.

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<sup>54</sup> Cicero, *Republic*, III.33.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

Consistent with earlier Platonic thinkers, Cicero argues that objective true forms exist prior to and outside of man and are discoverable by man through reason. For instance, in *The Republic* Plato identifies the four cardinal virtues: wisdom, justice, courage, and moderation.<sup>57</sup> These are pre-existing, objective moral virtues that man discovers through reason. Cicero echoes Plato's four virtues in his discussion of what is honorable in human life: "Everything that is honourable arises from one of four parts: it is involved either with the perception of truth and with ingenuity; or with preserving fellowship among men, with assigning to each his own, and with faithfulness to agreements one has made; or with the greatness and strength of a lofty and unconquered spirit; or with order and limited in everything that is said and done (modesty and restraint are included here)."<sup>58</sup> In this passage we see reflected Plato's four cardinal virtues, but Cicero ties them directly to the nature of man: "... we are eager to see or to hear or to learn, considering that the discovery of obscure or wonderful things is necessary for a blessed life. Consequently, we understand that what is true, simple and pure is most fitted to the nature of man."<sup>59</sup>

In both the Platonic and Ciceronian sense the cardinal virtues are those most "true, simple, and pure." Yet, this is a twist on the earlier teleological view of man, which holds that man's life should be aimed at knowing and achieving the good in a functional sense. Moral virtues or *arêtai* are those excellences which allow one to

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<sup>57</sup> Plato identifies the four cardinal virtues in *The Republic*, 427e-428a.

<sup>58</sup> Cicero, *On Duties*, I.15.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, I.13.



fulfill his/her role within society, and thus necessary for citizens to achieve the good life. Cicero develops this beyond Plato and Aristotle by arguing that those true things, discovered through reason, determine the “blessed life” of man. The “true, simple, and pure” things are in accord with the nature of man and are knowable through reason. Cicero further argues that the “power of nature and reason” directs man to understand that “constancy and order must be preserved, and much more so, in one’s decisions and one’s deeds.”<sup>60</sup> Cicero here identifies human behavior and morality with man’s nature and his reason. We see in this example of the cardinal virtues the Ciceronian conflation of law (or right reason) and morality (one’s decisions and deeds) within the context of natural law.

Cicero specifically defines virtue as “a habit of the mind, consistent with nature, and moderation, and reason.”<sup>61</sup> But unlike Aristotle’s formulation, Ciceronian virtue is connected to a supernatural god: “Therefore, virtue is the same in human and god, and is found in no other species beside; and virtue is nothing else than nature perfected to its highest level.”<sup>62</sup> For Cicero natural law imbues virtue with universality. He also sees achieving virtue as within human capability in a universal sense and not tied to a given polity: “There is no person of any nation who cannot

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<sup>60</sup> Cicero, *On Duties*, I.14.

<sup>61</sup> Cicero, *Treatise on Rhetorical Invention (De Inventione)*, in *Treatise on Rhetorical Invention and Treatise on Topics*, ed. C. D. Yonge (Digireads.com Publishing, 2009), 2.53.

<sup>62</sup> Cicero, *The Laws*, I.25.

reach virtue with the aid of a guide.”<sup>63</sup> Unlike Plato and Aristotle before him, Cicero ties virtue to natural law and a universal standard of behavior outside of man.

The view of virtue as a moral term is expanded in the thought of Cicero, who “invented ‘moralis’ to translate” the Greek word *ethikos*. In Cicero’s thought, *moralis* “means ‘pertaining to character’ where a man’s character is nothing other than his set dispositions to behave systematically in one way rather than another, to lead one particular kind of life.”<sup>64</sup> In Cicero’s view, the moral or virtuous life is consistent with the universal standard of natural law. Looking closely again at Cicero’s definition of law from *The Republic*, natural law both embodies and defines morality by directing right and wrong behavior. Cicero describes the function of the true law as “calling people to their duty by its commands and deterring them from wrongdoing by its prohibitions.”<sup>65</sup> Cicero includes within his definition of natural law the essence of moral law. He gives it the force of command and punishment typically associated with law itself. As Cicero presents it, the character of natural law directing right behavior is morality. The truth embodied in the natural law directs an individual’s decisions and actions, which again is morality. In other words, in Cicero’s conception, part of the definition of the natural law is morality. In *The Laws* Cicero draws the distinction between natural and civil law, with civil law occupying a

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<sup>63</sup> Cicero, *The Laws*, I. 30.

<sup>64</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 18.

<sup>65</sup> Cicero, *Republic*, III.3.3.

“small, narrow, corner” of natural law as a whole.<sup>66</sup> This distinction places Cicero’s definition of morality within the context of natural law, not determined by civil law. Civil law, by contrast, must reflect the natural law.

Cicero appeals to a divine source for the natural law near the end of his definition of law by stating: “... and there will be, as it were, one lord and master of us all – the god who is the author, proposer and interpreter of that law.”<sup>67</sup> This identification of a divine authority, or divine lawgiver, outside of man is repeated and expanded by later natural law theorists, particularly Thomas Aquinas.<sup>68</sup> By connecting the natural law to divinity, Cicero assumes that the law takes on the character of that divinity. He also notes (and develops further in *The Laws*) this connection between the natural law and god, both as sharing in knowledge of natural law.

Cicero views the natural law as universal and binding on all polities. “We cannot be exempted from this law by any decree of the Senate or the people; nor do we need anyone else to expound or explain it.”<sup>69</sup> Virtue provides a check on unjust or tyrannical rule, and it is binding on all individuals, whether good or wicked. Although it is pre-existent and knowable, whether man or a government chooses to discover or accept it is another issue. A good man follows its prohibitions and commands. By

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<sup>66</sup> Cicero, *Laws*, I.17.

<sup>67</sup> Cicero, *Republic*, III.33.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Aquinas specifically roots natural law within the Christian theistic tradition in his discussion of the law in *Summa Theologica*.

<sup>69</sup> Cicero, *Republic*, III.33

tying moral virtue to natural law, Cicero rationalizes the virtues identified by Plato by interweaving the nature and reason of man, the virtues found in nature, and man's purpose of living the good life.

Understanding the ancient concept of virtue is the starting point for evaluating American republican virtue and Warren's concept of virtue in particular. Important aspects of this classical concept of virtue carry forward into the Revolutionary era: the emphasis on patriotic or heroic virtue, the need for a virtuous citizenry to maintain the republic, the commitment to the public good, and the contrast between virtue and corruption. Virtue as a universal moral guide, as seen in Cicero, is evident as well in early American virtue. Still, other aspects of virtue seen in the American context are not adequately explained by looking only to ancient origins, necessitating further inquiry into the career of the concept of virtue.

From these ancient origins the concept of virtue underwent fundamental change within the context of Christianity: "The rise of Christianity to a position of religious dominance within the Roman empire from the time of Augustus at the beginning of the first century C.E. to that of the first Christian emperor Constantine early in the fourth century, certainly had immense political consequences, theoretical as well as practical."<sup>70</sup> These consequences were particularly evident in the transformation of the concept of virtue during this time. The predominant ancient or pagan view of *telos*, achieving *eudaimonia*, was supplanted by a Christian normative

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<sup>70</sup> Michael J. White, *Political Philosophy: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford, UK: One World Publications, 2003), 57.

anthropology or human *telos*: “Christianity holds two doctrines concerning the true function, or end, or good of human persons: (i) that function is the attainment of a kind of existence (salvation: eternal life in communion with God and in the fellowship of the saved) that transcends any sort of state or activity achievable in this mortal, biological life; and (ii) that function is not something that human beings can achieve or attain by their own (individual or social) efforts but, rather, is a gift bestowed by the grace of God.”<sup>71</sup> Although Aquinas shares Aristotle’s view that the ultimate human good is “happiness,” how human beings achieve that end differs significantly. In Aristotle’s view, the human end of *eudaimonia* is “attainable, in varying degrees, by some combination of natural innate and developed human capacities (*aretai*),” yet in fulfilling this purpose, human beings “in no way transcend our mortal human biological and social life.”<sup>72</sup> Aristotle had no access to Christian ideals in his pre-Christian context, thus they are not to be found in his view of human *telos*. Aquinas sought to reconcile the writings of Aristotle with the Christian traditions of the twelfth century. “It is this linking of a biblical historical perspective with an Aristotelian one in the treatment of the virtues, which is the unique achievement of the middle ages.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> White, *Political Philosophy*, 64.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>73</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 180.

Aquinas often is described as a Christian Aristotelian thinker<sup>74</sup> and his writings as a “synthesis of Aristotle and Christianity.”<sup>75</sup> Yet, “as a Christian Aquinas cannot accept as the sum and substance of normative anthropology Aristotle’s naturalistic account of the human function or ultimate end, which of course also serves as Aristotle’s account of *eudaimonia* or happiness.”<sup>76</sup> In his reconciliation of Aristotelian thought and his own religious tradition, “Aquinas sees the *ultimate* human function or end, and *perfect* happiness, as transcending the Aristotelian naturalistic account of the human function and of human happiness but also as being continuous with that natural function.”<sup>77</sup> Aquinas adopts Aristotle’s teleological framework, but places it within his Christian tradition, adding a transcendent dimension to human *telos*. Imperfect happiness is attainable by human beings in a temporal context, but for Aquinas *perfect* happiness can only be attained in heaven. This ultimate human end “represents the marriage of an essentially Aristotelian normative anthropology with the extravagant Christian normative anthropology to which Aquinas remains fully committed.”<sup>78</sup> <sup>79</sup> Aquinas’s synthesis of Aristotelian and Christian *telos* informs his view of virtue, or what he calls “the virtues.”

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<sup>74</sup> For example, see Thomas G. West, “Leo Strauss and the Founding,” *The Review of Politics* 53, No. 1, Special Issue on the Thought of Leo Strauss (Winter, 1991), pp. 157-172.

<sup>75</sup> White, *Political Philosophy*, 94.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>79</sup> White uses the phrase “extravagant Christian normative anthropology” to describe the Christian *telos* “to know [God our Creator and Redeemer], to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with

Like Cicero in the ancient tradition, Aquinas develops his conception of the virtues within a larger framework of natural law, which is rooted in a more fundamental concept of eternal law of God that “establishes the objective natures or functions of all natural kinds of things in the universe.”<sup>80</sup> Aquinas’s natural law serves as an “independent and objective moral pattern for making, and as a moral standard for assessing human law.”<sup>81</sup> Aquinas’s concept of virtue arises from both natural law and its underlying view of the purpose of man. “[A]ccording to the natural law, a life well-lived is one in which reason governs every level of human functioning so that it makes its proper contribution to the overall human good.”<sup>82</sup> The virtues, then, are universal standards of behavior, knowable through right reason and consistent with natural law and God’s eternal law.

Aquinas’s discussion of virtue is found in the second volume of his *Summa Theologica*, Questions 55-67. He defines virtue as “the perfecting of a capability.”<sup>83</sup> Human beings exercise the virtues in the attempt to achieve happiness. Aquinas’s discussion focuses, in a way similar to Plato and Cicero, on four cardinal virtues (wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice), to which he adds three specifically

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Him for ever in heaven,” referring to the universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. White presents further discussion of Christian *telos* and the importance of Christian theology in the development of political thought in *Political Philosophy*, chapters five and six.

<sup>80</sup> White, *Political Philosophy*, 99.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Williams, “Introduction,” *Aquinas, Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xvi.

<sup>83</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, in *Aquinas, Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, I:II q. 55, a 1.

Christian or theological virtues – faith, hope, and love (or charity). For Aquinas virtues are “dispositions” necessary to human life for three reasons: 1) “so that we might be *consistent* in what we do”; 2) “so that we can *readily* do things in the proper way”; and 3) “so that we might *take pleasure* in completing things in the proper way [emphasis in original].”<sup>84</sup> Aquinas sees the moral virtues and practical wisdom as necessary for happiness, yet they are insufficient to achieve the perfect happiness that Aquinas sees as consisting in the vision of God in heaven. This supernatural *telos* is beyond what human beings can achieve on their own through the exercise of moral virtues and practical wisdom. They need the aid of God in order to achieve it through the infusion of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Aquinas argues that God infuses these theological virtues into the individual believer at the point of salvation. These infused virtues cannot be developed by habit or human effort, or known through reason, as are the natural virtues identified by Aristotle. The theological virtues are essential to achieving perfect happiness, which is only possible with God.

Ellis Sandoz argues that Aquinas’s synthesis of classical and Christian virtue was transmitted into American colonial discourse in the Puritan tradition. Sandoz argues: “To a greater or lesser degree, this generalized synthesis of biblical revelation and Aristotelian and Scholastic philosophy passes through [Richard] Hooker to Jonathan Edwards in eighteenth-century America, and along the way astute republican writers such as John Milton and Algernon Sidney, to form the spiritual and

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<sup>84</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I:II q. 55, a. 1.



intellectual matrix of their theoretical argumentation and conviction.”<sup>85</sup> The colonists’ emphasis on natural law similarly is drawn from religious sources. Sandoz argues for the centrality of Christian thought in the development of the republican ideals embraced by the Revolutionary generation:

the principal *religious* springs of republican politics are: a paradoxical sense of the dignity yet frailty of every human being as potentially *imago dei*; individual and political liberty fostered through a rule of law grounded in “the nature and being of man” as “the gift of God and nature”; government and laws based on consent of the people; and above all, resistance to tyranny, whether ecclesiastical or political, in the name of truth, justice, and righteousness. These key elements were directly and essentially fostered by the prevalent ... Christianity of the eighteenth century and by a citizenry well-schooled in them by devoted Bible reading, from the pulpit, and through an enormous amount of controversial literature made widely accessible by the printing press.<sup>86</sup>

These universal moral ideals can be traced from Cicero well into the writings of Augustine and Aquinas, and into the early days of the American Republic.

But a potent secular thread of thought arises in opposition to sectarian or Christian virtue. Political theorists generally date the break of modern political

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<sup>85</sup> Ellis Sandoz, *Republicanism, Religion, and the Soul of America* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 11.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

thought with the preceding Christian tradition to the sixteenth-century Renaissance republican writings of Niccolo' Machiavelli (1469-1527). "Machiavelli rejected the incorporation of Christian virtues into the classical concept of virtue."<sup>87</sup> In the *Discourses on Livy* (1517), Machiavelli famously argued "that Christian faith had made men 'weak,' easy prey to 'wicked men,' since they 'think more about enduring their injustices than about avenging them.'"<sup>88</sup> Machiavelli further stated: "Our [Roman Catholic] religion has glorified humble and contemplative more than active men. It has then placed the highest good in humility, abjectness, and contempt of things human. ... And if our religion asks that you have strength in yourself, it wishes you to be capable more of suffering than of doing something strong."<sup>89</sup> By contrast, republics require courage, "a greatness of spirit, strength of body, and all other things capable of making men very strong."<sup>90</sup> Machiavelli argued that this emphasis within Christianity on meekness had "rendered the world weak and given it in prey to criminal man, who can manage it securely, seeing that the collectivity of men, so as to go to paradise, think more of enduring their beatings than of avenging them." The Christian ideals of humility and patience are harmful to republics because they

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<sup>87</sup> Vetterli and Bryner, *In Search of the Republic*, 22.

<sup>88</sup> Isaiah Berlin, "The Originality of Machiavelli," in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (New York: The Viking Press, 1955, 1979), 47.

<sup>89</sup> Niccolo' Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), II.2,

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, II.2.

embolden enemies, who see these traits as evidence of cowardice and weakness.<sup>91</sup>

Machiavelli saw Christians as being so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good to republican government.

Machiavelli looked back to the ancients for a concept of civic virtue to supplant the Christian virtue of his day. He emphasized the virtue of ancient Rome over that of the Greeks such as Plato and Aristotle. His emphasis was on recovering what he saw as admirable within the ancient heroic virtue tradition. For Machiavelli “Roman virtue is in politics and war; it is not the intellectual or contemplative virtue of philosophy or religion. To revive the virtue of the ancients, for Machiavelli, is to imitate their deeds and works, not to admire the beautiful creations or think high thoughts except as a necessary means to the end of imitation.”<sup>92</sup> Civic virtue for Machiavelli looked much like the heroic virtue of the ancient tradition: military valour, strength, courage, and manliness. Christian virtue, in contrast, was an enervating force in the republic, leading to weakness, humility, submission, and abject servility, all of which tend to undermine rather than sustain republican stability.

Machiavelli tended to use the term *virtu'* in a functionalistic or utilitarian sense. Virtue was a “utilitarian action in behalf of the preservation of the state.”<sup>93</sup> Machiavelli revived the classical view of civic virtue as a role-related concept with specific civic or public value to the republic. One displayed virtue if an individual

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<sup>91</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, II.14.

<sup>92</sup> Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 11.

<sup>93</sup> Vetterli and Bryner, *In Search of the Republic*, 22.

were especially adept at a given role – either as a prince, a soldier, or a citizen. In each of these roles, an individual can be a *virtuoso* much in the way that a musical *virtuoso* is especially talented at some area of music, perhaps as a harpist, flutist, or soloist. The state of a prince's, soldiers', or citizens' souls was of little concern to Machiavelli. His concern was offsetting the fragility of republics and the threat of corruption. Thus, a virtuous prince was especially adept at the role of being a prince. Machiavelli separated moral goodness as conceived in the Christian concept of virtue and replaced it with a civic virtue based on what is essential to republican government. Machiavelli's concept of virtue was "active, masculine, and martial."<sup>94</sup> A similar revival of the emphasis on ancient heroic virtue is identifiable within the American Revolutionary context.

The concept of virtue underwent one additional developmental stage important to early American political thought: the radical Whig or commonwealth tradition of early eighteenth-century British thinkers. In the political tumult of the Glorious Revolution (1688) and the years that followed, radical Whigs or advocates of a country ideology developed republican thought and a concept of virtue that greatly influenced the American republican context. Radical Whigs advocated a "country ideology" distinct from that of a "court ideology," which institutionalized the aristocratic and monarchical hierarchy in Great Britain. This ideological tradition first arose in the writings of John Locke, Algernon Sidney, John Milton, James Harrington, and others. They were followed by a second generation of thinkers that

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<sup>94</sup> Daniel T. Rogers, "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 79, no. 1 (Jun., 1992), 35.

were equally if not more influential in the development of American political thought: John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon (writing under the pseudonym *Cato*), Benjamin Hoadley, Henry St. John Viscount Bolingbroke, and others. Bernard Bailyn suggests that the later wave of this ideological tradition “more than any other single group of writers ... shaped the mind of the American Revolutionary generation.” Americans felt a kinship with these eighteenth-century writers “who modified and enlarged this earlier body of ideas, fused it into a whole with other, contemporary strains of thought, and, above all, applied it to the problems of the eighteenth century.”<sup>95</sup> Wood similarly emphasizes the importance of the radical Whig ideology of the commonwealth period of the seventeenth century – “the perfect government was always republican.” In Wood’s assessment, “the principles of republicanism” as developed within the radical Whig tradition “permeated much of what the colonists read and found attractive.”<sup>96</sup> A further influence on American thinking was classical antiquity. The two republican traditions clearly merged during the early colonial period. Wood notes that “the Americans’ cult of antiquity cannot really be separated from their involvement in the English Commonwealth heritage, for the two were inextricably entwined.”<sup>97</sup>

From this radical Whig or “country” ideology developed a complex view of virtue that significantly influenced American political thought. One of the earlier of

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<sup>95</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 35.

<sup>96</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 49

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

these thinkers, Algernon Sidney (1622-1683) stressed “three different conceptions of virtue and corruption: the virtue of self-control, versus the corruption of licentiousness; the virtue of martial valor, versus the corruption of weakness and effeminacy; and the virtue of integrity, versus the corruption of violating a public trust.”<sup>98</sup> Trenchard and Gordon, writing the popular *Cato’s Letters* (1720-23), saw virtue as a check against monarchical corruption. Virtue was characterized as “a love of liberty and one’s country.” Although significant emphasis is placed on classical ideals of self-sacrifice and love of country, Cato connects virtue and religion: “Where justice is exactly observed, religion will be observed; and to pretend to be very strict about the latter, without minding the former, would be highly absurd and ridiculous. *Virtue* necessarily produces religion, and is itself religion; and profaneness and irreligion will ever and necessarily follow corruption, the prolific parent of numberless mischiefs.”<sup>99</sup> Consistent with ancient republican virtue, “Cato” saw “publick spirit” as the highest expressions of virtue: “This is publick spirit; which contains in it every laudable passion, and takes in parents, kindred, friends, neighbours, and every thing dear to mankind; it is the highest virtue, and contains in it almost all others; steadfastness to good purposes, fidelity to one’s trust, resolution in difficulties, defiance of danger, contempt of death, and impartial benevolence to all

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<sup>98</sup> Alan Craig Houston, *Algernon Sidney and the Republican Heritage in England and America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 147.

<sup>99</sup> Cato (John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon), “Reflections occasioned by an Order of Council for suppressing certain impious Clubs that were never discovered,” Saturday, May 13, 1721, in *Cato’s Letters, or Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, and Other Important Subjects*. Four volumes, ed. Ronald Hamowy (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995). Vol 1. Chapter: NO. 29. SATURDAY, MAY 13, 1721.

mankind. It is a passion to promote universal good, with personal pain, loss, and peril: It is one man's care for many, and the concern of every man for all.”<sup>100</sup> Although the passage contains no reference to religion, still evident are echoes of universal moral principles, such as benevolence and compassion for others. Yet the explicit references to God and religion seen in the writings of Aquinas seem to be giving way to Enlightenment reason. The sense of public spirit reflects a strong commitment to the public good, but it does not require of citizens an abject rejection of private interest:

If my character of publick spirit be thought too heroick, at least for the living generation, who are indeed but babes in that virtue; I will readily own, that every man has a right and a call to provide for himself, to attend upon his own affairs, and to study his own happiness. All that I contend for is, that this duty of a man to himself be performed subsequently to the general welfare, and consistently with it. The affairs of all should be minded preferably to the affairs of one, as every man is ready to own when his own particular is embarked with the whole; as indeed every man's will prove to be sooner or later, though for a while some may thrive upon the publick ruins, but their fate seldom fails to meet them at last, them or their posterity.<sup>101</sup>

The Enlightenment world is not free of religious sentiment or thought. The Puritan resistance focused on breaking with the authority of the established church, not with

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<sup>100</sup> Cato, “Of publick Spirit,” Saturday, July 1, 1721, in *Cato's Letters*, vol. 2 June 24, 1721 to March 3, 1722 (LF ed.) > NO. 35. SATURDAY, JULY 1, 1721.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

religion as such. The right to worship freely challenged a specific orthodoxy, not religion generally. *Cato's Letters* locate virtue and liberty in Protestant nations: "In arbitrary countries, it is publick spirit to be blind slaves to the blind will of the prince, and to slaughter or be slaughtered for him at his pleasure: But in Protestant free countries, publick spirit is another thing; it is to combat force and delusion; it is to reconcile the true interests of the governed and governors; it is to expose impostors, and to resist oppressors; it is to maintain the people in liberty, plenty, ease, and security."<sup>102</sup> The influence of *Cato's Letters* in American thought is significant. As Clinton Rossiter notes, "No one can spend any time in the newspapers, library inventories, and pamphlets of colonial America without realizing that Cato's Letters rather than Locke's Civil Government was the most popular, quotable, esteemed source of political ideas in the colonial period."<sup>103</sup>

Before moving on to a discussion of virtue in the early American context, two additional threads of virtue within the European philosophical traditions must be considered: that of Charles de Secondat Baron de Montesquieu in *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) and Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). Montesquieu saw virtue as the necessary "spring"<sup>104</sup> of popular government. Montesquieu was careful to identify that his conception of virtue is "not a moral virtue or a Christian

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<sup>102</sup> Cato, "Of publick Spirit," Saturday, July 1, 1721.

<sup>103</sup> Clinton Rossiter, *Seedtime of the Republic: The Origin of the American Tradition of Political Liberty* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953), 141.

<sup>104</sup> Charles de Secondat Baron de Montesquieu., *The Spirit of the Laws* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 22.



virtue.”<sup>105</sup> Instead, it was the political virtue necessary to a specific form of government. Montesquieu explained: “Virtue, in a republic, is a very simple thing; it is the love of the republic; it is a feeling and not the result of knowledge; the lowest man in the state, like the first, can have this feeling.”<sup>106</sup> Republican virtue was self-perpetuating and also fostered a devotion to the common good over individual self-interest. As he further explained: “Love of the homeland leads to goodness in mores, and goodness in mores leads to love of the homeland. The less we satisfy our particular passions, the more we give ourselves up to passions for the general order.”<sup>107</sup> In a republic, a love of homeland led to a love of the common good. For Montesquieu the good man was not “the Christian good man,” but is the “political good man, who has political virtue,” who “loves the laws of his country and who acts from the love of the laws of his country.”<sup>108</sup> Consistent with classical republican thought, Montesquieu emphasized the importance of the rule of law and a self-sacrificing devotion to the common good. For Montesquieu, republican virtue required self-sacrifice and “a renunciation of oneself, which is always a very painful thing.”<sup>109</sup> He separated his concept of political virtue from religion. In a footnote to the text, Montesquieu further explains that he spoke of political virtue, “which is

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<sup>105</sup> Montesquieu., *Spirit of the Laws* , xli.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., xli-xlii.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 35.

moral virtue in the sense that it points toward the general good, very little about individual moral virtues, and not at all about that virtue which relates to revealed truth.”<sup>110</sup>

Adam Smith in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1761) began his discussion of virtue in the context of classical thinkers Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, and a host of others. Smith argues that virtue consists in propriety, prudence, and benevolence.<sup>111</sup> Unlike the republican thought of Montesquieu, which separated political virtue and religion, Smith connected virtue to human happiness dependent upon God: “The happiness of all mankind ... seems to have been the original purpose intended by the Author of nature, when he brought them into existence. No other end seems worthy of that supreme wisdom and divine benignity which we necessarily ascribe to him; and this opinion, which we are led to by the abstract consideration of his infinite perfections, is still more confirmed by the examination of the works of nature, which seem all intended to promote happiness, and to guard against misery.”<sup>112</sup> To achieve that end or *telos* of happiness, God has given “general rules” through which our “moral faculties” are guided to determine what “is fit, and right, and proper to be done; the contrary wrong, unfit, and improper.”<sup>113</sup> He argues further: “[B]y acting according to

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<sup>110</sup> Montesquieu., *Spirit of the Laws*, 25.

<sup>111</sup> For a fuller discussion of Adam Smith’s concept of virtue, see Charles L. Griswold, *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and Jerry Z. Muller, *Adam Smith in His Time and Ours: Designing the Decent Society* (New York: Free Press, 1993).

<sup>112</sup> Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Ryan Patrick Hanley (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 191.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

the dictates of our moral faculties, we necessarily pursue the most effectual means for promoting the happiness of mankind, and may therefore be said, in some sense, to cooperate with the Deity, and to advance as far as in our power the plan of Providence.”<sup>114</sup> Smith argued that acting in accordance with these general rules was essential to achieving happiness: “How vain, how absurd would it be for man, either to oppose or to neglect the commands that were laid upon him by Infinite Wisdom, and Infinite Power! How unnatural, how impiously ungrateful not to reverence the precepts that were prescribed to him by the infinite goodness of his Creator.”<sup>115</sup>

Unlike Montesquieu, Smith envisioned a significant role for God in shaping virtue and in the governance of human conduct, including economic matters. Smith placed God at the center of his discussion of human duties and obligations: “[W]e ought neither to protect the helpless of our children, nor afford support to the infirmities of our parents, from natural affection. All affections for particular objects, ought to be extinguished in our breast, and one great affection take the place of all others, the love of the Deity, the desire of rendering ourselves agreeable to him, and of directing our conduct, in every respect, according to his will.”<sup>116</sup>

From this moral framework, Smith counters Bernard Mandeville’s argument in *The Fable of the Bees; Or Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1714) that human beings are incapable of acting in any interest other than their own self-interest. Smith

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<sup>114</sup> Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 191.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

took issue with Mandeville's skepticism, a "system which seems to take away altogether the distinction between vice and virtue."<sup>117</sup> Smith dismissed Mandeville's argument to be "in almost every respect erroneous."<sup>118</sup> Smith did not insist that the virtuous citizen be concerned only with the public good; indeed "self-love may frequently be a virtuous motive."<sup>119</sup> For Smith "the love of virtue [is] the noblest and the best passion of human nature."<sup>120</sup>

MacIntyre argues that Smith "was a life-long republican. The connection between Smith's preoccupation with virtue and his republicanism was not something peculiar to his thought." In many respects, Smith exemplified the republican thought of his day. As MacIntyre notes: "Republicanism in the eighteenth century *is* the project of restoring a community of virtue; but it envisages that project in an idiom inherited from Roman rather than Greek sources and transmitted through the Italian republics of the middle ages. Machiavelli with his exaltation of civic virtue over both the Christian and the pagan virtues articulates one aspect of the republican tradition, but only one. What is central to that tradition *is* the notion of a public good which is prior to and characterized independently of the summing of individual desires and interests."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 362.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 363.

<sup>121</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 236-7.

## Virtue in the American Context

If, as MacIntyre argues, eighteenth-century republicanism sought to restore a community of virtue, what vision of virtue animated the republican project in the American colonies? Various conceptions of virtue are evident in the American context during the founding era: “A thorough check of newspapers and magazines, the chief purveyors of this morality, shows these virtues to have been most repeatedly discussed: wisdom, justice, temperance, fortitude [the four cardinal virtues], industry, frugality, piety, charity, sobriety, sincerity, honesty, simplicity, humility, contentment, love, benevolence, humanity, mercy, patriotism, modesty, patience, and good manners. ... The virtues themselves, as can be plainly seen, were an ill-assorted mish-mash of Greek, Roman, Christian, and latter-day English qualities.”<sup>122</sup> A variety of ideological traditions is represented in this listing: classical republicanism, Christianity, bourgeois or middle-class virtues, and the radical Whig or country ideology.

The American founding represents a period of significant conceptual development and change, especially the meaning of political concepts within republican thought. A constellation of political concepts, authority, representation, even the very meaning of republic, were vigorously debated during the drafting and ratification of the Constitution. “The upshot of this debate,” as Terence Ball and J. G. A. Pocock note, “was that citizens of the fledgling republic ceased to speak a

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<sup>122</sup> Rossiter, *Seedtime of the Republic*, 138.

provincial variation of political English and began to speak in the terms of a political idiom that was distinctly and recognizably American.”<sup>123</sup> With independence secured, the Federalists and Antifederalists contested the meaning of many political concepts associated with the republican ideology, including the meaning of “republic” itself.

But the philosophical and ideological foundations of these concepts were put into place well before the Constitutional Convention. Early Americans saw virtue as providing an indispensable check on corruption and a virtuous republican citizenry was dedicated to the public good over self-interest. “This willingness of the individual to sacrifice his private interests for the good of the community—such patriotism or love of country—the eighteenth century termed ‘public virtue.’”<sup>124</sup> Employing the concepts of virtue and corruption, the American patriots differed little from their radical Whig or country ideology counterparts in Great Britain. As Pocock argues, they reflect “key points in the long continuous history of political language and its concepts.”<sup>125</sup> Republican ideology during the Revolutionary era “remained so completely integrated into American political culture that patriots seldom paused to define it. They took their shared republican traditions for granted, and evoked them

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<sup>123</sup> Terence Ball and J. G. A. Pocock, “Introduction,” in *Conceptual Change and the Constitution*, 4.

<sup>124</sup> Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 68.

<sup>125</sup> Pocock, “Machiavelli, Harrington, and English Political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1972), 146.

with casual words and references, rather than elaborate expositions of a doctrine that required no explanation.”<sup>126</sup>

American republican virtue reflected a relatively stable core of conceptual ideals transmitted across historical periods. MacIntyre’s thesis in *After Virtue* is helpful in understanding both the changes and the consistencies in virtue during this time: “Every particular view of the virtues is linked to some particular notion of the narrative structure or structures of human life.”<sup>127</sup> Thus, a given historical era’s view of human *telos* helps define its view of virtue. In every historical era, “The virtues are those qualities which enable the evils to be overcome, the task to be accomplished, the journey to be completed.”<sup>128</sup> Eighteenth-century America was a time of conceptual consolidation, a merging of various threads of thought into one concept, at once consistent with the dominant intellectual traditions (Christian thought, republican thought, and bourgeois thought) and with the existing intellectual and political climate. A closer look at these predominant American perspectives on virtue during the early colonial period further demonstrates an adaptation of common threads of virtue thought to political challenges peculiar to the American context.

John Adams is often seen as one of the most important republican thinkers of the American founding generation, writing frequently about virtue. Adams’s emphasis on virtue is evident in his correspondence with Mercy Otis Warren. His

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<sup>126</sup> M.N. Sellers, *American Republicanism: Roman Ideology in the United States Constitution* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1994), 6-7.

<sup>127</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 174.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

political writings touch on virtue; for example, as he wrote in *Thoughts on Government* (1776): “If there is a form of government, then, whose principle and foundation is virtue, will not every sober man acknowledge it better calculated to promote the general happiness than any other form?”<sup>129</sup> He emphasized the necessity of virtue to curbing human passions: for example, he points to “the great political virtues of humility, patience, and moderation, without which every man in power becomes a ravenous beast of prey.”<sup>130</sup>

As Adams corresponded with Warren, he wrote frequently of virtue. For example:

Pray Madam, are you for an American monarchy or Republic? Monarchy is the gentleest and most fashionable Government ... For my own part I am so tasteless as to prefer a Republic, if we must erect an independent Government in America, which you know is utterly against my inclination. But a Republic, although it will infallibly beggar me and my children, will produce Strength, Hardiness, Activity, Courage, Fortitude, and Enterprise; the manly noble and Sublime Qualities in human Nature, in Abundance ... Under a well-regulated Commonwealth, the People must be wise and virtuous and cannot be otherwise ... As politics therefore is the Science of human Happiness and human Happiness is clearly best promoted by Virtue, what thorough Politician

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<sup>129</sup> John Adams, *Thoughts on Government*, in *The Political Writings of John Adams: Representative Selections*, ed. George A. Peek, Jr. (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1954), 85.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.



can hesitate who has a new Government to build whether a Commonwealth or a Monarchy?

But Madame, there is one Difficulty which I know not how to get over. Virtue and Simplicity of Manners are indispensably necessary in a Republic among all orders and Degrees of Men. But there is so much Rascallity, so much Venality and Corruption ... among all Ranks and Degrees of Men even in America, that I sometimes doubt whether there is public Virtue enough to Support a Republic.<sup>131</sup>

Warren responded to Adams's query on March 1776: "I have long been an admirer of a republican government, and was convinced, even before I saw the advantages delineated in so clear and concise a manner by your pen."<sup>132</sup> She shared Adams's assessment that republican government "was a form of government productive of many excellent qualities, and heroic virtues in human nature."<sup>133</sup> She expressed her hope that "the American republic will come as near the point of perfection, as the condition of humanity will admit."<sup>134</sup> Yet she confided to Adams her "*fears*, that American virtue has not yet reached that sublime pitch which is necessary to baffle the designs of the artful,—to counteract the weakness of the timid, or to resist the

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<sup>131</sup> Adams, to Mercy Otis Warren, Jan. 8, 1776, in *Warren-Adams Letters, 1743-1814*, Vol. 72 (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1917), 201-202.

<sup>132</sup> Warren to Adams, March [10], 1776, in *Selected Letters*, 69.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

pecuniary temptations and ambitious wishes that will arise in the breast of many.”<sup>135</sup>

They shared a similar insistence on the need for virtue in republican government.

Adams replied on April 16, 1776, with a concise description of the virtue needed in an American republic:

The form of Government, which you admire, when its Principles are pure, is admirable, indeed, it is productive to every Thing, which is great and excellent among Men. But its Principles are as easily destroyed, as human Nature is corrupted. Such a government is only to be supported by pure Religion or Austere Morals. Public Virtue cannot exist in a Nation without private, and public Virtue is the only Foundation of Republics. There must be a Positive passion for the public good, the public Interest, Honor, Power, and Glory, established in the Minds of the People, or there can be no Republican Government, nor any real Liberty: and this Public passion must be Superior to all private Passions. Men must be ready, they must pride themselves, and be happy to sacrifice their private Pleasures, Passions, and Interests, nay, their private Friendships and dearest Connections, when they stand in Competition with the Rights of Society.<sup>136</sup>

Adams expressed concern about the “Selfishness and Littleness even in New England”<sup>137</sup> that might undermine the colonial war effort. He feared, as well, the

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<sup>135</sup> Warren to Adams, March [10], 1776, in *Selected Letters*, 70.

<sup>136</sup> Adams to Warren, April 16, 1776, in *Warren-Adams Letters*, 222.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

deleterious influence of “the Spirit of Commerce ... [which] corrupts the morals of families as well as destroys their Happiness, it is much to be feared [and] is incompatible with that purity of Heart and Greatness of soul which is necessary for a Happy Republic.”<sup>138</sup>

Although equally committed to the necessity of virtue in a republic, Adams’s conception of virtue rarely invokes the emotional rhetoric of heroic virtue that Warren did in her dramatic works and poetry. Her purpose was to stir popular opinion to the patriotic fervor necessary to the impending war effort. Adams’s conception of virtue rarely exhibited the passion with which Warren infused it. Still, striking parallels between Adams’ and Warren’s concepts of republican virtue I hope will become clear in the chapters that follow. Both saw Christianity “as an educative tool in shaping and reinforcing moral virtue.”<sup>139</sup> Virtue should be taught to children and practiced throughout life. Like most republican thinkers of their generation, both saw virtue as essential to a useful and happy life.

Another important thread of virtue in early American thought is found in Benjamin Franklin’s (1706-1790) practical virtue or bourgeois virtue. In his *The Art of Virtue* (1732), Franklin listed thirteen virtues he wished to acquire in his own life and as a guide to others for traits essential in social interactions. These virtues are seen as pragmatic, social virtues, reflective of Puritan morality, but derived as well

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<sup>138</sup> Adams to Warren, April 16, 1776, in *Warren-Adams Letters*, 222-3

<sup>139</sup> C. Bradley Thompson, *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty* (Lawrence, KA: University of Kansas Press, 1998), 23.

from other sources. They are general or universal, common-sense, practical virtues held among the people of the middle-class and seen as necessary for harmony in social and political relations. In Franklin's view, they were among the traits "necessary or desirable" to life. He explained that he identified the virtues included on his list from "the various Enumerations of the moral Virtues I had met with in my reading."<sup>140</sup>

Franklin's list included: temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility. Sometimes these are referred to as "pagan virtues" or universal virtues because they are generally accepted among all people. For example, an individual can express frugality, sincerity, and cleanliness whether he is a Christian or subscribes to no religion at all. They are known through reason and are essential to orderly social relations. For example, in Franklin's listing, the precept associated with the virtue of humility is to "Imitate Jesus and Socrates."<sup>141</sup> Franklin explained that he wrote (at age 26) after concluding: "that the mere Conviction that it was in our Interest to be compleatly virtuous, was not sufficient to prevent our Slipping, and that the contrary Habits must be broken and good Ones acquired and established, before we can have any Dependence on a study uniform Rectitude of Conduct."<sup>142</sup> His book provided a "method" for acquiring the desired virtues. He constructed the list, his "intention

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<sup>140</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*, 68-69.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

being to acquire the *Habitude* of all these Virtues” and “to fix on one of them at a time, and when I should be Master of that, then proceed to another, and so on till I should have gone thro’ the thirteen.”<sup>143</sup>

Franklin explained that each virtue could be developed through the practice or habit of that virtue. To successfully master these virtues, Franklin “made a little Book” allotting “a Page for each of the Virtues”<sup>144</sup> and created charts to mark his progress in attaining each of the listed virtues. He identified a variety of sources for his listing of virtues. For example, he quoted lines from Addison’s *Cato, A Tragedy* as the “Motto” for the book: “Here will I hold: If there is a Pow’r above us, / (And that there is, all Nature cries aloud / Thro’ all her Works) he must delight in Virtue, / And that which he delights in must be happy.”<sup>145</sup> He quoted Cicero and the *Book of Proverbs*. Franklin also saw the need to enlist the help of God in acquiring these virtues: “And, conceiving God to be the Fountain of Wisdom, I thought it right and necessary to solicit his Assistance for obtaining it.”<sup>146</sup> Franklin wrote as part of his book a prayer enlisting God’s assistance: “O Powerful Goodness! bountiful Father! merciful Guide! Increase in me that Wisdom which discovers my truest interests; Strengthen my Resolutions to perform what that Wisdom dictates. Accept my kind

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<sup>143</sup> Franklin, *Autobiography*, 69.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

Offices to thy other Children, as the only Return in my Power for thy continual Favors to me.”<sup>147</sup>

Franklin specifically adopted as his method for acquiring these virtues the Aristotelian idea of the habituation, or developing virtues by practicing them. Franklin’s method emphasized “the development of the ancient idea of habit into a truly effective tool for behavioral change.”<sup>148</sup> As Franklin’s list of thirteen virtues demonstrates, the virtue traditions available at the founding often overlapped in the specific traits each advocated. “If one examines Franklin’s famous list of thirteen virtues, it is clear that no particular strain of Western cultural heritage predominates; the list is a *mélange*.”<sup>149</sup> For example, Franklin saw “humility” as a virtue exemplified both by Jesus Christ and Socrates. Missing from Franklin’s listings are the republican heroic virtues of patriotism and manliness, but included are two of the four cardinal virtues found in the writings of Plato and later in Aquinas – “temperance” or “moderation,” and “justice.” The meaning of “resolution” is close to that of “fortitude,” the fourth cardinal virtue. “Order,” “frugality,” “industry,” and “cleanliness” often are thought to be bourgeois virtues. In this pragmatic formulation, Franklin speaks of the virtues necessary to daily life, rather than a singular concept of virtue typically associated with republican thought.

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<sup>147</sup> Franklin, *Autobiography*. 72.

<sup>148</sup> Norman S. Fiering, “Benjamin Franklin and the Way to Virtue,” *American Quarterly* 30, No. 2 (Summer, 1978), 202.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

As the preceding discussion demonstrates, virtue holds a complex place in republican thought. Keeping in mind this framework of virtue over history and in the American colonies at the eve of the Revolution, we turn to a consideration of Warren's life and her republican concept of virtue.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Life of Mercy Otis Warren

*I pray you present the homage of my great respect to Mrs. Warren.  
I have long possessed evidences of her high station in the ranks of genius.*  
Thomas Jefferson to Gen. James Warren, March 21, 1801<sup>150</sup>

Mercy Otis Warren epitomizes Massachusetts history. She came from one of the oldest Massachusetts Bay families and married into another venerable Massachusetts family. Both the Otis and Warren families descended from passengers of the original *Mayflower* voyage. While living in Barnstable, the Otis family attended West Parish Church, the first and oldest Congregational church in Massachusetts, founded in 1639. Warren possessed a long colonial pedigree. Her mother Mary Allyne Otis was a descendent of *Mayflower* passenger Edward Doty. Records show Doty was an indentured servant who attempted a mutiny while on the *Mayflower* and later settled in the Plymouth colony without further incident. The Warren family descended from the Doty line as well. The Otis family came from England to settle in the Massachusetts Bay Colony between 1630 and 1632. Her father, Col. James Otis (1702-1778), was a respected merchant, military leader, and politician in Barnstable, Massachusetts. By marrying James Warren, she combined her impressive lineage with that of another *Mayflower* family, that of Richard

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<sup>150</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Gen. James Warren, March 21, 1801, in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson: Vol. 9-10*, ed. Albert Ellery Burgh (Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1907), 231-232. This letter is cited in numerous biographies of Mercy Otis Warren, one of the first of these written by Maud Macdonald Hutchenson in "Mercy Warren, 1728-1814," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 10, No. 3 (Jul., 1953), Third Series; 378-402.



Warren.<sup>151</sup> Through her husband's mother, she was also related to *Mayflower* passenger Edward Winslow, the third governor of the Massachusetts colony. After the death of his first wife, *Mayflower* passenger Edward Winslow remarried Susanna Fuller White, the widow of William White, the first to die after reaching Massachusetts Bay. James Warren and Mercy Otis's marriage merged four *Mayflower* bloodlines: Richard Warren (1580-1628), Edward Winslow (bap. 1595-d.1655), Edward Doty (ca. 1580s–1655), and William White (ca. 1580s- 1621).

Although not a *Mayflower* descendent, Mercy's father James Otis, Sr., represented a notable colonial family line. He descended from John Otis I (1581-1657), who brought his family from the West Country of England, to the shores of Massachusetts Bay just south of Boston between 1630 and 1632. John Otis I's only son (and Mercy's great-great-grandfather John II) was born in 1621 in Devon, England. Shortly after his birth, the Otis family moved to the English village of Barnstaple (from which the colonial settlers would derive the name "Barnstable"). Most likely the Otis family (with John II about ten years old) was transported to Bear Cove just south of Boston on one of at least four known voyages of the *Lyon* between 1630 and 1632. The Otis family and many of their neighbors who left England identified themselves as "a distinct puritan community"<sup>152</sup> and as "a conscious

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<sup>151</sup> The genealogical records of the first four generations descended from Richard Warren can be found in Robert S. Wakefield, *Mayflower Families Through Five Generations: Descendants of the Pilgrims Who Landed In Massachusetts, Dec. 1620, Volume 18, Part 1: Richard Warren, Four Generations* (Plymouth, MA: Mayflower Families, 1999). The genealogy of the original Mayflower families can be found in other volumes of the same series.

<sup>152</sup> John J. Waters, *The Otis Family: in Provincial and Revolutionary Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina Press, 1968), 9. Waters offers a detailed description of the Otis family in England in the

community of God's people."<sup>153</sup> This desire to be part of the Puritan "visible church"<sup>154</sup> fueled much of the growth of the Massachusetts colony in the 1630s. Much as John Winthrop had seen his early settlement as a "city on a Hill," early travelers from East Anglia and the West Country of England were animated by a similar religious zeal and envisioned their new home as "the promised land." As the leader of a family of stalwart Puritans and "Visible Saints,"<sup>155</sup> John Otis I was respected as "an ancient member"<sup>156</sup> of the original church in Hingham. His family and life reflect "the emergence of the protestant, literate individual and the nuclear family"<sup>157</sup> in colonial American history.

The prominence of the Otis family is still evident in the area then known as Bear Cove, later incorporated in 1635 as the Village of Hingham. The main thoroughfare along the waterfront retains the name, Otis Street. John Otis I acquired land in Hingham, where he was one of the community's most knowledgeable farmers and served in many civic offices. His son John Otis II inherited his father's land in

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first chapter of *The Otis Family*. Other helpful secondary sources include: Maud Macdonald Hutcheson, "Mercy Warren, 1728-1814," *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 10 (July, 1953), 378-402; Nancy Rubin Stuart, *The Muse of the Revolution: The Secret Pen of Mercy Otis Warren and the Founding of a Nation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Hill Press, 2008); Jeffrey H. Richards, *Mercy Otis Warren* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995); Mary Elizabeth Regan, "Pundit and Prophet of the Old Republic: The Life and Times of Mercy Otis Warren, 1728-1814," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1984); and Alice Brown, *Mercy Warren* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896).

<sup>153</sup> Waters, *Otis Family*, 10.

<sup>154</sup> Edmund S. Morgan discusses the importance of the visible church and visible saints in the Puritan tradition in *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York: New York University, 1963).

<sup>155</sup> Waters, *Otis Family*, 47.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

Hingham and engaged in trade in the growing colony. John Otis II moved his family to the Plymouth area and for the remainder of his life, he “channeled his talents toward accumulating property and establishing his eight children,”<sup>158</sup> among them her grandfather, John Otis III.

Although John Otis I was a successful farmer, his Otis heirs produced a strong commercial lineage. Mercy Otis Warren’s great-grandfather, grandfather, and father were all involved in colonial trade. Hers was also a community-minded lineage, with her forefathers active in community service and the political affairs of the day. But a rebellious streak seemed bred in the Otis bone as well. As a young man, John Otis II fought the 1650 increase in Hingham village taxes. He initially refused to pay the tax and continued to fight the tax for four years. Finally, facing the prospect of a punitive fine, Otis gave a full confession before the Hingham church, paid his tax, and avoided further penalty. Shortly after in 1662, John Otis II moved to Scituate and settled there with his growing family, which would ultimately yield eight children who lived to maturity. A man of considerable business skill, Otis continued to accumulate land and holdings in Scituate as well as in Barnstable, where the next generation of the Otis family would settle.

After inheriting a portion of his father’s estate as well as his business acumen, John Otis III tripled the family holdings and continued the family commitment to local affairs by serving in numerous non-political positions in the community. He combined farming with trade and shipping to establish himself as one of Barnstable’s

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<sup>158</sup>.Waters, *Otis Family*, 30.

leading merchants and active citizens. His accumulation of land and influence would help him to establish his family as “a most remarkable political dynasty.”<sup>159</sup> His oldest son, John, attended Harvard, leaving his brother James (Mercy’s father) the role of managing the family business. James increased the Otis homestead in Barnstable and grew the family’s mercantile business. Although without formal education, James Otis was a self-taught, well-respected lawyer, a member of the Barnstable militia, and served as the district court judge. Upon his father’s death, James inherited the Otis family’s spacious homestead in West Barnstable, where Mercy was born and lived until her marriage. She was the first daughter and third child of thirteen children born to James and Mary Allyne Otis, only seven of whom would reach adulthood.

The Otis family was among the most prominent of Barnstable County. But what was the Barnstable community like? The historical work of John J. Waters, Jr., provides an invaluable sketch of Barnstable County in the late 1600s and the early 1700s. The county was one of the area’s largest population centers, consistently home to one-third of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The county’s population quadrupled from 2,500 in 1653 to more than 10,000 in 1690. The number of towns in the county grew from 10 to 25 over those same years.<sup>160</sup> As the population grew, Mercy’s grandfather, John Otis III, established himself as the area’s leading merchant, one of its most influential citizens and at his death was one of the county’s “three richest

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<sup>159</sup> Waters, *Otis Family*, 41.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

men.”<sup>161</sup> The historical records show the pivotal role John Otis III played in the growth of the Barnstable community. In 1696 he obtained permission to build the town’s first warehouse on Barnstable Harbor. This warehouse launched the Barnstable shipping industry, expanding the fleet from one sloop to seven by 1713. As Waters notes, “By 1715 Otis stood as the leading merchant of his port.”<sup>162</sup> He traded in a wide range of goods, everything from general materials such as nails and flints, to finished consumer goods such as brass skillets and pewter spoons, to luxury goods such as buckles and broadcloth. His business alliances spread from Bristol to Boston, through an extended network of family members, as well as political and business associates. He also accumulated considerable political influence, leading the Barnstable militia, being elected as Barnstable representative in 1692 and later to the Massachusetts Council, and serving as Barnstable chief justice.<sup>163</sup>

Mercy’s father, James, inherited his father’s lands, business acumen, and knack for accumulating political power and community influence. He also inherited the first clock in the colonies, along with a number of wardrobes, the family home, and considerable land holdings. He had apprenticed in his father’s store and understood the intricacies of business and trade. Like his father, he was a merchant, a lawyer, a politician, and a speculator. As had become typical in the Otis family, James married well. In 1724, he wed Mary Allyne, the daughter of a prominent

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<sup>161</sup> Waters, *Otis Family*, 59.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

Connecticut business family. Before moving his family to Connecticut, her father had been a native of Massachusetts descended from the *Mayflower*. The third of James and Mary Otis's thirteen children was Mercy Otis, born September 14, 1728.

### The Early Years

There is little surviving record of Mercy's early years, but many biographers have stitched together from varying sources a picture of her childhood as generally idyllic. Her family was prominent, well-established, and highly respected within the Barnstable community. Their family homestead, called by many at the time a "mansion," was a "high double house with a gambrel roof and three dormer windows"<sup>164</sup> overlooking the large Salt Marshes and nearby Barnstable Bay. Her father was a leader in local political and business affairs, as well as "a pillar of the West Parish,"<sup>165</sup> the family's Congregational church. Her mother, Mary Otis, was the mistress of the family homestead, taking on its management as James's many public duties took him away from home. She was a remarkably able woman. "No small part of the family's increasing prosperity must be credited to the competence of this hardworking New England wife."<sup>166</sup> Mary Allyne Otis gave birth to ten children after Mercy was born, only four of whom would survive into adulthood. Mercy had playmates in her two older brothers, James Jr. (1725), and Joseph (1726), and two

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<sup>164</sup> Waters, *Otis Family*, 64.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

younger sisters, Mary (1730) and Hannah (1732). She had the closest relationship with her oldest brother James, whom she affectionately referred to as Jemmy. Mercy would tag along after him to his tutoring lessons, closely sharing his intellectual passion throughout her life. Age difference likely established less close relationships between Mercy and her youngest surviving siblings. Elizabeth (1739) was born when Mercy was eleven and Samuel Allyn (1740) when she was twelve. The Otis home had a number of servants, including at least one black female servant. A childhood servant named Ann would later accompany her as she began her married life in Plymouth. Still, considering her mother's periods of convalescence during her difficult later childbearing years, Mercy was likely more of a caregiver than a playmate to her youngest two siblings.

The Otis children enjoyed the prestige of their extended family as well. Her father's older brother and their uncle John Otis IV was the leader of the town's East Parish and founder of the Second Church of Barnstable. The most influential clergyman in the community was Jonathan Russell, her uncle by marriage to her father's sister of the same name, Mercy Otis (also known as Marcy). Their community was a "little self-contained world of unshifting values"<sup>167</sup> and "a society of fundamental values which were reechoed in its conservative church."<sup>168</sup> Mercy's childhood days were filled with the domestic training typical for colonial girls,

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<sup>167</sup> Nancy Rubin Stuart, *The Muse of the Revolution: The Secret Pen of Mercy Otis Warren and the Founding of a Nation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Hill Press, 2008), 21.

<sup>168</sup> Waters, *Otis Family*, 73.

including mastery of “the arts that go to the making of good housewives.”<sup>169</sup> Her mother trained her in soap-making and embroidery, as well as the skills needed to manage a household.<sup>170</sup> Among her tutelage in household skills, her mother likely taught Mercy to read as well. Reading was seen as a skill that equipped girls to read the Bible, an essential activity in their future roles as mothers and wives. Mercy’s only documented respites from her household duties occurred when she attended lessons with her brother James in her Uncle Jonathan’s study. One historian suggests that the Barnstable community of her childhood shaped Warren’s lifelong commitment to republican government: “This childhood experience of her family’s leadership in a socially cohesive, largely homogenous community would provide an affective base for her mature vision of a republican polity, free of factional conflict and self-serving interest groups.”<sup>171</sup> Certainly her early childhood experiences point to a possible influences on her future political thought, but this formulation of the Barnstable community may be overly idyllic. In many ways, it oversimplifies Warren’s mature republican vision, which in her many writings she attributes to her understanding of history and human nature, both of which are rife with conflict and the many consequences of corruption. By the time of her political writings, Warren had moved well beyond any nostalgic desire to re-create the community of her Barnstable youth.

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<sup>169</sup> Alice Brown, *Mercy Warren, With Portrait* (New York: Charles Scribners’ Sons, 1896), 23.

<sup>170</sup> Waters, *Otis Family*, 65.

<sup>171</sup> Mary Elizabeth Regan, “Pundit and Prophet of the Old Republic: The Life and Times of Mercy Otis Warren, 1728-1814” (PhD diss, University of California, Berkeley: 1984), 23.



Community life in Barnstable revolved around the church. Warren's Sundays likely were spent attending services and worshipping at West Parish Congregational church, where her uncle was pastor. Beginning with the Pilgrims' first proclamation of Thanksgiving in 1620, Massachusetts governors regularly decreed public days of prayer, fasting, and Thanksgiving.<sup>172</sup> By the time of Warren's birth in 1728, public days of fasting and thanksgiving had become institutionalized annual events in the colony. Often special days of prayer and fasting were decreed after extraordinary natural events, such as the blizzard of 1717, the earthquakes of 1727 and 1755, and the extreme drought of 1749. They were also part of a larger pattern of jeremiads within the congregational church, in which clergy tied earthly misfortune to the sin of the people, and called the congregation to repentance to restore God's blessings. Sin was a destructive force and a threat to social order. In the public decrees, the people were called to personal and public expressions of humiliation and repentance, as well as prayerful recognition of their dependence on the Providence of God for provision and welfare. Such religious disciplines were seen as essential to the spiritual life and material well-being of the individual believer, the church, and to society as a whole. This pattern of recognizing the destructive threat of sin, followed by calls to repentance with the hope of restoring God's blessing and favor, is part of a larger phenomenon identified as the "American jeremiad."<sup>173</sup> It is a pattern strongly echoed

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<sup>172</sup> For a history of public days of fasting and Thanksgiving, see: William DeLoss Love, Jr. *The Fast and Thanksgiving Days of New England* (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1895), 296.

<sup>173</sup> The term was developed by Sacvan Bercovitch in *The American Jeremiad* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

in Warren's political writings. No matter the reason for the proclamation, these days were part of the fabric of colonial life. They were both religious observances and social events, during which the congregation would gather and join in solemn religious disciplines as the united local body and as a community.

Warren was raised in a Barnstable Congregational church that included in its articles of faith: a belief in "one and only one God, Creator of all things, both visible and invisible, and revealed to us in the Scriptures as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit"; that the Scriptures "are the records of God" and written by men inspired by the Holy Spirit; that mankind was created by God "holy and happy, and left him to the freedom of his own choice, and that by transgression he fell into a state of sin and suffering"; that salvation and eternal life comes only through the atoning sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ; and that "all who truly repent of their sins, and are obedient to the will of God, and by faith accept Jesus Christ as their Savior are made the children of God"; and that there will be a "resurrection of the just and the unjust, and that God hath appointed a day of final judgment" after which "the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life everlasting."<sup>174</sup> Members of the West Barnstable Congregational Church agreed to the church rules of government and discipline. It was one of the oldest Congregational churches in the colony, founded upon the teachings of the original Puritan church, which had been built upon the Reformation teachings and theology of John Calvin. Its doctrine had remained

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<sup>174</sup> This statement of faith is reprinted in Rev. H. E. Thygeson, *Articles of Faith and Covenant of the Congregational Church, West Barnstable, Mass. With Brief Historical Sketch, Regulations, and Catalogue of Members, May, 1892*. (Hyannis, Mass.: F.B & F.P. Goss Publishers and Printers, 1892).

relatively unchanged since first founded in 1629 by Rev. John Lothrop, despite going without a pastor for almost ten years after his death and numerous threats of division during its long history. These basic church teachings are reflected throughout Warren's lifetime of writings.

Because of its distance from the Connecticut River Valley in northwestern Massachusetts, the epicenter of the Great Awakening led by Jonathan Edwards, Barnstable's West Parish tended to be insulated from many of the turbulent religious disputes that raged throughout Massachusetts in the 1700s. Here Warren received a consistent congregational orthodoxy throughout her childhood and well into her twenties. West Parish church records show that Rev. Russell generally resisted pressures to change the traditions of the church he had inherited after a twenty-nine-year pastorate of his father, Rev. John Russell. Early in his term in 1716 the church divided amicably along geographical lines of the east and west precincts of Barnstable. This was not a theological split, but one that grew out of the needs of the area's growing population. The parishioners were allowed to choose their preferred parish. Russell was given a similar choice, and on Thanksgiving 1719, he chose the West Parish. He seemed inclined to resolve disputes through personal style, rather than joining the pitched theological debates. In one specific instance, a handful of congregants sympathetic to liturgical reforms pushed to change the music and form of worship of the West Parish services. The dispute, referred to as the "singing controversy," centered on growing differences over worship style between those advocating the new Harvard divinity emphasis on singing "psalm tunes" or "regular

psalmody” versus singing in the “usual way” traditionally implemented in the church. Although the controversy churned for some time, Russell in 1725 built consensus behind his generation’s musical preferences and “regular” psalm singing became the orthodoxy.<sup>175</sup> This event demonstrated Russell’s gifts of diplomacy. The West Parish church also withstood the Separatist challenge in the 1740s, when Russell was able to avoid much of the controversy and keep his congregation united by not joining with thirteen of fifteen Barnstable county clergy who signed a public denunciation of the messages of many itinerant clergymen traveling the area during this time.

At times, Warren witnessed her uncle lead the congregation in the exercise of church discipline. At age sixteen, church records indicate one congregant came before the assembled church to explain why he had stopped attending regular church services. He was called upon “to give reason of his absenting himself from the Lord’s table.”<sup>176</sup> On another occasion, when Warren was eighteen, the church received the confession of repentance for fornication from a young woman named Patience Blackhoarse. Church records indicate the church grew by two hundred and forty-two congregants, and five hundred and sixty-three received baptism during his pastoral offices from 1712 to 1759. None of Russell’s sermons survive, but he is generally seen as a “clergyman of orthodox views befitting his Yale education.” The inscription on his tombstone reads that he “served the Lord with all humility of mind and life and

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<sup>175</sup> This controversy is discussed in Regan, “Pundit and Prophet of the Old Republic,” 25-27.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

was in great esteem and veneration among his people.”<sup>177</sup> The influence of Rev. Russell on Warren as her tutor was immeasurable and is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

The venerable West Parish congregational church was a source of constancy in a climate of considerable theological changes and challenges in Massachusetts in the 1700s. The most significant disruption in the congregation seemed to come from population growth. Only four years after it opened in 1719, the congregation had outgrown the facility, and in response, the building literally was cut in half, the ends pulled apart, and about eighteen feet added to its length. One of the earliest bell towers in the colonies was built during that renovation. In the early 1800s, the Otis family donated a Revere bell to the church in honor of Col. James Otis, Mercy’s father. The original West Parish meeting house still stands in Barnstable. It is the oldest operating public meeting house in America and the oldest congregational church meeting house in the world.<sup>178</sup>

Family and home life provided another source of continuity for Warren. Despite the regular travel required of her father and other male family members, Warren rarely left the confines of Barnstable. On one of these rare occurrences, she attended the commencement festivities for her brother James’s graduation from Harvard in 1743. It was an occasion marked by orations from the colony’s most

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<sup>177</sup> Gurdon Wadsworth Russell, *An Account of Some of the Descendents of John Russell, the emigrant from Ipswich, England, who came to Boston, New England, October 3, 1635, together with some sketches of the allied families of Wadsworth, Tuttle, and Beresford*, ed. Edwin Stanley Welles (Hartford, CN: The Case, Lockwood & Brainerd Company, 1910), 128-129.

<sup>178</sup> “History of West Parish” available on the church website: <http://www.westparish.org/history/index.html>.

learned men, academic exercises and defenses by the graduates, the conferring of degrees, and fine dinners at the stately Harvard Hall. The day of celebration ended in a procession of professors, dignitaries, students, and guests to the home of the Harvard president.<sup>179</sup> During the festivities, she met her future husband, James Warren, Jr., her brother's friend and colleague from nearby Plymouth. He was a fine match for an Otis daughter: son of her father's friend and colleague in the bar, and coming from a family descended from *Mayflower* passenger Richard Warren, James Warren was heir to the legacy of another prestigious colonial family. Their friendship and eventual courtship evolved over the next eleven years, with Warren frequently visiting the Otis family in Barnstable and engaging in law practice with her brother James. By the time they married in 1754, James Warren, Jr., had begun to establish himself as a prosperous Plymouth merchant and farmer. The two married at what for that time was a late age: Mercy was a twenty-six-year-old bride, and James, her twenty-eight-year-old groom.

A few days after their wedding, the young couple moved into the Warren home on the Eel River in nearby Plymouth to live with his parents and youngest sister. Three years later, Mercy conceived her first son and looked forward to life as the wife of an influential colonial merchant and farmer and mother to his children. That same year, her father-in-law James Warren, Sr., died, leaving to her husband the Warren Clifford farm (as Mercy had renamed it), the family shipping fleet, and the mercantile business. With a baby on the way, they moved to a home near the center of

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<sup>179</sup> Brown, *Mercy Warren*, 29-30.

town, although keeping the Clifford farm as a summer home. As had Otis generations before her, Mercy entered adulthood positioned for a life of prominence.

#### Education and Intellectual Influences:

Although it was unusual for a woman of her day to be formally educated, Warren had the advantage of coming from an affluent, influential family in which education was valued. She had as close to a formal education as could be had by a woman at that time. As the Otis family gained political and economic stature in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, it also developed a deepened dedication to education. Mercy's great-grandfather, John Otis III, understood the importance of "a well-educated and strategically placed family" and the Otis "concept of family training came to include formal education."<sup>180</sup> Although her Uncle John Otis IV attended Harvard University, the management of the family business fell to her father James, who never attended college. It is likely that he felt this want of formal training keenly, and as a result, ensured his own sons would attend Harvard by hiring his brother-in-law, the Rev. Jonathan Russell (1690-1759), as their tutor.<sup>181</sup> Even at a time when girls were not formally educated and certainly not trained with the goal of attending Harvard in mind, Mercy would greatly reap the benefit from her father's commitment to education.

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<sup>180</sup> Waters, *Otis Family*, viii.

<sup>181</sup> William Tudor, *The Life of James Otis, of Massachusetts: containing also, notices of some contemporary characters and events, from the year 1760 to 1760-1775* (Boston, MA: Wells and Lilly, Court Street, 1823), 7.

Her Uncle Jonathan was one of the area's most-educated men, respected as well for his piety. As pastor to First Parish church beginning in 1712, Rev. Russell was an influential fixture in Barnstable community life. He came from an education-minded clerical family. His grandfather was the Rev. John Russell, a 1645 graduate of Harvard, and his father was the Rev. Jonathan Russell, Sr. (1655-1711), who preceded him in the ministry at Barnstable from 1683 until his death in 1711. Barnstable's venerable First Parish church was the first congregational church in America, established in October 1639 by Rev. John Lothrop. Rev. Russell's father was the congregation's fourth pastor, remembered as "a pious and learned divine and God was pleased to answer his prayers, and crown his labors with success."<sup>182</sup> As a prominent member of the Massachusetts clergy, Rev. Russell Sr. was selected to deliver the annual Massachusetts Election Sermon, "A Plea for the Righteousness of God," in 1704.<sup>183</sup>

Uncle Jonathan's younger brother, Rev. Samuel Russell (1699-1755), was among a group of Congregationalist ministers credited with founding Yale University. The General Court of the Colony of Connecticut on Oct. 9, 1701, passed "An Act for Liberty to Erect a Collegiate School" to create an institution to train ministers and lay leadership for Connecticut. Although official Yale records indicate its founders were motivated by a "desire to have a College, nearer and less expensive

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<sup>182</sup> John Langdon Silbey, *Biographical Sketches of Harvard Graduates, Vol. II: 1659-1677* (Cambridge, MA: Charles William Sever, 1881), 455-456.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*



than Harvard,”<sup>184</sup> concern seemed to be growing that the colony’s primary college for educating clergy was no longer maintaining Puritan religious orthodoxy. Samuel Russell is remembered in Yale history as “among the most forward in the movement which gave birth to the College.”<sup>185</sup> The founding group (all of whom were Harvard alumni) met in Russell’s study in Branford, Conn., to donate books from their personal libraries to create the school’s first library. Samuel Russell was a graduate of Harvard, class of 1681, as was his brother Jonathan, Harvard class of 1704. Among the founders was Puritan minister Samuel Mather, son of Increase Mather, who had served as acting president of Harvard College in 1685, and served officially as its president from 1692 until his death in 1701. Samuel Mather was a 1690 Harvard graduate and the younger brother of Cotton Mather, famous for his role in the Salem witchcraft trials.

Yale was established as a more orthodox alternative to Harvard College. Rev. Samuel Russell served as a tutor or instructor in the college and as a member of its Board of Trustees. Degrees were conferred on the first four graduates of the school in 1702. Johannes “John” Russell, son of Rev. Samuel Russell and Jonathan’s nephew, was among three graduates in the Yale class of 1704. Azariah Mather, son of Yale founder Rev. Samuel Mather, graduated in 1705. Three years later Rev. Jonathan Russell would graduate with a master’s degree along with two other graduates in the Yale class of 1708. One of his classmates, Benjamin Allen, had studied theology

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<sup>184</sup> Francis Bowditch Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College, With Annals of the College History: October, 1701-May, 1745*, Vol. 1 (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1885), 1-3.

<sup>185</sup> Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College*, 26.

under Russell's father in Barnstable. The other was John Prout, son of a sea captain who went on to serve as treasurer of Yale (1717-1765) as well as a probate judge and justice of the peace in New Haven, Conn.<sup>186</sup> At the death of his father, Rev. Jonathan Russell Jr., became the fifth pastor in the first Congregational church in America. Three years later on Dec. 26, 1715, he married James Otis's older sister Mary (1685-?), also known as Mercy. Unusual for the time, the couple had no children of their own. It was recorded by a Barnstable historian that Rev. Russell "was noted for his early piety, talents, and assiduity in his professional duties."<sup>187</sup> Like his father before him, he developed a wide reputation as a college preparatory tutor. Certainly the sons of James Otis Sr. would be well-prepared for the rigors of college under Rev. Russell's instruction.

Born into an environment that emphasized intellectual achievement and political involvement, Mercy was a ready recipient of the rich and rigorous educational regimen typical of the young men of her day. Like her older brother James, who was undergoing his Uncle Jonathan's tutoring as preparation to enter Harvard, Mercy had access to a challenging classical education. One biographer notes that "From her uncle, Mercy learned to write, absorbing the rhythms, cadences, and phrasing of his Sunday Sermons, which were later echoed in her writing."<sup>188</sup> Most biographies attribute to Russell's tutoring Warren's exposure to Walter Raleigh's

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<sup>186</sup> Dexter, *Biographical Sketches*, 74-78.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>188</sup> Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 13.

*History of the World*. But based on the copious and varied literary references in her writings, Warren most likely followed a course of study and reading lists similar to those that pre-university young men completed. The most comprehensive evaluation of Warren's intellectual influences can be found in "Libraries of the Mind: A Study of the Reading Histories of Mercy Warren, Abigail Adams, and Judith Sargent Murray (1728-1820)."<sup>189</sup> The reading dossier is based on a typical university preparation readings list of late-seventeenth century America, as well as through identifying the many references in her writing. Hers was a broad and challenging intellectual program, typically offered to the sons of influential colonial families, young men destined to be the colonial leaders of the future. Tutors such as Rev. Russell had to be certified by a university and would be required to conduct the pre-university tutorial program required for admission into Harvard and other colonial institutions of higher education. Although no actual record of Warren's reading list exists, it can be

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<sup>189</sup> William Cibbarelli, "Libraries of the Mind: A Study of the Reading Histories of Mercy Warren, Abigail Adams and Judith Sargent Murray (1727-1820)," (PhD dissertation, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 2000): 66-85. Although Cibbarelli provides the most comprehensive reading dossier available on Mercy Warren, the listing has limits, contains some errors, and omits numerous references. The author explains that the dossier has been compiled by identifying written works referenced by Warren in her primary writings. Yet a number of obvious references are absent. For example, Warren extensively quotes from British poet Edward Young's "Epistle to Mr. Pope, Concerning the Authors of the Age" (1730) in the prologue to her play (1773), yet none of Young's published works is included in the reading dossier. Similarly, Warren quotes multiple stanzas from Alexander Pope's "First Satire on the Second Book of Horace Imitated" (1733) in the prologue to her play (1775). The only work of Pope's listed in the reading dossier is *The Works of Alexander Pope* 1720, a work published more than ten years before the later referenced work. The dossier does not include this later published work, even though it is cited prominently in one of Warren's most important published writings. Another place for caution is Cibbarelli's "Reading Dossier Summary," pp. 208-209. In explaining the summary, the author admits its limitations. Categorization of some works is problematic. For example, John Bunyan's *Pilgrims' Progress* (1678) is categorized under the category "Novels, Poetry, and Plays" in the reading dossier, which would include it among "Belle Lettres" in the Reading Dossier Summary. It is easily argued that it is a religious work, rather than a play, novel, or a work of poetry, as the reading dossier indicates. Certainly the reading dossier is an important and welcome scholarly contribution to identifying Warren's intellectual sources, but it is not without error or limitation.

assumed that the tutorial was typical of that used by pre-university tutors, emphasizing “reading the classical and humanist authors, theology, divinity, Latin and Greek.”<sup>190</sup> The classical works in the tutorial included “Roman and Greek historians, poets, dramatists, political theorists and philosophers such as Aristotle, Caesar, Herodotus, Livy, Plato, Plutarch and Sallust.”<sup>191</sup> That her studies included Greek and Roman history is demonstrated by her numerous references to and easy familiarity with the writings of Cato, Pliny the Elder, Cicero, Aesop, Ovid, Plutarch, Hesiod, Homer, Virgil, and others. She likely would have read popular seventeenth- and eighteenth-century translations of the classics, such as those by Alexander Pope, John Dryden, and Thomas Hobbes. She was familiar as well with the works of later writers, including playwright Joseph Addison (evidenced by inclusion of a soliloquy from his play “Cato” in the prologue to her drama *The Adulateur* (1772)), Francis Bacon, Peter Boyle, Geoffrey Chaucer, William Congreve, Daniel Defoe, René Descartes, Matthew Hale, James Harrington, Niccolo’ Machiavelli, John Milton, Jean Racine, William Shakespeare, Algernon Sydney, and Jonathan Swift. The references in her writings point to a striking breadth of education and knowledge, as this passage from one of her early plays, *The Group* (1775), demonstrates:

Look over the annals of our virtuous fires.  
And search the story of Britannia’s deeds,  
From Caesar’s ravages to Hambden’s fall;

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<sup>190</sup> Cibbarelli, “Libraries of the Mind,” 28.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

From good Hambden down to glorious Wolfe,  
Whose soul took wing on Abraham's fatal plain,  
Where the young Hero fought Britannia's foes,  
And vanquished Bourbons dark ferocious hosts,  
Till the slaves trembled at George's name.  
It was love of freedom drew a Marlborough's sword;  
This glorious passion moved a Sydney's pen;  
And crowned with Bayes, a Harrington and Locke,  
It is freedom wreathes the garlands over their tombs.<sup>192</sup>

As is evident in the twelve short lines of dramatic verse in the passage above, Warren was familiar with a wide variety of important authors who had great influence in her day, reflecting significant works of history, literature, political philosophy, and jurisprudence. These works are included among those typically included in the education of the time.

She drew as well from a deep reservoir of biblical knowledge, employing theological ideas and scriptural references throughout her writings. She was familiar with the writings of Lord Bolingbroke, Roger Cotes, David Hume, John Locke, and publications such as *Cato's Letters*, *Independent Whig*, *The Craftsman*, *The Spectator*, *The Tattler*, *Massachusetts Spy*, and *Boston Gazette* (the latter two published her early anonymous works). One biographer contends that she

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<sup>192</sup> Warren, *The Group*, in *The Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, Act II, Scene 3.

“devoured”<sup>193</sup> Pope and Dryden’s translations of Virgil and Homer. Her uncle likely introduced her to works by Shakespeare, Milton, and a wide variety of other literature. Considering the stature of her family and the proximity of her family home to colonial travelers, it can be assumed that Warren was exposed to a wide variety of contemporary colonial newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, almanacs, and broadsides, publications that comprised much of colonial American reading.

Although she read widely of the classics, it is unclear how much formal training Warren received in the languages of Greek and Latin. Biographer Nancy Rubin Stuart asserts that Warren was “prevented from studying Greek and Latin,”<sup>194</sup> but offers no explanation for the restriction. Cibbarelli validates Stuart’s assertion, noting that Warren’s “fluency in the classical languages was non-existent except for common words and phrases.”<sup>195</sup> Still Warren was likely familiar with classical languages, considering that many of the versions of classical Greek and Latin texts readily available in eighteenth-century America appeared in dual translation. The format was designed to reinforce classical and English language skills and to serve as a guide for students with no previous training in Latin or Greek.

Warren had a powerful intellectual affinity for works of history, political theory, and the classics. Biographers note that Warren read widely in these areas and was especially fond of Sir Walter Raleigh’s *History of the World*. Cibbarelli’s reading

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<sup>193</sup> Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 13.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Cibbarelli, “Libraries of the Mind,” 28.

dossier summary reflects this preference.<sup>196</sup> Sixty-two percent of the 205 books included on Warren's reading list are works of history, geography, travelogues, philosophy and political theory. Of the 147 authors identified there, 103, or 70 percent were writers of history, geography, travelogues, philosophy and political theory. By comparison, 1 percent of Warren's reading falls into the category of *belles lettres*, or novels, plays, and poetry. Still among these thirty-four *belles lettres* titles are significant serious literary works, such as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as well as works by Defoe, Dryden, Swift, Pope, Horace, Moliere, Ovid, Shakespeare, Virgil, and Sophocles. The category of *belles lettres* might lead one to believe that it indicated lighter intellectual fare, but in Warren's case the category contains much of the classical content of her reading dossier and her later letters indicated she spurned more popular novels.

Warren also read a handful of important economic texts. Although not a burgeoning genre in her day, she read two works by Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776). She also criticized on a number of occasions the works of Bernard Mandeville, which would have included the economic and moral satirical parable, *The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1714), in which he argues that virtue is detrimental to commerce and intellectual progress. Warren rejects

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<sup>196</sup> My discussion of Warren's readings is derived from Cibbarelli, "Libraries of the Mind," 208-209.

Mandeville's writings as among those that receive "the sceptics' empty boast"<sup>197</sup> in her poem, "To Genius America" (1778). His book *The Fable of the Bees* is listed among the skeptics' works found on the dining room bookshelf in the second scene of her drama *The Group*. This listing of books in the scene setting of the play is designed to tie the corruption of colonial officials under British sway to works of skepticism, vice, and falsehood. She demonstrates significant understanding of market practices and economic history in the development of her thread of bourgeois virtue and in her historical writings. Her writings indicate a close scrutiny on Warren's part of the economic issues of the day, and her reading dossier confirms this. Included on a list of readings are the proceedings of the British Parliament, the Journals of Congress, the British Annual Register, and a host of what were, at the time, the leading news and current events publications and newspapers.

Warren's writings reflect a deep religious faith, an understanding of Puritan theology, and biblical literacy. Despite significant Christian expression in her work, only eight religious writings appear among her readings. She studied four foundational theological works: the *Bible*, the *Book of Common Prayer*, the *Catechism*, and the *Psalter*. The King James Bible was the most available biblical translation in the colonies at the time, and the one Warren would have read. Also included are the works of a contemporary writer, Unitarian minister Jonathan Mayhew (1720-1766), *Discourses Concerning Unlimited Submission and Nonresistance to Higher Powers* (1750) and *Observations on the Charter and*

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<sup>197</sup> Warren, "The Genius of America," 250.



*Conduct of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (1763).

Mayhew was an early critic of British rule and pastor of Boston's West Church from 1747 until his death in 1766. As one of the most influential preachers in Boston at the time, he was asked to deliver the Thanksgiving Sermon in 1766, less than two months before his death. On the occasion of Parliament's repeal of the Stamp Act, he addressed his sermon "The Snare Broken" to the King's privy councilor, William Pitt. It was one of the first public uses of the natural law principle of self-preservation to criticize British despotism, and would eventually provide much of the colonial rationale for Revolution.<sup>198</sup>

Another important theological work among Warren's readings is Richard Watson's, *A Collection of Theological Tracts*, a six-volume collection of 34 separate theological works, first published in 1785 and designed for use by students of the clergy. Watson was a preeminent Anglican minister in England and served as Bishop of Llandalf from 1782 to 1816. His *Collection of Theological Tracts* includes: John Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1727), an eighteenth-century translation of Josephus's histories, Rev. Robert Boyle's eight sermons on natural religion delivered in 1720, and other notable works of apologetics and theology, dating from 1730 through 1779.<sup>199</sup> Watson was well-known for the blistering criticism of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* (published in three parts in 1794, 1795, and 1807) contained in

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<sup>198</sup> See Jonathan Mayhew, "The Snare Broken" (1766), in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era: 1730-1805*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1991), 234-264.

<sup>199</sup> Richard Watson, *A collection of theological tracts, in six volumes*, (Cambridge, UK: J. Archdeacon for J & J Merrill, 1785).

his *An Apology for the Bible* (1796). Watson minced no words in his criticisms addressed directly to Paine:

I hope there is no want of charity in saying that it would have been fortunate for the Christian world had your life been terminated before you had fulfilled your intention.

In accomplishing your purpose, you will have unsettled the faith of thousands, rooted from the minds of the unhappy virtuous all their comfortable assurance of a future recompense, have annihilated in the minds of the flagitious all their fears of future punishment.

You will have given the reins to the domination of every passion and have thereby contributed to the introduction of the public insecurity and of the private unhappiness usually and almost necessarily accompanying a state of corrupted morals.<sup>200</sup>

The selections from the anthology of sermons and theological works reflected Watson's commitment to more traditional theology. Warren's reading list includes multiple writings of Puritan theologian and Antifederalist James Winthrop, *Attempt to Translate the Prophetic Part of the Apocalypse of St. John* (1794), *Attempt to Arrange – Scripture, Prophecies yet remaining unfulfilled* (1803), and *Appendix to the New Testament* (1808). The last of these works by Winthrop is a collection that contains the first two plus a third, *A systematic arrangement of several Scripture prophecies relating to the Antichrist; with their application to the course of history*

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<sup>200</sup> Richard Watson, *An Apology for the Bible In a Series of Letters, Addressed to Thomas Paine. Author of a Book Entitled, "The Age of Reason, Part of the Second, Being an Investigation of True and of Fabulous Theology"* (1796); (Cambridge: Hilliard and Brown, 1828), 4.

(1795), in which Winthrop interprets the prophecies of Daniel, Ezekiel, and John. In the introduction, Winthrop states his purpose in writing the work in 1795: “It is proposed to ascertain some other great events mentioned in those prophecies, as being coincident with those of the Apocalypse, which are now rapidly unfolding.”<sup>201</sup> He argues that the description offered in Daniel 11:45 of “a country situation between two seas, which he calls the glorious holy mountain” is a reference to America. Winthrop points to a similar description in Ezekiel 38:11, 12: “Ezekiel appears to describe the country as a wilderness, a land of unwalled villages, in a defenseless state, and invaded for mere plunder. They probably both mean the American continent, which remarkably divides the ocean for more than a third of the circumference of the globe, extending from the north pole to the fifty-sixth degree of southern latitude.”<sup>202</sup> Winthrop points to the year of his work, 1795, as “probable time for the resurrection of the witnesses.”<sup>203</sup> Although in error on the date of Christ’s return, the argumentation places Winthrop within the American millennial tradition. In a letter to Warren, Winthrop requests Warren’s critique of his work. There is no evidence of a response from Warren, and thus, it is unclear how fully she read Winthrop’s works or her opinion of them.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> James Winthrop, *A systematic arrangement of several Scripture prophecies relating to the Antichrist, with their application to the course of history* (Boston, MA: Thomas Hall, State Street, 1795), iv.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>204</sup> Cibbarelli, “Libraries of the Mind,” footnote 142 at 82.

Not listed among Warren's readings is Winthrop's influential Antifederalist work, *Letters to Agrippa*, published in the *Massachusetts Gazette* between 1787 and 1788. In light of her own Antifederalist beliefs and her familiarity with Winthrop's other writings, it is likely that Warren read this work. She would be familiar as well with the life and writings of his famous ancestor, John Winthrop. He was the influential founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1629, one of its early governors, and author of "A Model of Christian Charity" (1631), which contained the famous reference to the new colony being "as a city upon a Hill." Warren and her husband were friends with Rev. John Winthrop's great-great grandson John Winthrop (1714-1779), one of the colonies' leading scientists and professor of astronomy and mathematics at Harvard, and his wife, Hannah Fayerwether Tolman Winthrop. Warren refers to the writings of Dr. Winthrop on numerous occasions, dedicates two poems to him, and corresponds regularly with his wife, Hannah.<sup>205</sup> Other works among her readings, although not explicitly religious, are written from a Christian perspective. Among these are: John Bunyan's classic Christian allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), British apologist William Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785), Pilgrim William Bradford's *History of the Plymouth Colony* (1650), John Clark's *A Compendium of the Fabulous History of the Heathen Gods and Heroes* (1731), Congregational minister Thomas Prince's *A Chronological*

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<sup>205</sup> Warren, "To the Hon. J. Winthrop, Esq." 208-212, and "On the Death of the Hon. John Winthrop, Esq. L.L.D. Hollisian Professor of Mathematicks and Natural Philosophy, at Harvard College, Cambridge," 235-239, both published in *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*. Many of these letters between Warren and Hannah Winthrop are published in Richardson's, *Selected Writings*. The complete collection of Warren-Winthrop letters is housed at the Massachusetts Historical Society.

*History of New-England* (1736), which places the colonial experience within the context of biblical history, as well as other writers generally categorized within the theistic or Christian tradition. Paley was well-known for his writings in natural theology, the use of the watchmaker analogy as evidence for the existence of God, his utilitarian thought, and for his vigorous opposition to the slave trade. Prince founded the first religious journal in America, *The Christian History*, in 1743.

Considering her family background, Massachusetts religious history, and regular congregational church attendance in Barnstable and during married life in Plymouth, Warren was steeped in Puritan theology and history, and was more influenced by that tradition than her reading dossier suggests. Still, the religious works included in her reading dossier support the conclusion that Puritan thought influenced Warren's writing. The religious climate in Barnstable and throughout the Massachusetts Bay Colony was a consistent influence through her childhood into her early twenties. Involvement in the local church remained a staple of her life. Regular church attendance was an important aspect of Warren's life. In her letters she mentions specific times she was unable to attend church, indicating it was a rare occasion for her to miss public worship. In a letter to her husband, expressing distress over news that he might be assigned to lead troops in New York, she writes: "I could not Eat, I could not go Even to the House of public Worship in the afternoon."<sup>206</sup> Again in 1784, she remarked on a rare occasion of missing church: "I take up pen this morning before I repair to public Worship (where I have not been since last

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<sup>206</sup> Warren to James Warren, Sept. 15, 1776, in *Selected Letters*, 8.

Dec.?).” Among the possible reasons for not attending is the reference to her son Charles being unwell for a prolonged period and some travel during that time.<sup>207</sup>

Warren continued the habit of religious observance developed and nurtured in Barnstable. After moving to Plymouth following their marriage in 1754, the young couple began attending the First Church of Plymouth. James Warren, Sr. was a member of the church and served as a deacon, and the young couple joined in those Warren family observances. The Plymouth church in 1760 ordained the 22-year-old Rev. Chandler Robbins (1738-1799), who would serve as the Warren’s pastor until his death in 1799. In contrast to the preaching of Rev. Russell, at least nine of Rev. Robbins’s sermons survive, which will be considered in detail below. A sermon preached in 1760 by his father, Rev. Philemon Robbins at his ordination at the First Church provides the theological context Rev. Chandler Robbins entered when he stepped into the pulpit in Plymouth. In his ordination before the “numerous Assembly,” Rev. Robbins outlined what he believed were his son’s duties as pastor within the context of the church’s congregational theology: 1) To preach the “Gospel Truth” because “Fallen Man is awfully dark, blind, and ignorant; apt to receive Error for Truth, and Truth for Error”; 2) To preach the Law, not “to terrify the People needlessly” but to remind them of their need for salvation; 3) To preach the Gospel, or the good news, of “Christ’s active and passive Obedience, whereby the Law is honored, Justice satisfied, and a Door opened for the Salvation of Men”; 4) To preach “Morality, or the Requirements of the moral Law” and to “give them Rules for

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<sup>207</sup> Warren to Sarah Sever, May 2, 1784, in *Selected Letters*, 181.

Self-Examination” to open avenues for true repentance; 5) To use well-reasoned arguments “with their People to engage them for God” to convince them that God is “infinitely worthy” of “their Hearts, Time, Service, Influence, and their All to Him.” Rev. Robbins also challenged his son to meet the duties of pastors to “Pray with and for their People” “since so much is depending on Men’s Conduct in their State of Probation, there is great Need of, and great Reason for Prayer.” The pastor’s prayer should be in secret, with families, in public, and with the sick and needy. Finally, part of the minister’s instruction should include “feed[ing] his Flock by Example,” living what he preaches them to live. To avoid the “heavy Damnation” for failing in their duties, ministers must “be Lovers of Jesus Christ”, and must love His laws, His children, and to do the work of the church heartily, with fidelity, cheerfully, and compassionately.<sup>208</sup>

As the sermon drew to a close, Rev. Robbins offered some fatherly advice to his son, urging him to work hard in the ministry, to stay close to God through a prayerful life, and to “Remember to be always little in your own Eyes.”<sup>209</sup> He further advised the church of its duties toward the new pastor: to pray for him, to attend church, to offer “Candor and Charity towards him” when he makes mistakes, to support his material needs, and to “encourage, assist, and strengthen him in his

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<sup>208</sup> Rev. Philemon Robbins, “A sermon preached at the ordination of the Reverend Mr. Chandler Robbins: to the pastoral office over the First Church and Congregation in Plymouth, January 30, 1760. By his father, the Reverend Mr. Philemon Robbins, Pastor of the First Church in Branford,--Connecticut” (Boston:, MA S. Kneeland, in Queet-Street, 1760). In [New York: Readex Microprint, 1985] 11 x 15 cm. (Early American Imprints, First Series; no. 8727), 5-11.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

Work.”<sup>210</sup> He ended the listing of their duties with a humorous threat: “If I hear that my Son is reduced to Want and Poverty, thro’ your Neglect; I will go and tell your heavenly Father.”<sup>211</sup>

Rev. Robbins agitated for the Revolution from the pulpit. His sermons contained numerous statements of millennialism and patterns of jeremiad reflected in Warren’s writings.<sup>212</sup> But he also worked to restore more traditional practices and teachings to the church. As social pressures developed to liberalize church practices, Robbins returned to his Yale orthodoxy and Calvinist doctrine, often to the discomfort of his parishioners. In 1743, a number of parishioners left the First Church to form the Third Church of Plymouth, and built a new meeting house on what was then called King Street. James Warren, Sr., was among the 86 who left, presumably taking his family with him. Forty years later in 1783, the Third Church closed and the remaining parishioners returned to the First Church. James Warren, Sr., is listed among church members in 1703. James Warren’s younger sister Ann was baptized as an infant in the church in 1728, and his sister Sarah was baptized in 1730.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Robbins, “A sermon preached at the ordination of the Reverend Mr. Chandler Robbins,” 20-21

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>212</sup> Robbins argued, for example, that the discovery of the New World had opened a “new era of faith,” which “the Revolution confirmed.” Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, 128.

<sup>213</sup> See John Cuckson, *A Brief History of the First Church In Plymouth: 1606-1901* (Boston, MA: George H. Ellis Company, 1902); *Records of the Town of Plymouth: 1743-1783* (Plymouth, MA: Memorial Press, 1903); and *Plymouth Church Records: 1620-1859* (Boston, MA: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1920).



Even with the break with the First Church in 1743, the Warren family had returned to their original church in 1783. A number of Robbins's sermons and public speeches were delivered between 1783 and his sudden death in 1799. On the occasion of his death in July 1799 almost years later, Rev. William Shaw offered these thoughts about the life of Dr. Chandler Robbins: "[T]hrough life, he maintained a distinguished and dignified character. Born of a religious and respectable family, he was indoctrinated in the principles of our holy religion, and from a child became acquainted with the holy scriptures. The sacred doctrines, and the admirable maxims, contained in that divine system, appear to have commanded his attention and belief, and to have had the most salutary influence on his life and conversation."<sup>214</sup> The sketch published with the official sermon noted that the Scriptural doctrines preached by Rev. Robbins "did not materially differ from those maintained by the first founders of the church."<sup>215</sup> The funeral rites of Rev. Robbins, who appeared to have died suddenly of a stroke or heart attack, "were attended by the whole society, from hoary age to lisping childhood. The procession was arranged with great judgment; and genuine sympathy and silent regret marked its every moment. The corpse was

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<sup>214</sup> William Shaw, "The resurrection of good men to a blessed immortality, a ground of consolation to surviving mourners: illustrated in a discourse, delivered at Plymouth, July 14, 1799, a few days after the death and interment of the Rev. Chandler Robbins, D.D. Pastor of the First Church of Christ in that town" (Boston, MA: Samuel Hall, no. 53, Cornhill, 1799). Microfiche [New York: Readex Microprint, 1985], 11 x 15 cm. (Early American imprints, First series; no 36300), 18.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

placed in the broad aisle of the meeting house, which had so often resounded with the solemn counsels, and earnest expostulations of the deceased.<sup>216</sup>

The depth and content of Warren's religious influences are important to understanding her political thought. Woven throughout her writings are biblical ideas, phrases, and passages in her work that indicate a mature biblical understanding, application, and fluency. As the discussion of the Christian thread of her concept of virtue demonstrates, Warren employs her understanding of Christian morality as a basis of her political thought and a source of many of her historical judgments. Many of her republican principles are forged within her religious context, reflecting her own personal faith as well as the larger religious history of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

#### On the Eve of Revolution

Warren's childhood within a powerful political family, combined with her well-trained mind and intellectual disposition, gave her unique entrée into the wider political world in which she moved after marrying James Warren. Like her father, her husband James was a man of influence within the community. At her Plymouth fireside in 1773 the revolutionary Committee of Correspondence was born. Warren applauded her brother's cry that "Taxation without representation is tyranny." She supported her husband, while at times chastising and always spurring on the many patriots around her. Her voluminous letters demonstrate her position within the colonial community. She encouraged and advised young mothers in raising their

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<sup>216</sup> Shaw, "The resurrection of good men to a blessed immortality," 24.

children. She consistently advocated her republican values in her communication with leading figures of her day: John and Abigail Adams, George and Martha Washington, Elbridge Gerry, Thomas Jefferson, other colonial luminaries, and her many female friends and family members. Through her letters, we see her also as a loving, conscientious mother to her five sons, gently offering advice, ever prodding them to virtuous conduct. Although Warren was born into an age “when needlework and housewifery were all that could be expected of a woman,”<sup>217</sup> as she reached adulthood and married James Warren, the colonial world around her had begun to change enormously and irretrievably. As fate would have it, Mercy Otis Warren would live her life at the center of this whirlwind, playing a significant role in shaping the American future.

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<sup>217</sup> Brown, *Mercy Warren*, 23.

## CHAPTER 3

### Warren's Republican Political Framework

*I have long been an admirer  
of a republican government.*

Mercy Otis Warren to John Adams, March 10, 1776<sup>218</sup>

Writing as an Antifederalist under the pseudonym “A Columbian Patriot,” Mercy Otis Warren opposed the newly proposed American constitution because it simply did not reflect her republican vision for the new nation. Rather, it was a “many headed monster, of such motley mixture, that its enemies cannot trace a feature of Democratick or Republican extract.”<sup>219</sup> Her own republican ideals were clear to her, and she identified a passage in her *History* that she considered to be the best depiction from her writings of the principles that animated her political thought:<sup>220</sup>

If peace and unanimity are cherished, and the equalization of liberty, and the equity and energy of law maintained by harmony and justice, the present representative government may stand for ages a luminous monument of republican wisdom, virtue, and integrity. The principles of revolution ought ever to be the pole-star of the statesman, respected by the rising generation;

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<sup>218</sup> Warren to John Adams, March 10, 1776, in *Selected Letters*, 69-70.

<sup>219</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution, and on the Federal and State Conventions, by a Columbian Patriot* (1788), in *Contributions by Women to Early American Philosophy: Anne Bradstreet, Mercy Otis Warren, and Judith Sargent Murray*, Therese Boos Dykeman (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd., 2009), 121.

<sup>220</sup> A heated correspondence ensued between Warren and John Adams after the publication of her *History*, Warren points to her understanding of republicanism. See Warren to John Adams, Aug. 1, 1807, in *Correspondence between John Adams and Mercy Warren*, Charles F. Adams, ed. (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 394-399. Warren refers to her views of republicanism in this letter on p. 396.

and the advantages [432] bestowed by Providence should never be lost, by negligence, indiscretion, or guilt.

The people may again be reminded, that the elective franchise is in their own hands; that it ought not to be abused, either for personal gratifications, or the indulgence of partisan acrimony. This advantage should be improved, not only for the benefit of existing society, but with an eye to the fidelity which is due to posterity. This can only be done by electing such men to guide the national counsels, whose conscious probity enables them to stand like a Colossus, on the broad basis of independence, and by correct and equitable arrangements, endeavor to lighten the burdens of the people, strengthen their unanimity at home, command justice abroad, and cultivate peace with all nations, until an example may be left on record of the practicability of meliorating the condition of mankind.<sup>221</sup>

The passage is rich with republican ideas and images: Warren's republicanism places sovereignty with the people, who enjoy equality of rights, the protection of the rule of law, a representative government of well-designed institutions, and the advantages of Providence. They have a civic right and duty to participate in the election of virtuous leaders, who are committed to independence, personal probity, and are dedicated to the common good, rather than self-promotion or party politics. For her, the American republic stands as a beacon of peace and justice around the world and a promise to

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<sup>221</sup> Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution, interspersed with Biographical, Political and Moral Observations*, ed. Lester Cohen, (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1994), 696. Subsequent references cite this work as *HAR*.

future generations. It sets forth an optimistic vision for the nation's citizens, leaders, and posterity.

As the Revolutionary War drew to a close, Warren sensed the return of the colonies to their pre-war monarchical sympathies. She presciently expressed her concerns about the colonies mixing the ideals of republicanism with the old habits of monarchism in a letter to John Adams in May of 1783: "What a many headed monster would it appear, should we see a republic grafted on the principles of monarchy? The slips might thrive but the fruit must be despotism."<sup>222</sup> Five years later, Warren would see those fears materialize. To her mind, the proposed government was a pernicious form of "immediate *aristocratic tyranny* [italics in original]," designed by men who "prostrated every worthy principle beneath the shrine of ambition."<sup>223</sup> Riddled with "undefined meaning in some parts, and the ambiguities of expression in others,"<sup>224</sup> she viewed it as ripe for abuse by those holding political power. Written in secret, with no input from the people and with no opportunity for change or revision, the process itself was suspect – a point Warren used to great rhetorical advantage in her pamphlet.

But the content of the new constitution was most worrisome to Warren. In her view, it embodied few of the fundamental republican principles that animated the revolution. In the widely circulated pamphlet, *Observations on the New Constitution*,

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<sup>222</sup> Warren to John Adams, May 1783, in *Selected Letters*, 167.

<sup>223</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 120.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

*and on the Federal and State Constitutions* (1788), Warren claims that the men responsible for the new constitution “tell us that republicanism is dwindled into theory—that we are incapable of enjoying our liberties—and that we must have a master.”<sup>225</sup> As the American colonies moved forward as a new nation, Warren feared her republican vision was being sublimated to the forces of tyranny that had been defeated in the war. Rather than become the free republic the Revolutionary generation had envisioned, she believed America was destined to “soon terminate in the most *uncontrouled despotism* [italics in original].”<sup>226</sup>

Like many in her generation, Warren was a staunch advocate of republican political ideals. As the Revolution was breaking out, she wrote to Adams: “I have long been an admirer of a republican government, and was convinced, even before I saw the advantages delineated in so clear and concise a manner by your pen,—that if established in the genuine principles of equal liberty—it was a *form* productive of many excellent qualities, and heroic virtues in human nature—which often lie dormant for want of opportunities for exertion.”<sup>227</sup>

As her missive to Adams demonstrates, her republican vision is optimistic, based on a hope that given the right political circumstances, human beings can act in a way that creates meaningful, virtuous public life. Still Warren’s thinking reflects a sober assessment of human nature as prone to corruption. Republicanism provides

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<sup>225</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 119.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>227</sup> Warren to John Adams, March 10, 1776, in *Selected Letters*, 69.

“opportunities for exertion” of the better qualities of human nature. Founded on the rule of law and built of institutions designed to disperse and check political power, republicanism protects the sovereignty of the people, as well as their liberty and independence (or non-dependence). Unlike monarchy, which requires a passive disposition and servile obedience from its subjects, republicanism is an energetic form of government that places significant demands upon the citizenry: Republican citizens must be capable of self-government and virtuous living, of checking passion with reason and moral restraint. They must be vigilant against vice, unchecked ambition, avarice, luxury and the manifold threats of corruption. They must be willing to sacrifice their own interests, and give their lives, if necessary, to promote the common good.

What are the assumptions that inform Warren’s republican vision? Several of her assumptions flow from the influence of her religious background. Evident in her writing is her recognition of the proclivity of human nature toward depravity and corruption. Her congregational background taught that through the initial transgression of God’s command by Adam and Eve, human beings “fell into a state of sin and suffering” and continued afterward in a state of original sin.<sup>228</sup> Warren’s political writings reflect this view of human nature, according to which humans are prone to temptation, passion, and vice. As she notes in the closing passages of her *Observations*: “Passion, prejudice, and error, are characteristics of human nature.”<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Thygeson, *Articles of Faith and Covenant of Congregational Church*, 10.

<sup>229</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 131.



Yet she also believed, as her Congregational background taught, that human beings possess free will, making virtuous choices possible, and from her republican viewpoint, highly desirable. Her moral observations of history present a mixed record of human actions. As she notes in the opening paragraphs of her *History of the American Revolution*: “The study of human character opens at once a beautiful and a deformed picture of the soul. We there find a noble principle implanted in the nature of man, that pants for distinction. This principle operates in every bosom, and when kept under the control of reason, and the influence of humanity, it produces the most benevolent effects.”<sup>230</sup> But disastrous consequences ensue when human beings are unable to check their passion: “[W]hen the checks of conscience are thrown aside, or the moral sense weakened by the sudden acquisition of wealth or power, humanity is obscured, and if a favorable coincidence of circumstances permits, this love of distinction often exhibits the most mortifying instances of profligacy, tyranny, and the wanton exercise of arbitrary sway.”<sup>231</sup>

Her litany of the consequences of human depravity and corruption seems almost endless: malice, darkness of mind, wantonness, self-aggrandizement, venality, ambition and avarice, corruption, wanton cruelty in battle, profligacy, speculation, acquisitiveness and luxury, and a host of other vices. The lessons of history are clear: “The indulgence of these turbulent passions has depopulated cities, laid waste to the finest territories, and turned the beauty and harmony of the lower creation into an

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<sup>230</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 3.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

aceldama.”<sup>232</sup> The experience of war offers powerful evidence of the corruption of man:

It must appear among the wonders of Divine Providence, that a creature bestowed with reason should, through all ages and generations, be permitted the wanton destruction of his own species. The barbarous butchery of his fellow-mortals, exhibits man an absurd and ferocious, instead of a rational and humane being. May it not be among the proofs of some general lapse from the original law of rectitude, that no age or nation since the death of Abel, has been exempt from the havoc of war? Pride, avarice, injustice, and ambition, have set every political wheel in motion, to hurry out of existence one half the species by the hands of the other.<sup>233</sup>

Her historical writing at times reflects a pessimistic view of human nature: “In all ages, mankind are governed less by reason and justice, than by interest and passion: the caprice of a day, or the impulse of a moment, will blow them about as with a whirlwind, and bear them down the current of folly, until awakened by their misery.”<sup>234</sup> Perhaps to establish her credentials as an objective historian or in an attempt to reach a wider audience and to not offend those who did not share her religious views, Warren attempts to distance herself from what was at the time a

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<sup>232</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 4. “Aceldama” means any place of slaughter or bloodshed, and is derived from the location near Jerusalem purchased with the bribe Judah accepted for betraying Jesus in Acts 1: 18, 19.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 642.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 632.

divisive theological debate over whether human nature is fallen.<sup>235</sup> “Religious discussions we leave to the observation of the theologian, who, however human nature may be vilified by some and exalted by others, traces the moral causes and effects that operate on the soul of man. The effects only are level to the common eye, which weeps that the result is more frequently productive of misery than felicity to his fellow human beings.”<sup>236</sup>

Despite this seeming equanimity on the question of human nature, her writings – especially her personal poetry and correspondence – belie a deep commitment to the fundamental teachings of her faith, including a fallen human nature. Her letters speak of the imperfection and depravity of mankind. She warns her sons about the temptations of corruption and sin, frequently targeting the corrosive influence of rising religious skepticism. As those around her experience the sufferings of war and the loss of loved ones, she comforts and consoles her grieving friends with the hope of heaven. The predominant theme in her personal poetry is a deep understanding of the theology that undergirds her faith. A poem written to her husband (1766) makes reference to the fall of man: “Like the first pair on Eden’s

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<sup>235</sup> A few months before her death on Oct. 19, 1814, Warren points to this theological debate, the Unitarian Controversy, in a letter to Margaret Cary on 1 Jan. 1814: “I am tired of the disputes of Theologians and Metaphysicians, and more sickened by the bitterness of spirit which reigns among professed Christians. I have not seen either Channing’s, Thatcher’s, or Carey’s Discourses, nor the pernicious book which gave rise to them.” Richards and Harris note that this is a possible reference to publications of “the liberal Unitarian wing of American Congregationalism: William Ellery Channing (1780-1842), Samuel Cooper Thacher (1785-1818), and Thomas Carey (1745-1808), all from Massachusetts and all preachers of ‘rational’ Christianity” (see footnotes, p. 255). A helpful discussion of the dispute is found in Mary Kupiec Cayton’s “Who Were the Evangelicals? Conservative and Liberal Identity in the Unitarian Controversy in Boston, 1804-1833, in *Journal of Social History* 31, No. 1 (Autumn, 1997), 85-107.

<sup>236</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 651.

banks / Before the raging fiend / With bold illusive arts deceiv'd / The mother of mankind."<sup>237</sup> Throughout her personal poetry is the theme of God's light dispelling darkness and sustaining mortal human beings in the face of sufferings in a fallen world. In her poem "The Nineteenth Psalm" Warren praises God at length for His creation, asking for strength to "shun each secret sin / And cure the errors that may lurk within!" so that she may "find acceptance in my Saviour's eyes."<sup>238</sup> She recognizes God as "thou supreme eternal King! / Who o'er creation reigns / Whose power supports the rolling spheres / And yet my life sustains."<sup>239</sup> She looks forward to her soul being "freed from sin and death."<sup>240</sup> This strong theological foundation is evident throughout more than 40 years of writings. In one of her last letters before her death in 1814, Warren outlines the fundamentals of her faith:

We know there is only one self-existent, infinitely wise, and adorable Being—possessed of all possible perfection; we believe that he has sent a person styled his *beloved son*, to redeem a wretched race. Him, he has commanded us to hear. To him who was with Him before the World began, he has given all power in Heaven and on Earth. Of his essence, of his equality with the Father, it becomes not us to decide. He has said, "my Father is greater than I," but that, "My Father and I are one." I lay my hand on my mouth and silently bow,

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<sup>237</sup> Warren, "To J. Warren, Esq., An Invitation to Retirement," in "The Private Poems of Mercy Otis Warren," Mercy Otis Warren and Edmund M. Hayes, *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (Jun., 1981), 206.

<sup>238</sup> Warren, "Nineteenth Psalm," in "Private Poems," 208.

<sup>239</sup> Warren, "Address to the Supreme Being," in "Private Poems," 223.

<sup>240</sup> Warren, "Nineteenth Psalm," in "Private Poems," 209.

not doubting, if we sincerely and devoutly desire to know God and Him whom He hath sent, we shall have light sufficient to lead us safely through this valley of night, and introduce us where we shall see and understand more of the true meaning of St. Thomas's expression, "My Lord and my God"—as well as more—ininitely more of the nature of essence of both the Father and the son, than can possibly be discovered or comprehended while in this probationary state.<sup>241</sup>

Warren inevitably brings this Christian worldview to her writings and political thinking. Consistent with her religious upbringing, Warren saw God as playing a role in the political affairs of man, especially in the history of American colonists who "seemed to have been remarkably directed by the finger of Divine Providence, and led on from step to step beyond their own expectations, to exhibit to the view of distant nations, millions freed from the bondage of a foreign yoke, by that spirit of freedom, virtue, and perseverance, which they had generally displayed from their first emigrations to the wilderness, to the present day."<sup>242</sup>

The geographical distance between Great Britain and the American colonies "led to a period of independence"<sup>243</sup> designed by Providence to develop within the colonists the desire to be a free nation." She viewed America as a "favored nation"

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<sup>241</sup> Warren to a Very Young Lady (early 1800s), in *Selected Letters*, 252-3.

<sup>242</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 641.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 97;130.

with God operating on its side.<sup>244</sup> Although others attributed the American victory to other causes, she shares the perspective of “the reflective mind, which believes and rejoices in the intervention of Divine Providence, keeps its eye on that Superintending Power which governs the universe, and whose finger points the rise and fall of empires.”<sup>245</sup> Warren frequently attributes American victories and successes to the “hand of Providence”<sup>246</sup> intervening on their behalf, often against what appeared to be insurmountable odds. At times the courage and spirit of the colonists waned under the oppression of the British and the hardships of war. Yet, as Warren notes, “But a superintending Providence, that overrules the designs, and defeats the projects of men, remarkably upheld the spirit of the Americans, and caused events that had for a time a very unfavorable aspect, to operate in favor of independence and peace, and to make a new nation of the recent emigrants from the old and proud empire of Britain.”<sup>247</sup> Numerous times in her *History* she attributes the American victory as “the completion of the designs of divine government” directed by “He who ordains the destiny of man.”<sup>248</sup>

What political principles form the basis of Warren’s political thought? In her criticism of the proposed Constitution, Warren embraces the tenets of the social

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<sup>244</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 641.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 505.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 192; 680.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 525.

contract tradition of John Locke.<sup>249</sup> From that perspective, human beings are born into a state of nature, possessing natural rights and freedoms and governed by natural law, and by consent enter into a contract to be governed. Warren embraces the concept of natural law. Like Locke and Thomas Hobbes, she argues that “Self defence is a primary law of nature, which no subsequent law of society can abolish; this primaevial principle, the immediate gift of the Creator.”<sup>250</sup> Warren’s justification of the revolution echoes Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* and the social contract tradition, but this merging is not uncommon in pre-Revolutionary discourse.<sup>251</sup> As Revolutionary fervor grew in 1774, the British announced an edict to hold any colonist “liable on the slightest suspicion of treason.”<sup>252</sup> Warren writes in her *History*:

Though the operation of this system in its utmost latitude was daily threatened and expected, [145] it made little impression on a people determined to withhold even tacit consent to any infractions on their charter. They considered the present measures as a breach of a solemn covenant, which at the time that it subjected them to the authority of the king of England,

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<sup>249</sup> Warren often makes reference to John Locke, although he is not typically considered a republican thinker. This is an example of her tendency to synthesize or merge seemingly competing political traditions into her political thought. She makes use of Locke while defending her republican principles, often listing him among other thinkers in the radical Whig tradition, Algernon Sidney, Robert Boyle, James Harrington, Thomas Bayes, and others. For examples of this, see Warren, *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous*, 184; 192; 237; , Act II, Scene 3; and in *HAR*, 630.

<sup>250</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 118.

<sup>251</sup> I discuss this rhetorical merging more fully in Chapters 7 and 9.

<sup>252</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 80.

stipulated to them the equal enjoyment of all the rights and privileges of free and natural born subjects. They chose to hazard the consequences of returning back to a state of nature, rather than quietly submit to unjust and arbitrary measures continually accumulating.<sup>253</sup>

Great Britain ruled the colonies with “the oppressive hand of power,”<sup>254</sup> in violation of the colonists’ natural rights, their rights as British citizens, and the terms of their political agreement with England. Warren applauded when her brother James Otis, Jr., invoked the principles of Locke and famously argued before the Massachusetts Legislature in 1761, “Taxation without representation is tyranny.”<sup>255</sup> Just as Locke saw revolution as justified when government displayed “a long train of abuses, prevarications and artifices, all tending the same way,”<sup>256</sup> Warren saw the colonies similarly were justified in their opposition to the “long established tyranny” of British rule.<sup>257</sup> In her letters she made reference to the colonists making their “appeal to heaven”<sup>258</sup> for relief from British tyranny, echoing the language of Chapter XIV in Locke’s *Second Treatise*.

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<sup>253</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 80.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>255</sup> See G. Mercer Adam, John Clarke Ridpath, and Charles K. Edwards, *James Otis: The Pre-Revolutionist* (Teddington, Middlesex, UK: Echo Library, 2006).

<sup>256</sup> John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*, in *John Locke, Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing House, 2003), 376

<sup>257</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 81.

<sup>258</sup> Warren to Hannah Fayerwether Tolman Winthrop, Plymouth, January 1777, in *Selected Letters*, 27, referring to Locke’s *Second Treatise*, 363



In many ways Lockean principles inform her opposition to the newly drafted constitution. Warren reminds her readers of the “political axioms” upon which “all writers on government agree”:<sup>259</sup>

that man is born free and possessed of certain unalienable rights – that government is instituted for the protection, safety and happiness of the people, and not for the profit, honour, or private interest of any man, family, or class or men.—That the origin of all power is in the people, and that they have an incontestible right to check the creatures of their own creation, vested with certain powers to guard the life, liberty and property of the community: And if certain selected bodies of men, deputed on these principles, determine contrary to the wishes and expectations of their constituents, the people have an undoubted right to reject their decisions, to call for a revision of their conduct, to depute others in their room.<sup>260</sup>

The republican principles that animated the American Revolution were “grounded on the natural equality of man, their right of adopting their own modes of government, the dignity of the people, and that sovereignty which cannot be ceded either to representatives or to kings.”<sup>261</sup> She credits the intellectual inspiration of the Declaration of Independence to British thinkers Edmund Ludlow, Algernon Sidney,

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<sup>259</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 120.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 629.

John Milton, James Herrington, “the learned, enlightened, and renowned”<sup>262</sup> Locke, and jurist William Blackstone. The principles brought to America by the first settlers “were deeply infixed in the bosoms of their posterity, and nurtured with zeal, until necessity obligated them to announce the declaration of independence of the United States.”<sup>263</sup> Warren’s embrace of natural rights, natural law, and social contract theory of Locke and the Atlantic republicans is evident throughout her writings.

Her concept of republican liberty is drawn largely from this tradition, as well. Warren sees the arbitrary exercise of British power to be tyranny, and liberty as the defeat or absence of such tyranny. Warren defines republican freedom as “rational liberty”<sup>264</sup> dependent upon the exercise of virtue as a means of checking passions and of fostering independence. The capacity for self-government was found in virtue, as the means to resisting despotism, slavery, and non-dependence. The writings of Quentin Skinner and Philip Pettit offer a helpful discussion of Locke’s contributions of the ideas of slavery to the concept of republican liberty as absence of arbitrary power. Warren’s conception of republican liberty reflects this definition. Skinner in “Freedom as the Absence of Arbitrary Power” points to Locke’s definition of slavery as key to understanding republican liberty. “To live in servitude, according to Locke’s summary, is to live ‘under an Absolute, Arbitrary, Despotical power’; more specifically, a slave is said to be someone condemned to living in subjection to a

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<sup>262</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 630.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 631.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

Master with ‘an Arbitrary Power over his Life.’”<sup>265</sup> As Warren develops her conception of republican liberty and its opposite, tyranny, she adopts this language of servitude, slavery, and arbitrary power. Skinner argues that in this concept of freedom, republicans see that “the presence of arbitrary power within a civil association has the effect, as they like to phrase it, of converting its members from the status of free-men into that of slaves.”<sup>266</sup> Considerable debate among political theorists surrounds the question of how Locke’s definition of slavery fits within his larger concept of republican liberty, whether a potential for arbitrary power constitutes a state of being unfree or if an individual is unfree if and only if such arbitrary power is actually exercised to inhibit personal action. But this contemporary debate has little bearing on Warren’s concept of republican liberty as freedom from arbitrary power, as her concept of liberty is defined by the reality of repeated acts of British tyranny that diminished colonial freedom. Thus, in her formulation, Americans were unfree and deprived of liberty because they were experiencing tyranny and expressions of arbitrary power, without recourse to the protection of the rule of law or any means of checking that arbitrary power.

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<sup>265</sup> Quentin Skinner, “Freedom as the Absence of Arbitrary Power” in *Republicanism and Political Theory*, ed. Cecile Laborde and John Maynor (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd: 2008), 86. A further discussion of republican freedom is presented by Philip Pettit in “Republican Freedom: Three Axioms, Four Theorems” also in this volume. See especially pages 102-132.

<sup>266</sup> Skinner, “Freedom as the Absence of Arbitrary Power,” 85.

Warren develops this concept of republican liberty in two ways: first, in her contrast between liberty and the tyranny of arbitrary power;<sup>267</sup> and second, by identifying liberty as defining the early colonial political experience. We see these two predominant themes reflected in her first drama, *The Adulateur*. As the play opens, the old patriots Brutus (her brother James Otis) and Cassius (John Adams)<sup>268</sup> describe America as “the sweet retreat of freedom” whose founders “liv’d for freedom, and for freedom dy’d” and who “grasped at freedom, and they nobly won it.”<sup>269</sup> But time has passed, and “the sullen ghost of bondage” has pervaded the colonies, threatening to “tread down [their] choicest rights” and to destroy what the old patriots view to be “the happiest boon of Heaven.”<sup>270</sup> The threat to liberty is “the tyrant on his throne.”<sup>271</sup> She has specifically in mind Thomas Hutchinson, royal governor of Massachusetts. She models the play’s tyrannical character Rapatio on Hutchinson. Rapatio admits that the “prime basis” of his government is to “break through every tie of law and justice” and “to mangle law and reason.”<sup>272</sup> While

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<sup>267</sup> Bernard Bailyn identifies this characteristic of Revolutionary rhetoric which sets in opposition “power” to “liberty” in Ch. 3, “Power and Liberty: A Theory of Politics” in *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967), 55-93.

<sup>268</sup> Benjamin Franklin V identifies the characters Brutus (James Otis), Cassius (Adams), Brundo (Bernard), and Rapatio (Hutchinson) in Warren’s plays, *The Adulateur* (1773), *The Defeat* (1773), *The Group* (1776), *The Blockheads* (1776), and *The Motley Assembly* (1779), in his introduction to *The Plays and Poems Of Mercy Otis Warren*.

<sup>269</sup> Warren, *Adulateur*, Act I, Scene 2.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

liberty protects the natural rights to security, property, and life, tyranny threatens to destroy these. Under the rule of the tyrant, “The worthy citizen / finds property precarious – all things tend to anarchy and ruin.”<sup>273</sup> The tyrant holds “all the reins of government” and plans to wield his power to “Abuse the citizens, yet go unpunish’d.”<sup>274</sup> Whether the colonies can resist tyranny and re-establish their original liberty, the old patriots can only hope that “A manly sense of injured freedom wake them” and rouse them to shake off “the cold inactive spirit that slumbers in its chains.”<sup>275</sup> She contrasts liberty with slavery, as the character Brutus reminds his fellow patriots: “The man who boasts his freedom, / Feels solid joy -- though poor and low his state, / He looks with pity on the honored slave.”<sup>276</sup> Similarly, the patriot leader Brutus states: “I fear / The manacles prepared by Brundo's hand.”<sup>277</sup> The character Brundo represents former Massachusetts Gov. Bernard.

Warren sets liberty and tyranny in opposition. As the Revolution approaches, she explains: “The late convulsions are only the natural struggles which ensue when the genius of *liberty* arises to assert her rights in opposition to the ghost of Tyranny.”<sup>278</sup> She places the blame largely at the feet of Gov. Hutchinson, whom she

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<sup>273</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act I, Scene 2.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., Act I, Scene 1.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., Act III, Scene 1.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., Act V, Scene 1.

<sup>278</sup> Warren to Ellen Hobart Lothrop, [July?] 1775, in *Selected Letters*, 55.

described as “dark, intriguing, insinuating, haughty and ambitious, while the extreme of avarice marked each feature of his character.”<sup>279</sup> Her *History* records that Hutchinson “seized the opportunity to undermine the happiness of the people, [and] while he had their fullest confidence, to barter away the liberties of his country by the most shameless duplicity.”<sup>280</sup> But in an important way, Hutchinson put a human face on the deeper tyranny of the British. Many shared her conviction that the colonists were not responding to an occasional, trifling infringement of their liberty, but to a sustained violation of their rights and systematic exercise of arbitrary power, or tyranny. In making this distinction Warren’s reasoning echoes that of Locke: “Mankind are generally inclined to submission to rulers, and I believe history will furnish few instances of universal murmur, except when power is made, by the corrupt passions of governors, the instrument of tyranny.”<sup>281</sup> She makes a similar argument to her friend, British writer Catherine Macaulay: “Mankind have ever been so prone to yield implicitly obedience to that authority to which they have long been accustomed that there are few examples of resistance, unless the ill timed exercise or wanton abuse of power has rendered it necessary to resist that arbitrary spirit ... When the scimitar is drawn from such principles as these, life and fortune are a feature in the balance against the chains of servitude, which have long clanked in the

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<sup>279</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 45.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>281</sup> Warren to Hannah Quincy Lincoln, June 12, 1774, *Selected Letters*, 30.

disgusted ear of America.”<sup>282</sup> In the tyranny of British rule she saw “the guilty triumph in successful villainy, and the dark deeds of venality, oppression, and hypocrisy.”<sup>283</sup> To restore liberty, the colonists had to overthrow British tyranny. Warren is hardly alone in contrasting liberty with tyranny. The thinking so permeates early American thought that the Declaration of Independence identifies Britain’s egregious abuses of power as “the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states,”<sup>284</sup> thus justifying revolution. Warren often connects tyranny and slavery, using language such as “chains,” “bondage,”<sup>285</sup> “yoke of servitude,”<sup>286</sup> and similar imagery of enslavement. She sees the British authorities as “arbitrary and distant Lords”<sup>287</sup> exercising wanton power over the colonies. She calls on other colonists to “repel the arm of despotism, which has manacles prepared to enslave the unborn millions.”<sup>288</sup> American acquiescence to British oppression could lead only to servitude under a tyrannical master. Such fear of slavery fueled colonial desires for independence:

This dread hung heavily on the most sober and judicious, the most wise and virtuous part of the inhabitants of America. They were sensible [aware] that

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<sup>282</sup> Warren to Catherine Sawbridge Macaulay, Feb. 1, 1774, *Selected Letters*, 84.

<sup>283</sup> Warren to Harriet Shirley Temple, July 30, 1775, *Selected Letters*, 56.

<sup>284</sup> Warren to Hannah Quincy Lincoln, June 12, 1774, *Selected Letters*, 35.

<sup>285</sup> This language is used throughout her early writings. For example, the words “chains” and “bondage” appear numerous times in *The Adulateur*.

<sup>286</sup> Warren to Hannah Fayerwether Tolman Winthrop, August 1774, in *Selected Letters*, 31.

<sup>287</sup> Warren to Catherine Sawbridge Macauley, June 9, 1773, *Selected Letters*, 14.

<sup>288</sup> Warren to Hannah Quincy Lincoln, June 12, 1774, *Selected Letters*, 35.

both public and private virtue sink with the loss of liberty, and that the nobler emulations which are drawn out and adorn the soul of man, when not fettered by servility, frequently hide themselves in the shade, or shrink into littleness at the frown of a despot. They felt too much for themselves, and feared too much for posterity, longer to balance between either complete or partial submission, or an unreserved and entire claim to absolute independence.<sup>289</sup>

As Warren and her fellow patriots saw it, true liberty would be restored only when British tyranny was defeated and the inheritance of freedom recovered. In her pre-Revolutionary letters Warren points to the colonies' early foundation of liberty that flowed from their British roots, as she notes: "The rapacious arm of tyranny has now seized and is devouring the fair inheritance" and the land is "groaning under the yoke of foreign servitude."<sup>290</sup> As "the lineal descendants of the puritans, who had struggled in England for liberty as early as the reign of Edward the sixth,"<sup>291</sup> the colonists had a deep inheritance of liberty to draw upon as Revolution approached. She reminds her readers of the perseverance and virtue of their forefathers: "This small company of settlers, after wandering some time on the frozen shore, fixed themselves at the bottom of the Massachusetts Bay. Though dispirited by innumerable discouraging circumstances, they immediately entered into engagements with each other to form themselves into a regular society, and drew up a covenant, by which they bound

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<sup>289</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 165.

<sup>290</sup> Warren to Catherine Sawbridge Macauley, June 9, 1773, *Selected Letters*, 15.

<sup>291</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 56.



themselves to submit to order and subordination.”<sup>292</sup> Their laws and lives were marked with wisdom, dignity, simplicity, and piety.

Although Warren wrote no systematic work explaining her political ideas and ideals, many of the basic concepts of her thought can be identified through a careful reading of the writings she did produce. Evident is her intellectual debt to Locke and other natural rights and natural law thinkers. She recalls the thinking of the colonists in the years leading up to the Revolution:

The inhabitants of the whole American continent, appeared even at this period ready for the last appeal, rather than longer to submit to the mandates of an overbearing minister of state, or the execution of his corrupt designs. The masterly writers of this enlightened age, had so clearly defined the nature and origin of government, the equal claims and natural rights of man, the principles of the British constitution, and the freedom the subject had a right to enjoy thereby; that it had become a prevailing opinion, that government and legislation were instituted for the benefit of society at large, and not for the enrichment of the few; that whenever prerogative began to stretch its rapacious arm beyond certain bounds, it was an indispensable duty to resist.<sup>293</sup>

Employing those assumptions of natural law and natural rights derived from Locke and other philosophical traditions, Warren believed “[t]he whole sovereignty in the

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<sup>292</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 8.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

republican system is in the people,”<sup>294</sup> and that all political power rests with the people. She saw “free and equal representation”<sup>295</sup> to be “privileges of pure and genuine republicanism.”<sup>296</sup> Yet, as the colonies emerged from the Revolutionary War to form a new nation, the task facing them was to establish a government that would embody and preserve the ideals of republicanism. For Warren, this required a careful balance of liberty and power, of individual rights and the common good, to encourage prosperity while maintaining simplicity, a balance that would hold in perfect tension the competing claims of republican thought:

Yet, it may be observed, that it will require all the wisdom and firmness of the most sagacious heads, united with the most upright hearts, to establish a form of government for an extensive nation, whose independence has been recently acknowledged by Great Britain. This must be done on a just medium, that may control the licentiousness of liberty, and the daring encroachments of arbitrary power; a medium that may check the two extremes of democracy, and the overbearing influence of a young aristocracy, that may start up from a sudden acquisition of wealth, where it had never before been tasted.<sup>297</sup>

For Warren the proposed Constitution failed to strike the proper balance.

Her opposition helps to further explain her concepts of sovereignty and representation. In her criticism of the newly drafted Constitution, Warren argued that

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<sup>294</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 658.

<sup>295</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 120.

<sup>296</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 659.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 625-6.

“it is a republican principle that the majority should rule”<sup>298</sup> and that “the fundamental principle of a free government is the equal representation of a free people.”<sup>299</sup> Like many Antifederalist critics, she saw one of the primary faults of the proposed constitution as its failure to include a Bill of Rights. She argued: “The rights of individuals ought to be the primary object of all government, and cannot be too securely guarded by the most explicit declarations in their favor.”<sup>300</sup> To support this position, she appealed to the authority of the eminent English jurist William Blackstone, who wrote: “[T]he principal aim of society is to protect individuals in the absolute rights which were vested in them by the immediate laws of nature, but which could not be preserved in peace, without the mutual intercourse which is gained by the institution of friendly and social communities.”<sup>301</sup> Another serious defect in the proposed Constitution was its failure to protect the rights of conscience or freedom of the press. She also opposed the lack of trial by jury in civil cases, an essential legal right spanning the history of British jurisprudence. In a larger sense, the constitution failed to provide the legal and institutional protections that would guard against the encroachment of tyranny. If too much power were given to the federal government at the beginning, there would be no way to stop the accretion of power in the future. The sovereignty of the people would be sacrificed to the inevitable growth of federal power.

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<sup>298</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 136.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

Warren's criticisms also highlighted the failure to include annual elections of representatives. Her concept of representation required citizens to participate in the political process and elections for a number of reasons: to inform their representatives, to hold them accountable, to check political corruption, and to fulfill their political responsibilities as free citizens. Like other republican thinkers, Warren insisted that political sovereignty rested with the people. She assigned responsibilities to citizens in the exercise of these political rights: "And when society has thus deputed a certain number of their equals to take care of their personal rights, and the interest of the whole community, it must be considered that the responsibility is the great security of integrity and honor; and that annual election is the basis of responsibility."<sup>302</sup> She argued that longer terms of office increased the likelihood of political corruption. Understanding the corrupting nature of political power, she reminded her readers: "Man is not immediately corrupted, but power without limitation, or amenability, may endanger the brightest virtue."<sup>303</sup> The rule of law is one of the limitations on power. Arbitrary power and disregard for the rule of law undermined the virtue of Great Britain. Even the most virtuous of leaders or citizens are unlikely to resist the corruption associated with power.

Like other republicans Warren feared the threat of corruption. She argued that "a frequent return to the bar of their Constituents is the strongest check against the corruptions to which men are liable, either from the intrigues of other of more subtle

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<sup>302</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 122.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*

genius, or the propensities of their own hearts.”<sup>304</sup> Among the designs of Gov. Hutchinson to destroy American liberty was to extend the time between elections to three years, the idea being that a change in government is more difficult to make the longer the period between elections. She noted that Parliament rejected his idea, but her point would not be lost on her readers. No plan advocating biennial or triennial elections was seriously considered by officials concerned about liberty. To her it was untenable that the proposed constitution set elections for senators every six years and representatives every two years. She concluded her support for annual elections by arguing that “the best political writers have supported the principles of annual elections with a precision, that cannot be confuted, though they may be darkened, by the sophistical arguments that have been thrown out with design to undermine all the barriers of freedom.”<sup>305</sup>

Warren leveled a number of other criticisms against the new constitution based on her conception of representation. Requiring elections of senators every six years would effectively “be an appointment for life, as the influence of such a body over the minds of the people will be coequal to the extensive powers with which they are vested, and they will not only forget but be forgotten by their constituents.”<sup>306</sup> She based her opposition to the Senate election provision on the claim that “a branch of the Supreme Legislature thus set beyond all responsibility is totally repugnant to

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<sup>304</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 122.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

every principle of free government.”<sup>307</sup> She took exception to there being “no provision for a rotation, nor anything to prevent the perpetuity of office the same hands for life.”<sup>308</sup> The rotation of elected officers checks behavior in public office. Rotation of office “teaches him the feelings of the governed, and better qualifies him to govern in his turn.”<sup>309</sup> Two further criticisms were based on what she saw as inadequate representation: there being only one representative to every 30,000 inhabitants and only ten electors assigned to Massachusetts. In the first instance, she suggests that each state be allowed to decide its own “regulations of time, places, and manner of choosing [its] own Representatives.”<sup>310</sup> In the second case, the electoral process as proposed “is nearly tantamount to the exclusion of the voice of the people in the choice of their first magistrate.”<sup>311</sup> She predicted that states would act as an “aristocratic junto,” combining votes “to place at the head of the Union the most convenient instrument for despotic sway.”<sup>312</sup>

She feared as well that the electoral process would significantly undermine both the sovereignty of the people and that of individual states. Again, power rested with the people and was best expressed within the framework of individual state sovereignty. As made clear in her opposition to the Electoral College, much of

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<sup>307</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 126.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*

Warren’s criticism turns on her view of state sovereignty. In fact, she sees among the proposed constitution’s most dire consequences “the annihilation of independence and sovereignty of the thirteen distinct states”<sup>313</sup> – a phrase she repeats twice within the pamphlet. It takes away an individual state’s ability to raise revenue to pay its debts, instead shifting every source of revenue and the power of taxation to Congress. She also opposed the ratification process on the basis of state sovereignty: states are not allowed input or to offer changes to the proposals; the states are given inadequate time to fully evaluate the proposals; assent by only nine of the thirteen colonies is required for ratification, which constitutes “a subversion of the union of Confederate States” that could provoke civil unrest and possibly civil war.<sup>314</sup> She saw each of the individual states as a sovereign republic, and she was fierce in her defense of state sovereignty against the threat of federal consolidation of political power.

Warren embraced not only natural rights, but also the idea of “the natural equality of man.”<sup>315</sup> “Equal liberty,” she had written earlier to Adams, “is the birthright of man and the only basis on which Civil society can enjoy any durable tranquility.”<sup>316</sup> Republican principles are “grounded on the natural equality of man, their right of adopting their own modes of government, the dignity of the people, and

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<sup>313</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 128.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>315</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 619.

<sup>316</sup> Warren to John Adams, April 4, 1775. Available at: *Founding Families: Digital Editions of the Papers of the Winthrops and the Adams*, ed. C. James Taylor (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2007).

that sovereignty which cannot be ceded either to representatives or to kings.”<sup>317</sup> For Warren the “natural equality of man” requires that all individuals should be considered to be on “an equal footing, subject to the same feelings, stimulated by the same passions, endowed with the same heavenly spark to point them to what conduces most to the tranquillity of society, and to the happiness of the individual.”<sup>318</sup> She saw the American Revolution as an example of the “sudden rotations in human affairs [that] are wisely permitted by Providence, to remind mankind of their natural equality, to check the pride of wealth, to restrain the insolence of rank and family distinctions, which too frequently oppress the various classes in society.”<sup>319</sup>

Warren’s opposition to aristocracy and hereditary privilege was rooted in this conception of natural equality. Hereditary position in society is the antithesis of republican freedom and equality: “Democratic principles are the results of equality of condition. A superfluity of wealth, and a train of domestic slaves, naturally banish a sense of general liberty, and nourish the seeds of that kind of dependence that usually terminates in aristocracy.”<sup>320</sup> Hereditary aristocracy was highly prone to corruption, thus posing a serious threat to the republican ideals of virtue and liberty. “Aristocracy

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<sup>317</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 629.

<sup>318</sup> Warren to Hannah Lincoln Quincy, Sept. 3, 1774, in *Selected Letters*, 35.

<sup>319</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 119.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.



is a still more formidable foe to public virtue, and the prosperity of a nation.”<sup>321</sup> The republics of Geneva, Batavia, Poland and Ancient Rome, as well as the modern Italian states, all were threatened by aristocracy. From her historian’s perspective, “the tyranny of an oligarchy or aristocracy [is] frequently more severe and cruel than that of monarchy.”<sup>322</sup> After the war, she saw her fear of the development of an aristocracy realized in formation of the Order of the Cincinnati, an organization of Revolutionary military officers. To her it was an organization that “aimed at nothing less than an *American Monarchy*, & hereditary Nobility.”<sup>323</sup> She worried that “some men of genius, professed republicans” had become “advocates for Monarchy and all the trappings of Royalty. The *British Constitution* is the idol of their warmest devotion and they daily sigh for *Patrician rank*, hereditary titles, stars, garters, and nobility, with all the insignia of arbitrary sway [italics in original].”<sup>324</sup> The Order of the Cincinnati eventually disbanded, after many of its members resigned citing concerns similar to those Warren had offered.

Like many other Antifederalists, Warren envisioned republics to be small in size, and pointed to the models of the ancient Roman Republic and the republics of Batavia, Poland, Denmark, and Geneva. As an advocate of a small republic, she challenged the “federal republic” established in the proposed constitution, doubting

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<sup>321</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 133.

<sup>322</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 679.

<sup>323</sup> Warren to Winslow Warren, Aug. 22, 1784, *Selected Letters*, 185.

<sup>324</sup> Warren to Catherine Sawbridge Macaulay Graham, May 31, 1791, *Selected Letters*, 231.

that it could be sustained “through this continent in a gigantic size.”<sup>325</sup> She argued that “[t]he difficulty, if not impracticality, of exercising the equal and equitable powers of government by a single legislature over an extent of territory that reaches from the Mississippi to the Western lakes, and from them to the Atlantic Ocean, is an insuperable objection to the adoption of the new system.”<sup>326</sup> She rejected the Federalist vision of an extended republic or a federal republic, convinced that such a large territory would eventually require a highly centralized, powerful federal government. She thought the new government, as proposed, would ultimately “destroy state governments, and offer a *consolidated system*, irreversible but on conditions that the smallest degree of penetration must discover it to be impracticable.”<sup>327</sup>

Another criticism of the constitution centered on the establishment of a standing army, which typically was the means by which monarchies retained power. “[F]reedom revolts at the idea” of a standing army.<sup>328</sup> The basis for her opposition is spelled out in one of the early chapters of her *History*:

The experience of all ages, and the observations both of the historian and the philosopher agree, that a standing army is the most ready engine in the hand of despotism, to debase the powers of the human mind, and eradicate the manly spirit of freedom. The people have certainly every thing to fear from a

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<sup>325</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 122.

<sup>326</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 127.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

government, when the springs of its authority are fortified only by a standing military force. Wherever an army is established, it introduces a revolution of manners, corrupts the morals, propagates every species of vice, and degrades the human character.<sup>329</sup>

In Warren's mind, it was a "dread calamity."<sup>330</sup> She likely found her readers sympathetic to this criticism. The colonies had experienced the tyranny and terror of the British standing army, including the killing of five civilians in the Boston Commons in 1770, the forced quartering of British troops during the Revolutionary War, and the ominous presence of the Redcoats in their daily lives. "Standing armies have been the nursery of vice and the bane of liberty from the Roman legions to the establishment of the artful Ximenes, and from the ruin of the Cortes of Spain, to the planting of the British cohorts in the capitals of America."<sup>331</sup>

Warren was uncomfortable with many aspects of the proposed constitution's institutional arrangements and powers: There are "no well-defined limits of the Judicial Powers."<sup>332</sup> Similarly, she warned that the appellate jurisdiction of the federal supreme court "includes an unwarrantable stretch of power over the liberty, life, and property of the subject, through the wide Continent of America."<sup>333</sup> Further, the executive and legislative powers are "so dangerously blended as to give just cause

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<sup>329</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 36.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>331</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 124.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

of alarm.”<sup>334</sup> Congress is given the power to determine its own salary, a power which she argued may appear benign but “is to be feared when America has consolidated its despotism.”<sup>335</sup> She warned that “the glorious fabric of liberty successfully reared with so much labor and assiduity totters at the foundation, and may be blown away as the bubble of fancy by the rude breath of military combinations, and politicians of yesterday.”<sup>336</sup> Monarchy found its greatest practical support for arbitrary power in its standing army. After defeating the despotism of Great Britain, her fears turned to the threat of despotism from within: “[I]t is native usurpation that is shaking the foundations of peace, and spreading the sable curtain of despotism over the United States.”<sup>337</sup>

Consistent with other republican thinkers, Warren stressed the need for energetic citizenry. Monarchy relies upon “the doctrine of passive obedience”<sup>338</sup> of the people to accept the rule of an absolute monarch. “The mind becomes enervated, and the national character sinks to a kind of apathy with only energy sufficient to curse the breast that gave it milk.”<sup>339</sup> An apathetic, disengaged citizenry was fit only for monarchical rule. By contrast, a republic required an energetic citizenry, ever

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<sup>334</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 123.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*

vigilant against the threat of corruption and vigorous in its defense of virtue and liberty. Annual elections bolstered citizen engagement and energy. Self-government promoted vigor and an active citizenry. Republicans of her day understood republics to be fragile political things, prone to decay and ruin from within – hence, the need for virtue. As a historian well-schooled in ancient history, she knew only too well the short history of most republics. Virtue sustained the republic. Through her study of history, Warren had all the evidence she needed to highlight the many lessons of the corruption, degeneration, and demise of republican government.

Warren’s initial opposition to the new constitution stemmed from her understanding of republican principles. She longed to see true republican principles realized in the new nation. Her republican vision foresaw a constellation of independent sovereign states, each operating as its own republican government, bound by loose ties of union into one nation, with its citizens enjoying their hard-won republican liberty, free from dependence on other nations, and fully embodying the principles of republican government. As a republican thinker, Warren knew the dream of the “beautiful fabric of republicanism”<sup>340</sup> could only be realized through the expression of virtue.

Warren and the Antifederalists eventually lost most of this political battle. They were unsuccessful in defeating the proposed constitution, but they successfully advocated the necessity of a Bill of Rights, which was adopted as one of the first actions of the inaugural Congress. Although Warren fought valiantly for her

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<sup>340</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 29.

republican principles against what she saw to be a deeply flawed proposed constitution, she expressed support for the Constitution in her *History* (1804). How can this change of view be explained, especially in light of the pointed, principled opposition outlined above? Her evaluation of the Constitution in the final chapter of her *History* helps explain this apparent change of heart. She begins her evaluation of the Constitution in light of her view of human nature: “Perfection in government is not to be expected from so imperfect a creature as man.”<sup>341</sup> Still in the new Constitution she saw the best reflection of republican government: “Perhaps genius has never devised a system more congenial to their wishes, or better adapted to the condition of man, than the American constitution. At the same time, it is left open to amendments whenever its imperfections are discovered by the wisdom of future generations, or when new contingencies may arise either at home or abroad, to make alterations necessary. On the principles of republicanism was this constitution founded; on these it must stand.”<sup>342</sup> As she reports, “The new constitution was adopted with applause and success, and the promise and expectations of amendments.”<sup>343</sup> She was heartened by changes that had already been made to the original document through the amendment process:

Many corrections and amendments have already taken place and it is at the present period as wise, as efficient, as respectable, as free, and we hope

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<sup>341</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 692.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, 661-2.

as permanent, as any constitution existing on earth. It is a system admired by statesmen abroad, envied by distant nations, and revered [424] by Americans. They pride themselves on this palladium of safety, fabricated at a dangerous crisis, and established on the broad basis of the elective voice of the people. It now depends on their own virtue, to continue the United States of America an example of the respectability and dignity of this mode of government.<sup>344</sup>

Most important among these “corrections and amendments”<sup>345</sup> was the Bill of Rights, ratified in 1791, which had been advocated in many Antifederalist arguments and specifically advocated by Warren in *Observations*. The Eleventh Amendment had been ratified in Feb. 7, 1795, establishing the principle of state sovereignty-immunity from being sued by another state or country. After problems arose in the 1796 and 1800 presidential and vice-presidential elections, in 1804 the Electoral College was amended to require that electors cast votes for a single party ticket. In the election of 1796, Federalist John Adams was elected president, and Democratic-Republican Thomas Jefferson was elected as his vice president. This split-party result led to significant conflict within the executive branch. Critics of the process also feared that in this situation, the party that lost the presidency could capture the vice presidency and stage a coup, taking over power through succession after the death of the president. Warren voiced support for the Bill of Rights in her Antifederalist writings, but she makes no specific mention of the other amendments in her *History*.

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<sup>344</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 692.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*

One of the reasons for the success of the Constitution (and Warren's subsequent support of the document) had been the election of George Washington as the nation's first president: "The new system of government was ushered into existence under peculiar advantages; and no circumstance tended more rapidly to dissipate every unfavorable impression, than the unanimous choice of a gentleman to the presidential chair, at once meritorious, popular, and beloved, beyond any man."<sup>346</sup> In her opposition to the proposed constitution, Warren had expressed fears that the presidency had powers similar to that of a monarch. The selection of Washington had both calmed those fears and had been the key to successfully implementing the new Constitution: "Had any character of less popularity and celebrity been designated to this high trust, it might at this period have endangered, if not have proved fatal to the peace of the union. Though some thought the executive vested with too great powers to be entrusted to the hand of any individual. Washington was an individual in whom they had the most unlimited confidence."<sup>347</sup> Not only had she been concerned about the powers of the presidency under the new constitution, Warren also pointed to the threat a standing army posed to republican liberty. She attributed much of the success of the new Constitution to "the dissolution of the American army."<sup>348</sup> Despite these encouraging developments in the initial implementation of the Constitution, Warren still feared for the future of the republic: "Notwithstanding the advantages that may

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<sup>346</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 662.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*



be derived, and the safety that may be felt, under so happy a constitution, yet it is necessary to guard at every point, against the intrigues of artful or ambitious men, who may subvert the system which the inhabitants of the United States judged to be most conducive to the general happiness of society.”<sup>349</sup> She still harbored concerns about the tendency of those in political power to “pant for distinction” and to long for “pride of title and distinction, and an avarice for wealth to support it.”<sup>350</sup> She feared the undermining of “republican opinions, by interested and aspiring characters, eager for [427] the establishment of hereditary distinctions and noble orders.”<sup>351</sup>

It comes as no surprise that her concerns about the new republic centered on whether the people and leaders of the new nation had sufficient virtue to sustain the republic. The threats were many: the “spirit of avarice and speculation,”<sup>352</sup> “avarice without frugality,”<sup>353</sup> “a thirst for the accumulation of wealth,”<sup>354</sup> “the pursuit of private interest,”<sup>355</sup> “the declension of morals,”<sup>356</sup> and the rapid dissipation of the republican values so important to the Revolutionary generation. She feared as well the “tyranny of opinion,” which she saw as capable of “beclouding [the mind] with

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<sup>349</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 692.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, 690.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, 694.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, 389.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 391.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

prejudices which sink it into habitual servility, when reason languishes until overwhelmed by a torpor become too general to awaken, without producing convulsions more to be dreaded than submission.”<sup>357</sup>

Warren looked to a number of political mechanisms to answer these threats of corruption. She reminded her readers that “the elective franchise is in their own hands.”<sup>358</sup> She encouraged them to elect “such men to guide the national counsels, whose conscious probity enables them to stand like a Colossus, on the broad basis of independence.”<sup>359</sup> She discouraged any potentially corrupting connection with foreign nations, especially corrupt European nations that could lead to dependence or corruption. Rather, she encouraged the American government “forever to maintain with unshaken magnanimity, the present neutral position of the United [434] States.”<sup>360</sup>

True to her deepest republican principles, Warren returns to the theme of virtue as guarantor of the new republic. “It now depends on their own virtue, to continue the United States of America an example of the respectability and dignity of this mode of virtue.”<sup>361</sup> The Constitution provided a strong framework for the new republican government. In Warren’s estimation “Nothing seemed to be wanting to the United States but a continuance of their union and virtue. It was their interest to

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<sup>357</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 694.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, 696.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 697.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, 692.

cherish true, genuine republican virtue, in politics; and in religion, a strict adherence to a sublime code of morals, which has never been equalled by the sages of ancient time, nor can ever be abolished by the sophistical reasonings of modern philosophers.”<sup>362</sup> Many of her original Antifederalist criticisms had been ameliorated by early amendments to the Constitution. Warren remained cautiously optimistic about the future prospects of the new republic, largely because of “the excellent constitution.”<sup>363</sup> But Warren’s *History* stood as a reminder to future generations that the Constitution in itself provided only the framework for the new republic. The struggle against corruption never ended.

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<sup>362</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 648.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, 688.

## CHAPTER 4

### Mercy Otis Warren's First Thread of Virtue: The Classical View

*Who in these modern days, has arrived at such a  
degree of Roman virtue as not to grudge the costly sacrifice?*  
Mercy Otis Warren to Hannah Fayerwether Tolman Winthrop, 1774<sup>364</sup>

Mercy Otis Warren's conception of virtue at the time of the American founding reflects classical republican virtue, often expressed as patriotic self-sacrifice and requiring constant vigilance against corruption. Throughout her published writings and in correspondence with leading citizens of her day, Warren is an unwavering advocate of classical republican virtue. Enamored with the virtue of the Romans, Warren would often sign her writings with the pen name "Marcia," a reference to the second wife of Cato. Plutarch described Marcia as an example of Roman virtue, as "a woman of good reputation,"<sup>365</sup> thoroughly devoted to her husband and concerned for his safety. Two distinct elements of this thread of virtue are evident in Warren's writings – the heroic Greek virtues of the Homeric tradition and the virtues of the Athenian and the later Roman republics.<sup>366</sup> Warren's dramas epitomize the heroic virtue of the Homeric tradition and were meant to inspire patriotism and courage in her Revolutionary readers. Her dramatic writings are animated by classical ideals of patriotism, boldness in battle, resolution, manly

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<sup>364</sup> Warren to Hannah Fayerwether Tolman Winthrop 1774, in *Selected Letters*, 27.

<sup>365</sup> Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives of Illustrious Men*, trans. Arthur Hugh Clough (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Co., 1876), 551.

<sup>366</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre identifies these two threads of classic virtue in *After Virtue*, Chapters 10-11.

courage, bravery, and resistance to corruption. In this element of her writing, Warren draws heavily on her early classical training as well as on the prominent thread of antiquity in early America.<sup>367</sup> This demonstration of heroic virtue is a key element of her concept of virtue, and is most evident in her Revolutionary writings.

Warren incorporates into her political thought many other themes of the classical view of virtue: Plato's four cardinal virtues (courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom), as well as the Platonic idea that harmonizing the virtues leads to a peaceful city and a peaceful human soul; Aristotle's notions of citizenship, civic engagement, devotion to the common good; and especially lessons learned from the Roman Republic, including the importance of virtue, as well as the constant threats of corruption, licentiousness, self-interest, unchecked ambition, and luxury. She draws as well on a role-related conception of virtue common to the ancients. A virtuous individual developed and expressed *arête*, or excellence, associated with his or her role in society. Virtue then consists of the corresponding characteristics that enable an individual to fill a given role and to achieve *eudaimonia*, or happiness, by fulfilling his or her *telos*, or purpose. Using this formulation, Warren finds that a virtuous general is one who fulfills his military duties with excellence and in accordance with the standards associated with his position. She also incorporates the ideals of virtue borrowed from the ancients in Machiavelli's republican *virtu'*, especially the concept of manly military prowess in the face of tyranny. But this patriotic virtue is available to the Revolutionary generation through the writings of numerous classical thinkers.

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<sup>367</sup> See Cibbarelli, "Libraries of the Mind," 66-84; see also Chapter 2 of this work.

These many aspects of classical virtue figure heavily in the formulation of a classical thread in her conception of virtue.

Stories of the heroes of antiquity fired the colonial imagination at the American founding. As Bailyn notes in *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, “Most conspicuous in the writings of the Revolutionary period was the heritage of classical antiquity.”<sup>368</sup> Revolutionary literature is replete with references to Greek and Roman mythology, invoking a plethora of classical authors, among them Cicero, Virgil, Pliny the Elder, Lucretius, Homer, Cato, Seneca, and numerous others. Classical ideas and works, indeed, the very “thought of antiquity was second nature to Americans of the founding era.”<sup>369</sup> As Bailyn argues, the colonists “found their ideal selves, and to some extent, their voices”<sup>370</sup> by invoking the heroes of antiquity and the lessons of ancient Rome in their Revolutionary struggle. Using the classical tradition, “the Americans put together a conception of the ideal republican society.”<sup>371</sup> Warren falls within this ideological tradition. Latin classics and

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<sup>368</sup> Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 26. For a further discussion of classical influences, see Bailyn, pp. 23-27. Helpful discussions of the influence of Greek and Roman thought at the founding are found in other scholarly sources, including: Meyer Reinhold, *Classica Americana: The Greek and Roman Heritage in the United States* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1984); Eric Nelson, *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), chapters five and six; Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greek, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994) and *Greeks and Romans Bearing Gifts: How the Ancients Inspired the Founding Fathers* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008); and John C. Shields, *The American Aeneas: Classical Origins of the American Self* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001).

<sup>369</sup> Ellis Sandoz, *Republicanism, Religion, and the Soul of America*, 87.

<sup>370</sup> Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 26.

<sup>371</sup> Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 53.

contemporary histories of the ancient world fill Warren's readings and education, and this classical intellectual background is reflected throughout her writings.

A chronological consideration of Warren's works offers insights into the classical element of her virtue thinking. Her emphasis on heroic virtue is most evident in her early works, but remains a key theme throughout her writings. Classical republican virtue is clearly seen in her three earliest satirical plays: *The Adulateur, a Tragedy, as it is now acted in Upper Servia* (1773), *The Defeat* (1773), and *The Group* (1775). The three plays take the form of classical dramas populated by characters with Roman names, Cassius, Brutus, Rapatio, and Proteus, as well as a host of virtuous Senators and corrupt Roman officials. This genre allows her to invoke many of the lessons of the Roman republic and draw on historical figures, symbols, and concepts of classical republican thought. In this, she presents a powerful portrayal of virtue for her colonial audience and connects the ancient world to her current political context through popular dramatic works. Classical republican virtue emerges in these early works and is woven throughout her republican thought and her conception of virtue over the next three decades of her writing career.

In these three early works, a number of themes begin to mark Warren's conception of virtue as it developed during her lifetime. First, she draws the stark classical republican contrast between virtue and corruption, imbuing the characters of colonial patriots with virtue and those operating at the direction of or sympathetic to the British government (colonial government officials as well as British soldiers) with varying levels of vice. She warns of the constant threat to virtue posed by corruption

and vice, especially self-interest, luxury, privilege and position, ambition and avarice. Second, she establishes virtue as a revolutionary rallying cry equal to that of freedom and liberty, stating in numerous places in her plays that the patriots' sacrifices are made in the cause of virtue, not only of liberty. She reminds her audience of the sufferings and sacrifices of previous generations, who often gave their lives to preserve freedom. She encourages her readers to call on this inheritance of virtue and liberty in their own fight against British tyranny. Virtue for Warren is the essential element of American identity and its future success as a republic. Third, she develops the contrast between the simple, virtuous rural, agrarian life, and the luxurious and corrupting environment of urban life. In her later writings, this contrast develops not along geographical lines (city versus country), but as a call to simplicity and necessity versus luxury and accumulation, no matter where a citizen resides. Fourth, even in these early writings, she makes clear her opposition to a standing army because of its threat to republican liberty. This theme surfaces again in her opposition to the newly drafted federal constitution in *Observations on the New Constitution and on the Federal and State Conventions, By a Columbian Patriot* (1788). Finally, she incorporates into her conception of virtue the lexicon of ancient republican thought: despotism and tyranny, justice and the rule of law, non-dependence, the role of fate or fortune, the threat of faction, and the importance of remembering the noble past of their ancestors. She uses as examples many of the villains of Roman history and Machiavelli's republicanism, especially Nero. She invokes what would have been the familiar language of classical literature, sirens, sea nymphs, and plentiful references



to Roman gods and goddesses and famous events of Roman history, all or much of which would be familiar to her colonial audience.

This classical thread is part of a larger framework for the place of virtue within her republican thinking. Virtue provides a check on corruption in the public and private spheres. Without virtue, liberty cannot resist the encroachment of tyranny. Employing the classical dramatic genre allows her to remind her audience of the many lessons of ancient republicanism and apply them to their own struggle against British oppression. The first of these early satirical political plays, *The Adulateur*, was published anonymously in segments twice in 1772, Warren's first publication. Although written in dramatic form, it was not intended for performance and was published instead as a pamphlet in 1773. Benjamin Franklin V in his introduction to the 1939 compilation of Warren's plays and poems called the play "a flawed work."<sup>372</sup> Franklin pointed to evidence that Warren composed "most" of the 1773 text, but "someone else, without her knowledge, wrote material that became incorporated into what we now know as *The Adulateur*."<sup>373</sup> Despite the play's textual problems and dispute over some of its contents, it still provides an important first look at Warren's concept of virtue in the Revolutionary political context.

Using the dramatic form gives Warren a powerful vehicle for political satire and for republican persuasion. She sets *The Adulateur* in Upper Servia (intended to be

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<sup>372</sup> Benjamin Franklin V, "Introduction," *The Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, viii. *The Adulateur* was published in the *Massachusetts Spy* on March 26 and April 23, 1772, and printed and sold as a pamphlet at the New Printing Office (Boston) a year later.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*

Boston) and depicts the growing tensions between repressive British colonial rule and rising revolutionary fervor. Her main characters are Rapatio, leader of a tyrannical government (the thinly veiled Massachusetts colonial governor Thomas Hutchinson) and a group of patriots led by Brutus (modeled after her brother and Revolutionary leader James Otis, Jr.).<sup>374</sup> Colonists were familiar with the historical view of Brutus as a Roman hero with “an acute sense of patriotism.”<sup>375</sup> Samuel Adams is also represented among the patriots as Cassius, the play’s impassioned defender of liberty. The play’s title reflects its dominant theme, that freedom-loving colonial patriots should not be deceived by outward appearances of the colonial government or lured by promises of position, power, or pension, but must instead be awakened to the deceptive scheme to undermine republican liberty being undertaken by Rapatio and his many minions. Rapatio is the ultimate *adulateur*. An “adulateur” (in modern usage, adulator), is “one who offers praise consciously exaggerated or unmerited; a servile or hypocritical flatterer.”<sup>376</sup> One of its uses dating to 1779 suggests a person who flatters a rival for political gain. In Warren’s day it was a derogatory term, often associated with hypocritical, self-promoting individuals who flatter a ruler of despicable character for personal gain, and it is associated with sycophantic deception

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<sup>374</sup> Franklin in his “Introduction” associates Warren’s characters with the real people they are meant to represent in these plays.

<sup>375</sup> H. Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 24.

<sup>376</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, OED Online. March 2011. Oxford University Press.

by someone in authority.<sup>377</sup> In the play the term reflects the corrupting character of Gov. Hutchinson and those who work on his behalf, acting in a treacherously deceptive manner to betray colonial patriots and the cause of freedom.

In this first play, Warren makes twenty-seven references to virtue, or to virtuous action and character. The play's prologue sets the stage by quoting another well-known drama, *Cato's Tragedy*, written by Joseph Addison in 1712 and first performed in 1713. Addison's play features the figure of Cato, the last of the Roman republicans and whose name was seen by Americans at the time as "the watchword for the martyrdom of liberty."<sup>378</sup> Warren quotes Addison's *Cato* in the prologue to *The Adulateur*:

Then let us rise, my friends, and strive to fill  
This little interval, this pause of life,  
(While yet our liberty and fates are doubtful)  
With resolution, friendship, Roman bravery,  
And all the virtues we can crowd into it;  
That Heav'n may say it ought to be prolong'd.<sup>379</sup>

It was a familiar reference, one that epitomized republican virtue for the revolutionary generation. Addison's *Miscellaneous Works* (1726) is listed among the pre-university

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<sup>377</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, OED Online. March 2011.

<sup>378</sup> Frederic M. Litto, "Addison's *Cato* in the Colonies," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 23, No. 3 (Jul., 1966), 431. Forrest McDonald discusses the importance of Addison's *Cato* in the foreword to *Cato: A Tragedy and Selected Essays*, ed. Christine Dunn Henderson and Mark E. Yellin, with a Foreword by Forrest McDonald (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2004), ix-x.

<sup>379</sup> Warren, "Prologue," *The Adulateur*, in *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*.

tutorial typical of the reading curriculum of her day. Warren referred again to Addison in *Observations on the New Constitution by a Columbian Patriot*.<sup>380</sup> The five-part play was popular among British audiences and was considered a theatrical classic in the colonies by the 1760s. The influence of Addison's *Cato* on the Revolutionary generation is significant: It was reportedly George Washington's favorite play, and he had it performed before the Continental Army when it was encamped at Valley Forge in 1777; it is thought to be the source of Patrick Henry's ultimatum, "Give me liberty or give me death!"; it is thought to have inspired Washington's praise of Benedict Arnold in a letter of 1775 following the unsuccessful Quebec expedition: "It is not in the power of any man to command success; but you have done more – you have deserved it"; and it is cited as a likely source for Nathan Hale's famous dying words when caught by the British for espionage, "I regret that I have but one life to give to my country."<sup>381</sup> As historian of theater Frederic M. Litto notes of Addison's play, "In the years of increasing political tension before the Revolution, its depiction of Cato's last stand for liberty against the usurpation of Caesar found special sympathy in the hearts and minds of the colonists."<sup>382</sup> In

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<sup>380</sup> Cibbarelli, "Libraries of the Mind," 70.

<sup>381</sup> For a fuller discussion of the importance of Addison's *Cato* in American Revolutionary thought, see: Litto, "Addison's *Cato* in the Colonies," 431-449. The parallels to Patrick Henry's words are seen in *Cato*, Act II, Scene 1, 23-25: "My voice is still for war, / Gods, can a Roman senate long debate / Which of the two to choose, slavery or death!" and Act II, Scene 4, 79-80: "It is not now a time to talk of aught / But chains, or conquest; liberty, or death." The line from Washington's letter to Nathan Hale parallels that of Act I, Scene 2: "What a pity it is / That we can die but once in service of our country." See also: F. K. Donnelly, "A Possible Source of Nathan Hale's Dying Words," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 42, No. 3 (Jul., 1985), 394-396.

<sup>382</sup> Litto, "Addison's *Cato* in the Colonies," 431.

Addison's play, the ruthless tyrant Julius Caesar overcomes republican virtue in his conquest of Utica, and Cato dies a martyr for liberty at his own hands. In Warren's dramatic rendition, colonial Gov. Thomas Hutchinson plays the role of Julius Caesar and the young patriot Marcus (and by extension all American patriots), that of the martyr Cato.

By invoking the dramatic example of Cato's virtuous stand against tyranny, Warren provides both a patriotic exhortation and a powerful warning to her Boston audience. The parallel Warren draws is clear: Tensions have intensified between Britain and the citizens of Boston. Two years after the Boston Massacre (1770) and with the city in the midst of the revolt against the Tea Act of May 1773, the political climate is volatile and armed conflict appears inevitable. But what will be required of the patriotic citizens of Boston? To Warren, the crisis threatens the most basic liberties of the colonists and will require of them patriotic virtue equal to that of the noblest among the ancient Roman republicans.

As Brutus reminds the audience in the opening lines of the play, the Boston citizens' "choicest rights" had been "tread down" by the acts of British soldiers, "while hoodwinked justice drops her scales, and totters on her basis."<sup>383</sup> Upper Servia (Boston) stands on the brink of war – it must either fight for liberty or live in bondage. Freedom is threatened by the tyrannical Rapatio and the soldiers at his command; the patriot leaders fear the citizens of Servia are blissfully unaware of the threat and what will be required of them to preserve liberty. Cassius offers hope to

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<sup>383</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act I, Scene I.

Brutus, recalling the virtue of heroes of ancient Rome and the patriots' legacy of liberty:

Oh! Brutus, our noble ancestors,  
Who lived for freedom, and for freedom died;  
Who scorned to roll in affluence, if that state  
Was sickened over with the dread name of slaves;  
Who in this desert stocked with beasts and men,  
Whose untamed souls breathed naught but slaughter --  
Grasped at freedom and nobly won it.<sup>384</sup>

The patriotic characters in the play – Brutus, Cassius, Junius, Portius, and the young patriot Marcus – epitomize all that is virtuous. They are noble, animated by firmness, zeal, and an “ancient sense of freedom.”<sup>385</sup> They are willing to die for their country. They are “men who scorn the name of faction – men who nobly act from sense of honor.”<sup>386</sup> They call on “impartial justice”<sup>387</sup> rather than mob passion to judge their foes.

By contrast, Rapatio is a tyrant, driven by greed, the desire for revenge, and an insatiable lust for power. As his name suggests, his is a character marked by rapacity, i.e., inordinate or predatory greed. He cares little for the rule of law or for justice. In

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<sup>384</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act I, Scene 1.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, Act II, Scene 1.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*

his opening soliloquy, Rapatio is revealed: his desire is for “homes, places, pensions.”<sup>388</sup> As for the citizens of Upper Servia, he muses to himself: “I’ll trample down their choicest rights / And make them curse the hour that gave me birth.”<sup>389</sup> His power is secured by “inhuman soldiers,”<sup>390</sup> who “abuse the citizens and go unpunished.”<sup>391</sup> They “will break through every tie of law and justice” to obey his commands.<sup>392</sup> Rapatio’s government is plagued by corruption: “All the posts of honor are filled with beings wholly at my service ... who if I spoke, would mangle law and reason, And nobly trample on the highest ties.”<sup>393</sup> Rather than emulate the virtuous examples from Roman history, Rapatio twice compares himself favorably to the Roman emperor Nero. As the first act closes, Rapatio devises a plot to stir conflict in Upper Servia that will enable him to squelch the awakening patriotic fervor and to solidify his power:

I’ll make the scoundrels know who sways the scepter

Before I’ll suffer this, I’ll throw the state

In dire confusion, nay I’ll hurl it down,

And bury all things in one common ruin.

Over fields of death; with hastening step I’ll speed,

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<sup>388</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act I, Scene 2.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., Act II, Scene 1.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid., Act I, Scene 2.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

And smile at length to see my country bleed;  
From my tame heart the pang of virtue sling,  
And mid the general flame like Nero sing.<sup>394</sup>

As the play progresses, Rapatio's nefarious plot unfolds: an innocent "virtuous citizen"<sup>395</sup> is killed by one of Rapatio's soldiers, the melee begins, and the patriots rally to the cause of virtue and freedom.

With her specific references to virtue and what constitutes virtuous action, Warren lays the foundation of the classical republican thread of her conception of virtue. Just as Aristotle spoke of the habituation of virtue, Warren similarly adopts the idea of the habit of virtue into her conception. Virtue is learned in youth and can be easily lost. It is ever-threatened by the corruption of the likes of Rapatio, his minions, and the soldiers of his standing army. One of Rapatio's minions, Limput, laments his actions against his fellow citizens:

In youth when all my soul was full of virtue,  
And growing age had not matured my practice,  
I felt a pang and shuddered at a crime.  
But thoughts like these have long since slept; old habits  
Have seared my conscience – Vice is now familiar—<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Scene I, Act 2.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, Act II, Scene 3.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*, Act II, Scene 4.



Virtue must be taught at a young age, practiced until it becomes habit, and guarded throughout life. Corruption and vice, too, can become habit and pose a constant threat to virtue, thus requiring constant vigilance. Virtue and corruption are contrasted clearly in *The Adulateur*. Importantly at this point, Warren refers to virtue in a singular sense, rather than as multiple virtues one can learn and express. Her later conception of virtue includes both this singular and a plural sense. This singular conception is consistent with ancient usage. The listing of multiple virtues developed in the scholastic writings of Aquinas, who categorized the virtues according into spiritual, intellectual, or moral characteristics, then sought to unify those virtues in the Christian context. This change in Warren's later writings suggests a shift in emphasis on the classical heroic virtue necessary to the war effort to a more general Christian virtue needed to sustain the republic when the war ends.<sup>397</sup> In this first publication, virtue is a singular concept.

Warren offers virtue as a powerful rallying cry for the revolutionary generation. The virtuous sage Cassius presses Brutus to "live to rescue virtue"<sup>398</sup> and to tend to "virtue and freedom."<sup>399</sup> As patriots begin their fight against Rapatio, Brutus reminds his fellow patriots, "But if we chance to fall, we fall for virtue, the

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<sup>397</sup> See Ch. 1 for a discussion of this aspect of the career of the concept of virtue.

<sup>398</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act II, Scene 1.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, Act I, Scene 1.

cause disarms the tyrant of his sting / And wards off his shafts.”<sup>400</sup> The patriots are called to “virtue’s cause”:<sup>401</sup>

And hence, ye patriots learn a useful lesson –  
He who in virtue’s cause remain unmoved  
And nobly struggles for his country’s good:  
Shall more than conquer – better days shall beam,  
And happier prospects crowd again the scene.<sup>402</sup>

The play ends not in an appeal to the cause of liberty, but to the cause of virtue. Warren returns again to the theme of patriots fighting in virtue’s cause in later dramatic works, and she judges in the actions of men and women in her *History* in terms of how they served this cause during the Revolutionary War. She connects virtue to America’s future, invoking for the first time a millennial theme as she closes the play:

While thou, my country, shall again revive,  
Shake off misfortune, and through ages live.  
See through the waste a ray of virtue gleam,  
Dispel the shades and brighten all the scene.  
Waked into life, the blooming forest glows,  
And all the desert blossoms as the rose.

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<sup>400</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act II, Scene 4.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, Act III, Scene 3.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*

From distant lands see virtuous millions fly,  
To happier climates, and a milder sky,  
While on the mind successive pleasures pour,  
Till time expires, and ages are no more.<sup>403</sup>

Like many in her day, Warren envisions America as a beacon of hope to the world, and invokes the language of the biblical prophecies of Isaiah 35:1, when “the desert shall rejoice and blossom as a rose,” reflecting the joyful flourishing of Christ’s coming kingdom on earth and the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>404</sup> Virtue is the key to reviving the patriotic dream and offers hope against the tyranny that envelopes them.

Warren’s second play, *The Defeat*, was published closely on the heels of *The Adulateur* in July 1773 in the *Boston Gazette* and it, too, was never performed. It is a much shorter work and appears in a fragmentary rather than in coherent dramatic form.<sup>405</sup> Warren refers to virtue eighteen times in this shorter work. She incorporates many of the same republican themes, but explains, expands, and deepens her expression of classical ideals. She returns to the dramatic setting of “Upper Servia”

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<sup>403</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act V, Scene 3.

<sup>404</sup> This passage in Warren’s play refers to Isaiah 35:1. To explain the Biblical references in Warren’s work I refer to the King James Version, which was the translation widely available to American colonists in the eighteenth century. For Biblical commentary contemporary to Warren and early America, I use Matthew Henry’s *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, first published in 1706, and John Wesley’s *Explanatory Notes* (1754-1765), both available to early Americans. The King James Version of the Holy Bible is widely available, but for this paper, I have relied on the website: Bible Study Tools at <http://www.biblestudytools.com/>.

<sup>405</sup> Franklin, “Introduction,” xi. Franklin calls *The Defeat* “Warren’s least satisfactory dramatic creation” and “too fragmentary to be effective dramatically.” Only four of the characters listed in the dramatic personae have lines in the play, and a prominent character, Limput, is not included in the listing. Franklin further argues that the play does not constitute a separate work, but is “best seen as an incomplete extension of *The Adulateur*.”

(Boston), again employing Roman names for her characters. The play continues the action of *The Adulateur*, with Rapatio reprising his role as the nemesis of American virtue and liberty. The play's prologue taps the work of another writer familiar to her audience, the British poet Edward Young (1683-1765). Young was most famous for his poem, "The Complaint, Or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality," published in 1742. He was an ordained Anglican priest and well-known as a Christian apologist as well as poet.<sup>406</sup> The quotation used by Warren comes from one of his lesser-known poems, "Epistle to Mr. Pope, Concerning the Authors of the Age" (1730):

O how I laugh when I a blockhead see  
Thanking a villain for his probity,  
Who stretches out a most respectful ear  
With snares for wood-cocks in his holy leer,  
It tickles through my soul to hear the cock's  
Sincere encomium on his friend the fox,  
Sole patron of his liberties and rights,  
While graceless Reynard listens – till he bites.<sup>407</sup>

Reynard the fox is a medieval reference to a trickster figure, a nasty but charismatic character, a hardened evil-doer with whom there is no turning of his ways. With that,

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<sup>406</sup> Isabel St. John Bliss, "Young's *Night Thoughts* in Relation to Contemporary Christian Apologists," *PMLA* 49, No. 1 (Mar., 1934), 37.

<sup>407</sup> Warren, "Prologue," quoting Edward Young, "Epistle to Pope" (1730), *The Defeat*, in *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*.

Warren continues the dramatic theme of virtue being cleverly undermined by the false flattery of the men who hold colonial political power. In the opening soliloquy,

Rapatio reveals his designs against Upper Servia:

I've traversed over the records of the land,  
Ransacked the musty volumes of the dead,  
Researched the deeds of former infamy,  
And traced each monument of early days.  
Nor unexplored have left one useful line  
To prove the darling purpose of my soul  
And fix the shackles on an injured land.<sup>408</sup>

Despite the valor and fierce patriotism of the virtuous citizens in *The Adulateur*, Rapatio still employs his deceitful scheme of seducing unwitting colonists with “salary, pension, perquisites.”<sup>409</sup> On his way to address the Assembly of senators, he muses to himself:

A feather bribes all, but the virtuous few,  
I'll tinkle empty titles in their ears  
And browse the rattle for the crest of fools,  
Lull supine in thoughtless indolence.  
And sink the claim of freedom with a nod:

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<sup>408</sup> Warren, *The Defeat*, Act I, Scene 1.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid. This desire for “salary, pension, [and] perquisites” makes the British authorities into “placemen,” the idiom of the English “Commonwealthmen.” See Caroline Robbins’s *Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development, and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2004).

Nor leave a trace of all their boasted rights.<sup>410</sup>

Her warning to the audience is clear: Rapatio appears virtuous, but is in fact driven by “wild ambition,”<sup>411</sup> and by the vices of pride, avarice, and revenge. The virtuous Senators discover his plot and Rapatio is defeated, his corrupted soul beyond salvation. His is a “soul deformed by avarice and pride, all the tumult of discordant fears.”<sup>412</sup> In the end Rapatio is ruined, as he tells his loyal henchman Limput: “A lifeless effigy won’t long suffice / But you and I as forfeiture must pay / Our hoary heads to this much injured state.”<sup>413</sup>

Warren continues to develop the classical republican contrasts between corruption and virtue, between self-interested ambition and devotion to the common good, between arbitrary exercise of power and importance of the rule of law, and many of the lessons she draws for her audience are familiar. The virtuous senators are “cool, deliberate, honest, brave, and wise, / Benevolent, humane, rejoicing most / When happiness is most diffused to Man / Renowned for virtue as for hate of tyrants.”<sup>414</sup> But as for the character marked by vice, his is

A base, duplicit, narrow servile soul,

Subtle, all natural, treacherous, insincere,

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<sup>410</sup> Warren, *The Defeat*, Act I, Scene 1.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., Act III, Scene 2.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

Dissimulation rest upon his tongue ...

Proud and ungrateful, no restraints can bend,  
false to his friends, and faithless to his God.”<sup>415</sup>

Warren intensifies the portrayal of viciousness of Rapatio’s character and presents him as a scheming betrayer of King George, indicating ongoing colonial sympathy for the British crown but growing dissatisfaction with the repressive authority of colonial officials. In the dramatic notes in the middle of the play, Warren calls King George “our pious and gracious monarch” and refers to the “unexampled goodness of George the Third.”<sup>416</sup> Cognizant of stubborn colonial loyalty to the King, her most efficacious target is Gov. Hutchinson. The overriding lesson for the audience is to see Rapatio for who he truly is. As he finally admits:

[W]e’re the miscreants that have sold their rights,  
Yet cheated many with a false pretense  
That we alone the public welfare sought.  
The mask is off and my detested form  
Is known to those who have been most deceived.”<sup>417</sup>

Tory colonists are being deceived by overreaching, corrupt colonial officials. For Warren, Gov. Hutchinson poses the primary threat to colonial liberty and *The Defeat* provides the opportunity to expose and destroy him with her pen.

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<sup>415</sup> Warren, *The Defeat*, Act III, Scene 2.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid., dramatic notes between Act III, Scene 1 and Act III, Scene 2.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., Act III, Scene 2.

As for her conception of virtue, it is a check on corruption and once awakened, it is capable of overcoming vice. It is a source of peace for the virtuous individual, but those who reject virtue, are plagued with inner turmoil. As Rapatio bemoans his fate, “Peace I did say! that gentle heavenly guest / Has not resided in my cankered breast / Ever since my native land I basely sold, / For flattering titles and more sordid gold.”<sup>418</sup> The virtuous Senate is able to see through Rapatio’s schemes to “call virtue vice and giving truth the lie.”<sup>419</sup> The patriotic Senators are “virtue’s friends, / Who ever have their country’s good at heart.”<sup>420</sup> Warren draws a bright line between virtue and the threat of vice, embracing much in the classical republican tradition.

Warren’s third pre-Revolutionary and popular play, *The Group* (1775), strikes many of the earlier themes of her thinking about virtue. Franklin notes that the first two scenes of the play “were evidently so popular that at least three separate editions were published”<sup>421</sup> in 1775. The work was circulated in Boston and then more widely in New York and Philadelphia. The play is set in Boston in 1774, after Gov. Hutchinson had been replaced by Parliament with the Writ of Mandamus, adopted on Aug. 9, 1774. The move inflamed colonial anti-British passions, seen as an act of arbitrary power effectively nullifying the Massachusetts Charter. Warren’s prologue

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<sup>418</sup> Warren, *The Defeat*, Act III, Scene 1.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., Act III, Scene 2.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Franklin, “Introduction,” *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, xiv.



“borrow[s] the following spirited lines from a late celebrated poet”<sup>422</sup> and quotes Alexander Pope’s “First Satire on the Second Book of Horace Imitated” (1733):

What! Armed for virtue, and not point the pen,  
Brand the bold front of shameless guilty men,  
Dash the proud gamester from his gilded car,  
Bare the mean heart which lurks beneath a star.  
...  
Shall I not strip the gilding off a knave,  
Unplaced, unpensioned, no man’s heir or slave?  
I will or perish in the generous cause;  
Hear this and tremble, ye who escape the laws;  
Yes, while I live, no rich or noble knave,  
Shall walk the world in credit to his grave,  
To virtue only, and her friends, a friend,  
The world beside may murmur, or commend.<sup>423</sup>

The stage again is set for her predominant themes of virtue against vice. The play is replete with corrupt, pro-Tory characters, backed by “a mighty army and navy, from blunderland [Great Britain], for the laudable purpose of enslaving its best friends.”<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> For the poem in its entirety, see *Alexander Pope, Selected Poetry*, ed. Pat Rogers, (Cambridge, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), 88-92. Warren specifically refers to lines 105-108 and 114-122 in *The Group*, Prologue, in *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*.

<sup>423</sup> Warren, “Prologue,” *The Group*.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, Act I, Scene 1.

Franklin's introduction offers a succinct statement of the main tension within the play: "Warren's message is clear. The political turmoil has forced people to examine their consciences, to make hard decisions, to rank their values. If Americans side with Britain, then, they do so because they are morally corrupt, as are the Tories in this play. These people choose self over family, expediency over the humane teachings of their fathers, contaminated urban values over purer rural ones, corruption over morality, tyranny over godliness, oppression over freedom, and England over America."<sup>425</sup> In terms of her conception of virtue, Warren's message is equally clear – in the closing scene of the play, the colonists are called to "fight in virtue's ever sacred cause."<sup>426</sup>

Again in this drama Warren invokes many classical images and references. The group of Tory characters is presented as "court sycophants, hungry harpies, and unprincipled dangles ... led by Massachusettensis in the form of a basilisk."<sup>427</sup> Massachusettensis was the popular Tory pamphleteer and prominent lawyer, Daniel Leonard (1740-1820). Leonard was elected before the age of 30 to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, joined the Whigs in opposition to British policies, and in 1773 was serving on the Boston Committees of Correspondence, the pro-Revolutionary political organization birthed at the Warren home a few years earlier.

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<sup>425</sup> Franklin, "Introduction," *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>426</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act II, Scene 3.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, Prologue. This description of the characters follows after the listing of the "Dramatis Personae."

By August 1774, “it was clear he had been converted,” had become a “staunch supporter” of British authority, and was “irrevocably classified as a Tory.”<sup>428</sup>

A basilisk is a legendary small but deadly lizard described by Pliny the Elder as “being not more than 12 fingers [12 inches] in length.”<sup>429</sup> The basilisk is king of all serpents, so venomous it leaves a trail of lethal venom in its wake. It is widely mentioned in literature, dating back to the early Greeks and throughout ancient mythology. The basilisk is mentioned in the Bible in Isaiah 14:29 and Psalm 91:13, by Shakespeare, and in the poetry of Pope and others. From the basilisk legend is derived the phrase “evil eye,” referring to the creature’s legendary power to kill with a single glance.<sup>430</sup> Bulfinch’s *Mythology* notes that the basilisk was called king of the serpents because “all other serpents and snakes, behaving like good subjects, and wisely not wishing to be struck dead, fled the moment they heard the distant hiss of their king.”<sup>431</sup> As the play unfolds, Warren fleshes out the reptilian likeness of Massachusettensis, comparing him to Satan in the Garden of Eden: “And like the toad squat at the ear of Eve / infusing poisons by his snaky tongue.”<sup>432</sup> Portraying Massachusettensis as a basilisk not only reflects Warren’s satirical bent, but is a

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<sup>428</sup> Charles S. Hyneman, “Massachusettensis, Daniel Leonard 1740-1820: To All Nations of Men: Boston 1773,” in *American Political Writing During the Founding Era: 1760-1805*, ed. Charles S. Hyneman and Donald Lutz (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983), 209-216.

<sup>429</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History: A Selection*, ed. John F. Healey (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 117.

<sup>430</sup> For a discussion of the basilisk in ancient literature, see R. McN. Alexander, “The Evolution of the Basilisk,” *Greece and Rome*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series 10 no. 2 (1963), 170-181.

<sup>431</sup> Thomas Bulfinch, *Bulfinch’s Mythology* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing Company, 2004), 203.

<sup>432</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act II, Scene 3.

charged pejorative characterization, exposing his pure destructive power and, like the mythical serpent, his treacherous duplicity and power to render fully subservient those under his authority.

*The Group* abounds with references to antiquity. Brigadier Hateall compares himself to Nero, relishing the prospect of the coming war and its toll on the colonists:

Compassion never shall seize my steadfast breast,  
Though blood and carnage spread through all the land;  
Till streaming purple tinge the verdant turf,  
Till every street shall float with human gore,  
I, Nero like, the capital in flames,  
Could laugh to see her glotted sons expire,  
Though much too rough my soul to touch the lyre.<sup>433</sup>

Warren again uses Roman names for her characters, Rapatio, Brutus, Cassius, Rusticus, Hortensius, and Dick the Publican<sup>434</sup>. The remorseful turncoat Beau Trumps fears the judgment of “Nemesis’s just impartial scale,”<sup>435</sup> referring to the Greek’s goddess of divine retribution, who represents the righteous anger of the gods toward the proud or insolent. Warren compares the powerful treachery and deception of Massachusettensis to the Siren’s voice. Beau Trumps awaits the morning, when

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<sup>433</sup>Warren, *The Group*, Act I, Scene 1.

<sup>434</sup> “Publican” refers to a tax collector in the ancient Roman Republic and a tavern-keeper in Britain.

<sup>435</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act II, Scene 1.

“e’er bright Phoebus does his course begin.”<sup>436</sup> Phoebus is an ancient Greek name for the sun. He invokes the myth of Phaeton, the son of sun-god Helios, as an example of his rising fame, and recalls the legacy of “the brave sons of Albion’s warlike race”<sup>437</sup> (the ancient name for Great Britain). The newly appointed judge Collateralis hears “warlike Clarion sounds through every street,” calling forth the “manly force” of patriot soldiers to “defend invaded right.”<sup>438</sup> Similar use of the language and lessons of antiquity fill Warren’s Revolutionary plays and later writings.

Warren continues to contrast vice and virtue, this time giving it further application to the Revolutionary context, especially in the writings of the Tory *Massachusettensis* versus patriot John Adams in *Novanglus*, published in 1774-1775. Warren draws a stark choice for the colonists: siding with *Massachusettensis* is the equivalent of siding with corruption and tyranny, while *Novanglus* rings resoundingly with patriotic virtue. To side with Adams is to choose the side of virtue and liberty. She takes aim at *Massachusettensis* for employing his pen against the patriot cause and one of the goals of the play is to unmask his true intentions. Here Warren incorporates the lessons of antiquity recorded by Machiavelli. Brundo (Gov. Bernard)

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<sup>436</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act II, Scene 1.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid. Pliny the Elder makes note of this early name in *Natural History*: “Its native name is Albion, while all the islands, about which I shall speak a little later, are called the Britains.” Pliny (the Elder), in *Natural History: A Selection*, 52.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., Act II, Scene 2.

has “A Tyrant’s heart, but no Machiavel’s head.”<sup>439</sup> Warren invokes the lessons of Machiavelli as she exposes the character of Massachusettensis:

Can you suppose there yet is such a dupe  
As still believes that wretch an honest man?  
The latter strokes his serpentine brain  
Outvie the arts of Machiavelli himself;  
His Borgian model here is realized,  
And the stale tricks of politicians played  
Beneath a vizard fair ---  
--- Drawn from the Heavenly form  
Of blest religion weeping over the land  
For virtue fallen, and for freedom lost.<sup>440</sup>

The passage refers to the rule of Cesare Borgia, who is depicted in Machiavelli’s *Prince* as an effective but ruthless leader whose virtue in the end falls short of the republican ideal. He possessed the political prowess (*virtu*) to restore order to Romagna, but according to Machiavelli, Borgia’s cruelty, while first bringing success, ultimately becomes his undoing.<sup>441</sup>

In addition to the opening salvo portraying Massachusettensis as a basilisk, in the play his writings are favorites among Tory officials, including the corrupt Lord

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<sup>439</sup> Warren, *The Defeat*, Act III, Scene 2

<sup>440</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act II, Scene 1.

<sup>441</sup> This discussion of Borgia’s *virtu* can be found in numerous places in *The Prince*. See Machiavelli: *The Prince*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 23; 59.

Chief Justice Hazelrod. Recognizing the persuasive power of Massachusettensis, the character Meagre worries:

In spite of all the truths *Novanglus* tells,  
And his cool reas'ning argumentative style,  
Or master strokes of his unrivalled pen,  
They will divide, and wavering submit  
And take the word of Massachusettensis.<sup>442</sup>

Warren's reply is unequivocal: despite his rhetorical skill, Massachusettensis will be unable to corrupt the patriots' virtue.

Not Massachusettensis' oily tongue,  
Or retailed nonsense of a Philarene  
Not Senex rant, nor yet dull Grotius' pen,  
Or the whole Group of selfish venal men.  
If gathered from cold Zembla's frozen shore,  
To the warm zone where rapid rivers roar,  
Can either coax them, or the least control  
The valorous purpose of their Roman souls.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> References to the debate between Novanglus and Massachusettensis appear in Warren's *The Group*, Act II, Scene 3.

<sup>443</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act II, Scene 3. References in this passage are many: Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) was a Dutch philosopher. His *The Law of War and Peace* (1625) was translated into English and published in London in 1738 and appears on the Warren's reading list (See: Cibbarelli, "Libraries of the Mind"). Zembla likely refers to the islands of New Zembla, located in the Arctic Ocean north of Russia. The meaning of Philarene is unclear. Senex refers to "old age" in the ancient divisions of age. For these references, see *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Cambridge, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Here Warren is forcing her readers to search their conscience and make a choice – continue in sympathy with Great Britain or join the patriotic cause. Siding with *Massachusettensis* is supporting corruption and tyranny; to support *Novanglus* is to take the side of virtue and liberty, and to remain true to the valorous purpose of their Roman souls. As the closing soliloquy prophesies, the battle with Britain is imminent, much will be sacrificed, and many lives – including many of *Virtue's* sons – will be lost. Again, the colonists have a choice: liberty or tyranny:

Til British troops shall to Columbia yield,  
And freedom's sons are Masters of the field;  
Then over the purpled plain the victors tread  
Among the slain to seek each patriot dead.  
(While Freedom weeps that merit could not save  
But conquering Hero's must enrich the Grave.)  
An adamantine monument they rear  
With this inscription – *Virtue's* sons lie here!<sup>444</sup>

Warren crafts a message of liberty and virtue that reflects colonial reality, but couches it in classical terms guaranteed to resonate with her audience in Boston and throughout the colonies.

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<sup>444</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act II, Scene 3.



Warren's first three plays, *The Adulateur* (1773), *The Defeat* (1773), and *The Group* (1775), give voice to the classical thread of her concept of virtue. Her next two Revolutionary plays, *The Blockheads* (1776) and *The Motley Assembly, a Farce* (1779), make no specific mention of virtue, but reflect her views of the revolutionary political climate. Warren again picks up the theme of classical virtue in her next published work, *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous* in 1790. The collection includes two five-act dramas, *The Sack of Rome: A Tragedy in Five Acts* and *The Ladies of Castile*, written between 1783 and 1785, and eighteen poems, most originally in newspapers. In these works, her concept of virtue becomes more complex to include: both a singular and plural view of virtue; a distinction between private and public virtue; the delineation between male and female ideals of virtue; and an integration of philosophical and theological ideals into her earlier political framework. She continues to explore the connection between republican political thought and the concept of virtue, as well as the role of individual private virtue and the public or civic expression of virtue.

In the two dramatic works in the 1790 publication, Warren further develops her vision of the ideal expression of virtue within a republic. The presentation of classical virtue in *The Sack of Rome* is consistent with her earlier dramatic works, but reflects the changed political context. The Americans have won independence from Great Britain and Warren's main concern becomes how to encourage and perpetuate the virtue necessary now that the colonies are free from tyrannical British rule. Just as virtue was fundamental in the Revolutionary cause, Warren sees it as critical to the

success of the new republic. Clearly she is troubled by what she sees developing in the wake of the War. All around her she sees signs of waning virtue, which in her mind will inevitably bring a return of tyranny, only this time taking an American form. At about the time she is writing *The Sack of Rome* and *The Ladies of Castile*, Warren notes in a letter to John Adams:

The Virtues of a Cato could not save Rome, nor the abilities of Padilla defend the Citizens of Castile from sinking under the hand of Tyranny. Yet later times have shown us a [William] *Tell* who rose suddenly from obscurity & boldly rescued the Liberties of his Country,--But as the Conduct of Mankind in all ages depends much on the character and genius of their Leaders, these may yet appear in America some who have capacity enough to form the Manners of the people & Virtue enough to save his Contemporaries from Irretrievable Ruin in consequence of the inexperience, the Weakness, the Extravagance, the Venallity, & [??] complasance [sic] of his predecessors. But the political stars, either in the southern or more Northern Hemisphere do not now augur such an happy Revolution in favour of purer morals or more energetic government. ...The Massachusets are under a cloud which almost obscures the scale of probaty [sic] & perhaps it may be long before it dissipates.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> Warren to John Adams Dec. 18, 1782, in *Selected Letters*, 165.

Central to Warren's political thought is the importance of virtue to liberty and to republican government. Without citizens of requisite virtue, neither liberty nor republics can endure.

In the wake of the Revolutionary War, the political problem for Warren becomes how to create, encourage, and preserve the virtuous citizenry necessary to republican government. For the answer, she again turns to the lessons of ancient Rome. As the city is about to be overrun by barbarians, Warren dramatizes how corruption of republican virtue has led to the undoing of the leading citizens of Rome, including the Emperor and his family, a leading Roman senator, and leaders of the Roman army. Vice pervades the Empire, and "the character of man was sunk to the lowest stage of depravity" and "debilitated by the habits of every species of luxury."<sup>446</sup> The language of the prologue reflects the concerns she shared with Adams, as she warns that "an impenetrable cloud was thrown over the religious and political institutions, both of the Roman and the Gothic world."<sup>447</sup> She urges her audience "to shun the luxurious vices, or the absurd systems of policy, which have frequently corrupted, distracted, and ruined the best constituted republics."<sup>448</sup> Like most classical republicans, the fall of Rome for Warren exemplified the importance of virtue. As she notes in the play's prologue:

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<sup>446</sup> Warren, Prologue, *The Sack of Rome*, in *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, 9.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

In tracing the rise, the character, the revolutions, and the fall of the most politic and brave, the most insolent and selfish people, the world ever exhibited, the hero and the moralist may find the most sublime examples of valour and virtue; and the philosopher the most humiliating lessons to the pride of man, in the turpitude of some of the capital characters: While the extensive dominions of that once celebrated nation, their haughty usurpations and splendid crimes, have for ages furnished the historian and poet with a field of speculation, adapted to his own peculiar talents ... while [this] writer has aimed at moral improvement, by an exhibition of the tumult and misery into which mankind are often plunged by an unwarrantable indulgence of the discordant passions of the human mind.<sup>449</sup>

Warren shows through her characters the threat corruption poses to virtue and demonstrates that citizens must be trained in virtue in order to remain vigilant in its defense. Warren's focus no longer is to expose the veiled vice of British tyranny. These later characters are not the satirized representations of actual colonial figures seen in her earlier works. Instead, she creates fictional Roman characters whose actions serve as a powerful warning to the new republic of virtue being corrupted from within.

As in her other plays, *The Sack of Rome* provides a vehicle for identifying the many threats to republican virtue: luxury, ease, vice, "furious factions,"<sup>450</sup> wanton

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<sup>449</sup> Warren, "To the Public," *The Sack of Rome*, 10-11.

<sup>450</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act I, Scene II.

expressions of passions and lust, a desire for power, deception and political treachery, wild ambition, perfidy, and an unchecked desire for glory, fame and revenge – all of which makes for compelling drama, but eventual (and all too predictable) tragedy. As Rome falls, it is the leader of the Barbarian horde who reminds the audience: “Empire decays when virtue’s not the base, / And doom’d to perish when the parts corrupt.”<sup>451</sup> The villain is not the barbarian leader Genseric, but vice and its abject corruption of republican virtue. As the play closes, the lesson of Warren’s tragedy is ominously clear: “In [Gaudentius’s] last sob -- the last of Romans died.”<sup>452</sup>

Warren develops similar classical republican themes of virtue and corruption in *The Ladies of Castile*. It is a new and different setting for her writings. But just as her audience would be familiar with the lessons of the fall of Rome, they would recognize the lessons of virtue in Spain under Charles V (1500-1558). As the play opens, Spain is locked in civil war, facing “her last struggles for liberty, previous to the complete establishment of despotism by the family of Ferdinand.”<sup>453</sup> In the play’s introductory letter addressed to her son Winslow, Warren notes that the lessons of Spain “will ever be interesting to an American ear, as long as they triumph in their independence, pride themselves in the principles that instigated their patriots, and glory in the characters of their heroes whose valour completed a revolution that will

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<sup>451</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act V, Scene 3.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, Act V, Scene 5.

<sup>453</sup> Warren introduces *The Ladies of Castile* with a letter to her son, Winslow, written on February 20, 1784. This passage is found in the “Introductory Letter,” 100, *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous 1790 in Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*.

be the wonder of ages.”<sup>454</sup> As she does in *The Sack of Rome*, Warren uses historical lessons to warn her audience about the dire consequences of the collapse of virtue in the young republic: a nation without virtue will be enslaved. The play’s main characters include: Don Juan de Padilla, commander of the royal troops and last of the older virtuous generation; Donna Maria (his wife); Don Francis (Donna Maria’s brother); and Conde’ Haro (commander of the Spanish royal army). Warren again establishes the classical contrast between virtue and corruption. The virtuous characters are marked by selfless patriotic love of country and bravery, as well as an aversion to luxury, wanton expressions of power, and to the arbitrary monarchical rule precipitating the civil war. They respect the sacrifices of the virtuous generations that went before them, and honor both their memory and their ideals. The corrupt characters have no respect for impartial justice, and live by the sword rather than the rule of law. They are corrupted by “the cursed thirst of gold,” trade honor for “soft refinements that flow in with wealth,” and are willing to “wear the liv’ry of a slave.”<sup>455</sup>

Virtue is most clearly represented in the character of Don Juan de Padilla, to whom Warren refers in her letter to Adams as unable to “defend the Citizens of Castile from sinking under the hand of Tyranny.”<sup>456</sup> As the play opens, Don Juan

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<sup>454</sup> Warren, “Introductory Letter,” *The Ladies of Castile*, 101.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*, Act II, Scene V.

<sup>456</sup> Warren to John Adams, Dec. 18, 1782, in *Selected Letters*, 165.

justifies the patriots' virtuous cause against Charles V and encourages his friend Don Francis:

When virtue arms, and liberty's the prize,  
No cloud should set on brave Don Francis' brow.  
The love of glory, victory and fame,  
A noble sense of dignity and worth,  
Is the birth right of Castilla's sons: --  
Inur'd to glory, and the feats of war,  
Our fathers held their freedom from the gods.  
...  
'Tis freedom's genius, nurs'd from age to age,  
Matur'd in schools of liberty and law,  
On virtue's page from sire to son convey'd.<sup>457</sup>

As the play unfolds, Don Juan epitomizes selfless love of country and willingly gives his life in the war against tyranny, reminiscent of Cato invoked in *The Adulateur* years earlier. In Don Juan's soliloquy in the closing scene of Act III, Warren reminds her audience of Spain's history and its connection to ancient Rome:

'Twas on the spot, where now Toledo stands  
Our ancestors defeated Pompey's troops;  
And in the height of Rome's exalted fame,  
Numantia's plains have smok'd with Roman blood.

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<sup>457</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act I, Scene 2.

Even in the Zenith of republic pride,  
The virtuous Scipio found it no mean talk,  
To subjugate Numantia's warlike sons;  
Nor does our blood so cold and languid run,  
That we have not the courage to be free.<sup>458</sup>

Don Juan embodies patriotic virtue in the classical sense: "I give my life a cheerful sacrifice; / 'Tis a just debt my country may demand."<sup>459</sup>

Don Francis wrestles over whether he should take up arms in the civil war beside Don Juan, as his conscience balks at serving the corrupt regent Don Velasco, whose "high swol'n pride bursts forth in peals of rage" and who with cruelty in war "forbids his son to spare a single life."<sup>460</sup> Don Francis contrasts virtue and tyranny:

When honour calls, and justice wields the sword,  
True virtue spares, and clemency forgives;  
But when a fierce, tyrannic lust of sway,  
Deforms the soul, and blots out nature's stamp,  
The wolf, or tiger, prowling for his prey,

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<sup>458</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act III, Scene 4. Numantia is the ancient name of a territory in Spain invaded by forces of the Roman republic three times between 143-133 BC. The first two attempts were unsuccessful and the third, known as the Siege of Numantia, was led by Scipio and lasted eight months, during which the people of Numantia chose starvation, and ultimately suicide over surrender. The heroic virtue of the Numantians is recorded by early Roman historians, including Appian's *History of Rome*, Pliny and Polybius, and romanticized in the play, "La Numancia" by Miguel de Cervantes (1582).

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*, Act III, Scene 4.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*, Act II, Scene 2.



Is less a savage than the monster man.<sup>461</sup>

The virtuous characters engage valiantly in battle against the raging despotism of Don Velasco. There is less classical republican language and symbolism in this play than in those set in Rome. Yet Warren intertwines the histories of ancient Spain and ancient Rome to invoke similar lessons of virtue, marked by manly spirit, courage, patriotism, and military valour. The play offers inspiring heroes and heroines of virtue: Don Juan faces execution with dignity; his wife Donna Maria remains committed to his ideals of virtue and liberty after his death; and in the final moments of the play, Conde' Haro offers a hopeful vision, based on the promise and power of virtue:

To virtue bend the wayward mind of man –  
Let not the father blast his children's peace,  
By rancour—pride—and cursed party rage;--  
Let civil feuds no more distract the soul—  
Blast the dark fiends who wake mankind to war,  
And make the world a counterpart to hell.<sup>462</sup>

Assessments vary on the importance and dramatic quality of these later plays. Critical assessments characterize them as “two unexceptional plays” that are “generally less rewarding than the best of Warren's earlier plays.”<sup>463</sup> A harsher

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<sup>461</sup> Warren, *Ladies of Castile*, Act II, Scene 2.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*, Act V, Scene 4.

<sup>463</sup> Franklin, “Introduction,” *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, xxiii.

analysis suggests that her plays are “static affairs full of high moralizing.”<sup>464</sup> Still, the two plays are an attempt by Warren “to comment seriously ... on the difficulty of retaining freedom.”<sup>465</sup> Although the plays may fall short of literary or dramatic standards, they are essential to understanding Warren’s developing conception of virtue. Still central to her political theory is the claim that virtue is the only safeguard for liberty and to preserving a republic. But in these later plays, we see the development of three further aspects in her conception of virtue. For the first time in her published works, Warren draws the distinction between public and private virtue, and how private virtue must undergird public or civic virtue. Second, she begins to incorporate a pluralist idea of virtues to complement the singular virtue depicted in her early plays. This use of plural virtues reflects the shift in emphasis from the heroic virtue of Warren’s Revolutionary plays to the Christian core of her conception of virtue in her later writings, once the threat of war ends and the need for classic virtue subsides.

Warren draws the distinction between public and private virtue and begins to emphasize how private virtue must undergird public or civic virtue. She develops aspects of this distinction in her early plays, exposing the private motives for public actions. But only in these later works does she explicitly introduce the distinctions of public and private virtue into her writings. The first mention is found in Warren’s letter to her son Winslow, which serves to introduce *The Ladies of Castile*. In it,

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<sup>464</sup> George Weales, “The Quality of Mercy, Or Mrs. Warren’s Profession,” *Georgia Review* 30 (1979), 891.

<sup>465</sup> Franklin, “Introduction,” *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, xxiv.

Warren explains that in writing the drama she “wishes only to cultivate the sentiments of public and private virtue in whatever falls from her pen.”<sup>466</sup> This distinction provides an important aspect of her overall framework of virtue, pointing to a return to and re-emphasis on the Christian core of her conception once independence is won and other threats face the republic. In her assessment of the Revolutionary War, for example, one of her bases for historical judgment rests on evaluating an individual’s private and public virtue.

Warren begins to incorporate plural “virtues” to complement the singular virtue seen in her early plays. Her pre-Revolutionary plays emphasize a singular conception of virtue, often personified, in much the same way virtue is represented in early colonial symbols and early colonial flags. In these earlier works, American patriots fight in the cause of virtue, in a clearly singular form. She still speaks frequently in these later works of “true virtue” and the “cause of virtue,” but mixes this singular concept with a plural idea of *virtues*. For example, in *The Sack of Rome* the virtues of Roman commander Aetius are extolled, as “Great Aetius’s virtues justly claim. / A tributary tear from half the world.”<sup>467</sup> His son, Gaudentius, is praised for “The genuine virtues of his youthful heart / Cherish’d by reason – ripen’d to sublime, / Nurs’d up by honor, gratitude, and worth.”<sup>468</sup> Similarly, the son of Donna Maria and Don Juan de Padilla is described as having “the fairest virtues beam in his young

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<sup>466</sup> Warren, “Introductory Letter,” *The Ladies of Castile*, 101.

<sup>467</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act III, Scene 4.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, Act II, Scene 3.

eye.”<sup>469</sup> The “contagion of each vulgar vice” works to erase “each sterling virtue of the soul,”<sup>470</sup> indicating a plurality of virtues residing within each individual. Still the characters act in the cause of virtue, a singular, civic ideal consistent with that of her Revolutionary plays. While the three plays written between 1772 and 1775 emphasize a singular concept of virtue as the Revolutionary ideal, both the singular and a plural view of virtue are interwoven in these later works.

Warren’s published poetry can be divided into two chronological categories for the purposes of evaluation: Revolutionary poetry written from 1774 to 1781; and post-Revolutionary poetry, written after 1782. Of the eighteen poems in the collection, eight poems fall into the first category, three in the second, and seven poems are undated. Two of Warren’s most important political poems were published in 1774: “A Political Reverie” and “The Squabble of the Sea Nymphs, or the Sacrifice of the Tuscararoes,” written at the request of her friend John Adams to commemorate the Boston Tea Party of 1773. A third political poem, “The Genius of America, weeping the absurd Follies of the Day,” comments on the lamentable actions of some “Americans’ desire to frolic while Patriots are still [in 1778] dying in battle.”<sup>471</sup> Although the theme of virtue appears throughout these poems, the three political poems most clearly reflect classical republican themes. The first two poems cast the impending conflict between the colonies and the British in the language of

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<sup>469</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act III, Scene 5.

<sup>470</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act V, Scene 2.

<sup>471</sup> Franklin, “Introduction,” in *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, xxvi;

ancient Rome, invoking many of the symbols and heroes of antiquity. “A Political Reverie” portrays Warren’s dream of the American future. In the poem, virtue is personified as an ancient goddess who has departed her earlier realms of ancient Rome and Europe to reside in America. Warren powerfully envisions the new republic formed by the American colonies:

No despot here shall rule with awful sway,  
Nor orphan’s spoils become the minion’s prey ...  
For then each tyrant, by the hand of fate,  
And standing troops, the ban of every state,  
Forever spurn’d, shall be remov’d as far,  
As bright Hesperus from the polar star:  
Freedom and virtue shall united reign,  
And stretch their empire o’er the wide domain.<sup>472</sup>

The American colonists have a long inheritance of virtue to draw upon: Their forefathers “quitted plenty, luxury and ease, / Tempted the dangers of the frozen seas,” until the “race of heroes safely wafted o’er”<sup>473</sup> and settled in America. But the patriot dream of a virtuous America is imperiled. Rather than ruling peacefully with freedom, virtue is “torn up by faction, and intestine broils” to become “the prey of each rapacious arm, / Strip’d and disrob’d of every native charm.”<sup>474</sup> British

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<sup>472</sup> Warren, “A Political Reverie,” in *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, 190.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

corruption and oppression threaten virtue and liberty. As the poem progresses, a seraph of “a bright form, with soft majestic grace”<sup>475</sup> appears and acts as Warren’s muse, or guide. Seeing how virtue has been corrupted and how the colonies have been enslaved by British oppression, the poet despairs. But her guide assures her of the possibility of restoring liberty and virtue:

“The glow from breast to breast is spread,  
From sire to son the latent spark convey’d;  
Let those bless’d shades rest in their sacred urns,  
Lie undisturb’d – the glorious ardour burns,  
Though far transferred from their lov’d native soil,  
Virtue turn’d pale, and freedom left the isle,  
When she stretch’d out her avaricious hand,  
And shew’d her sons her hostile bloody wand,  
United millions parried back the blow,  
Britain recoil’d and sadly learnt to know,  
Cities with cities leagu’d, and town with town,  
She trembled at her fate when half undone.”<sup>476</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> Warren, “A Political Reverie,” 191.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

It is a reassuring vision for a nation tottering on the brink of war, but the seraph solemnly notes it will come at a considerable price. She offers one final vision, one that must be fulfilled before virtue and liberty can be restored:

For death promiscuous flies from ev'ry hand,  
When faction's sword is brandish'd o'er the land,  
When civil discord cuts the friendly ties,  
And social joy from every bosom flies;  
Let the muse forbear the solemn tale;  
And lend once more, the "*Grecian painter's veil*."<sup>477</sup>

In the final verse of the poem, Warren invokes a powerful Greek symbol of grief that would be both familiar and sobering to her readers. It is a reference to Timanthes, an ancient Greek painter who depicted a veiled Agamemnon, filled with unspeakable grief as his daughter Iphigeneia stood ready for death as a sacrifice in Aeschylus's tragedy *Agamemnon*. Pliny the Elder, writing in the first century AD, noted that Timanthes's use of a veil to cover Agamemnon's face represented grief beyond what the painter could adequately portray by any artistic means.<sup>478</sup> To restore virtue to her rightful place in the colonies would require the patriotic sacrifice epitomized by the heroes of antiquity and would likely come with similar grief and loss.

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<sup>477</sup> Warren, "A Political Reverie," 194 [italics in original].

<sup>478</sup> Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, lines 247-253, quoted by Susan Woodford in *Images of Myths in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6; Woodford outlines the story of Iphigeneia and its depiction in Greek mythology in pages 3-9.

Warren's second patriotic poem of the same year, "The Squabble of the Sea Nymphs, or the Sacrifice of Tuscararoes" depicts the Boston Tea Party of a year earlier. After being asked by John Adams to write the poem, Warren accepts the request in a letter to Abigail:

Tell Mr. Adams if there was any body in this part of the world that could in compliance with his request sing the rival Nymphs and celebrate the happy victory of a Salacia in a manner that would merit his approbation he may be assured it would immediately be attempted,—but I think a person with two or three strokes of his pen has sketched out so fine a poetical plan need apply only his genius for the completion—Yet if he thinks it would be too great condescension in him to associate much with muses, while under the direction of Apollo his time is so much more usefully and importantly filled up, a particular friend of his would be glad of a little clearer explanation of some of his characters; she not being well enough versed in ancient mythology to know who is meant by the son of Neptune who so easily transforms himself into the mischeivous of every species, as there are several modern Proteus's to whom it is equally applicable.<sup>479</sup>

"The Squabble of the Sea Nymphs" is a relatively short poem. Unlike the sober warning of "A Political Reverie," it has a lighter satirical touch and is "written after the style of Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*."<sup>480</sup> The poem is filled with classical

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<sup>479</sup> Warren to Abigail Smith Adams, Dec. 29, 1774, in *Selected Letters*, 43.

<sup>480</sup> Edmund Hayes, "The Private Poems of Mercy Otis Warren," 200.



references and symbols. The opening lines feature the Greek god Phoebus as the rising and setting sun, giving way to Cynthia, the virgin goddess of the moon. Under the cover of darkness and dressed as native Indians, the colonists “make an offering to the wat’ry god”<sup>481</sup> Neptune by dumping the tea in the harbor. The squabble then ensues between two rival goddesses of the sea, Amphytrite, wife of Poseidon, who rejects the sacrifice of the tea, and Salacia, wife of Neptune, who eventually accepts it. Warren approves of the defiant actions of the colonists, portraying them as

The champions of the Tuscararan race,  
(Who neither hold, nor even wish a place,  
While faction reigns, and tyranny presides,  
And base oppression o’er the virtues rides;  
While venal measures dance in silken sails,  
And avarice o’er the earth and sea prevails;  
While luxury creates such mighty feuds,  
E’en in the bosoms of the demi gods;).<sup>482</sup>

In accepting the tea thrown into the sea, Salacia “bids defiance to the servile train, / The pimps and sycophants of George’s reign.”<sup>483</sup> The clear classical parallels are consistent with that thread of thought emerging in her other Revolutionary work. Warren employs the language and figures of antiquity to establish the classical

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<sup>481</sup> Warren, “The Squabble of the Sea Nymphs,” in *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, 202.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, 204

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

contrast between virtue and corruption and to identify the threat that faction, luxury, ambition, and tyranny pose to virtue and liberty. By doing so, she places responsibility for the conflict squarely on the corrupt, oppressive British authorities.

The last of her political poems, “The Genius of America, weeping the absurd Follies of the Day” (1778), continues to plead the cause of virtue as the war progresses. Although the poem does not follow the same classical line as the two other patriotic poems, a number of passages are worth mentioning for the insights they offer into her view of virtue. Rather than pinpoint corruption with the British, she now identifies the effects of luxury and ambition in the patriots, even as their countrymen die in the war. In the poem’s opening lines Warren asks: “Shall freedom’s cause by vice be thus betray’d?”<sup>484</sup> The signs of corruption of patriotic virtue are clear:

The selfish passions, and the mad’ning rage,  
For pleasure’s soft debilitating charms,  
Running full riot in cold avarice’ arms,  
Who grasps the dregs of base oppressive gains,  
While luxury in high profusion reigns.  
Our country bleeds, and bleeds at every pore,  
Yet gold’s the deity whom all adore.<sup>485</sup>

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<sup>484</sup> Warren, “The Genius of America, 246.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid.

She poignantly recalls the patriotic sacrifice of colonial soldiers in the three years of the war and reminds her readers “That virtue only made them brave and free.”<sup>486</sup> She connects truth to virtue, as she expands her contrast with vice: “Thus truth exhibits virtue in an age, / When vice, unblushing, stalk’d across the stage.”<sup>487</sup> But her attack here shifts somewhat from her earlier political works, as she takes aim at skepticism as a powerful threat to virtue. “He lives a sceptic, if you take his word, / Thinks ‘tis heroic to deny His God, / Or to dispute his providential care, / Derides his precepts, or to scoff at prayer.”<sup>488</sup> As for the virtue that animated the Revolutionary generation, those ideals are discarded as “antique, odd ideas of truth, / Such musty rules for regulating youth.”<sup>489</sup> The skeptics of the age “With scientific brow can demonstrate, / Whate’er the pious sage or priest may prate, / Virtue is an enthusiastic dream.”<sup>490</sup> In her dramatic works written before the Revolutionary War, the scheming and deception of colonial government officials and British sympathizers posed the greatest threat to American virtue. As the war progresses, Warren sees the skeptics of the age playing that same role, those who “assume a self important air ... to confound, or proselyte the fair.”<sup>491</sup> In this poem, fading virtue threatens to doom the war effort. As she laments, “While wide spread ruin stalks from door to door, /

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<sup>486</sup> Warren, “The Genius of America,” 247.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*

Famine and sword still threat'ning to devour, / How many dance on dissipation's wing, / No pen can appoint, nor can the poet sing."<sup>492</sup> Without virtue, "the *Brute's* secure – the Man has not a soul."<sup>493</sup> When the war is over, Warren will see this same loss of virtue as an endemic threat to republican government and specifically, to the new republic itself. Although in many respects consistent with the classical tension she draws between vice and virtue, this new target of attack signals another thread in her virtue thinking, the Christian thread, which will be discussed in greater depth in chapter six of this work.

Warren established the classical thread of her conception of virtue in her Revolutionary writings and continued to express that aspect of virtue more fully in her writings following the war. Considering the focus in her earlier works, it is unsurprising that classical republican virtue is predominant in her evaluation of the American Revolution in her most mature work, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution, Interspersed with Biographical, Political and Moral Observations* (1805). In her *History*, Warren often invokes ancient Rome as an important reference point for historical evaluation. The language of republican virtue fills her historical landscape. She uses the terms "virtue" or "virtuous" 109 times in the *History's* two volumes. She describes various individuals as "brave" ninety-nine times. She makes reference to "bravery" sixty-six times, "courage" fifty-six times, "valor" or "valorous" seventy-four times, "fortitude" twenty-two times, and

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<sup>492</sup> Warren, "The Genius of America," 252.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

describes actions or character as “manly” eighteen times. She describes individuals as “patriots” or “patriotic,” or applauds “patriotism” fifty-four times. She applies these terms in her evaluation of the figures of the American Revolution. Those who fare well in her historical analysis are those who resemble “the heroes of antiquity.”<sup>494</sup> They maintained their virtue amidst the vagaries of war; they “lost no part of their vigor or fortitude under the sharpest disappointments and misfortunes,”<sup>495</sup> but instead exerted “manly resistance to the tyrannous hand stretched out to enslave them.”<sup>496</sup> Classical republican virtue informs her framework for evaluating the history of the American Revolution, and it becomes a measure of individual character in her historical assessment. Her evaluation of John Adams illustrates the breadth of her concept of virtue, which includes a classical republican thread that reflects the traits of great Roman leaders. This is reflected in Adams’s firmness, wisdom, patriotism, and self-sacrifice:

Mr. Adams was a gentleman of a good education, a decent family, but no fortune. Early nurtured in the principles of civil and religious liberty, he possessed a quick understanding, a cool head, stern manners, a smooth address, and a Roman-like firmness, united with that sagacity and penetration that would have made a figure in a conclave. He was at the same time liberal in opinion, and uniformly devout; social with men of all denominations, grave

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<sup>494</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 93; 160.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*, 435.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, 451.

in deportment; placid, yet severe; sober and indefatigable; calm in seasons of difficulty, tranquil and unruffled in the vortex of political altercation; too firm to be intimidated, too haughty for condescension, his mind was replete with resources that dissipated fear, and extricated in the greatest emergencies.<sup>497</sup>

She gives Adams much credit for his role in gaining independence for the American colonies. Warren concludes her portrait of Adams: “Through a long life he exhibited on all occasions, an example of patriotism, religion, and virtue honorary to the human character.”<sup>498</sup> Unsurprisingly Warren finds many examples of classical republican virtue in the self-sacrificing actions of American citizens and soldiers. She applauds “the patriotic feelings of the yeomanry of the country [that] prompted them to the utmost exertions for the public service.”<sup>499</sup> American soldiers and statesmen possessed “uncommon vigor, valor, fortitude, and patriotism”<sup>500</sup> and were motivated by a “spirit of freedom, virtue, and perseverance.”<sup>501</sup> These patriotic soldiers “seemed to have been remarkably directed by the finger of Divine Providence, and led on from step to step beyond their own expectations.”<sup>502</sup> Patriotism and self-sacrifice to the

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<sup>497</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 116.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*, 649.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, 641.

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*

common good – the classical republican virtue of the colonies – secured independence.

American soldiers throughout the war demonstrated valour, vigor, industry, patriotism, love of country, bravery above measure, and she lists numerous examples of patriotic virtue ranking them equal to the heroes of antiquity. Before the opening of official hostilities with Great Britain, the colonists outside Boston were careful not to exacerbate the tensions to the point of violence. Warren points to an example in February 1775, when a small group led by Lt. Col. Alexander Leslie was dispatched to Salem. They were stopped outside Boston, when residents lifted the bridge and blocked their passage. Unable to pass, Lt. Col. Leslie and his soldiers returned to Boston without incident. Warren compares the colonists' courage to that of the ancients. She argues that the people living in the rural areas outside Boston “were not deficient in point of courage.”<sup>503</sup> They were prepared to “smite the sceptred hand, whenever it should be stretched forth to arrest by force the inheritance purchased by the blood of ancestors, whose self-denying virtues had rivalled the admired heroes of antiquity.”<sup>504</sup> Often soldiers faced fatigue and insurmountable odds with exemplary fortitude and bravery. Their leaders often displayed military prowess rivaling that of the ancients. Among numerous examples of manly military virtue is Gen. Nathaniel Greene, who rejected advice to retreat despite receiving intelligence of an approaching British force of overwhelming size. As those around him pressed for

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<sup>503</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 93.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*

retreat, Warren records that Gen. Greene replied “in the laconic style of the Spartan, with the Spirit of a Roman, and the enthusiasm of an American – ‘*I will recover this country, or perish in the attempt.*’”<sup>505</sup> He marshaled what additional forces he could find, including militia from surrounding states and continued to fight the British. Warren notes that his “subsequent conduct and success justified his noble resolution”<sup>506</sup> to fight, rather than retreat. Through the countless examples of classical virtue she cites, Warren makes clear that these revolutionary Americans are their forefathers’ virtuous sons.

Warren’s *History* continues the classical republican contrast between virtue and vice. From her historian’s perspective, corruption of virtue is the primary cause of conflict and war. As the Revolutionary War breaks out, Warren sees the conflict as fitting this historical pattern and identifies corruption as the cause of the war: “We must now pursue the progress of a war enkindled by avarice, whetted by ambition, and blown up into a thirst for revenge by repeated disappointment. Not the splendor of a diadem, the purple of princes, or the pride of power, can ever sanction the deeds of cruelty perpetrated on the western side of the Atlantic, and not unfrequently by men, whose crimes emblazoned by title, will enhance the infamy of their injustice and barbarism, when the tragic tale is faithfully related.”<sup>507</sup> Throughout her *History*, Warren invokes the lessons of Rome to demonstrate how vice corrupts republican

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<sup>505</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 441.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.



virtue and threatens the principles that animated the American founding. “The love of domination and an uncontrolled lust of arbitrary power ... have been equally conspicuous in the decline of Roman virtue ... It was these principles that overturned that ancient republic.”<sup>508</sup> Virtue “drove the first settlers of America from elegant habitations and affluent circumstances, to seek an asylum in the cold and uncultivated regions of the western world.”<sup>509</sup> Looking back at colonies as the Revolutionary War begins, Warren expresses optimism that “vice seemed to be abashed by the examples of moderation, disinterestedness, and generosity, exhibited by many of the patriotic leaders.”<sup>510</sup> The colonists possessed classical republican virtue: “Happily for America, the inhabitants in general possessed not only the virtues of native courage and a spirit of enterprise, but minds generally devoted to the best affections. Many of them retained this character to the end of the conflict by the dereliction of interest, and the costly sacrifices of health, fortune, and life.”<sup>511</sup> Like the heroes of antiquity, the colonists were “armed with resolution and magnanimity, united by affection, and a remarkable conformity of opinion, the whole people seemed determined to resist in blood, rather than become slave of arbitrary power.”<sup>512</sup>

True to her republican principles, Warren judges the leading figures of the Revolutionary War according to their virtue and character. Chief among those traits

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<sup>508</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 5.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid.*

worth recording for posterity is classical republican virtue. She describes the character of her brother and revolutionary, James Otis: “His humanity was conspicuous, his sincerity acknowledged, his integrity unimpeached, his honor unblemished, and his patriotism marked with the disinterestedness of the Spartan.”<sup>513</sup> Cast in a less favorable light, Warren records that American Gen. Charles Lee “as a soldier he was second to no man,” but fell well short of the ideals of republican virtue: “Without religion or country, principle, or attachment, gold was his deity, and liberty the idol of his fancy: he hoarded the former without taste for its enjoyment, and worshipped the latter as the patroness of licentiousness, rather than the protectress of virtue. He affected to despise the opinion of the world, yet was fond of applause. Ambitious of fame without the dignity to support it, he emulated the heroes of antiquity in the field, while in private life he sunk into the vulgarity of the clown.”<sup>514</sup> Avarice continued to undermine republican virtue, and unchecked ambition remained one of the most powerful forces of corruption and vice, and a constant threat to a republic. Recalling the lessons of history, she again reminded her readers of the fragile nature of republican government: “It may be observed, that pure republicanism is cherished by the philosopher in his closet, and admired by the statesman in his theories of government; yet when called into operation, the combinations of interest, ambition, or party prejudice, too generally destroy the

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<sup>513</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 49.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

principle, though the name and the form may be preserved.<sup>515</sup> Warren identified growing corruption of classical republican virtue among the military leaders following the war. She sees their motivation as shifting from honorable patriotic service to the nation to a desire for position, power, and the trappings of aristocratic distinction, characteristic not of a republican virtue but of monarchy:

As the officers of the American army had styled themselves of the order, and assumed the name of *Cincinnatus*, it might have been expected that they would have imitated the humble and disinterested virtues of the ancient Roman; that they would have retired satisfied with their own efforts to save their country, and the competent rewards it was ready to bestow, instead of ostentatiously assuming hereditary distinctions, and the *insignia* of nobility. But the eagle and the ribbon dangled at the button-hole of every youth who had for three years borne an office in the army, and taught him to look down with proud contempt on the patriot grown grey in the service of his country.<sup>516</sup>

Excessively ambitious individuals are not remembered kindly in Warren's *History*. For example, Maj. Gen. Henry Knox was "a man of extensive ambition, who had imbibed ideas of distinction too extravagant for a genuine republican."<sup>517</sup> She warns of "intoxicated ambition,"<sup>518</sup> against "the ambition of princes,"<sup>519</sup> of the destructive

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<sup>515</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 616.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, 618.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*, 621.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*, 646.

power of “fierce ambition”<sup>520</sup> fired by connections with other nations. She reminds her readers to warn them to remember how “other quarters of the globe ... have been laid to waste by ambition”<sup>521</sup> and to be vigilant against “the intrigues or ambition of any class of men.”<sup>522</sup>

A primary theme is Warren’s concern about the future of America and specifically, the political problem of whether there is virtue sufficient to sustain the new republic. She is cautiously optimistic about America’s future, that “though in her infantile state, the young republic of America exhibits the happiest of prospects.”<sup>523</sup> But this is only possible if the citizens of the new republic remember the lessons of history:

The people of the United States are bound together in sacred compact and a union of interests which ought never to be separated. But the confederation is recent, and their experience immatured; they are however generally sensible, that from the dictatorship of Sylla [sic] to the overthrow of Caesar, and from the ruin of the Roman tyrant to the death of the artful Cromwell, deception as well as violence have operated to the subversion of the freedom of the people. They are sensible, that by a little well-concerted intrigue, an artificial consideration may be obtained, far exceeding the degree [421] of real merit on

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<sup>519</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 648.

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid.*, 644.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, 689.

<sup>522</sup> *Ibid.*, 678.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

which it is founded. They are sensible that it is not difficult for men of moderate abilities, and a little personal address, to retain their popularity to the end of their lives, without any distinguished traits of genius, wisdom, or virtue. They are sensible [aware], that the characters of nations have been disgraced by their weak partialities, until their freedom has been irretrievably lost in that vortex of folly, which throws a lethargy over the mind, till awakened by the fatal consequences which result from arbitrary power, disguised by specious pretexts, amidst a general relaxation of manners.<sup>524</sup>

In her mind, many of the seeds of republican destruction had already been sown. During the War, she finds evidence that “America had nurtured sons of boundless ambition, who thus early contemplated stars, garters, and diadems, crowns, sceptres, and the regalia of kings, in the yet simple bosom of their country.”<sup>525</sup> Further, she notes that “Some symptoms of this degradation of the human character have appeared in America.”<sup>526</sup> As for the future of American republicanism, the lessons of history are clear: “It is an unpleasing part of history, when “corruption begins to prevail, when degeneracy marks the manners of the people, and weakens the sinews of the state.” If this should ever become the deplorable situation of the United States, let some unborn historian, in a far distant day, detail the lapse, and hold up the contrast between a simple, virtuous, and free people, and a degenerate, servile race of beings,

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<sup>524</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 690-1.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*, 618.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, 677.

corrupted by wealth, effeminated by luxury, impoverished by licentiousness, and become the *automatons* of intoxicated ambition.”<sup>527</sup> The question of whether the American republic will endure “now depends on their own virtue, to continue the United States of America an example of the respectability and dignity of this mode of government.”<sup>528</sup>

In many respects, her *History* is as much a warning about the future of the nation as it is an historical accounting of the Revolutionary War. Striking familiar chords of antiquity, history, and ancient republican virtue, she reminds her readers: “[E]very free mind should be tenacious of supporting the honor of a national character, and the dignity of independence. This claim must be supported by their own sobriety, economy, industry, and perseverance of every virtue. It must be nurtured by that firmness and principle that induced their ancestors to fly from the hostile arm of tyranny, and to explore a new nation in the forlorn and darksome bosom of a distant wilderness.”<sup>529</sup>

The greatest threats to republican liberty can only be checked by virtue. Throughout her writings, Warren includes classical republican virtue as an important framework for her political thought. Antiquity provides the heroes of a Revolutionary generation and the historical lessons for generations to come. Her view of classical republican virtue – expressed as patriotism, self-sacrifice, disinterestedness, concern

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<sup>527</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 645-6.

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*, 647.

for the public good, manly courage in war, fortitude, valour, and others – provides the heroes for a Revolutionary generation and the historical blueprint for generations to come. “On the principles of republicanism was this constitution founded; on these it must stand.”<sup>530</sup> Pre-eminent among these principles of republicanism is virtue. The classical republican tradition plays a fundamental role in her political thought and her concept of virtue. Yet as we will see in the next two chapters, there is for Warren more to the American story of virtue.

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<sup>530</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 692.

## CHAPTER 5

### Mercy Otis Warren's Second Thread of Virtue: The Bourgeois-Marketplace View

*It has been observed that commerce has a tendency to narrow the mind, but I do not think the observation just.*  
Mercy Otis Warren to her son Winslow Warren, Nov. 24, 1782<sup>531</sup>

Republican ideals embraced by the American founders, especially the concept of virtue, are often depicted by contemporary scholars as in conflict or even as irreconcilable with capitalism and commercial society. What they saw as the greatest corrupting threats to liberty, ambition and avarice, we today would view to be two primary driving forces of capitalism: self-interest and desire for profit. Yet Mercy Otis Warren draws a clear distinction between the modest self-interest that fuels capitalism, and extreme self-interest or selfishness to the exclusion of concern for the common good, which is a source of the corruption so destructive to republics. From this perspective, the growth of a thriving American merchant and commercial culture could sound the death knell of republican virtue. Warren saw the threat, yet supported American industry, trade and economic prosperity, as well as her sons' careers in business. The challenge, in Warren's estimation, was how the young republic could be economically successful, without falling prey to the economic corruption that could destroy the republic.

As a republican thinker, Warren recognized the threat to republicanism inherent in America's growing commercial sector. Like many republicans of her day, she feared the corrupting influence of unchecked rapid accumulation of wealth,

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<sup>531</sup> Warren to Winslow Warren, Nov. 24, 1782, in *Selected Letters*, 162.



unchecked greed, speculation, and a host of other economic vices. “Thus it is not uncommon to see virtue, liberty, love of country, and regard to character, sacrificed at the shrine of wealth.” New England clergy as well “consistently pictured the thirst for material possessions as the antithesis of civic virtue.”<sup>532</sup> The “urge for accumulation” was also identified by clergy and republican thinkers alike as a palpable threat to liberty, leading to political corruption and personal vice.<sup>533</sup> As a woman of faith, she was no doubt familiar with the biblical admonition that “the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.” (1 Tim. 6:10) Yet as the descendent and beneficiary of three generations of successful colonial merchants, Warren had a unique personal understanding of how prosperous commercial endeavors contributed to the welfare of individuals, families, and communities, as well as to the public good. She was not opposed to commerce or capitalism and advised her sons in ways to be successful in careers in those areas, yet she vigorously and consistently expressed concern about the threat of economic corruption.

In light of her background and her republican principles a number of questions arise: How did Warren view the place of commercial activity within her overall republican framework and within the new republic? What was the greatest economic threat to the new republic? Did Warren adapt her concept of virtue to the commercial context once America became an independent nation? Was her conception of virtue

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<sup>532</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 41.

<sup>533</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 67.

sufficient to meet the challenges of American economic realities as it moved into the nineteenth century?

As a republican thinker Warren fully understood the many threats posed by commerce and trade. As a response to these, she incorporates into her overall concept of republican virtue a thread of bourgeois virtue designed to guide the actions of American merchants and commerce and to check the corrupting influence of a commercial society. It can be argued further that her conception of bourgeois virtue reflects a fairly sophisticated system of marketplace ethics and economic principles for the new republic. Her conception of virtue in this arena has two components: it reflects the bourgeois virtue reflected in the Protestant work ethic and listed among the pragmatic virtues of Benjamin Franklin; but it also sets forth a marketplace virtue that directly addresses the challenges she identifies as most dangerous to the new republic – the possession of wealth as the “only source of distinction in this young country.”<sup>534</sup> In this chapter, I will address the questions raised above and will evaluate how Warren applies her conception of virtue to meet the unique challenges posed by prosperity and economic success in the new republic.

Just as virtue generally is defined as the standard of correct behavior, bourgeois virtue provides a standard of right and wrong behavior in economic relationships, especially the behavior of the mercantile or merchant middle class of a society. In its earliest usage, the French word *bourgeois* referred to “townsman” and

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<sup>534</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 687.

was derived from the Germanic word *burgh* for walled town.<sup>535</sup> Although the term is not prevalent in early American thought and is more common to the early nineteenth century and beyond,<sup>536</sup> the term bourgeois reflects conventional middle-class morality and the common-sense, practical values of industry, frugality, and thrift associated with the Protestant work ethic. The term typically is associated with both capitalism and commercial society and is frequently employed in modern political thought in a disparaging sense, such as in Marxist thought in which the bourgeois class is seen as exploiting the workers for material gain. More generally it is defined as the commercial or shop-keeping middle class.<sup>537</sup> Although Warren does not use the term bourgeois, emerging in her political thought is her answer to the question of what kind of virtue is required to guide the behavior of the growing middle- or merchant class. She points to standards of right and wrong behavior necessary to activities such as moneymaking, trade, and other business endeavors. Her writings frequently point to merchants, trade, and American industry. Her letters to her sons advise them to be useful, while resisting avarice and other temptations. She refers as well to standards

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<sup>535</sup> Deidre M McCloskey offers a helpful discussion of origins of the term *bourgeois* in the second chapter of *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 68-78.

<sup>536</sup> One of Warren's favorite playwrights, Thomas Addison, used the term bourgeois in *Remarks on Italy* published in 1733, but it is unclear whether she had read that work.

<sup>537</sup> "bourgeois, n.1 and adj." OED Online. March 2011. Oxford University Press.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/22110?rskey=XEphhq&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed April 16, 2011).

that must guide the merchant, shopkeeper, or tradesman, going about the daily life of production, exchange, and commercial trade.

Bourgeois or capitalist virtue can be seen in two ways in Warren's political thought. In a negative sense Warren expresses what bourgeois virtue is *not* or as its opposite: corruption within the commercial or economic context. When bourgeois virtue is absent, corruption manifests as avarice (an insatiable greed for riches), luxury, rapid accumulation of wealth, and as other vices endemic to the rise of commerce. Although not as extensively developed as her view of bourgeois virtue expressed in the negative and as its opposite corruption, Warren also develops bourgeois virtue in a positive sense: as the characteristics necessary to check the many temptations posed by wealth and prosperity. Warren's positive formulation of bourgeois virtue focuses on specific character traits and behaviors that offer a possible check on corruption. These include industry, honesty in business dealings, respect for contractual obligations, emphasis on necessity, frugality, moderation, disinterestedness, dedication to the public good, usefulness, simplicity of manners and taste, benevolence, and deferred self-gratification. These she contrasts with the many examples of economic corruption.

Before turning to Warren's positive conception of bourgeois or marketplace virtue, it is important to first consider how she views corruption in economic matters. Corruption is so fundamental to republican thinking that it permeates all threads of Warren's conception of virtue. In classical republican virtue, corruption takes the form of leaders acting as tyrants, officials desiring position and privilege at the

expense of public duty, and citizens thinking more of their own self-interest rather than the common good. The republic's rule of law is abrogated, patriotism languishes, its institutions fail, and the republic crumbles. In Christian virtue, the citizens and their leaders become corrupt when they fail to acknowledge God or follow His laws, and instead operate on their own understanding of what constitutes correct behavior. The results of the corruption of Christian virtue are similar to that of classical virtue: public officials operating outside the bounds of God's law become a law unto themselves, and the people are unable to check their passions. When virtue in any of its forms is corrupted, the bonds of family, community, government, and society disintegrate.

Warren saw the desire for wealth and acquisitiveness expanding rapidly in the colonies before the war. She attributed the conflict with the British in great part to the corruption of the colonists. The desire “for the temporary advantage of a dignified title or the imaginary happiness of accumulated wealth have sown the seeds of discord and will not cease to nourish the baneful growth, till the foundations of a mighty Empire are shaken, till the civil sword is drawn, and thousands of their fellow citizens may fall.”<sup>538</sup> Her understanding of the threat posed by unchecked wealth and accumulation came from her republican principles, but they also were rooted in her knowledge of the historical patterns of corruption in human nature. Once again Warren points to human history as an illustration of her larger republican principle: “A regard to private interest ever operates more forcibly on the bulk of mankind than

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<sup>538</sup> Warren to Hannay Fayerwether Tolman Winthrop, August 1774, in *Selected Letters*, 32.

the ties of honor, or the principles of patriotism; and when the latter are incompatible with the former, the balance seldom hangs long in equilibrio. Thus it is not uncommon to see virtue, liberty, love of country, and regard to character, sacrificed at the shrine of wealth.”<sup>539</sup>

Warren viewed this tendency toward corruption as latent within human nature. The corrosive influence of wealth and ambition had been the mainspring of tyranny throughout human history, as she notes: “The bulk of mankind have indeed, in all countries in their turn, been made the prey of ambition. It is a truth that no one will contest, [230] though all may regret, that in proportion to the increase of wealth, the improvement in arts, and the refinements in society, the great body of the people have either by force or fraud, become the slaves of the few, who by chance, violence, or accident, have destroyed the natural equality of their associates.”<sup>540</sup> Warren now could count America among the nations that had become “the prey of ambition” and the colonists among those whose natural equality had been destroyed by the force and fraud of others. Corruption did not cease with the Revolutionary War.

Instead, Warren saw corruption expanding as the war progressed. She shared her concerns about the growing “spirit of accumulation”<sup>541</sup> with her fellow republican and friend John Adams. Such a spirit, she wrote Adams, “is rampant among us, and checks the desire of improvements more agreeable to reason and nature, yet this

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<sup>539</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 40.

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>541</sup> Warren to John Adams, May 8, 1780, in *Selected Letters*, 134.

baneful passion is not the only danger that threatens an infant republic.”<sup>542</sup> Equally concerning to Warren was the growing American desire for European luxuries, which elevated “the taste for elegance and the most refined pleasures to the highest pitch.”<sup>543</sup> Rather than checking corruption, the context of war presented new opportunities for avarice, ill-gotten gain, and other forms of vice. The “spirit of accumulation” lamented by Warren further fueled the degeneration of American character and virtue.

Even though the war had been fomented by officials in the service of the British crown lusting for position, power, and wealth, the colonies had not yet learned the lesson of the dangers of such corruption. The troubles faced by the colonists during the war were similar to those experienced before the war began. As the war progressed, Warren noted that “such a spirit of avarice and peculation had crept into the public departments, and taken deep hold of the majority of the people, as Americans a few years before, were thought incapable of.”<sup>544</sup> The pre-war generosity of spirit had been lost and the character of the American people had changed forever. Before the war, the wealthy had seen it as part of their civic duty to be generous with their wealth. During the war inflation was rampant and currency unstable, making the wealthy unable to contribute to the needs of the less fortunate. Economic realities rendered any previous philanthropic impulses of the wealthy impossible: “The

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<sup>542</sup> Warren to John Adams, May 8, 1780, in *Selected Letters*, 134.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>544</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 389.

opulent, who had been used to ease, independence, and generosity, were reduced, dispirited, and deprived of the ability of rendering pecuniary service to their country.”<sup>545</sup> The needs of the less fortunate, including “the widow, the orphan, and the aged,”<sup>546</sup> went largely unmet. Those who had willingly assisted those less fortunate members of society had become unable to do so in the economic circumstances of the war. This reflects the expression of bourgeois virtue in a positive sense: public beneficence and generosity of those of more means to the less fortunate. Corruption of American character continued throughout the war. Warren attributed this “sudden change of character”<sup>547</sup> to rapid changes in individual fortune and economic circumstances: “a sudden accumulation of property by privateering, by speculation, by accident or fraud, placed many in the lap of affluence, who were without a principle, education, or family. These, from a thoughtless ignorance, and the novelty of splendor to which they had been total strangers, plunged into every kind of dissipation, and grafted the extravagancies and follies of foreigners, on their own passion for squandering what by them had been so easily acquired.”<sup>548</sup>

The positive expressions of bourgeois virtue, including industry, moderation, necessity, frugality, and delaying self-gratification, gave way to speculation, privateering, fraud, dissipation, luxury, and indulgence. Evidence of the corruption of

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<sup>545</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 389.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>547</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*, 389-390



the American character for Warren seemed endless: “[A]varice without frugality, and profusion without taste, were indulged, and soon banished the simplicity and elegance that had formerly reigned.”<sup>549</sup> Spreading among the next generation of Americans was “a thirst for the accumulation of wealth, unknown to their ancestors.”<sup>550</sup> Such corruption was rampant following the Revolutionary War: “Sanctioned by the breach of public faith, the private obligations of justice seemed to be little regarded, and the sacred idea of equity in private contracts was annihilated for a time, by the example of public deficiency.”<sup>551</sup> Contracts were to be honored as a binding agreement, upon which the integrity of marketplace rested.

While Warren’s lamentations about corruption are familiar, they also reflected important elements of her positive conception of bourgeois or marketplace virtue. She emphasizes traits of frugality, taste, simplicity, and elegance as essential to checking corruption from wealth. Without these, avarice and “the thirst for the accumulation of wealth”<sup>552</sup> grow. Warren expands her conception of bourgeois virtue to include two principles of business ethics: the private obligations of justice and the “sacred idea of equity in private contracts.”<sup>553</sup> She expressed concern about the “abuse of contracts” and noted the importance of “the punctual discharge of all contracts, both public and

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<sup>549</sup>Warren, *HAR*, 390.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*

private”<sup>554</sup> during the Washington Administration. Warren offers here a more sophisticated view of the importance of contracts and how individuals should operate within the commercial world, emphasizing the need for virtue in the relationships of the marketplace.

Warren identified within the post-war context a new and serious threat to the young republic. One of her primary reasons for opposing monarchy is the corrupting tendency of the aristocracy to seek distinction through family connections, privileges, and luxury. Although the new republic was not a monarchy, it still was susceptible to ambition and avarice – “the primary sources of corruption.”<sup>555</sup> Warren argues that from these sources “have arisen all the rapine and confusion, the depredation and ruin, that have spread distress over the face of the earth from the days of Nimrod to Caesar, and from Caesar to an arbitrary prince of the house of Brunswick.”<sup>556</sup> Her view of human nature remains, even with the Revolution and a new constitution. The aristocratic privilege that had corrupted Great Britain posed no threat to America. Instead, Warren feared that ambition and avarice would find a new outlet for expression. In a republican government there no longer exists the avenue to power through inheritance or the aristocracy. As she argues, the American republic “admits no titles of honor or nobility, those powerful springs of human action; and from the rage of acquisition which has spread far and wide, it may be apprehended that the

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<sup>554</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 636.

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*

possession of wealth will be in a short time the only distinction in this young country. By this it may be feared that the spirit of avarice will be rendered justifiable in the opinion of some, as the single road to superiority.”<sup>557</sup> The desire to possess wealth to gain power would be the most dangerous corrupting force in the new republic. It would destroy generosity and override disinterested virtue. Rather, it would breed “every species of bribery and corruption” and let loose a rampant “innovating spirit.”<sup>558</sup> Ambition and avarice would lead to “the most unwarrantable excesses.”<sup>559</sup> Such corruption, if unchecked by virtue, would lead to the luxury and tyranny that the colonists experienced under Great Britain.

Warren had seen evidence of this corruption throughout the war years, and feared it was accelerating once the war ended. She blamed much of this situation on a number of economic factors. She identifies depreciating paper currency during and after the war as the main problem in the new economy, leading to “a spirit of avarice and speculation”<sup>560</sup> that threatened independence. As she notes, “the declension of morals was equally rapid as with the depreciation of the [American] currency.”<sup>561</sup> She continues:

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<sup>557</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 687.

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>559</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.*, 389.

<sup>561</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

The depreciation of paper had been so rapid, that at this time, one hundred and twenty dollars of the paper currency was not an equivalent to one in silver or gold: while at the same time, sudden accumulation of property by privateering, by speculation, by accident or fraud, placed many in the lap of affluence, who were without a principle, education, or family. These, from a thoughtless ignorance, and the novelty of splendor to which they had been total strangers, suddenly plunged them into every kind of dissipation, and grafted the extravagancies and follies of foreigners, on their own passion for squandering what by them had been so easily acquired.<sup>562</sup>

The depreciation of currency had let loose “a train of restless passions”<sup>563</sup> and its effects had continued long after the war: “Thus, avarice without frugality, and profusion without taste, were indulged, and soon banished the simplicity and elegance that had formerly reigned: instead of which, there was spread in America among the rising generation, a thirst for the accumulation of wealth unknown to their ancestors. A class who had not the advantages of the best education, and who had paid little attention to the principles [237] of the revolution, took the lead in manners.”<sup>564</sup> The depreciation of currency itself continued, as well. Warren saw paper currency to be a “deceptive medium”<sup>565</sup> and a “source of moral turpitude.”<sup>566</sup>

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<sup>562</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 389-390.

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.*, 665.

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

In Warren's estimation, the depreciating currency had other serious consequences as well. It cast doubt on the integrity of public officials and the economic system: "Deeply involved in public contracts, some of the largest public creditors on the continent were particularly suspected of fomenting a spirit, and encouraging views, inconsistent with the principles and professions of the friends to the revolution."<sup>567</sup> She pointed to the necessity of creating a stable medium of trade and a sound currency, rather than continued use of paper currency. She applauded the Washington administration's plan to eliminate the national debt accrued during the war, even if it meant increasing taxes. She feared that the public debate, if not addressed seriously, "would hang on the neck of America to the latest generations."<sup>568</sup> Rather than increase government trade regulations, she pointed to the need for economic actors to operate according to established "principles of equity and reciprocity."<sup>569</sup> Adhering to the "laws of trade and society"<sup>570</sup> provided another means of ordering economic activity.

Despite this incisive analysis of the failed economic policies in the new nation, Warren was not critical of capitalism or economic growth. "The enterprising

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<sup>566</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 416.

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*, 611.

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.*, 665.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.*, 651.

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

[433] spirit of the people seems adapted to improve their advantages.”<sup>571</sup> She notes: “The effects of industry and enterprise appear in the numerous canals, turnpikes, elegant buildings, and well constructed bridges, over lengths and depths of water that open, and render the communication easy and agreeable, throughout a country almost without bounds. In short, arts and agriculture are pursued with avidity, civilization spreads.”<sup>572</sup>

Warren opposes “anticommercial regulations”<sup>573</sup> and the “shackles laid upon Trade,”<sup>574</sup> favoring instead an economic context regulated informally by the principles of bourgeois and marketplace virtue. Corruption could flow from vice within the economic realm, but undue government interference strangled economic activity. She spoke admiringly of the “industry and genius”<sup>575</sup> of the young nation. She often encourages her son Winslow’s business career, applauding his “Youth, Industry, & commercial abilities.”<sup>576</sup> She shares with him her opinions on economic regulation: “No Man is able to pay his debts from the scarcity of Cash, and few Crediters are in a Capacity to wait. No business can be done from the shackles laid upon Trade by Imports. Excises are the great part of which sinks in the pockets of

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<sup>571</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 697.

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid.*, 698.

<sup>573</sup> Warren to Winslow Warren Aug. 28, 1784, in *Selected Letters*, 187.

<sup>574</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>575</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 130.

<sup>576</sup> Warren to Winslow Warren Aug. 28, 1784, in *Selected Letters*, 188.

officers.”<sup>577</sup> Her concerns are not with economic success and prosperity, but rather with the excesses of self-interest and dependence. These can be countered with bourgeois and marketplace ideals of moderation and industry, with an eye toward being useful to society.

Much of Warren’s knowledge of and perspective on economic matters reflects her experiences growing up in a prosperous merchant family. Warren read a number of books pertaining to economics. She thoroughly rejects Mandeville’s satirical mocking of virtue in economics. Like Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Warren rejects Mandeville’s contention that vicious actions can lead to virtue. In his parable of the bees, Mandeville mocks the notion of virtue, instead arguing that accumulated vice is most productive to society. Warren rejects Mandeville’s skepticism throughout her writings. She quotes approvingly Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* in her history of the Revolutionary War. She refers to “the private obligations of justice,”<sup>578</sup> suggesting an understanding of what constitutes ethical or honest business practice. She recognizes that individuals engaging in commerce must deal honestly with others and pay them their due. It also requires a fair price be charged for services rendered or products sold. She points to the importance of the “sacred idea of equity in private contracts,”<sup>579</sup> which had been “annihilated for a time.” “Sanctioned by the breach of public faith, the private obligations of justice

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<sup>577</sup> Warren to Winslow Warren Aug. 28, 1784, in *Selected Letters*, 188.

<sup>578</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 390.

<sup>579</sup> *Ibid.*, 504.

seemed to be little regarded.”<sup>580</sup> Warren here suggests a number of ethical business practices and marketplace virtues: First, parties to a contract are expected to fulfill their obligations. Second, a contract states clearly the terms of agreement and those are not to be altered by one party or the other. Third, businessmen must be honest in their dealings and recognize their contractual obligations. Fourth, the product being sold must be represented honestly and accurately. At a very basic level, individuals engaging in business must be virtuous in their dealings with other economic actors: no cheating, no lying, no fraud, no finger placed surreptitiously on the scale.

This concept of bourgeois or marketplace virtue is similar to that of at least one prominent Congregational thinker in colonial America. In 1709 Cotton Mather delivered a public sermon to the Massachusetts General Assembly, entitled “An Essay on the Golden Street of the Holy City: Publishing a Testimony against the Corruptions of the Market-Place. With Some Good Hopes of Better Things to be yet seen in the American World.”<sup>581</sup> In the sermon, Mather presented a biblical understanding of bourgeois or what he termed “market-place” virtue by bringing Christian principles to bear on economic and commercial activities. As the title of the sermon suggests, Mather was concerned about the corruption arising from the dealings of the marketplace. Warren read many of the early colonial writers and theological thinkers, including Congregationalist minister Jonathan Mayhew and

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<sup>580</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 390.

<sup>581</sup> Cotton Mather, *Theopolis Americana*: “An Essay on the Golden Street of the Holy City: Publishing a Testimony against the Corruptions of the Market-Place. With Some Good Hopes of Better Things to be yet seen in the American World. In a Sermon to the General Assembly of the Massachusetts Province in New England (2 September 1709),” in *The Kingdom, the Power, & The Glory: The Millennial Impulse in Early American Literature*, ed. Reiner Smolinski (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1998), 254-268.



dozens of theologians whose writings are included in the collection of tracts edited by Richard Watson. Whether Warren had specifically read or was familiar with Mather's public sermon is unclear. Still many of the principles Mather presented find currency in Warren's conception of virtue in the marketplace, making his sermon worth a closer look.

Mather defines the "market-place" as "the Place where the Affairs of Trade bring together a Concourse of People"<sup>582</sup> and he casts a vision for a "Market-place of Righteousness, a Mountain of Holiness."<sup>583</sup> Reminiscent of Warren's repeated warnings about the threat of corruption, Mather envisions that the things "done in the *Market-Place*, shall be done without *Corruption*."<sup>584</sup> Foremost, the marketplace must be "full of *Good Men!* Full of *Righteous & Holy Ones*."<sup>585</sup> He emphasizes the necessity for honest dealings in the marketplace: "The Street must have no *Dirty Ways of Dishonesty* in it. ... Let there be none but *Just* and *Fair* dealings in the Market-Place. Let all the Actions of the Market-Place be carried on with a *Golden Equity* and *Honesty* regulating of them."<sup>586</sup> Mather's motions for correct behavior in the marketplace flow from his religious views and represent a mixture of Christian virtue with bourgeois virtue. He warns individuals who profess faith in God, yet are

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<sup>582</sup> Mather, *Theopolis Americana*, 256.

<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>585</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

dishonest in their business practices, that the punishment from God will be great for cheating, oppressing, or wronging others. From this starting point, he offers four specific “motions” to guide behavior in the marketplace:

1) His first motion is that the “Golden Rule of Charity may Operate, in all the *Dealings* of the Market-Place.”<sup>587</sup> Referring to Matt. 7:12, Mather reminds his listeners to heed the “golden rule,” i.e., individuals should do to others what they would have others do to them. He argued that the golden rule established a universal principle for marketplace interaction, was accepted by both Christians and pagans, and was “by *Nature* Engraven on the mind of Man, and as readily confessed as any principle of the *Mathematicks*.”<sup>588</sup> He argued that implementing this principle would “mightily Rectify all our *Dealings*”<sup>589</sup> in the marketplace. Flowing from this principle, Mather contends that the dealings of the marketplace should be marked by honesty and transparency, so that if an individual’s actions “should be laid, open to all your *Neighborhood*, you need not be Ashamed of them.”<sup>590</sup> Mather argued that if the golden rule operated in the marketplace, “there would need no *Laws* to force men to be *Honest*.”<sup>591</sup>

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<sup>587</sup> Mather, *Theopolis Americana*, 259.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid.

2) Mather's second motion was "That all Frauds in our *Dealings* of all sorts, may be the *Abomination* of all that have any thing to do in the Market-Place."<sup>592</sup> Mather warns that "the Irregular & Inordinate *Love of Gold*"<sup>593</sup> leads men to deal dishonestly with others. He listed specific dishonest dealings that should be avoided: using false weights and measures; lying to one another; selling adulterated or counterfeited wares; men passing off their wares "deceitfully" (for example, selling wood "not of Dimensions that are promised unto the Purchaser" or bundles of lumber that "are not as Good *Within* as they are *Without*"); cheating others because "they find them ignorant, or Scruce grievously upon them, only because they are Poor and Low" and struggling "to keep up the *Necessaries* of humane life"; to sell necessities of life "at an *Immoderate Price*, merely because other People want them, when we can more easily spare them"; "to *Employ* others, and not *Reward* them according to *Contract*"; and to "rob the *Publick Treasury*" by falsely reporting exchanges, or by helping others to do the same.<sup>594</sup> Many of these principles are reflected in Warren's conception of bourgeois or marketplace virtue.

3) Mather's third motion is "That there may be not so much as any Tendency to any thing *Oppressive* or *Injurious*, in the *Dealings* of the Market-Place."<sup>595</sup> Mather cautions against usury and the temptation of people to live beyond their means until

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<sup>592</sup> Mather, *Theopolis Americana*, 259.

<sup>593</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>594</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>595</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

they “must borrow, and defraud, and Whistle, and hurt other People, to Support their Vanity.”<sup>596</sup> He warns against taking on inordinate debt: “’Tis a thing of *Evil Tendency*, for People to Run into *Debt*, when they know, they can’t Run *out of it*, as well and as fast as they Run *into it*; so they Spend what is none of *their Own*.”<sup>597</sup> He encouraged the annual payment of debt, rather than going “from year to year, without *Settling their Accounts*”<sup>598</sup> and warned against defrauding creditors or helping others to do so.

4) Mather’s final motion is “that They who Command the Street, would look upon themselves, as concerned, *Above others* to keep all *Dishonesty* out of it.”<sup>599</sup> In other words, he called on the political leaders whom he was addressing to model virtue in the marketplace and to act with honesty in their dealings.

Many of the scriptural principles of Mather’s sermon emerge in Warren’s writings regarding economic interactions and activities in the marketplace. Warren stresses the importance of adhering to contractual agreements, of honest dealings, of the private obligations of justice. She, too, recognizes the importance of having leaders who model honesty in their political and financial dealings. These are among the principles Warren draws on to develop a concept of bourgeois virtue necessary to guide the commercial context of the new American republic.

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<sup>596</sup> Mather, *Theopolis Americana*, 261.

<sup>597</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>598</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>599</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

Bourgeois virtue can be seen as the ethics or guiding principles for relationships in the marketplace, but it also is reflected in the Protestant work ethic and also among the practical virtues necessary for a society to function. We see this element of bourgeois virtue, for example, contained in the list of practical virtues suggested by Benjamin Franklin. These virtues guide all social interactions, including those in the marketplace, but are not necessarily rooted in Christian morality. They are generally or universally, commonsense, practical virtues that held among the people of the middle-class and are seen as necessary for the harmony of social and political relations. They were among the traits seen as essential to the new republic. Franklin's list is reflective of bourgeois virtue: temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility.<sup>600</sup> Sometimes these are referred to as "pagan virtues" because they are pre-Christian or non-Christian and are universally accepted among all people. They also feature prominently among what are commonly viewed as bourgeois virtues. For example, an individual can express frugality, sincerity, and cleanliness (which is thought to be next to godliness) whether he is a Christian, or subscribes to no religion at all. The ancient pagan societies recognized the four cardinal virtues (wisdom, justice, moderation, and courage) discussed in Plato's *Republic*, most of which make Franklin's list. Although sometimes defined as pagan virtues, these are found in Christian thought and in other religious traditions. The German jurist Samuel von Pufendorf (1632-1694) listed many of Franklin's virtues among the laws of nature, as

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<sup>600</sup> See Franklin, *Autobiography*, particularly pp. 68-78.

behaviors “which are to be practiced for the sake of common sociability.”<sup>601</sup> They are a matter of “mutual beneficence” based on the idea “that every man promote the advantage of others, so far as he conveniently can.”<sup>602</sup> Although a Christian, Pufendorf was offering commonsense principles to guide social relations. These common-sense practical virtues are not exclusively classical or Christian ideals, and fit well into the more general category of bourgeois virtue.

Common-sense, bourgeois virtue is woven throughout Warren’s writings. Many of these she refers to in her letters of advice to her son Winslow. For example, she speaks of her appreciation of sincerity and virtue above the admiration she has for fine rhetorical flourishes: “I love better that frankness and sincerity which bespeaks a soul above dissimulation, that generous, resolute, manly fortitude that equally despises and resists the temptations to vice.”<sup>603</sup> In numerous letters she attempts to steer her son away from the temptations of the flesh, advocating instead chastity and delayed self-gratification. As she recalled the role played in the Revolution by her brother James Otis, Jr., she counted among his attributes: probity, generosity, affability, sincerity, integrity, honor, and patriotism.

As the Revolutionary War drew to a close and Warren considered the threats posed to republican self-government she saw that the primary concern was no longer British tyranny and corruption from outside the colonies. Instead, the threat of

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<sup>601</sup> Samuel von Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to the Natural Law* (1673), ed. James Tully and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Bk. I, Ch. 8.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

<sup>603</sup> Warren to Winslow Warren, December 1779, in *Selected Letters*, 120.

corruption now resided within the republic, in the form of economic or commercial corruption. As she had during the war, Warren saw that commerce carried with it enormous temptations to corruption. Yet, she knew that commerce was essential to any nation. Coming from a long line of successful colonial merchants, she understood the importance and benefits of a prosperous commercial environment. Despite her warnings about corruption, her view of commerce is very positive. For example, she expresses her admiration of many aspects of commerce in a letter to her son, Winslow: “It has been observed that commerce has a tendency to narrow the mind, but I do not think the observation is just, except with the little Traficer [sic] who aims only at accumulation without a Wish to benefit society. The Merchant may enlarge the bounds of Intercourse, he may spread knowledge, may widen the Avenues of useful improvement, may encourage industry & rank himself among the first class of Benefactors of his country.”<sup>604</sup> In this passage, corruption is reflected in a narrow-minded “little Traficer” who is driven by self-interest and desires to accumulate wealth only for his own ends. If the opposite of this example is considered, bourgeois virtue then would be reflected by the merchant who participates in commerce with a mind to benefit society as well as himself. As the second example of the passage demonstrates, virtuous economic action benefits others. In this positive conception of bourgeois virtue, the desire for individual accumulation of wealth is tempered by generous, philanthropic actions that benefit society. Accumulating wealth purely for oneself and only to benefit narrow self-interest is a form of corruption. Wealth used

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<sup>604</sup> Warren to Winslow Warren, Nov. 24, 1782, in *Selected Letters*, 162.

to improve the welfare of society reflects Warren's ideal of bourgeois virtue. Warren admits the many benefits of a prosperous economy. Unlike the corrupt "little Traficer," a generous merchant is able to improve society by enlarging the bounds of social intercourse, by spreading knowledge, and by providing the means for others to improve and to be useful. A merchant who acts in a way consistent with bourgeois virtue expands economic opportunities for others, perhaps providing jobs and opportunities for improvement, and thus promotes the good of his fellow citizens, his community, and his nation.

Warren cannot be categorized as an anti-capitalist or anti-commercial thinker. Rather she recognizes the value of industry and enterprise to a growing nation:

Though in her infantile state, the young republic of America exhibits the happiest prospects. Her extensive population, commerce, [435] and wealth, the progress of agriculture, arts, sciences, and manufactures, have increased with a rapidity beyond example. Colleges and academies have been reared, multiplied, and endowed with the best advantages for public instruction, on the broad scale of liberality and truth. The effects of industry and enterprise appear in the numerous canals, turnpikes, elegant buildings, and well constructed bridges, over lengths and depths of water that open, and render the communication easy and agreeable, throughout a country almost without bounds. In short, arts and agriculture are pursued with avidity, civilization



spreads, and science in full research is investigating all the sources of human knowledge.<sup>605</sup>

A prosperous economy enables a nation to develop necessary infrastructure and public works. Citizens and society benefit from the establishment of educational institutions. A nation's education, communication, advances, and general well-being are fueled by economic prosperity. Warren applauds the "enterprising spirit of the people"<sup>606</sup> and sees the "spirit of enterprise" to be "very advantageous in a young country."<sup>607</sup>

Characteristically Warren points her audience back to the need for virtue to check corruption and self-interest in economic matters, but this does not diminish her support for economic development and commerce. Like any other American citizens, merchants and tradesmen are capable of overcoming narrow self-interest to benefit the greater interests of the whole. Warren specifically mentions the importance of the self-sacrificing actions of merchants and manufacturers as the Revolutionary War approached. Without the involvement of all individuals engaged in colonial trade, resistance to British oppression very likely would have failed. Instead, each merchant and tradesman demonstrated a single-minded commitment to the common good, risking their individual economic self-interest as well as their lives in the effort:

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<sup>605</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 698.

<sup>606</sup> *Ibid.*, 697.

<sup>607</sup> *Ibid.*, 648.

As all the American continent was involved in one common danger, it was not found difficult to obtain a general combination against all further importations from England, a few articles only excepted. The mercantile body through all the provinces entered into solemn engagements, and plighted their faith and honor to each other, and to their country, that no orders should be forwarded by them for British or India goods within a limited term, except for certain specified articles of necessary use. These engagements originated in Boston, and were for a time strictly adhered to through all the colonies. Great encouragement was given to American manufactures, and if pride of apparel was at all indulged, it was in wearing the stuffs fabricated in their own looms. Harmony and union, prudence and economy, industry and virtue, were inculcated in their publications, and enforced by the example of the most respectable characters.<sup>608</sup>

Similarly she commends the sacrificial acts of rural citizens, who despite great personal cost continued to pay their taxes during the war. The difficult economic circumstances of the war often put them at risk to be exploited by unscrupulous lenders: “The patriotic feelings of the yeomanry of the country, had prompted them to the utmost [343] exertions for the public service. Unwilling to withhold their quota of the tax of beef, blankets, and other necessaries indispensable for the soldiery, exposed to cold and hunger, many of them had been induced to contract debts which could not be easily liquidated, and which it was impossible to discharge by the products from

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<sup>608</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 39-40.

the usual occupations of husbandry.”<sup>609</sup> Although during the war many citizens discarded common sense and abandoned virtue in economic matters, others demonstrated heroic virtue in the face of uncertain financial conditions and often at great personal sacrifice. Ever optimistic about the possibility for human beings to choose virtue, Warren utilizes both negative and positive examples to build her conception of bourgeois or marketplace virtue.

Throughout her writings Warren echoes John Locke’s connection between private property and liberty. Property is primary among natural rights, and self-protection of that property is first among the laws of nature:

It is an undoubted truth, that both the rude savage and the polished citizen are equally tenacious of their pecuniary acquisitions. And however mankind may have trifled away liberty, virtue, religion, or life, yet when the first rudiments of society have been established, the right of private property has been held sacred. For an attempt to invade the possessions each one denominates *his own*, whether it is made by the rude hand of the savage, or by the refinements of ancient or modern policy, little short of the blood of the aggressor has been thought a sufficient atonement.<sup>610</sup>

When one’s life and property are threatened, the natural principle of self-defense and the law of self-preservation come to life in every human being. For Warren then, the problem is not with accumulation of wealth per se (although she stresses the need for

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<sup>609</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 649.

<sup>610</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

moderation). Rather, her concern is with the corrupting influence that excessive wealth or undue personal gain typically exerts on the virtue of a republic. The unchecked desire for wealth undermines the common sense and virtue necessary to republican government. Bourgeois virtue insists upon a generous spirit, moderation in the accumulation of wealth, avoidance of debt and bankruptcy, and a focus on long-term financial stability rather than on risky, short-term speculation and rapid acquisition. So highly does Warren value the importance of financial responsibility that she offers this advice to her son Winslow: “I have marked you from the early period of childhood as an admirer of the Great, the Noble & sublime. Therefore never counteract the Native dictates of a generous Heart by submitting to any action tinctured with meanness. This may be done by a steady Method of circumscribing your Expenses within the Bounds of your income.”<sup>611</sup> In the same letter, Warren advises her son to avoid the gaming tables, encouraging him instead to employ his many talents, including “a mind formed for enterprize” in his “struggle for distinction.”<sup>612</sup> Throughout her writings, she warns of the consequences of avarice, which can “lead to speculation, usurious contracts, to illegal and dishonest projects, and to every private vice, to support the factitious appearances of grandeur and wealth.”<sup>613</sup> She reminds her readers that no amount of wealth or riches can possibly

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<sup>611</sup> Warren to Winslow Warren, Nov. 1782, in *Selected Letters*, 162,

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>613</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 648.

compare to “that rich inheritance which they so bravely defended”<sup>614</sup> during the Revolutionary War. Citizens of the young republic should reject the “chimerical pursuit of the golden fleece of the poets” and instead remember “the independent feelings of ancient republics, whose prime object was the welfare and happiness of their country.”<sup>615</sup> If the citizens were expected to demonstrate bourgeois virtue to check the corruption of wealth, so were their leaders. “From [306] the principles, manners, habits, and education of the Americans, they expected from their rulers, economy in expenditure, (both public and private,) simplicity of manners, pure morals, and undeviating probity.”<sup>616</sup>

Warren saw the importance of free trade and a prosperous economy. The seas were “designed by God and nature, that all mankind might reap the benefits of a free and open intercourse with each other.”<sup>617</sup> In its early days, before British involvement in colonial matters, America enjoyed tremendous economic advantages:

Indeed America was at this period possessed of a prize, replete with advantages seldom thrown into the hand of any people. Divided by nature from three parts of the globe, which [340] have groaned under tyrants of various descriptions, from time immemorial, who have slaughtered their millions to feed the ambition of princes, she was possessed of an immense

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<sup>614</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 649.

<sup>615</sup> *Ibid.*, 648.

<sup>616</sup> *Ibid.*, 630.

<sup>617</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

territory, the soil fertile and productive, her population increasing, her commerce unfettered, her resources ample. She was now uncontrolled by foreign laws; and her domestic manufactures might be encouraged, without any fear of check from abroad: and under the influence of a spirit of enterprise, very advantageous in a young country, she was looking forward with expectations of extending her commerce to every part of the globe.<sup>618</sup>

Whether these natural economic advantages still existed was an open question.

Warren spoke numerous times of the need for agreements of “amity and commerce”<sup>619</sup> with foreign nations, yet expressed concern about the influence of foreign culture, and she discouraged entanglements of dependence with foreign nations. She also expressed significant concern about growing federal control of economic matters, opposing the development of a national bank, monopolies, and a national funding system. Such sweeping economic projects, she argued, “had never been thought of, in the early stages of an infant republic, and had they been suggested before the present period, would have startled both the soldier and the peasant.”<sup>620</sup>

She remained unconvinced that the institutions of the federal government were justified in such expansions of power into economic matters. Warren was concerned that following the war, “the distressed state of American finances was alarming.”<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>618</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 648.

<sup>619</sup> See, for example, Warren, *HAR*, 255; 258; 409; 533; 554; 555; 565; and 592.

<sup>620</sup> *Ibid.*, 660.

<sup>621</sup> *Ibid.*, 623.

She expressed significant doubts as to whether the new Constitution would be able to remedy the nation's present economic ills, or address the economic challenges it would face well into its future. But of one thing Warren was certain, American citizens should expect of their leaders "economy of expenditure, (both public and private,) simplicity of manners, pure morals, and undeviating probity."<sup>622</sup> In short, the American people should demand virtue in all aspects of their nation's economic life.

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<sup>622</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 630.

## CHAPTER 6

### Mercy Otis Warren's Third Thread of Virtue: The Christian View

*May the Great Gaurdian of Virtue, the  
source, the fountain of everlasting truth  
watch over and ever preserve you from  
the baleful walks of vice.*

Mercy Otis Warren to her son James Warren Jr., September 1772<sup>623</sup>

Mercy Otis Warren relied heavily on her understanding of the history of ancient republics to inform her political thought and her concept of classical republican virtue. Ancient Rome was a great republic because its laws were just, its institutions mixed, and its people virtuous and free. She embraced the Roman emphasis on patriotism, self-sacrifice, and duty to country. Yet Warren and the ancient republicans inhabited very different worlds. Unlike Homer, Aristotle, and other ancient republican thinkers, Warren was steeped in a context of Christian belief. For a republican thinker in eighteenth-century America, there were limits to how fully classical republican thought could define virtue. Consider the argument offered by Noah Webster in his support of the proposed constitution: “Montesquieu supposed virtue to be the principle of a republic. He derived his notions of this form of government, from the astonishing firmness, courage and patriotism which distinguished the republics of Greece and Rome. But this virtue consisted in pride, contempt of strangers and a martial enthusiasm which sometimes displayed itself in defence of their country. These principles are never permanent—they decay with

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<sup>623</sup> Warren to James Warren, Jr., Sept. 1772, in *Selected Letters*, 7. Misspelling in the original.



refinement, intercourse with other nations and increase of wealth. No wonder then that these republics declined, for they were not founded on fixed principles, and hence authors imagine that republics cannot be durable.”<sup>624</sup> Both Federalists such as Webster and Antifederalists such as Warren recognized the limits of classical republican virtue: it was fragile and lacking “fixed principles” to undergird, guide, and perpetuate it. Warren’s religious beliefs provided the “fixed principles” missing from Roman virtue and offer for her the source of enduring values necessary to sustain an American republic. The Bible was an important source for her thought, and biblical citations and themes can be identified throughout her writings.<sup>625</sup> Her Christian thought is evident throughout her conception of virtue.

Like many Revolutionary thinkers, Warren’s preference for republican government recognized the need for virtue. Steeped in the Puritanism and Congregationalism of colonial Massachusetts, hers was not only the secular republican virtue of Machiavelli, or the pagan civil religion of the ancients, but it incorporated a vigorous conception of Christian virtue. Considering Warren’s Congregationalist religious milieu and long Puritan heritage, it is unsurprising that her conception of political virtue incorporates a strong Christian thread. Historians of New England congregationalism note that virtue in Warren’s religious context

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<sup>624</sup> Noah Webster, “An Examination into the Leading Principles of the Federal Constitution: By A Citizen of America” (10 Oct. 1787), in *Pamphlets on the Constitution of the United States, Published during Its Discussion by the People, 1787—1788*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford. Brooklyn, 1888. Reprint. (New York: De Capo Press, 1968), 65. <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch16s17.html>

<sup>625</sup> Lester H. Cohen, “Introduction,” *HAR*, xxxiv.

typically was understood within “the traditional context of salvation and service”<sup>626</sup> and that it carried with it a strong sense of individual and corporate obligation to God. Warren was a woman of serious Christian faith. Her vision of republican government and conception of virtue are based on religion and the moral values that stem from her belief in God.

Christian virtue is action or behavior consistent with the character and word of God. As the earlier discussion of virtue in Chapter 1 notes, Christian virtue focuses on the importance of salvation through Jesus Christ as both the purpose of this life and the promise of the next. Its central principle is salvation through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.<sup>627</sup> As Aquinas argues, the intellectual and moral virtues reflect the character of God, but can be exercised through reason. The spiritual or theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity have God as their object, are divinely infused in human beings through their relationship with Jesus Christ, and are known only through divine revelation. It is often represented as the three theological virtues: faith,

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<sup>626</sup> Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 158.

<sup>627</sup> According to orthodox Christian theology, man is separated by his sin from a holy and perfect God who cannot allow sin into his presence, or into heaven. But God loved mankind so much that he sent his son, in the form of Jesus of Nazareth, to live life as a human being – fully God and fully man – to be tempted as we are, yet without sin. The life of the historical Jesus, who lived in Palestine two millennia ago, was marked by miracles of healing and supernatural evidence of his divinity. God allowed Jesus to be put to death on a Roman cross, then raised him from the dead on the third day, fulfilling hundreds of Old Testament prophecies, and paving the way for mankind to become reconciled to God. Christians believe that by accepting the sacrifice of Jesus, and by inviting him to live in their hearts, they can enter into heaven and God’s presence despite their sins and failings. Followers of Christ believe that when God examines their hearts, he chooses to see his perfect and sinless son rather than their sin, and therefore in his mercy makes a way for them to spend eternity with him in heaven.

hope, and charity.<sup>628</sup> Another listing of Christian virtues is contained in Gal. 5:22: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith.” Also included would be mercy, sacrifice, love of God, humility, and forgiveness. These characteristics point to a more encompassing definition of Christian virtue. Echoing the Aristotelian idea of the habituation of virtue, Augustine called virtue “a good habit consonant with our nature,” and Aquinas defined it as *habitus operativus bonus*, or an operative habit that is good, i.e., it is consistent with the character and nature of God, who is good. Virtue is the opposite of vice and must be developed as an operative habit. Virtue is not a potential conception, but is an exercise of good or evil action or behavior.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of virtue is helpful here. Virtue is “the power or operative influence inherent in supernatural or divine being.”<sup>629</sup> Another definition states that virtue is “conformity of life and conduct with the principles of morality; voluntary observation of the recognized moral laws or standards of right conduct; abstention on moral grounds from any form of wrongdoing or vice.”<sup>630</sup> These aspects of virtue when placed within a theistic setting provide a definition of Christian virtue: life and conduct in conformity with the

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<sup>628</sup> Dagger, *Civic Virtues*, 195. The theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity, are often seen as distinct from other Christian virtues (meekness, gentleness, joy, self-control, etc.), in that they are supernatural, i.e., they have God for their immediate and proper object; they are divinely infused; and they are known only through divine revelation.

<sup>629</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers multiple definitions of the word “virtue.” See “virtue, n.,” in OED Online. March 2011. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223835?rskey=7T1nY0&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed April 15, 2011).

<sup>630</sup> Ibid.

principles of Christian morality, and voluntary observation of the recognized moral laws of God and his standards of right conduct. Three elements, then, come into play in this definition of Christian virtue: God (from whom the standards of right and wrong derive), conscience (an individual's knowledge of God's standards), and individual choice or free will (whether to choose to act in a manner consistent with God and conscience).

Warren brought her faith into her conception of virtue. Foundational to her Christian worldview was her belief in a providential triune God; that human beings have free will; that disobedience to God as recounted in the Book of Genesis led to the fall of mankind and the continuation of original sin in the human race; that redemption from sin is available through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross; and that repentance and obedience to God's will is necessary to be judged among the righteous who will inherit everlasting life in Heaven. The Christian thread of Warren's concept of virtue is rooted firmly in this biblical framework. Warren saw God as the source and guardian of virtue: "Let us never forget that he who rules creation with a glance, has caused the guilty to fly; and that it is he alone who inspires with valor, virtue and wisdom, sufficient to defeat the machinations of an obstinate, powerful and unrelenting foe."<sup>631</sup> Similarly she noted to another friend, "Yet still we have a more certain and a more animating motive to virtue when we consider that the eye of *omnicence* [sic] traces the most secret resources of the heart; and that the hidden springs lie open to him who is the source, the sum, and the pattern of

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<sup>631</sup> Warren to Dorothy Quincy Hancock, April 1776, in *Selected Letters*, 73

perfection.”<sup>632</sup> The virtue necessary to sustain the American republic is impossible without God.

From Warren’s writings emerges a list of specific traits that she associates with Christian virtue. In her *History* she describes the character of Connecticut colonial Governor Jonathan Trumbull, Sr. (1710-1785), the only colonial governor who supported the Revolutionary side against Great Britain. After describing Trumbull as a “patriot, and the friend of a young and growing country,”<sup>633</sup> Warren further describes his Christian character: “His uniform conduct as a Christian, was not less signal; his integrity and uprightness, his benevolence and piety, and the purity and simplicity of his manners, through a long life, approached as near an example of the primitive patterns of a sublime religion, as that of any one raised to eminence of office.”<sup>634</sup> To this list of characteristics found in the character of Gov. Trumbull can be added other expressions or traits that Warren throughout her writing specifically associates with Christianity and Christian virtue, including: “intrepidity of the christian”<sup>635</sup> or bravery, boldness, and resolute fearlessness; “forgiveness,” “a spirit of candor and forbearance,” “justice,” “sobriety of manners,” and “purity of ...morals”;<sup>636</sup> “a mild spirit” or humility, “benevolent affections,” tolerance of

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<sup>632</sup> Warren to Janet Livingston Montgomery, June 1780, in *Selected Letters*, 139.

<sup>633</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 409.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*, 409.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

<sup>636</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

differing religious practices, “charity,” and “brotherly kindness”;<sup>637</sup> “mildness of manners,” “humanity,” and “rectitude of character”;<sup>638</sup> “resignation, fortitude, and piety” in the face of suffering, “manners gentle,” “heart sincere,” “mild [in] his deportment”;<sup>639</sup> “faith, fortitude, and courage”;<sup>640</sup> “patience” and “self-denial.”<sup>641</sup>

This list of traits, however, provides but a starting point for understanding the place of Christian thought in Warren’s conception of virtue.

Although the virtue predominant in Warren’s early plays is representative of classical republican virtue, undergirding these works is the thread of Christian virtue. In *The Group* she raises the patriotic rallying cry, reminding the colonists that “they fight in virtue’s ever sacred cause” while those who oppress and tyrannize them “tread on divine and human laws.”<sup>642</sup> The phrase Warren uses here, “in virtue’s sacred cause,” is seen repeatedly in the writings of American poetry, including Philip Freneau’s popular “Stanzas.”<sup>643</sup> Warren’s characterization of “the sacred cause of virtue” infuses classical virtue with Christian virtue. Warren employed a strong biblical reference to unmask the deception of British sympathizers in the Massachusetts government, who “like the toad squat at the ear of Eve,” hatched

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<sup>637</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 335.

<sup>638</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>639</sup> Warren, “Lines,” in *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, 240.

<sup>640</sup> Warren to James Warren, March 10, 1778, in *Selected Letters*, 100.

<sup>641</sup> Warren to Hannah Quincy Lincoln, September 3, 1774, in *Selected Letters*, 34.

<sup>642</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act II, Scene 3.

<sup>643</sup> Philip Freneau, “Stanzas,” in *The Poems of Philip Freneau: Poet of the Revolution*, Vol. III, ed. Fred Lewis Pattee (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Library University, 1907), 235.

schemes that plunged the country “in ten thousand woes.”<sup>644</sup> With the scheme unmasked and truth revealed, the new judge Collateralis paints a picture of the damage done by the treachery: “Drawn from the Heavenly form / Of blest religion weeping over the land / For virtue fallen, and for freedom lost.”<sup>645</sup>

Many examples of Christian ideals appear alongside the concept of classical republican virtue presented in her Revolutionary plays. As she describes the ancient classical virtue expressed by the patriots, she attributes the care of virtue and freedom to a single higher power. In the opening dialogue among the old patriots in *The Adulateur*, the character Brutus (representing Warren’s brother James Otis Jr.) establishes the idea of God providentially guarding human virtue and freedom:

And now thou power supreme!  
Who hatest wrong and wills creation happy,  
Hear and revenge a bleeding country's groans;  
Teach us to act with firmness and with zeal:  
Till happier prospects gild the gloomy waste.  
While from our fate shall future ages know,  
Virtue and freedom are thy care below.<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>644</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act II, Scene 3. It is also a reference to John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book IV.800, in *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis, IN: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1957), 297.

<sup>645</sup> *Ibid.*, Act II, Scene 1.

<sup>646</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act I, Scene 1.

Writing about a classical setting, Warren referred to the idea of gods, plural, in her plays, which is language consistent with heroic virtue and with the language of ancient literature and culture. But as this passage indicates, her character invoked a personal deity, who watches over the American cause and hears the prayers of patriots. She viewed virtue and freedom as connected and overseen by a single, personal God. Brutus expected his prayers to be heard by a God who cares about his creation and will intervene in the lives of individual patriots by teaching them “to act with firmness and with zeal.”<sup>647</sup>

This view of a single deity was not available to or employed by ancient republics, but is reflective of Warren’s religious milieu and informs her conception of virtue. Mixed into the ancient literary context of her plays are biblical references that would not be lost on her audience. In *The Adulateur* Warren writes: “He who in virtue's cause remain unmoved / And nobly struggles for his country's good: / Shall more than conquer -- better days shall beam, / And happier prospects crowd again the scene.”<sup>648</sup> The phrase “shall more than conquer” closely parallels the language of Romans 8:34: “In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”<sup>649</sup> She uses phrases and terms with religious overtones: the patriots expected a “glorious harvest” of freedom; they offer “fervent prayer.”<sup>650</sup> Brutus notes

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<sup>647</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act I, Scene 1.

<sup>648</sup> *Ibid.*, Act III, Scene 3.

<sup>649</sup> King James’ version (*KJV*).

<sup>650</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act III, Scene 3.



that “all creation seems to join my joy,”<sup>651</sup> and he further encourages the young patriot Marcus to

See through the waste a ray of virtue gleam,  
Dispel the shades and brighten all the scene.  
Waked into life, the blooming forest glows.  
And all the desert blossoms as the rose.  
From distant lands see virtuous millions fly  
To happier climates, and a milder sky,  
While on the mind successive pleasures pour,  
Till time expires, and ages are no more.<sup>652</sup>

The passage refers to Isaiah 35: 1-2: “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing.”<sup>653</sup> The final lines of this passage point to Warren’s civil millennialism, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 9.

Warren’s use of biblical references and religious language demonstrates how she situated classical republican virtue (patriotism, honor, glory, self-sacrifice) within the context of her own religious beliefs.

From her earliest published writings, Warren emphasizes the role of conscience in her conception of virtue, making the connection between the operation

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<sup>651</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act III, Scene 3.

<sup>652</sup> *Ibid.*, Act V, Scene 3.

<sup>653</sup> *KJV*

of conscience and the expression of virtue. In *The Adulateur* Hazelrod encourages his fellow villains to not let their consciences trouble them about their treatment of the patriots: “We'll laugh at all the howls of patriotism. / Should virtue check, should conscience whisper terror, / And lash our troubled minds, we'll brave it all.”<sup>654</sup> A dulled conscience can inhibit an individual's ability to express virtue. Brutus warns the young patriot Marcus of the temptations that can overrun virtue:

You little know the world – there greater vices  
Lead to preferment. The man of honest mind,  
Whose generous soul disdains a groveling action,  
And grasps alone at virtue, sinks neglected.  
Yes, my young friend, would you be great and powerful,  
Loaded with wealth and honor, be a rascal,  
Stoop low and cringe – stick not at oaths, nor let  
Thy shrinking soul start at the thought of murder.  
Then to Rapatio go ...<sup>655</sup>

Having seen the destruction of vice and corruption, of the temptation to power, perquisites, and position for those around him, Marcus replies in protest:

Oh no! I scorn it – better live a poor man,  
And die so too – while virtue and my conscience  
Speak peace within. Better, though hate and malice

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<sup>654</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act V, Scene 2.

<sup>655</sup> *Ibid.*, Act V, Scene 3.

May shoot their shafts against me, better thus

To make my exit, while the soul with comfort

Reviews the past and smiles on the future.<sup>656</sup>

The villains in Warren's Revolutionary dramas mock virtue, while suppressing pangs of conscience regarding their behavior. The characters, seduced by promises of power, position, and pension, are plagued by a guilty conscience and regret the actions they have taken to betray the colonial cause. In one of the final scenes of the play, a friend of the government is in prison, tormented by his conscience and by the realization that he traded his virtue for power and position. He laments that his friends in the government "seduced my soul to laugh at virtue / to give up all my right to future bliss" in return for the "gilded airy prospects" of "Honor, places, pensions."<sup>657</sup> He realizes too late he has made a fool's bargain:

'Tis all a cheat, a damned cruel cheat,

The wretch that feasts himself on promises,

Pursues a phantom, and but grasps at air;

The illusive vapor leads him to a bog

Then leaves him to his fate – cursed enticers!<sup>658</sup>

A dulled or deadened conscience can temporarily quiet the inner conflict between virtue and vice. But a life of corruption and vice brings no lasting peace. Conversely,

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<sup>656</sup>Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act V, Scene 3.

<sup>657</sup> *Ibid.*, Act V, Scene 2

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid.*

a virtuous life is a life marked by a clear conscience and inner peace. When an individual listens to her conscience, recovering lost virtue is possible. Vice can be overcome, and the temptation to continue living in corruption can be resisted. But conscience must be heeded.

Crusty, the remorseful minion of Rapatio, bemoans how he had been seduced “to sell my friends, my country, and my conscience.”<sup>659</sup> But those who feel no regret and continue to justify their actions mock conscience and virtue. When Crusty expresses his feelings of remorse, Hazelrod answers:

Pho ... what misgivings – why these idle qualms,  
This shrinking backwards at the bugbear conscience?  
In early life I heard the phantom named,  
And the grave sages prate of moral sense  
Presiding in the bosom of the just;  
Or panting throngs about the guilty heart.  
Bound by these shackles, long my laboring mind  
Obscurely trod the lower walks of life,  
In hopes by honesty my bread to gain;  
But neither commerce, or my fangled drills,  
Or all the Iron-mongers curious arts,  
Gave me a competence of shining ore,  
Or gratified my itching palm for more;

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<sup>659</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act I, Scene 1.

Till I dismissed the bold intruding guest,  
And banished conscience from my wounded breast.<sup>660</sup>

She continues to emphasize the role of conscience in her next play, *The Defeat*. Rapatio admits he has willingly traded his conscience for money, position, and power. He thinks he is no longer bound by the laws of God or virtue:

Yes! Philaethes long ago broke down  
The guard of conscience, and that strong defense  
By foolish priests and prophets of old time,  
Plagued round her portals to secure her rights,  
This moral sovereign boldly he's renounced.  
Lucre now reigns his deity and guide.  
His penetrating genius proves it clear,  
precepts divine are but a worn out tale  
No revelation can exist at all,  
Denies his savior, and rejects St. Paul.<sup>661</sup>

Rapatio's henchmen, likewise, have traded virtue for position. The venerable Senator Honestus has discovered Rapatio's traitorous deception of his fellow officials:

I from my soul detest these base designs,  
Go tell thy master he deceives no more.  
The covered sting, the half disguised plan

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<sup>660</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act I, Scene 1.

<sup>661</sup> Warren, *The Defeat*, Act III, Scene 2.

Peeps through the veil and shows the abject man,  
Who for a place, a grasp of shining earth,  
Has stabbed the vitals that first gave him birth.  
Shall Servia bleed and shan't her sons complain,  
While traitors revel over her children slain?  
Go dirtiest dupe of all the venal race  
Who sell their country for a pensioned place,  
Who barter conscience for a gilded straw,  
Riot on right, and trample on the law.<sup>662</sup>

These passages point to the importance of virtue as a check on corruption, but also highlight the role of conscience in Warren's concept of virtue. Virtue brings happiness, an ordered and harmonious inner life. A soul of virtue is marked by a peaceful conscience, but the soul of vice and corruption is tormented by inner turmoil. As one of her patriotic characters pleads: This is contrasted with the inner peace of living virtuously: "[G]ive me but virtue, / That sunshine of the soul – enough – I'm happy."<sup>663</sup> Further developing the theme of conscience in *The Adulateur*, one of the virtuous senators describes Rapatio's soul, wracked by guilt: "Unhappy state of mind! What though ten thousand pleasures beam around him, the gilded couch – the

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<sup>662</sup> Warren, *The Defeat*, Act I, Scene 2.

<sup>663</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act II, Scene 2.

airy post of honor; No balm of peace, can mitigate his pain.”<sup>664</sup> Conscience whispers terror and guilt lashes troubled minds.

Warren expresses conscience in the classical republican context of her Revolutionary plays, but this aspect of her thinking is closely aligned with the Christian thread in her conception of virtue. Conscience is an inner reminder of right behavior consistent with Christian virtue. Her concern focuses on the “lessons of morality, and the consequences of deviation.”<sup>665</sup> Also consistent with her religious beliefs, human beings possess free will and can thus choose to act in a virtuous manner. Pointing to the writings of Moliere, Warren argues that although skeptics promote vice without a call to virtue, only conscience and reason can lead to a choice of virtue: “[W]hen vice is held up at once in an odious and ridiculous light, and the windings of the human heart which lead to self deception unfolded, it certain points us to the point of reason and rectitude, and if we do not embrace the amiable vision of virtue, we must exculpate the monitor and attribute the misguided choice, to the wrong bias of our own clamorous and ungoverned passions.”<sup>666</sup>

Further evidence of the connection between religion and virtue in Warren’s thinking is her criticism of skepticism. She “maintained a lifelong critique of philosophical and religious skepticism,”<sup>667</sup> and targeted many of the influential

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<sup>664</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act II, Scene 2.

<sup>665</sup> Warren, “To the Public,” in *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, 11.

<sup>666</sup> Warren to Abigail Smith Adams, Dec. 29, 1774, in *Selected Letters*, 42.

<sup>667</sup> See note #6 in *Selected Letters*, 123. Warren often targeted Voltaire, historian David Hume, and Lord Bolingbroke for their skepticism.

writers of her day. Skeptics challenged the place of religion in philosophy and in politics, denying the existence of God and undermining religious authority. Her criticism of skepticism often was voiced as a warning to the next generation. She opens her poem, "To Torrismond," written to her son in England: "My soul is sicken'd when I see the youth, / That sports and trifles with eternal truth."<sup>668</sup> She warns of the philosophers "Nurs'd in refinements of a sceptic age; / They spurn the precepts of the sacred page; / Hold revelation but the dream of pride, / The wish of man to be to God ally'd."<sup>669</sup> Understanding the source of young Torrismond's questioning, she unmask the skeptics and instead encourages him:

Come, my young friend, forsake the sceptic road,  
And tread the paths superior genius trod;  
Leave all the modern metaphysic fools,  
To reason on by false logistical rules;  
Leave all the quibblers of a mimic age,  
By rote to cavil at th' inspired page;  
Let learned trash their arguments sustain,  
While common sense, ejected from their brain,  
They through each jarring incoherence run,  
Until entangled in the web they've spun,

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<sup>668</sup> Warren, "To Torrismond," in *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, 183.

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.



They all things doubt but their superior sense,  
And live and die the dupes of dark suspense.<sup>670</sup>

As he responds to his conscience and reflects upon the religious and moral teachings of his youth, she promises him: “With what amaze you’ll find the christian scheme / Is not the product of a brain sick dream,”<sup>671</sup> as the skeptics would lead him to believe. She again takes the skeptics to task in the poem “The Genius of America” (1778).

He lives a sceptic, if you take his word,  
Thinks ‘tis heroic to deny his God,  
Or to dispute his providential care;  
Deride his precepts, or to scoff at prayer.”<sup>672</sup>

Chief among the skeptics identified by Warren are Lord Bolingbroke (1678-751), Voltaire (1694-1778), Edmond Hoyle (1672-1769), David Hume (1711-1776), and Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733), whose satirical attack on virtue in *The Fable of the Bees* (1714) was widely attacked as degrading to traditional morality. The skeptics,

With scientific brow can demonstrate,  
Whate’er the pious sage or priest may prate,  
Virtue is an enthusiastic dream,  
Reveal’d religion, a long worn out theme.<sup>673</sup>

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<sup>670</sup> Warren, “To Torrismond,” 186.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>672</sup> Warren, “The Genius of America,” 251.

Then she turns her sights on the deist, for whom “The Christian code becomes his wanton jest, / Scarce any decent principles remain.”<sup>674</sup> But skepticism and deism hold only empty promises of freedom from the restraints of religion and moral truth. They “rail aloud ‘gainst puritanic rules, / And learn their morals in deistic schools.”<sup>675</sup> Lost in their folly, passions, and vanity, they are unable to see that

The rippling surface hides the deep abyss,  
That gapes destruction, while the hydra’s hiss,  
Unheard as pleasure’s hallucinating song,  
In gales perfum’d, the triflers hurl along.<sup>676</sup>

Skepticism’s rejection of God, religion, morality and virtue destroys the humanity of man:

Profoundly learn’d, investigating truth,  
And thus thrown off the shackles of his youth,  
He’s wisest sure who makes the most of life,  
Prefers a mistress to a sober wife;  
The coxcomb laughs, and revels life away,  
While gaming high’s the business of the day;  
Pleasure shall dance in every festive bowl,

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<sup>673</sup> Warren, “The Genius of America,” 251.

<sup>674</sup> Ibid.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>676</sup> Warren, “To Torrismond,” 252.

The *Brute's* secure – the *Man* has not a soul.<sup>677</sup>

In the nation's earliest days, American religion and morals had been spared the threats posed by European skepticism. "In the outset of the American revolution, the arm of foreign power was opposed by a people uncontaminated by foreign luxury, the intricacies of foreign policies, or the theological jargon of metaphysical sceptics of foreign extract. Philosophy then conveyed honorable ideas of science, of religion, and morals."<sup>678</sup> She was so concerned with the corrosive influence of the skeptics, "she deplored—David Hume (because he was a skeptic), Edward Gibbon (whom she admired, but thought him suspect for his skepticism and Tory stance), Lord Bolingbroke (a great moralist, but a Tory), and Lord Chesterfield (who was, as Warren saw it, more concerned with style, taste, and wit than with substantive values)."<sup>679</sup> Still she recognized the growing influence of European skeptics and lamented that the American "character is since degraded by the unprincipled sarcasms of men of letters, who assume the dignity of philosophic thought. Instead of unfolding the sources of knowledge, and inculcating truth, they often confound without convincing, and by their sophistical reasonings leave the superficial [401] reader, their newly initiated disciple, on the comfortless shores of annihilation."<sup>680</sup> In a letter to friend, Janet Livingston Montgomery, Warren asks: "How does such a religion

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<sup>677</sup> Warren, "The Genius of America," 252.

<sup>678</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 679.

<sup>679</sup> Cohen, "Introduction," in *HAR*, xxxiv.

<sup>680</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 679.

triumph over the weak systems of infidelity and the whole tribe of modernized skeptics?”<sup>681</sup> In answer to her own question Warren points to the power of the example offered by a believer facing death: “If one of them was to behold the serene eye of [??] *faith*, smiling at every intimation that the period hastened [??] would dissolve the connexion between the immortal principle and the clay tenement, thus about to leap the verge of eternity, without either mixture of fear, or the rapture of enthusiasm, would he not think her supported by a divine philosophy, that far outweighs the half digested hope of annihilation, that buoys up the deistical triumphs of our times?”<sup>682</sup> She writes to her friend five years later and stresses again the truth of their shared faith: “To those who consider this world and the worlds that surround it as the work of chance, these observations may be ridiculed as the dream of superstition and weakness but my friend can smile with me on the much greater absurdities of the sceptic, who relinquishes the care of his God, and denies the superior tendency of his creator.”<sup>683</sup>

Consistent opposition to skepticism is seen throughout her writing. In a 1779 letter to her son Winslow, Warren offers a strong warning against the alluring power of skepticism in the writings of Philip Dormer Stanhope, the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl Lord Chesterfield. Between 1746 and 1771, the English politician Stanhope had written a series of private letters to his illegitimate son Philip Dormer Stanhope. Those letters

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<sup>681</sup> Warren to Janet Livingston Montgomery, 1780, in *Selected Letters*, 138.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid. [??] indicates words missing in original letter.

<sup>683</sup> Warren to Janet Livingston Montgomery, April 1785, in *Selected Letters*, 261.

were published as *Letters to His Son* (1774).<sup>684</sup> Warren admits she admires Lord Chesterfield as a “masterly writer,” yet her admiration ends when he “sacrifices truth to convenience, probity to pleasure, virtue to the graces, generosity, gratitude, and all the fine feelings of the soul, to a momentary gratification, we cannot but pity the man, as much as we admire the author.”<sup>685</sup> She takes exception to the “honey’d poison” of the advice he offers young men and rejects the notion “that a gentleman, in order to be initiated into the science of good breeding, should drop his humanity; or to acquire a courtly mien and become an adept in politeness, that he should renounce the moral feelings; or to be master of the graces, that his life should be a contrast to every precept of Christianity.”<sup>686</sup> Appealing to her son as “a reader capable of investigating truth,” she challenges him to see Chesterfield’s writings as “marked with the most atrocious license of thought, and stained with insinuations subversive of every moral and religious principle.”<sup>687</sup> Chesterfield’s letters were replete with references to cultivating pleasures of gambling, drinking, and women. For example, he opened one of the early letters of the collection: “DEAR BOY: Pleasure is the rock which most young people split upon: they launch out with crowded sails in quest of it, but without a compass to direct their course, or reason sufficient to steer the vessel; for want of

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<sup>684</sup> Philip Stanley Dormer, Earl of Chesterfield, Letter written London, March 27, 1747; in *Letters to His Son, on the Art of Becoming a Man of the World and a Gentleman: 1746-1747*; Project Gutenberg; Accessed at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/3351>

<sup>685</sup> The letter is published in its entirety in Edmund M. Hayes, “Mercy Otis Warren vs. Lord Chesterfield 1779,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 40, No. 4 (Oct. 1983), 616-621; 618.

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.*, 618.

<sup>687</sup> *Ibid.*, 620.

which, pain and shame, instead of pleasure, are the returns of their voyage. Do not think that I mean to snarl at pleasure, like a Stoic, or to preach against it, like a parson; no, I mean to point it out, and recommend it to you, like an Epicurean.”<sup>688</sup> It is easy to see Warren’s objections to Chesterfield’s questionable fatherly advice based on the passage above. She argues further to Winslow: “Can there be any portrait more unnatural and deformed, or an object more completely ridiculous, than that of a father exerting all the powers of brilliant talents, aided by the chicanery of subtle politicians, the false reasonings of the infidel tribe, and the vulgar witticisms of all the voluptuaries from Julius Caesar to Borgia, to arouse the corrupt passions in the bosom of his son, to enflame the desires, and to urge those loose gratifications, which it has been the work of ages to counteract, by all the arguments of reason, religion, and philosophy.”<sup>689</sup> Warren also chastises Chesterton for undue “severity to the ladies,” pointing out that she has “ever considered human nature as the same in both sexes,” capable of the same foibles, passions, vices, and virtues, and of reaching “the same degree of perfection, or sink to the same stages of ‘pravity.’”<sup>690</sup>

Although she recognized that “custom in most countries has branded licentious manners in female life with peculiar marks of infamy,”<sup>691</sup> Warren attributes such licentiousness not to gender differences, but to the destructive influence of

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<sup>688</sup> Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son, on the Art of Becoming a Man of the World and a Gentleman: 1746-1747*; Project Gutenberg; Accessed at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/3351>

<sup>689</sup> Hayes, “Mercy Otis Warren vs. Lord Chesterfield 1779,” 618-619.

<sup>690</sup> *Ibid.*, 620.

<sup>691</sup> *Ibid.*

skepticism. After singling out the effects of Chesterfield's "machivilian [sic] politicks, improved in the religious school of Voltaire," Warren argues "we live in days happily adroit in the arts of removing every impediment to pleasure, when the bars of rectitude are systematically reasoned down, and no other distinction is necessary but a dextrous talent at concealment."<sup>692</sup> Warren counters Lord Chesterfield's letters as further evidence of the destructive consequences of skepticism, especially for her sons' generation.

Although not meant for publication, Warren shared the letter with her friend Abigail Adams, who sent it to Nathaniel Willis, editor of the *Independent Chronicle* (Boston), who printed the letter on January 18, 1781. It was reprinted twice: in June 1784 under the title "A Letter from An American Lady to her Son" in *Boston Magazine* and again in January 1790 in *Massachusetts Magazine*.<sup>693</sup>

Warren's opposition to skepticism informed her criticism of other writers of the time. She saw Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* (1795) as a deistic attack on religion and the legitimacy of the Bible, as "effusions of infidelity" that "would not have been thought worthy of a serious refutation, had not much industry been employed, to disseminate this worthless pamphlet among the common classes of mankind. The young, the ignorant, the superficial and licentious, pleased with the attempt to let loose the wild passions of men by removing so efficient a guard as is contained in the sacred scriptures, this pernicious work was by them fought for, and

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<sup>692</sup> Hayes, "Mercy Otis Warren vs. Lord Chesterfield 1779," 619-620.

<sup>693</sup> The publication history of the letter is given by Hayes, "Mercy Otis Warren versus Lord Chesterfield, 1779," 617-618.

read with avidity. This consideration drew out the pens of men of character and ability, to antidote the poison of licentious wit.”<sup>694</sup> Skepticism eroded the religious and moral barriers that held human passions in check. Despite the growth of skepticism, Warren remained convinced of the power of religious truth – and virtue – to combat its influence: “Such a happy combination of propriety and dignity in each department might prevent all apprehensions of danger to religion from the sceptical absurdities of unprincipled men; neither the foolish, the learned, or licentious, would be able to sap the foundations of the kingdom of Christ. In the present state of society and general information, there is no reason to fear the overthrow of a system, by the efforts of *modern* infidels, which could not be shaken by the learned unbelievers of Greece, the persecutions of the Caesars, nor the power of the Roman empire.”<sup>695</sup> Throughout her writings, Warren connects virtue and religion: “Nothing seemed to be wanting to the United States but a continuance of their union and virtue. It was in their interest to cherish true, genuine republican virtue, in politics; and in religion, a strict adherence to a sublime code of morals, which has never been equalled by the sages of ancient time, nor can ever be abolished by the sophistical reasonings of modern philosophers.”<sup>696</sup>

#### Christian Virtue in Warren’s Private Poetry

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<sup>694</sup> Warren, “Appendix to Volume Two,” *HAR*, 379.

<sup>695</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 693.

<sup>696</sup> *Ibid.*, 648.



An often overlooked source of Warren's thinking is found in her private unpublished poetry, first recorded in 1759 at age 31 and written until "she was in her eighties and her sight gone."<sup>697</sup> Because her private poetry was not intended for public consumption, we can glean from it a rare, unfiltered look into the mind of the author. We see in her poetry a more personal side of Warren, one that expresses doubt, at times struggles deeply with suffering and sin, and yet reflects a consistent reliance on God and the Christian worldview that inevitably informs her conception of virtue. She weds classical republican virtue with expressions of faith and personal virtue. The theme of virtue is woven throughout her personal poetry. In this first poem, "Extempore to a young Person beholding the motion of a Clock," Warren speaks of the importance of virtue in light of the brevity of earthly life:

Extempore to a young Person beholding the motion of a Clock (1759)

How swift the hand that measures out  
To man his flying hours!  
How soon his hopes, his towering schemes  
All conquering time devours.  
  
Thy life is but a passing breath  
A vapour in the wind  
The bubble bursts, the shadows fly  
Nor leave a trace behind.

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<sup>697</sup> Edmund M. Hayes and Mercy Otis Warren, "The Private Poems of Mercy Otis Warren," *The New England Quarterly* 54, No. 2 (June, 1981), 203.

Arrest each moment's hasty flight  
Nor longer loiter here  
Waste not the golden sands of time  
Death stands forever near.

Then fancy's airy pinions droop  
And glittering prospects cease  
When India's wealth nor Caesar's fame  
Can give a moment's peace.

Nought but a conscious upright mind  
A life in virtue spent  
Can sooth the soul of that dark hour  
Or endless woe prevent.

Shall an immortal soul forget  
Its origen divine  
Led by a momentary dream,  
The wasting cares of time?  
Let not the world with all its snares  
Your wisdom thus arraign  
Loose not a day, lest time should close

What worlds can ne'er regain!<sup>698</sup>

This early poem reflects an important theme of virtue seen in Warren's later public writings: unchecked passion undermines virtue. She often sees virtue as threatened by vice, especially avarice and ambition represented here as "India's wealth" and "Caesar's fame." She urges the young person addressed by the poem to shun the world's fleeting and unsatisfactory temptations of fortune and fame and instead to pursue with "a conscious upright mind / A life in virtue spent." Also emerging in this poem is another facet of Warren's virtue thinking, the connection of virtue to wisdom. Vice ("the world with all its snares") is a threat to one of the four cardinal virtues, wisdom. Finally, representative of her concept of virtue is its foundations in Christian faith, as she recognizes the soul as immortal and of "origen divine."

The relationship of her personal faith to her concept of virtue is developed more fully in later poems. In "Nineteenth Psalm," for example, Warren speaks of the necessary involvement of God as a check on the passions and proclivities of the darker side of her heart. She relies on God to help her maintain virtue. In the final stanza, she writes:

Thy needful grace to me, my God impart  
Correct the musings of my devious heart;  
Guide my every accent of my tongue aright  
And every word my trembling lips indite  
While truth, sincerity, and virtue join

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<sup>698</sup> Warren, "Extemporare to a young Person beholding the motion of a Clock (1759)," in "The Private Poems of Mercy Otis Warren," 203-204. The word "origen" is misspelled in the original.

To fan devotion at the sacred shrine.

Then may my thoughts and meditations rise

And find acceptance in my Savior's eyes.<sup>699</sup>

In her poetry Warren consistently makes the connection between virtue, the threat of vice, and Christian belief. She acknowledges her reliance on God to temper vice, to resist temptation, and to develop and express virtue. She also expresses the Christian virtues of faith, charity, and one of the four cardinal virtues, prudence. In an untitled poem written shortly after the Revolutionary War, Warren recognizes her temptation to abandon virtue for worldly pursuits: "Let not the worthless joys of time / Or empty care engross my heart, / Nor let a low or sordid wish / E'er once debase my nobler part."<sup>700</sup> Recognizing that "bold temptations clog [her] way / And life's allurements beck'ning stand / To lead th' unwary heart astray," she asks that God help her to "not neglect the smallest part / Of social duty while I stay, / Let charity in every branch / With fervent friendship mark my way."<sup>701</sup> For Warren, God is "The all-pervading power who sees / The proper place, the fittest part / For each performer on the stage, / I trust will guide and guard my heart."<sup>702</sup> In "Contemplation," she asks God to "Call

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<sup>699</sup> Warren, "Nineteenth Psalm," in "Private Poems of Mercy Otis Warren," 208.

<sup>700</sup> Warren, "Untitled," in "Private Poems of Mercy Otis Warren," 209.

<sup>701</sup> Ibid.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid., 210.

back my vain and wandering heart / Nor let it rove abroad.”<sup>703</sup> And in “A Prayer”

Warren writes:

Assist me Lord in each relation  
To act that part in every station  
Thy providence assign’d  
With truth and purity of mind  
Let charity my actions guide  
And prudence all thy gifts divide.<sup>704</sup>

Warren sees the power of God as a check on personal vice, and human reason as given by God as another means of checking corruption. She writes in “A Thought on the inestimable Blessing of Reason”:

What is it moves within my soul  
And as the needle to the pole  
Directs me to the final cause  
The central point of nature’s laws?  
‘Tis reason, Lord, which thou hast given  
A ray divine, let down from Heaven.<sup>705</sup>

She asks God:

Then humbly will I thee implore,

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<sup>703</sup> Warren, “Contemplation,” in “Private Poems of Mercy Otis Warren,” 211.

<sup>704</sup> Warren, “A Prayer,” in “Private Poems of Mercy Otis Warren,” 212.

<sup>705</sup> Warren, “A Thought on the inestimable Blessing of Reason, occasioned by its privation to a friend of superior talents and virtues, 1790,” in “Private Poems of Mercy Otis Warren,” 213.

Whom worlds of rationals adore,  
That thou this tape should preserve  
From reason's laws let me ne'er swerve  
But calmly, mistress of my mind  
A friend to virtue and mankind.<sup>706</sup>

She ends with the “glad, enlighten'd soul” being “freed from these clogs,” which allows her to “Expand her wings, shake off her load / And rise to glorify her God.”<sup>707</sup>

In the poems commemorating the deaths of three of her five sons – Charles (1762-1785), Winslow (1759-1791), and George (1766-1800) – Warren in significant ways echoes the idea of republican motherhood,<sup>708</sup> in which some American women at the founding saw their primary political role to be training their children in the republican virtue essential to citizenship and participation in government. As the in Revolutionary generation, part of the duties of republican motherhood included sacrifice in the cause of republican liberty. Warren's poem “Written in deep affliction” following the death of Winslow expresses her reliance on God in the face of incalculable sorrow. The first two stanzas read:

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<sup>706</sup> Warren, “A Thought on the inestimable Blessing of Reason,” 214.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid.

<sup>708</sup> The term “republican mother” was coined by Linda K. Kerber, in “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment – An American Perspective,” *American Quarterly*, 28, No. 2, Special Issue: An American Enlightenment (Summer, 1976), 187-205. Kerber developed this theme further in subsequent publications, especially *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) and *Toward an Intellectual History of Women: Essays* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

My God! relieve my wounded heart  
Thou know'st the conflicts in my breast  
The source of pain—the recent smart  
The sorrows that my heart invest.

Ah! when I weep my hapless child  
And contemplate his bleeding breast,  
His graceful form, a breathless shade,  
My grief's too great to be express'd.<sup>709</sup>

Even in the midst of this obvious personal pain, Warren expresses a stunning reliance on God to check her passions” “Let not a sigh escape my breast / Or one desponding murm'ring thought, / Let resignation to thy will / By the correcting rod be taught!”<sup>710</sup> Just as in classical republican virtue, self-interest and personal passions are subjugated to the common good. In Warren's case intense personal emotions flowing from loss, pain, and doubt are surrendered to God by faith. In her poems, Warren's submission reflects her desire to practice virtue and obedience to God's will in her life.

Warren published the poem “Lines” to commemorate the death of her Charles, who died in 1785 after a protracted illness. In her dedication, she notes that “His resignation, fortitude, and piety, witnessed the excellence of that religion which

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<sup>709</sup> Warren, “Written in deep affliction,” in “Private Poems of Mercy Otis Warren,” 220.

<sup>710</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

supported him with dignity and calmness, and through many months of languid illness, reason justified in the hope of the Christian.”<sup>711</sup> Her pain and doubt are evident:

The father mourns with many a heartfelt-sigh,  
While to the grave bends the maternal eye;  
Her busy mind, too curious, would inquire,  
Why was he lent—or why so soon expire?  
Is it from life’s best joys my heart to wean?  
Or are severer pangs behind the scene?—<sup>712</sup>

She finds no answers, but instead takes comfort in what she knows to be true about God:

Let me not ask—but humbly bow my will,  
And own my God, the God of mercy still;  
Adore and tremble at Jehovah’s name,  
Whose hand, omnific, still supports my frame;  
Obey each precept of his laws divine,  
Nor at the darkest providence repine.<sup>713</sup>

The poem reflects Warren’s characteristic reliance on God in the in the face of grief and suffering. Shortly after Winslow’s death, she wrote to her son James, Jr.: “Alas!

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<sup>711</sup> Warren, “Lines,” in *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, 240.

<sup>712</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>713</sup> *Ibid.*



What shall I say in the anguish of my heart? I must be silent & not open my mouth because the Lord hath done this,—my only consolation is my belief in and my reliance on the providence of an infinitely wise, just, & beneficent being who has a right to resume the choicest of his gifts in his own time and manner. What is man that he should complain?”<sup>714</sup>

Warren’s faith sometimes is characterized as stoicism, but her letters are full of expressions of emotion. In a letter to her friend Janet Livingston Montgomery in April 1792, ten months after learning of Winslow’s death, she is still “in an agony of soul I this day weep the loss of an amiable accomplished son.”<sup>715</sup> She writes further of her “weak affectionate heart [that] constantly wanders to the dreary wilderness and contemplates the dear remains that lie there without the rights of sepulture,—can you wonder I then weep in the most bitter anguish of soul,—a wound too deep for philosophy to palliate or the hand of time ever to heal.”<sup>716</sup> She returns again to her faith, as a source of comfort and with sincere belief in God: “The supreme governour of the universe lends his fiat to the success of some and frowns on the most laudable efforts of others, through all the page of life for reasons that we cannot investigate while in this vale of tears, I wish to submit in silence to the premature stroke that has removed a son so much the expectation and delight of his friends.”<sup>717</sup> Such faith was the currency of comfort at a time when the colonies were recovering from ravages of

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<sup>714</sup> Warren to James Warren, Jr., Dec. 28, 1791, in *Selected Letters*, 233.

<sup>715</sup> Warren to Janet Livingston Montgomery, April 1792, in *Selected Letters*, 235.

<sup>716</sup> *Ibid.*, 234-235.

<sup>717</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

war. Warren had witnessed the early deaths of six of her eleven siblings, five before they reached their first birthday. In another poem she recognizes God's protection in her own life: "He has preserv'd my early youth, / Upheld by his Almighty hand / In midst of death's relenting power / I yet among the living stand."<sup>718</sup> That same reliance on God allowed her to comfort her many friends through a lifetime of letters, offering gentle reminders of the providence of God on earth, and the unfailing hope of heaven.

Warren's personal faith breathed moral life into her political conception of virtue and provided the firm foundation to her political thought. Many aspects of her writing exemplify the pre-eminent place of religion in her thinking. Americans expected virtue in their leaders – "economy in expenditure, (both public and private,) simplicity of manners, pure morals and undeviating probity." For Warren and for her fellow Americans, there is no doubt the source of such laudatory character: "These they considered as the emanations of virtue, grounded on a sense of duty, and a veneration for the Supreme Governor of the universe, to whom the dictates of nature teach all mankind to pay homage, and whom they had been taught to worship according to revelation, and the divine precepts of the gospel."<sup>719</sup>

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<sup>718</sup> Warren, "Untitled," 210.

<sup>719</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 630.

## CHAPTER 7

### Warren's Conception of Virtue: Weaving the Threads Together

*Yet, with you Sir, I have my fears, that American virtue  
has not yet reached that sublime pitch which is  
necessary to baffle the designs of the artful,--to  
counteract the weakness of the timid, or to resist the  
pecuniary temptations and ambitious wishes that will  
arise in the breast of many.*  
Mercy Otis Warren to John Adams, March 10, 1776<sup>720</sup>

When Mercy Otis Warren confides her fears to friend John Adams, what does she have in mind when she speaks of “American virtue”? What kind of virtue did Warren and others in her generation envision as necessary for the new republic on the eve of the Revolution? How did this American conception of virtue differ from that of other nations, in other historical, political, and ideological contexts? Terence Ball and J. G. A. Pocock note that philosophical differences between Federalists and Antifederalists gave rise to intense debates over the meaning of political concepts, including sovereignty, representation, republic, constitution, federalism, and most important to this study, virtue. “The upshot of this debate,” Ball and Pocock write, “was that citizens of the fledgling republic ceased to speak a provincial variation of political English and began to speak in the terms of a political idiom that was distinctly and recognizably American.”<sup>721</sup>

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<sup>720</sup> Warren to John Adams, 10 March 1776, in *Selected Letters*, 70.

<sup>721</sup> Ball and Pocock, *Conceptual Change and the Constitution*, 4.

These concepts took cohesive form during the constitutional debates. But as we look at the concept of virtue in early American thought, efforts to define what Warren recognized as virtue in America were well underway and largely established by the eve of the Revolutionary War. As tensions grew, the colonists looked for political, legal, and philosophical arguments to justify the break with Great Britain and later to explain how the new republic should be constituted. To do this, the Revolutionary generation drew on a variety of ideological sources and historical examples to make those arguments. The concept of virtue in this American context is drawn from these many sources. What arose during this period was a constellation of political concepts rooted in a variety of ideological traditions, but not wedded to any one tradition in particular. The Revolutionary generation cast a wide net, ideologically speaking, and put to use arguments of many and often divergent origins in their justification for independence and the superiority of republican government. Americans “could without any sense of incongruity cite Rousseau, Plutarch, Blackstone, and a seventeenth-century Puritan all on the same page.”<sup>722</sup> The many references in Warren’s political writings read like a diverse roll call of available ideological and literary traditions, historical sources, and political and religious philosophers.<sup>723</sup> Identification of the three philosophical threads in Warren’s writings is the starting point for understanding her view of virtue. But how she synthesized or

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<sup>722</sup> Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 7.

<sup>723</sup> The many intellectual influences in Warren’s political thought are discussed in detail in Chapter 2 of this work.

merged these many sources into one concept helps us better understand what she and her generation see as virtue at the founding.

Warren's political thought represented an intersection of theory and practice. As a member of the Revolutionary generation, she knew well that ideas drive political action. In weaving together these three ideological threads into a single coherent concept of virtue Warren tailors a concept of virtue she sees as best suited to the new republic. She remained throughout her life a dedicated republican thinker, and virtue consistently provided the most effective check on the threat of corruption, whatever form it takes. Calls for patriotism, self-sacrifice, and classical heroic virtue fuel Revolutionary fervor and check the corruption to which passivity in the face of potential tyranny necessarily leads. But underlying this classical heroic virtue is the more foundational principle of dedication to the whole, the *res publica*. Without virtue, tyranny extinguishes liberty, and human life is reduced to passive obedience, dependence, and subjection. Republican liberty is found in non-dependence, self-sufficiency, and self-government; dependence is antithetical to this concept of liberty. Virtue constrains the passions and human irrationality that make republican self-rule impossible. It curbs individual temptations to avarice and luxury in economic dealings. It emphasizes reasoned choices rather than irrational impulses. Virtue is the energetic, sustaining force that points citizens from self-interest to the common good, from passions to reasoned self-rule, and from vice and corruption to true liberty. In Warren's formulation, virtue provided an objective guide for human action and standard of accountability for public life, first as a citizen and in other role-related

contexts. But it also provided an immutable standard rooted in religious principle applicable equally to public and to private life alike. Exercising virtue enables an individual to be useful in public life and morally virtuous as a private individual. In this earthly life, virtue is expressed imperfectly; in the next life, perfect virtue is achieved.

Warren's intellectual background and education positioned her well to make the case for republican ideas, for liberty, and particularly for virtue. She had recourse to both history and tradition, and to the philosophy of the age. That she stood firmly within the republican tradition is unsurprising; monarchy was equated with tyranny, and democracy pejoratively with mob rule. Most in her generation saw republican government, with its mixed institutions and divided powers, reliance on the rule of law, and emphasis on virtue, as the ideal form of government for the new nation. Colonial intellectual and political debates were fought within the bounds of republicanism. As Ball notes in his introduction to *The Federalist*, the American republic "was a new political system created, not by the dictates of a lone legislator, but argued into existence and constituted collectively by means of an intense debate between partisans of different political persuasions and theoretical perspectives."<sup>724</sup>

Using her considerable intellectual arsenal as well as her position within the Massachusetts colony, Warren joined the debate. In her writings she sought to address what she saw as the most pressing problems of her day. Warren faces three political problems over the course of her writing and uses virtue to address each of those

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<sup>724</sup> Terence Ball, "Introduction." *The Federalist, with Letters of "Brutus"* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), xvi.

problems. The first problem she faced was how to motivate those undecided and reluctant colonists and those loyalists still sympathetic to the British crown to see why independence was imperative and to motivate all colonists to take action – to wage war – against British tyranny. She saw colonial liberty as increasingly threatened by the spread of corruption by British officials on American soil. The question for Warren was how to stir the latent virtue of the people to check corruption, resist tyranny, and establish a bulwark of republican liberty. The second problem she faced was how to check corruption spreading among the people, especially as the Revolution progressed and how to recover and sustain the virtue necessary to both win the war and establish a new republic. In republican parlance, corruption is the absence of virtue. The third problem was how to counter the various forms of vice and corruption arising from commercial growth of the new nation. Economic prosperity without the check of virtue typically led to avarice, luxury, and other vices that threaten to corrupt a free people and a republic. How then could this pernicious form of corruption be checked? What virtue was necessary to sustain the liberty of the new republic well into its future, especially in light of these perplexing challenges, i.e., the vices bred by economic prosperity and within the relations of the marketplace?

Warren answers these three challenges with virtue. As the analysis in the three previous chapters illustrates, Warren comfortably combines classical, Christian, and bourgeois or marketplace ideals within the concept of virtue in her political thought. Each thread of her concept addresses different aspects of the problems of corruption;

each is necessary to preserving the liberty of the people and the institutions of the republic. Liberty, too, was threatened by complacency, luxury, and often by material success. Warren knew well the lessons of history and the power of classical virtue to preserve a republic: when the virtue of Rome failed, the republic fell. Yet Warren is convinced as well that “he who rules creation with a glance ... he alone inspires the valour, virtue, and wisdom, sufficient to defeat the machinations of an obstinate, powerful and unrelenting foe.”<sup>725</sup> She points as well to the need for virtue to guide actions and behavior in economic matters. From our modern vantage point, the three threads might seem to be irreconcilable, yet these together form the basis of Warren’s conception of virtue.

Contemporary political theorists identify significant theoretical tensions between Christian and classical concepts of virtue, a divide recognized by Machiavelli in his rejection of Christian virtue as enervating to the ancient heroic virtue necessary to republics.<sup>726</sup> In his discussion of the ideal civil religion for republican government, Jean-Jacques Rousseau similarly presents Christianity as an enfeebling force in a republic. Rousseau argues in the *Social Contract* (1762) that it is an “error” to speak of a “‘Christian’ republic.”<sup>727</sup> “These two words are mutually exclusive. Christianity preaches only servitude and dependence; its spirit is too great

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<sup>725</sup> Warren to Dorothy Quincy Hancock, [c. April] 1776, in *Selected Letters*, 73.

<sup>726</sup> Machiavelli’s *virtu*’s discussed in greater detail in Ch. 1 of this work.

<sup>727</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Willmoore Kendall, trans. (Chicago: Regnery Gateway Inc., 1954), Book 4, Ch. 8, 218.



an invitation to tyranny for the latter ever to fail to take advantage of it.”<sup>728</sup> If republics require an energetic citizenry, as republican theorists argue, then in Machiavelli’s and Rousseau’s estimation, Christian virtue is a destructive, dangerous force. Although Warren shares Machiavelli’s views of fragility of republics and his emphasis on ancient virtue, she does not share his animosity toward Christian virtue or toward Christianity generally. Central to Warren’s conception of virtue are her personal religious beliefs and the Christian virtue derived from those beliefs. Christian virtue restrains human passions that, if left unchecked, lead inevitably to the corruption and vice that threaten any republic. Just as explicitly as Machiavelli and Rousseau condemn Christian virtue in their republican thought, Warren includes it as an essential component in her concept of republican virtue.

What are we to make of this apparent contradiction in Warren’s republican thought? How is Warren able to synthesize threads of thought that modern neo-republican thinkers, specifically Machiavelli, argue cannot co-exist within the republican framework? In this chapter, I address this possible conflict in Warren’s political thought and offer four rebuttals: First, I argue that the ideological mix at the founding represented multiple traditions, each with an accompanying concept of virtue. Colonial thinkers embraced these many traditions and adopted aspects of each to fit their political objectives as consistent with their overall republican framework. I argue that within this rich ideological context, Warren develops her three-thread conception of virtue. Yet, within this concept she prioritizes Christian ideals,

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<sup>728</sup> Ibid.

especially as she weaves the three threads together. As her Revolutionary-era dramas and poetry demonstrate, Warren shifts emphasis to classical heroic virtue as the Revolution approaches. In her post-revolutionary writings, when Warren addresses the threat of corruption from avarice and luxury, her concept of virtue shifts to highlight bourgeois or marketplace virtue. But in all phases of Warren's thought, Christian virtue remains the underlying and identifiable core of her concept of virtue. Classical virtue and bourgeois virtue are important, but Christian virtue is first among the three threads of her thought.

Second, I argue that this blending by Warren is characteristic of the republican discourse during the Revolutionary era, which commonly combined classical and Christian thought, and as the war approached, this fusion became particularly pronounced.<sup>729</sup> Warren's fusion of the three threads of thought is representative of republican discourse during the Revolutionary era and reflects "the republican synthesis" identified in recent scholarship. I argue further that her writing is reflective of more recent revisions of the republican synthesis that seek to include Lockean thought and other elements of the Christian tradition. Rather than separating these traditions, early American political thought tended instead to hold these many traditions simultaneously and merge them in a way reflected in Warren's republican synthesis.

Third, historical factors necessitated the merging of philosophical traditions – especially the classical with the Christian traditions. This is particularly seen in the

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<sup>729</sup> I discuss this convergence of republican and Christian millennial thought in detail in Chapter 9 of this work.

confluence of secular and religious thought on the eve of the Revolution. As conflict with Great Britain became inevitable, both colonial political and religious discourse increasingly emphasized and merged themes of war, battle, and the need for heroic virtue. Machiavelli's separation of heroic ancient virtue and Christian virtue makes no sense in the Revolutionary era, and his characterization of Christian virtue as meek, humble, and useless to republican military efforts is inapplicable in this context. Congregational pulpits thundered with sermons of Old Testament battle exploits, war themes, and prophetic visions of Jesus Christ returning not as a sacrificial lamb and the Prince of Peace, but as a sword-wielding judge of mankind. Revolutionary religious discourse did not focus on Christian meekness and submission to authority, but instead infused biblical thought with heroic and martial virtue to build the case for righteous resistance to tyranny. Machiavelli dismissed Christian virtue as immiscible with military valor, but the colonial military effort demanded heroic virtue and patriotic clergy led the intellectual charge. This heroic element, reflecting both a "just war" tradition and millennialism in colonial religious thought, challenges Machiavelli's contention that ancient republican virtue and Christian virtue are immiscible.

Finally, I argue that Machiavelli eliminates Christian virtue from republican thought in a way that the American founders – and certainly Warren – simply do not. As the development of the republican synthesis in the 1990s demonstrates, many differing threads of political and ideological thought characterize the revolutionary generation; these many traditions animate Warren's thought until her death in 1814.

These traditions are distinguishable from one another, as the analysis of her three threads of virtue attests. Yet their being *distinguishable* from one another does not necessarily make them *incompatible*. Some today may see these many traditions as irreconcilable; yet as Warren's thinking demonstrates, the Revolutionary generation had little difficulty viewing their world within these many traditions. Before moving on to a discussion of Warren's view of virtue as an ordering principle in republican government, I consider the mechanisms of virtue in republican government, namely the necessity of cultivating virtue and the need for political leaders to exemplify the virtue that citizens should seek to emulate.

After addressing the tensions between Christian and ancient virtue, I turn to an example of Warren's synthesis of the three threads as she addresses corruption arising from commerce. Here, too, we find a merging of philosophical threads to curb possible corruption, especially avarice, excessive accumulation of wealth, and luxury. Warren's concept of virtue in this realm mixes bourgeois virtue with its emphasis on industry, frugality, and moderation, Christian virtue in the form of honest dealings and self-denial, and republican virtue with her emphasis here on economic development that benefits the whole rather than excessive accumulation of wealth as its own end.

#### The Machiavellian "Problem"

The sixteenth-century Renaissance republican writings of Nic'colo Machiavelli (1469-1527) mark a distinct break with the preceding Christian tradition.

In the *Discourses on Livy* (1517) Machiavelli develops his argument that ancient republican thought and Christianity are mutually exclusive. The Christian faith makes men weak by exalting as its highest values submission, meekness, humility, and long-suffering. This passive Christian virtue is antithetical to the energetic virtue of ancient heroic republics: courage, bravery, abject self-sacrifice not for Christ in hope of salvation, but for the good of the republic. As Pocock argues, Machiavelli saw virtuous republics to be “at war with one another. For this reason, the Christian virtues and the civic virtues could never coincide.”<sup>730</sup>

In his 1972 essay, “The Originality of Machiavelli,” Isaiah Berlin argues that Machiavelli essentially stripped republican thought of any Christian underpinnings. Although scholarship regarding Machiavelli’s place in modern political theory arrives at the same general conclusion, Berlin’s incisive analysis is particularly instructive in highlighting the fundamental tension between the two traditions. “As for religion,” Berlin notes, “it is for [Machiavelli] not much more than a socially indispensable instrument, so much utilitarian cement: the criterion of the worth of a religion is its role as a promoter of solidarity and cohesion.”<sup>731</sup> He argues further that one of Machiavelli’s primary contributions to political theory is his contention that classical or pagan virtue and Christian virtue are irreconcilable. “What Machiavelli distinguishes is not specifically moral from specifically political values; what he

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<sup>730</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 213.

<sup>731</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “The Originality of Machiavelli,” in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 37.

achieves is not the emancipation of politics from ethics or religion,”<sup>732</sup> as other political theorists suggested. Instead, in Berlin’s estimation, what Machiavelli “institutes is something that cuts deeper still – a differentiation between two incompatible ideals of life, and therefore two moralities.”<sup>733</sup> Berlin explains how these “two moralities” are differentiated within Machiavelli’s republic thought: “One is the morality of the pagan world: its values are courage, vigour, fortitude in adversity, public achievement, order, discipline, happiness, strength, justice, above all assertion of one’s proper claims and the knowledge and power to secure their satisfaction; that for which a Renaissance reader Pericles had seen embodied in his ideal Athens, Livy had found in the old Roman Republic, that of which Tacitus and Juvenal lamented the decay and death in their own time. These seem to Machiavelli the best hours of mankind and, Renaissance humanist that he is, he wishes to restore them.”<sup>734</sup> As Berlin notes, Machiavelli contrasts this pagan morality with that of the Christian tradition: “Against this moral universe ... stands in the first and foremost place, Christian morality. The ideals of Christian morality are charity, mercy, sacrifice, love of God, forgiveness of enemies, contempt for the goods of this world, faith in the life hereafter, belief in the salvation of the individual soul as being of incomparable value – higher than, indeed wholly incommensurable with, any social or political or other terrestrial goal, any economic or military or aesthetic

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<sup>732</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>733</sup> Berlin, “Originality of Machiavelli,” 45.

<sup>734</sup> Ibid.

consideration.”<sup>735</sup> Berlin argues further that Machiavelli rejects Christian virtue and morality because they are destructive of republican government. “Machiavelli is convinced that what are commonly thought of as the central Christian virtues, whatever their intrinsic value, are insuperable obstacles to the building of the kind of society that he wishes to see.”<sup>736</sup>

Berlin is not alone in his assessment that Machiavelli effectively eliminates the Christian tradition from modern republican political theory. Sheldon S. Wolin argues that Machiavelli saw the importance of civic virtue as a “means for controlling the effects of faction.”<sup>737</sup> Machiavelli saw the need to “create a civic virtue which would serve to discipline and curb the desires and ambitions of the masses.”<sup>738</sup> Machiavelli rejected a Christian conception of civic virtue as this controlling device. Machiavelli believed that politics “was concerned with externals and that the promotion of man’s interior life did not belong to the province of the political.”<sup>739</sup> In short, “politics had nothing to do with man’s eternal state.” Christian virtue was valued for inner or “intrinsic effects,” but it was ill-fitted to forming citizens for republican government. Machiavelli sought to revive republican thought against the

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<sup>735</sup> Ibid.

<sup>736</sup> Berlin, “Originality of Machiavelli,” 46.

<sup>737</sup> Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960, 2004), 212.

<sup>738</sup> Ibid.

<sup>739</sup> Ibid.

backdrop of sixteenth-century Italy. As Wolin argues: “Like Hobbes later on, [Machiavelli] contended that originally Christianity had been completely acceptable as a civil religion. Now, however, it taught the wrong virtues of self-abnegation, humility, and other worldliness; it taught, in short, those virtues connected with the interior goods of the soul. A true civic religion ought to encourage a proper fear and respect for authority and help inculcate military valor.”<sup>740</sup> Harvey C. Mansfield shares this analysis of Machiavelli’s rejection of Christianity in republican virtue. Machiavelli was “present at the origin of a revolution in morality, which can be defined loosely in our terms as a change from virtue protected by religion to self-interest justified by secularism.”<sup>741</sup> Machiavelli essentially eliminates the role of Christian virtue from republican thought and replaces it with a civic virtue derived from the ancients and free from all vestiges of Christianity. Machiavelli attributes the erosion of the ancient republican greatness to the introduction of Christianity, which is nowhere to be found in the glory days of Rome. In Machiavelli’s neo-republican formulation, ancient virtue must be restored and Christian virtue eliminated if sixteenth-century Italy was ever to recover its earlier greatness. We see no such separation of Christian and classical virtue in Warren’s eighteenth-century republican writings.

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<sup>740</sup> Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 212.

<sup>741</sup> Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s Virtue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 7-8. Interestingly, Mansfield notes that Machiavelli never uses the term “Christian virtue,” instead using the term *virtu’* – reflecting his preference for an ancient, pre-Christian formulation of republican virtue. Machiavelli clearly presents Christianity as an enfeebling force within a republic. See Mansfield, 9.



## Of the Three Threads, Warren Prioritizes Christian Virtue

Warren's view of human nature and the unique human *telos* help our understanding of her concept of virtue. She embraces ancient republican virtue, marketplace or bourgeois virtue, and Christian virtue, but her teleological understanding of human nature reflects her Christian worldview. Any tradition of political thought necessarily flows from its view of human *telos*, or purpose of human existence. As the discussion of virtue in Chapter 1 demonstrates, the career of the concept of virtue is marked by shifting teleological assumptions. Aristotle's understanding of the ultimate purpose of human existence, to achieve human flourishing or *eudemonia*, subsequently defined his concept of virtue, *arête*. The purpose of human life could not reflect a Christian teleological understanding because Aristotle is writing more than four centuries before the birth of Christ. By contrast Aquinas's concept of virtue reflected a Christian teleological view of man. Beginning with Augustine and the early Christians, human purpose was redefined and was seen to consist in "knowing God, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in heaven."<sup>742</sup> The purpose of human existence, in this Christian view, "transcends any state or activity that is fully achievable in this mortal, biological, and social life" and "is not achievable by human beings at all without specific divine assistance."<sup>743</sup>

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<sup>742</sup> White, *Political Philosophy*, 77.

<sup>743</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

A similar Christian teleological understanding is seen in Warren's writings and her concept of virtue flows from this view of the human *telos*. Warren sees the purpose of mankind to consist in striving to overcome the depravity of human nature by checking the passions, so that living a useful – that is to say a virtuous – life becomes possible. All of this is done in the hopes of one day achieving “felicity,”<sup>744</sup> or eternal happiness. For Warren, the “rational satisfaction of the good man” exemplifies the purpose and meaning of human life. He “exerts all his talents for the benefit of society. We see his bosom tranquilized by a consciousness that every step tends to secure an immortality, where a full display of knowledge as well as a perfection of virtue will open on his admiring soul.”<sup>745</sup> Within the earthly republican context, serving the common good takes priority. Virtue is expressed imperfectly in this life and is perfected in the next. The purpose of human existence is to be useful in this life and happy in the next. The good man devotes his earthly life living according to the standards of virtue and serving the common good, keeping in mind what Warren understands as the certainty of securing eternal life.

Warren formulates this teleological understanding in the advice she offers her son James: “But the knowledge of ourselves my son is a science of higher importance;--this teaches to resist the impulse of appetite, to check the sallies of passion, and at the same time that it leads to certain permanent happiness and renders

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<sup>744</sup> Warren to Hannah Fayerwether Tolman Winthrop, February 1773, in *Selected Letters*, 10.

<sup>745</sup> Warren to Warren Winslow, Dec. 4, 1779, in *Selected Letters*, 119.

us useful to society.”<sup>746</sup> The good man in this life strives to exercise virtue to check his passions and impulses, which renders him useful to society. But the ultimate, eternal purpose of human life is achieving “permanent happiness.” Warren’s teleological understanding of human life is outlined in a blending of ancient and Christian terms by the elder patriot Brutus in *The Adulateur*. Encouraging the younger soldiers around him, Brutus reminds them: “And hence, ye patriots learn a useful lesson -- / He who in virtue's cause remain unmoved / And nobly struggles for his country's good: / Shall more than conquer -- better days shall beam, / And happier prospects crowd again the scene.”<sup>747</sup> In this passage, a person who acts virtuously in the service of the nation achieves glory, but Warren expresses it in manner consistent with Christian thought, that in so doing, the patriot is demonstrating the faith that leads to eternal life. Conversely, the corruption by self-interest undermines the public good. A virtuous individual looks first to the good of the community.

This Christian teleology is evident throughout Warren’s writings and in her concept of republican virtue, in particular. As she comforts friends who have suffered the loss of loved ones during the war, she consoles them with reminders that sacrificial death in battle serves the good of the nation and that exercising virtue demonstrates the faith that leads to eternal life. Even in her teleological understanding of human life she merges her republican ideals. Republican dedication to the common good, in accordance with the standards of virtue and usefulness is evidence of faith in

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<sup>746</sup> Warren to James Warren Jr., [c. July] 1773, in *Selected Letters*, 19.

<sup>747</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act III, Scene 3.

God that leads to eternal life. She shares this view of human purpose on many occasions in her correspondence. As she writes her friend Dorothy Quincy Hancock in January, 1787, upon the untimely death of Hancock's son in a skating accident: "Happy it is for man that while human friendships are too weak, and philosophy insufficient to support the drooping mind, religion leads us to the fount of compassion, and shews us the great father of spirits offering his benificent hand to dissipate the cloud, when the divine designation has been met with the fortitude of the Christian,--when it has answered its purpose,--when we have drank the cup of affliction with becoming dignity and resignation."<sup>748</sup> She similarly offers the consolation of the hope of heaven to her many friends and acquaintances during the trying times of the Revolution. This Christian understanding of human life marks her lifetime of writings, from her earliest poems to her last letters shortly before her death. As she remarked in an early poem "Extemporare to a young Person beholding the motion of a Clock," written at age 31:

Nought but a conscious upright mind  
A life in virtue spent  
Can sooth the soul in that dark hour  
Or endless woe prevent.  
Shall an immortal soul forget  
Its origen divine/ Led by a momentary dream,

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<sup>748</sup> Warren to Dorothy Quincy Hancock, [February?] 17[87], in *Selected Letters*, 214.

The wasting cares of time?<sup>749</sup>

Similarly in her poem “The Nineteenth Psalm” she writes: “Thy precepts are divine, thy statutes pure, / Thy promise through Eternity is sure.”<sup>750</sup> And in one of the last letters of her life at age 85, she writes to her sister-in-law Mary Otis upon the death of her husband and Warren’s brother Samuel Allyne Otis: “Your consolations are derived from a higher source than any thing that can be expressed by the tongue or the pen of a feeble mortal.” She closes the short letter, “May we my dear Sister, while we tarry be diligent followers of those who through faith and patience are inheriting the promises!”<sup>751</sup>

Warren’s concept of virtue is forged within her Christian beliefs and its attendant teleological understanding of human existence. Warren is both a Christian and a republican, and her concept of virtue reflects both commitments. It is not surprising that she speaks of Christian virtue and ancient virtue throughout her writings. Representative of this merging of traditions is the following passage from a letter to Hannah Tolman Winthrop on the eve of the Revolution:

May those enlarged and noble minds which dare to act with becoming firmness on the most trying occasions be long continued to adorn each department in which they may be called to officiate, and under the benign

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<sup>749</sup> Warren, “Extemporare to a young Person beholding the motion of a Clock,” 204.

<sup>750</sup> Warren, “The Nineteenth Psalm,” in Hayes and Warren, 208.

<sup>751</sup> Warren to Mary Gray Otis, May 24, 1814, in *Selected Letters*, 256-257.

influence of a superintending providence, may the virtue of the people save the empire from destruction.

We have many among us who yet inherit the noble spirit of their ancestors, who still retain a sense of the invaluable rights purchased at the expense of life and fortune to a race of self denying heroes whose actions would have done honour to the annals of Sparta.<sup>752</sup>

She assigns ancient heroic virtue to those who fought in the English Civil War, and hopes the same virtue will animate her generation to fight, under the guidance from “a superintending providence”<sup>753</sup> while saving both liberty and the empire. The Revolutionary generation fought to save liberty from the encroaching British tyranny. But in return, they expected the new republic to be led by principles of “economy in expenditures (both public and private,) simplicity of manners, pure morals , and undeviating probity. These they considered as the emanations of virtue, grounded on a sense of duty, and a veneration for the Supreme Governor of the universe, to whom the dictates of nature teach all mankind to pay homage, and whom they have taught to worship according to revelation, and the divine precepts of the gospel.”<sup>754</sup> Warren seems to make no philosophical distinction between these three threads of virtue. In

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<sup>752</sup> Warren, Letter to Hannah Fayerwether Tolman Winthrop, Jan. 31, 1774, in *Selected Letters*, 25.

<sup>753</sup> Warren, Letter to Hannah Fayerwether Tolman Winthrop, Jan. 31, 1774, *Selected Letters*, 25.

<sup>754</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 630.

the preceding examples and throughout her writings, she readily merges them into one, with no indication of conflict between the traditions.

### Finding Common Ground in the New Republican Synthesis

In light of Machiavelli's rejection of Christianity in his reformulation of republicanism and this emphasis within the modern republican tradition, Warren's emphasis on Christian virtue and its blending with other traditions may at first seem surprising. But Machiavelli reflects one thread among many that influenced eighteenth-century republicanism. In his discussion of eighteenth-century republican virtue, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that Machiavelli's influence is only part of the formulation of republican virtue. As MacIntyre explains: "Machiavelli with his exultation of civic virtue over both the Christian and the pagan virtues articulates one aspect of the republican tradition, but only one. What is central to the tradition *is* the notion of a public good which is prior to and characterizable independently of the summing of individual desires and interests. Virtue in the individual is nothing more or less than allowing the public good to provide a standard for individual behavior."<sup>755</sup> Eighteenth-century republicanism "represents an attempt at a partial restoration ... of the classical tradition."<sup>756</sup> Yet it does not embrace Machiavelli's *virtu'* and its exclusion of Christian virtue. As MacIntyre explains, eighteenth-century republicanism contains elements of Christian thought: "The Aristotelian virtue of

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<sup>755</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 236-237.

<sup>756</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

friendship and the Christian love of neighbor both contributed in the eighteenth century to the newly-named virtue of fraternity. And the republican concept of liberty was Christian too: ‘*Cui servire est regnare*’, says the prayer about God, or as the English version has it, ‘whom to serve is perfect freedom’, and what the Christian said about God the republican says of the republic.’<sup>757</sup> MacIntyre is hardly alone in recognizing the existence of both traditions within eighteenth-century republicanism and the concept of virtue in particular.

Political thought in eighteenth-century America reflects a period of conceptual consolidation, a merging of various threads of thought into one, at once consistent with the dominant intellectual traditions, but adapting to the intellectual and political realities. What Warren does with her conception of virtue reflects a distinctively American conception of virtue by merging existing threads of highly recognizable and accepted traditions to offer a conception with shared meaning that could guide and correct both public and private action. It is not necessarily a constitutive or contingent conception, but more a consolidating concept of virtue. In this respect, her conception of virtue is inherently conservative, bringing together traditions most familiar to and held most dear by early Americans.

Warren’s synthesis of these seemingly conflicting political traditions is confirmed in the development of the “republican synthesis”<sup>758</sup> in American political

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<sup>757</sup> Ibid.

<sup>758</sup> The term was first used by Robert Shalhope in “Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 29, No. 1 (Jan., 1972), 49-80.



theory since the late 1960s. This area of scholarship narrowed in the late 1970s to emphasize modern republican thought often to the exclusion of other important traditions, especially the thinking of John Locke and religious tradition. Scholarly challenges to this narrower view led to a re-consideration of early synthesis writings and a broadening into what is today expressed as “the new republican synthesis.”<sup>759</sup>

According to the “republican synthesis,” early American political thought reflects an amalgam or synthesis of many ideological traditions within an overarching framework of republicanism. Bernard Bailyn argued that the colonists “had at their fingertips, and made use of, a large portion of the inheritance of Western culture, from Aristotle to Moliere, from Cicero to “Philoleutherus Lipsiensis [Richard Bentley], from Vergil to Shakespeare, Ramus, Pufendorf, Swift, and Rousseau.”<sup>760</sup> Most important among these were five philosophical traditions: classical antiquity, Enlightenment rationalism, English common law, New England Puritanism, and the radical Whig or “country” ideology. All found a home within the larger framework of American republican thought. Similarly, Gordon S. Wood identified a multiplicity of important ideological traditions: radical Whig or English Commonwealth thought, Calvinist theology, and John Locke and others. Among these, significant influence was found in “the appeal of antiquity,” expressed in the works of republican writers

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<sup>759</sup> The term “New republican synthesis” was first used by Joyce Appleby to defend the influence of John Locke in the American founding, in “The New Republican Synthesis and the Changing Political Ideas of John Adams,” *American Quarterly* 25, No. 5 (Dec., 1973), 578-595. Also see Daniel T. Rodgers, “Republicanism: the Career of a Concept,” *The Journal of American History* 79, No. 1 (Jun., 1992), 11-38.

<sup>760</sup> Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 23. Bailyn discusses these five traditions in detail in Ch. 2 of *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*.

from the ancients through modern republicans, such as Machiavelli and Montesquieu, and by radical Whigs in eighteenth-century England, including Harrington, Bolingbroke, Trenchard and Gordon. Radical Whig patriots particularly embraced this republican tradition, viewing the republic as the ideal form of government, and public virtue as the means of checking vice and corruption.

Where Machiavelli and others insisted on a bright line of delineation between Christian and ancient thought, the Revolutionary generation sought and found common ground among these and other traditions. As Wood notes: “Whatever differences may have existed among the Whigs, all those committed to revolution and republicanism in 1776 necessarily shared an essentially similar vision of the corporate commonwealth—a vision of varying distinctness fed by both millennial Christianity and pagan classicism. Enlightenment rationalism and evangelical Calvinism were not at odds in 1776; both when interpreted by Whigs placed emphasis on the general will of the community and on the responsibility of the collective people to define it. . . . The ideal which republicanism was beautifully designed to express was still a harmonious integration of all parts of the community.”<sup>761</sup> Like Wood and Bailyn, Thomas Pangle identified within colonial republicanism “broad common ground shared by the classical and biblical traditions.”<sup>762</sup> Clinton L. Rossiter similarly argued that, “The common elements in these philosophies account for their peculiar appeal to

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<sup>761</sup> Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 60.

<sup>762</sup> Thomas L. Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 61.

the American mind.”<sup>763</sup> Colonial thinking drew from “reconstructed Puritanism,” “Christian rationalism, and from the morality of the rising middle-class.”<sup>764</sup> Rather than focus on the tensions within these traditions, colonists instead embraced the appeal of these many ideological sources based on “common elements” within them: “All these philosophies sang of individualism, reason, self-improvement, activity, and a religion of good works; all were optimistic about man’s nature and the nation’s future; all were moralistic, and the morality they preached had its reward in this world as well as the next; and all of them rejected the notion of infallibility in religion and politics, exalting in its place the great right of private judgment.”<sup>765</sup> Warren’s writings illustrate the influence and confluence of these multiple traditions in early American political thought.

This identification of common ground in the revolutionary era reflects the earliest writings within the development of the “republican synthesis” described by Robert E. Shalhope (1972). Shalhope argues that the emergence of the republican synthesis in American historiography presented a cohesive yet flexible intellectual framework for considering the ideological traditions that most influenced the American founding. It made possible the common ground needed during the revolutionary era. The overarching concept of republicanism offered the Revolutionary generation a sufficiently comprehensive framework for understanding

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<sup>763</sup> Clinton L. Rossiter, *Seedtime of the American Republic: The Origin of the American Tradition of Political Liberty* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1953), 139.

<sup>764</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>765</sup> Rossiter, *Seedtime of the Republic*, 139.

its political world, for merging its many ideological traditions, and for establishing the future nation. It could contribute to an understanding of the emergence of political institutions, offer a means of synthesizing seemingly irreconcilable political ideas, and could expand theoretical analysis of American political thought. Shalhope argued that the republican synthesis allowed scholars to “trace this evolution of ideas in order to perceive those important strands of thought that can be drawn together into a tentative synthesis.”<sup>766</sup>

Prior to these writings and well into the 1960s, scholars universally identified John Locke as the major influence on American political thought. According to Shalhope and others, the Lockean model of interpretation and the phrase *Locke et praeterea nihil* – Locke and nothing more – described American historiography until the late 1960s.<sup>767</sup> But that Lockean orthodoxy would be challenged by the emergence of classical republican thought beginning with the publication of Caroline Robbins’s *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman* in 1959, which “represents a turning point in the effort to understand American republicanism.”<sup>768</sup> Shalhope argued, “For the development of an understanding of American republicanism, Robbins’s book is of the utmost importance, for it thoroughly explored the thought upon which Americans drew and began the essential historical shift away from Locke.”<sup>769</sup>

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<sup>766</sup> Shalhope, “Toward a Republican Synthesis,” 49.

<sup>767</sup> Shalhope, “Toward a Republican Synthesis,” 49.

<sup>768</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>769</sup> *Ibid.*, 58. Shalhope identifies important scholars who adopted this viewpoint as early as 1903 until the mid-1940s. Among those Shalhope identifies: C. Edward Merriam, *A History of American Political*

Closely on the heels of Robbins's work Bailyn published his landmark works on American Revolutionary discourse, *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776* in 1965<sup>770</sup> and *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1968). Bailyn identified classical antiquity, Enlightenment rationalism, the English Common Law tradition, and New England Puritanism as four particularly important intellectual traditions. These traditions "did not in themselves form a coherent intellectual pattern."<sup>771</sup> Among them were "striking incongruities and contradictions."<sup>772</sup> In Bailyn's estimation, "What brought these disparate strands of thought together"<sup>773</sup> was the opposition thought of the radical Whigs and the ideas that animated the "country" ideology. The republican challenge to the Lockean liberal orthodoxy would continue over the next decades. Other notable works include those of Wood, Pocock, and Philip Pettit. Wood's *Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787* (1969) placed American revolutionary thought within a decidedly republican framework.

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*Thought* (New York, 1903); George M. Ducher, "The Rise of Republican Government in the United States," *Political Science Quarterly*, LV (1940), 199-216; Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought* (New York, 1943); Zera S. Fink, *The Classical Republicans: An Essay in the Recovery of a Pattern of Thought in Seventeenth Century England* (Evanston, IL, 1945); Correa Moylan Walsh, *The Political Science of John Adams: A Study in the Theory of Mixed Government and the Bicameral System* (New York: 1915); Randolph Greenfield Adams, *Political Ideas of the American Revolution* (Durham, NC, 1922); Andrew C. McLaughlin, *The Foundations of American Constitutionalism* (New York, 1932); Benjamin Fletcher Wright, *American Interpretations of Natural Law: A Study in the History of Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA, 1931); and Carl Becker, *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas* (New York, 1922). See Shalhope (1972), footnote 2, p. 49. The argument for Locke's predominant influence is also made by Louis Hartz in *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955).<sup>770</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

<sup>771</sup> Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 33.

<sup>772</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>773</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

Although Wood identified numerous traditions in the early American context, republicanism was paramount. As Wood asserted: “The Americans had come to believe that the Revolution would mean nothing less than a reordering of eighteenth-century society and politics as they had known and despised them—a reordering that was summed up by the conception of republicanism.”<sup>774</sup> What is most striking and perhaps most important in these early stages of the republican synthesis is the acknowledgment of multiple threads of political thought co-existing in the American political context. Wood, like Bailyn, argued that the early colonial period was characterized by various ideas, including the ideas of Locke, as well as New England Puritanism and other religious thought.

As the republican synthesis developed, the earlier recognition of a multiplicity of ideological traditions was submerged and eventually lost in the larger modern republican framework. As Shalhope notes: “With the publication of Wood’s book the main outlines of a republican synthesis became clear: Americans, drawing heavily upon English libertarian thought, created a unique attitude toward government and society that literally permeated their culture. A consensus, holding the concept of republicanism to stand for the new world Americans believed they had created, quickly formed.”<sup>775</sup> The influence and origin of American republicanism was further developed in Pocock’s *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (1975), which established the influence of Machiavelli on Radical Whig or “country” ideology during the English Civil War.

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<sup>774</sup> Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 48.

<sup>775</sup> Shalhope, “Toward a Republican Synthesis,” 71-72.

According to his argument, Machiavelli's modern republicanism had tremendous, if not predominant, influence on American Revolutionary thought. Machiavelli represented a thread of republican thought steeped in civic humanist language and increasingly free of religious or Christian influences. With *The Machiavellian Moment*, Pocock brought Lockean dominance in American historiography to an end:

It is notorious that American culture is haunted by myths, many of which arise out of the attempt to escape history and then regenerate it. The conventional wisdom among scholars who have studied their growth has been that the Puritan covenant was reborn in the Lockean contract, so that Locke himself has been elevated to the station of a patron saint of American values and the quarrel with history has been seen in terms of a constant attempt to escape into the wilderness and repeat a Lockean experiment in the foundation of a natural society. The interpretation put forward here stresses Machiavelli at the expense of Locke; it suggests that the republic—a concept derived from Renaissance humanism—was the true heir of the covenant and the dread of corruption the true heir of the jeremiad. It suggests that the foundation of an independent America was seen, and stated, as taking place at a Machiavellian—even a Rousseauan—moment, at which the fragility of the experiment, and the ambiguity of the republic's position in secular time, was more vividly appreciated than it could have been from a Lockean perspective.<sup>776</sup>

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<sup>776</sup> Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 545.

The republican synthesis after Pocock was not without difficulties. By embracing the preeminence of Machiavellian civic humanism, Pocock elevated neo-republican thought to the exclusion of Locke (as the passage above makes clear). But he also eliminated the importance of Christian thought, Puritan, Congregational, Christian or otherwise. Machiavelli's republican excision of Christian virtue highlights ideological tensions difficult to resolve within the republican synthesis as initially formulated, but eliminating its influence did not resolve those tensions.

The republican synthesis significantly shifted our understanding of early American political thought away from the influence of Locke to the influence of republican thought. But the subsequent ascendancy of this republican orthodoxy has been challenged and modified since the early writings of Wood and Pocock, and recalibrated to more fully recognize the importance of both Lockean and religious thought. Joyce Appleby has consistently criticized this modern republican emphasis since the early 1970s, arguing for a reconsideration of the influence of John Locke on early American thought. Other scholars similarly sought common ground between the two traditions. For example, Jean Yarbrough in the late 1970s argued similarly for a broader republican synthesis that included both Lockean liberalism and classical republicanism. Yarbrough supports the idea of a republican synthesis, but argued that the Founders "did not choose liberal democracy *over* republicanism. Their plan was far more ambitious: they sought to combine the advantages of liberal freedom and republican virtue, without the disadvantages of either. Their failure, such as it is, lies not in their deliberate retreat from republicanism, but in their misunderstanding of



how to preserve, within the context of liberal democracy, those virtues, especially civic virtues, necessary to republican government.”<sup>777</sup> The founders were influenced by seemingly disparate principles of liberal freedom (Lockean liberalism) and republican virtue, yet “sought to combine the best of liberal democracy and republicanism.”<sup>778</sup> Numerous critics of the republican synthesis argued that Locke remained a constant thread of influence within American republican thought and should be included prominently in the republican synthesis.

These early attempts to recalibrate the republican synthesis by re-injecting a serious consideration of Locke have been joined by other scholars intent on recovering this and other ideological traditions lost to the early republican synthesis. Lance Banning, for example, in 1986 offered a reconsideration of the incompatibility of republican and liberal thought in “Jeffersonian Ideology Revisited: Liberal and Classical Ideals in the New American Republic.” Banning argued, “Logically, it may be inconsistent to be simultaneously liberal and classical. Historically, it was not.”<sup>779</sup> In a more comprehensive treatment of the synthesis of republican and liberal traditions, Richard Dagger in *Civic Virtues* (1997) argues for the “possibility of republican liberalism.”<sup>780</sup> “From the historical point of view, then, there is reason to

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<sup>777</sup> Jean Yarbrough, “Republicanism Reconsidered: Some Thoughts on the Foundation and Preservation of the American Republic,” *The Review of Politics* 41, No. 1 (Jan., 1979), 63.

<sup>778</sup> Yarbrough, “Republicanism Reconsidered,” 95.

<sup>779</sup> Lance Banning, “Jefferson Ideology Revisited: Liberal and Classical Ideals in the New American Republic,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 43, No. 1 (Jan., 1986), 12.

<sup>780</sup> Dagger, *Civic Virtues*, 6.

believe that a concern for rights need not be hostile to the desire to promote civic virtue. Whether a satisfactory marriage of the two is possible, however, is another question.”<sup>781</sup> Dagger builds a convincing case for this “satisfactory marriage” in his defense of what he calls “republican liberalism.” His argument centers on his assumption that liberalism and republicanism are distinguishable from one another, but not necessarily inconsistent or incompatible with one another. As he notes, “Bread and butter are distinguishable, but hardly incompatible, and the same may be true of liberalism and republicanism.”<sup>782</sup> A similar argument can be applied to Warren’s synthesis of the three threads of virtue.

These revisions of the republican synthesis focus not on irreconcilable differences, but instead seek to identify common ground or synthesis between the competing ideologies of liberalism and republicanism. In so doing, they offer two important points for understanding Warren’s synthesis of classical, bourgeois, and Christian virtue. First, Banning’s modification of the republican synthesis makes an historical argument equally applicable to Warren’s thought: although from the perspective of modern political theory, two ideological sources may be determined from a modern perspective to be inconsistent, but historically they were not. Second, as Dagger’s argument suggests, significant ideas may be distinguishable from one another, but that does not necessarily make them incompatible, as his bread-and-butter analogy so effectively suggests. We can distinguish the three threads in Warren’s thought, but clearly in her conception of virtue she uses them in a way that

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<sup>781</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>782</sup> Dagger, *Civic Virtues*, 12.

suggests compatibility. Identifying common ground between the disparate traditions of liberalism and republicanism becomes possible.

Significant recalibrations of the republican synthesis have occurred in other areas of scholarship.<sup>783</sup> Just as a convincing case has been made to return Locke to the republican synthesis, a similar case was built for the influence of New England Puritanism and Christian thought within the republican synthesis.<sup>784</sup> Shalhope revisited the republican synthesis a decade after his 1972 analysis and identified

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<sup>783</sup> Philip Gould identifies five important contributions to the republican synthesis in “Virtue, Ideology, and the American Revolution: The Legacy of the Republican Synthesis,” *Eighteenth-Century American Cultural Studies*, 5, No. 3 (Autumn, 1993), 564-577. These include: Ann Fairfax Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union: Virtue and the Formation of American Republics* (Oxford University Press, 1991); Ellis Sandoz, *A Government of Laws: Political Theory, Religion, and the American Founding* (Louisiana State University Press, 1990); Dick Howard, *The Birth of American Political Thought, 1763-1787*, David Ames Curtis, ed. (University of Minnesota Press, 1989); and Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>784</sup> Important scholarship has emphasized the significance of Christian thought in the development of early American republican thought. The following list is far from exhaustive, but important scholarship in this area includes: Perry Miller *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (1939), *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (1953), *Errand Into the Wilderness* (1956) and *The American Puritans*, editor (1956); Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind, From the Great Awakening to Revelation* (1966), *The Puritans in America: A Narrative Anthology*, editor with Andrew Delbanco (1995); Ellis Sandoz, *Political Sermons of the Founding Era, 1730-1805* (1991), *A Government of Laws: Political Theory, Religion, and The American Founding* (1990), *Republicanism, Religion, and the American Soul* (2006); Ernest Tuveson *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (1968); Edmund S. Morgan *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (1963) and *Puritan Political Ideas, 1558-1794* (1965); Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (1975); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (1977); John F. Berens, *Providence and Patriotism in Early America* (1978); Catherine L. Albanese, *Sons of the Fathers: The Civil Religion of the American Revolution* (1978); Ruth H. Bloch *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Political Thought* (1985); Barry Alan Shain *The Myth of American Individualism: The Protestant Origins of American Political Thought* (1994); and works by Mark A. Noll, including *Christians and the American Revolution* (1977), *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (1986), *America's God: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (2002), *From Old Religion in a New World: The History of North American Christianity* (2002) and *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (2010).

further important modifications.<sup>785</sup> A number of these are important to our consideration of Warren's republican synthesis. For example, Robert E. Kelley identified four elements of republican thought, defined along geographic lines. These regional variants of republicanism, especially the essence of New England republicanism, help explain differences within American republican thought at the founding and contribute to a deeper understanding of Warren's thought. Among these philosophical traditions by region, Kelly identifies that of colonial New England:

New England republicans were, above everything, a pious and moralistic people. Believing in the politics of virtue, they looked to building a Christian Sparta, a universal Yankee nation, in the new United States. They thought of the nation at large as they did of their Puritan villages: as an organic community to be bound together in a shared way of life. The moral purity of the whole society, as an offering to God and an example to the fallen world, was their central concern. In their eyes, government was a divine institution, and like the Calvinist God Himself, should be strong and active. It should guide the nation toward economic as well as moral health by direct intervention. Thus it should foster godly living and industrious habits. The American people should be self-disciplined, self-denying, hard-working, but

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<sup>785</sup> Shalhope, "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 39, No. 2 (Apr., 1982), 334-356.

not corrupted by affluence; they should be energetic, upright, and engaged in furthering God's business.<sup>786</sup>

Kelley's characterization of New England republicanism matches much of Warren's republican thought and context, although in her Antifederalist views she diverges significantly from Kelley's argument that New England republicans insisted on a "strong and active" government. Warren tends rather toward an Antifederalist, limited conception of the role of government. But Kelley's description of the moral and virtue underpinnings of New England Puritanism is nonetheless applicable to her republican thought.

Another modification to the republican synthesis relevant to Warren's political thought is the thesis offered by Ellis Sandoz, who seeks to re-establish and prioritize religious thought among the multiple ideological threads in the American republican context, as it was originally identified in the earliest stages of the republican synthesis. Sandoz "reinterprets the sources of an American intellectual inheritance"<sup>787</sup> and argues that the "core consensus" of the American founding "included a determinant religious heritage, derived from classical and Christian roots."<sup>788</sup> In Sandoz's assessment: "The multiple pre-modern sources of [Revolutionary] political culture were complexly woven into [the] foundation of the

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<sup>786</sup> Robert Kelley, "Ideology and Political Culture from Jefferson to Nixon," *The American Historical Review* 82 No. 3 (Jun., 1977), 536-537.

<sup>787</sup> Philip Gould, "Virtue, Ideology, and the American Revolution," *American Literary History* 5, No. 3 (Autumn, 1993), 570.

<sup>788</sup> *Ibid.*, 571.

American representative republics as the most eligible form of government (even as we routinely call it *democracy* today) is, of course, beyond dispute – most especially common law constitutionalism and the Greek and Latin classics, among other neglected sources. But the importance of Bible reading and the spiritual grounding nurtured by it can hardly be overrated.”<sup>789</sup> Sandoz’s insistence on recognizing Christian influences in the republican synthesis capped a large body of scholarship that since the 1970s sought to demonstrate a similar consistent core of religious thought. Sandoz’s reinterpretation merges classical and biblical sources, but also points to a “potent strand of medieval Christian constitutional and political theory.”<sup>790</sup> This reinterpretation seeks to supplant “Whig theory and Renaissance civic humanism with a less secular version of ‘the great tradition of Western political theory and praxis.’”<sup>791</sup>

This ongoing development of the republican synthesis reflects a new pluralism arising from the scholarly debates since the writings of Bailyn, Wood, and Pocock. These early debates that sought to prioritize republicanism or liberalism in American thought “gradually spawned innovative approaches to the relationship in Revolutionary America between republican and liberal thought. What was once cast as a polarity now tends toward synthesis, pluralism, and multi-valance.”<sup>792</sup> Mark A.

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<sup>789</sup> Ellis Sandoz, *Republicanism, Religion, and the Soul of America* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press: 2006), 7.

<sup>790</sup> Gould, “Virtue, Ideology, and the American Revolution,” 571.

<sup>791</sup> Ibid.

<sup>792</sup> Ibid., 566.

Noll similarly notes: “Recent historical writing has made it abundantly clear that simplistic summaries cannot deal with the multivalent, tumultuous, and often extraordinarily fluid ideas of America's founding era.”<sup>793</sup> According to Noll, American ideological history underwent a “great change of the 1740s” which aligned “historic Protestant doctrines of providence with heretofore suspect notions of political action.”<sup>794</sup> This period of change ushered in a “new ideological alliance”<sup>795</sup> in American colonial history. Noll argues that before this time “dissenting wariness about British power only occasionally drew on specifically civic humanist, republican Real Whig—or Lockean—thinking. Among all colonial religious traditions, and especially among the New England Puritans, attention to divine revelation, concern for eternal life, and a belief in God’s direct control of quotidian existence insured that secular political analysis enjoyed, at most, a secondary place.”<sup>796</sup> But the colonial wars of the 1740s led to a different pattern, “in which Protestant leaders added secular political concepts, terms, and modes of reasoning—taken especially from republican intellectual sources—to their traditional spiritual reasoning,” creating a “newer amalgamation of religion and secular reasoning”<sup>797</sup> that would greatly influence the

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<sup>793</sup> Mark A. Noll, “The Contingencies of Christian Republicanism: An Alternative Account of Protestantism and the American Founding,” in *Protestantism and the American Founding*, ed. Thomas S. Engeman and Michael P. Zuckert (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 231.

<sup>794</sup> Noll, “The Contingencies of Christian Republicanism,” 231.

<sup>795</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>796</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>797</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

Revolutionary generation. By the time Warren was writing, those in the Puritan tradition no longer made a distinction between republicanism and Puritan thought. Sandoz argues: “The great political events of the American founding, thus, have a backdrop of resurgent religion whose calls for repentance and faith plainly complement the calls to resist tyranny and constitutional corruption so as to live virtuously as God-fearing Christians, and, eventually, as responsible republican citizens.”<sup>798</sup>

Early republican synthesis writer Gordon S. Wood acknowledged in a 1992 essay: “None of the historical participants, including the Founders, ever had any sense that he had to choose between republicanism and liberalism, between Machiavelli and Locke.”<sup>799</sup> Noll explains: “Recognizing that neither an air-tight republicanism nor an equally hegemonic liberalism dominated public intellectual life has led at least some historians to reevaluate the place of religion”<sup>800</sup> in American historiography. The definition of virtue reflected this republican synthesis, as well. In her evaluation of Revolutionary millennialism, Ruth H. Bloch identifies a merging of traditions in the revolutionary understanding of virtue: “The word ‘virtue’ in American political discourse contained many shades of meaning throughout the revolutionary period, drawing at once upon secular republican theory and Protestant ideas about

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<sup>798</sup> Ellis Sandoz, “Foreword,” in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era 1730-1805*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Press, 1991), xvii-xviii.

<sup>799</sup> Wood, *Republican Synthesis Revisited*, quoted in Noll, “The Contingencies of Christian Republicanism,” 228.

<sup>800</sup> Noll, “The Contingencies of Christian Republicanism,” 229.



righteousness. The classical republican definition of virtue always overlapped with Anglo-American Protestant values.”<sup>801</sup> Bloch’s analysis of the Revolutionary view of virtue demonstrates a merging of traditions – classical, bourgeois, and Christian: “The personal virtues of industry and frugality deemed essential to a good citizen were essentially the same as those prescribed by Protestant morality. The belief that the individual should sacrifice for the common good was also integral to Protestant, and particularly to Puritan, ideas of saintly community. But the American religious definition of virtue also diverged from the classical republican one in its strong emphasis on Christian belief.”<sup>802</sup> The Protestant and more particularly Puritan tradition had long insisted that religion “lay at the basis of virtue. The confluence of classical republican theories and traditional Protestant values had long enabled the concept of virtue to draw upon a rich combination as well as secular associations.”<sup>803</sup> Warren stands firmly within this understanding of virtue.

This new republican synthesis better reflects the many traditions available to the Revolutionary generation and offers reconciliation among these multiple traditions by accommodating rather than marginalizing or even eliminating divergent threads of thought. The Revolutionary generation drew from many philosophical traditions – New England Puritanism, the Atlantic republican tradition, antiquity, Locke and the Radical Whigs, the Scottish Enlightenment, and Machiavelli. Warren’s

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<sup>801</sup> Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Political Thought, 1756-1800* (Boston, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 109.

<sup>802</sup> Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 109.

<sup>803</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

three-thread concept of virtue is a particular case in point. Her thinking is representative of the Revolutionary generation's expression of what they saw as the accumulated wisdom found in the many traditions of Western thought.

#### War Themes and Ancient Virtue in Colonial Religious Discourse

Nowhere is this merging of philosophical traditions more evident than in the political discourse of the Revolutionary War. As the epigraph that opens this chapter indicates, Warren envisioned an American virtue "necessary to counteract the weakness of the timid."<sup>804</sup> Machiavelli characterized Christian virtue as meek and passive, to embody the very timidity that Warren sought to counteract with her concept of virtue. In this Revolutionary context, this was not the type of virtue republicans advocated, nor was it the type of virtue that the colonies would require to defeat the British. Patriotic clergy merged biblical and philosophical arguments to justify resistance to tyrants, particularly to British tyranny. Sermons delivered during this period connected biblical teaching to Locke's doctrine of revolution and radical Whig advocacy of armed resistance to tyranny in defense of liberty. Unsurprisingly the religious language of resistance rang with appeals to classical heroic virtue. Resistance to British tyranny was likened to Old Testament struggles of the people of Israel against many despotic threats. New England clergymen between 1774 and 1776 sought to embolden their congregations and to inspire soldiers within their flock to

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<sup>804</sup> Warren to John Adams, 10 March 1776, in *Selected Letters*, 70.

martial zeal. New England patriot clergy preached “a version of practical Christian republicanism which stirred Americans’ ‘martial spirit’ and prepared them to fight a war against their mother country.”<sup>805</sup> They “cited New England’s Puritan history, blamed Britain’s depravity for the necessity of armed conflict, entreated soldiers to behave morally, and demanded military discipline”<sup>806</sup> of the soldiers they addressed.

Evidence of this merging of Christian and heroic virtue is abundant during this time. New England sermons inspired both Revolutionary fervor and military action in the face of a mighty foe.<sup>807</sup> In January, 1776, Samuel Sherwood recalled the Puritan history in the colonies, where “learning, religion, and liberty have flourished.”<sup>808</sup> He reminded his congregation that “amidst the most violent and cruel attempts of a tyrannical and persecuting power, [God] has raised up persons of a martial, heroic spirit, and endowed them with skill, courage and fortitude, to defend and protect his church.”<sup>809</sup> Later that year President John Witherspoon preached a sermon at Princeton, in which he sketched a description of the ideal soldier: “It is in the man of piety and inward principle that we may expect to find the uncorrupted patriot, the

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<sup>805</sup> Sarah J. Purcell, “‘Spread This Martial Fire’: The New England Patriot Clergy and Civil Military Instruction,” *Journal of Church and State* 38 (1996), 622.

<sup>806</sup> Purcell, “‘Spread This Martial Fire,” 622.

<sup>807</sup> Although many American clergy added fuel to the Revolutionary fire, they were by no means monolithic in their perspective on the conflict with Great Britain. Many clergy members encouraged submission and obedience to British authorities, based on the admonition of Romans 13. For a discussion of these varying views of American clergy at the time of the Revolution, see: Mark A. Noll, *Christians at the American Revolution* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2006).

<sup>808</sup> Samuel Sherwood, “The Church’s Flight Into the Wilderness: An Address on the Times,” *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era: 1730-1805*, 504.

<sup>809</sup> *Ibid.*, 514.

useful citizen, and the invincible soldier.”<sup>810</sup> In the context of the Revolutionary War, colonial ministers and preachers called citizens to acts of patriotism, military courage, and sacrifice for the cause of American liberty. In 1777 Connecticut preacher Abraham Keteltas adopted a tone of Christian militancy, choosing as the basis of his sermon Psalm 74: 22 – “Arise O God! Plead thine own Cause.” After citing biblical and historical examples of resistance to tyranny, Keteltas tells his audience, “I think we have reason to conclude, that the cause of this American continent, against the measures of a cruel, bloody, and vindictive ministry, is the cause of God.”<sup>811</sup> He reminded his audience: “Liberty is the grand fountain, under God, of every temporal blessing, and what is infinitely more important, it is favorable to the propagation of unadulterated [C]hristianity. Liberty is the parent of truth, justice, virtue, patriotism, benevolence, and every generous and noble purpose of the soul.”<sup>812</sup>

Representative of many of the Revolutionary sermons, Jacob Cushing in 1778 based a sermon on Deuteronomy 32:43, and exhorted his congregation to military valor and courage: “Cultivate, my friends, a martial spirit, strive to excel in the art of war, that you may be qualified to act the part of soldiers well; and, under providence, be helpful in vanquishing and subduing the enemies of God and this people; and be numbered among those who shall be worthy to wear the laurels of victory and

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<sup>810</sup> John Witherspoon, “The Dominion of Providence Over the Passions of Men,” (17 May 1776) in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era 1730-180*, 559.

<sup>811</sup> Abraham Keteltas, “God Arising and Pleading His People’s Cause; Or the American War in Favor of Liberty, Against the Measures and Arms of Great Britain, Shewn to be the Cause of God,” in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era 1730-1805*, 595.

<sup>812</sup> *Ibid.*, 598.

triumph.”<sup>813</sup> Cushing encouraged them further to “strive for a more honorable and shining character; I mean, that of true Christians and good soldiers of JESUS CHRIST; and to fight manfully under his banner, as the high priest of your profession, and great captain of your salvation.”<sup>814</sup> The Harvard graduate reminded them that “Duty, interest, liberty, religion, and life, every good thing worth enjoyment, demand speedy and the utmost exertions.”<sup>815</sup> The righteous cause “obliges us (under GOD mighty in battle) to use our ‘swords as instruments of righteousness, and calls us to the shocking, but necessary, important duty of shedding human blood’; not only in defence of our property, life, and religion, but in obedience to him who hath said, “Cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood.”<sup>816</sup> He drew the sermon to its conclusion with a reference that mixed virtue, heroic valor, and eternal life: “We are all children of mortality—and must die out of this world. Blessed be GOD, honor and immortality beyond the grave is ascertained by divine revelation. Being called to glory by virtue, let us diligently and conscientiously perform all the duties of our holy religion; labor to secure our peace with GOD, through Jesus Christ our only Savior—that we may be perfect and compleat in him as

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<sup>813</sup> Jacob Cushing, “Divine Judgment Upon Tyrants” based on Deut. 32:43,” (Boston: 20 April 1778), in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era 1730-1805*, 624.

<sup>814</sup> Cushing, “Divine Judgment Upon Tyrants,” 624.

<sup>815</sup> *Ibid.*, 623.

<sup>816</sup> *Ibid.*

our head.”<sup>817</sup> Cushing further reminds the soldiers in his audience of their duty to fight valiantly to restore the liberty of their nation:

You were spared, it may be, further to signalize yourselves, and to do yet greater service for God and your bleeding country, which calls aloud to you, and all its hearty friends, to rouse and exert themselves, for the destruction of the common enemy and oppressor; and to wipe away the blood wherewith this land has been stained. To arms! To action, and the battle of the warrior! is the language of divine providence; and you have every motive imaginable to awaken, and excite you to be up and doing the work of the Lord faithfully.

The honor and glory of God, and the salvation of your country under God, call aloud upon all.<sup>818</sup>

Clearly these sermons reflect none of the meekness or submissiveness assigned to Christians by Machiavelli. Rather, sermons of this period were infused with revolutionary fervor and marked by increasing militancy and emphasis on classical virtue: courage in battle, patriotism, self-sacrificing action for the benefit of the nation, and willingness to shed blood for the country. They encouraged individual believers to emulate Old Testament examples of valour and bravery in battle. And reminiscent of Pericles’s *Funeral Oration*, sermons called women to heroically sacrifice their husbands and sons to the cause of the nation.

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<sup>817</sup> Ibid., 626.

<sup>818</sup> Cushing, “Divine Judgment Upon Tyrants,” 624.

Warren invoked similar heroic and Christian rhetoric throughout her writings and personal correspondence. It is within this context that her character Brutus encourages the younger generation of patriotic soldiers with references to heroic virtue and millennial themes, that by acting with heroic virtue they would receive the promise of Isaiah 35: 1 that the desert would “blossom as a rose”<sup>819</sup> and Romans 8:35, they would “more than conquer”<sup>820</sup> because of their courage and military valour. She writes in a letter in 1774 that if colonial patriots are called to war against the British, “the crimsoned stream will mark to future ages, the glory, and the virtue, of a patriotic race, who (if necessary) will cheerfully sacrifice life and its enjoyment, to extricate posterity from the threatened bondage.”<sup>821</sup> Yet as she attributes heroic virtue to colonial soldiers, in the same letter she trusts “to the great arbiter of the universe the decision of events which may produce mighty consequences both in the European and in the western World.”<sup>822</sup> And she speaks alternately of “martial music hush’d,”<sup>823</sup> “Rome’s long expiring fame,” “heavenly virtue,”<sup>824</sup> “patriotic zeal,”<sup>825</sup>

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<sup>819</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act V, Scene 3.

<sup>820</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act III, Scene 3.

<sup>821</sup> Warren to Hannah Fayerwether Tolman Winthrop, August 1774, in *Selected Letters*, 32.

<sup>822</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>823</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act I, Scene 1.

<sup>824</sup> *Ibid.*, Act I, Scene 2.

<sup>825</sup> *Ibid.*, Act III, Scene 2.

and “the last remains of patriotick virtue”<sup>826</sup> in her play lamenting the *The Sack of Rome*.

#### The Colonists Never Separated Christianity and Virtue as Machiavelli Did

What was Machiavelli’s influence on Warren’s republican thought and her concept of virtue? Based on Warren’s references to Machiavelli, she acknowledges the importance of Machiavelli’s insistence on the fragility of republics and the need for a robust concept of virtue to offset the threat of corruption and dissipation. But when Warren considers what kind of virtue is necessary for a republic, she looks elsewhere. She adopts a different view of ancient virtue, closer to that of Cicero, Plutarch, and other figures of antiquity than to the modern republicanism developed by Machiavelli. Specifically, Warren never separated Christian virtue from her republican thinking in the way that Machiavelli does, and there is little evidence that others in the Revolutionary generation made the separation either.

Warren read Machiavelli and cited him multiple times in her writings, and we can assume a level of familiarity with his republican ideas as we evaluate her political thought. Two of her specific references to Machiavelli appear in *Observations on the New Constitution*. Writing anonymously as “Columbian Patriot,” Warren criticizes the proposed Constitution for its failure to include a Bill of Rights: “The rights of individuals ought to be the primary object of all government, and cannot be too securely guarded by the most explicit declarations in their favor. This has been the opinion of the Hampdens, the Pym, and [11] many other illustrious names, that have

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<sup>826</sup> Ibid., Act IV, Scene 5.



stood forth in defence of English liberties; and even the Italian master in politicks, the subtle and renowned Machiavel acknowledges, that no republic ever yet stood on a stable foundation without satisfying the common people.”<sup>827</sup> Warren’s characterization of Machiavelli as “the Italian master in politicks” and “the renowned Machiavel” indicate the influence she believes he has with her readers. Whether Machiavelli is as “subtle” a philosopher as she suggests here is open to debate, but Warren is stressing a larger point within his republican thought. In *Discourses* Machiavelli argues as Warren notes that the stable foundation of republican government is based on “satisfying the common people.”<sup>828</sup> In this reference, Warren may have a number of passages from the *Discourses* in mind. For example, Machiavelli argued, “The desires of free peoples are rarely pernicious to freedom because they arise either from being oppressed or from suspicion that they may be oppressed.”<sup>829</sup> Therefore, satisfying those desires will tend toward preserving liberty. She might also be referring to a later passage in the *Discourses* in which Machiavelli argues that giving the people the “right of accusation” or *accusa* allows it to “vent its ambition”<sup>830</sup> and to diffuse rising emotion. More likely, Warren has the following passage from *The Prince* in mind: “Well-ordered states and wise rulers have always been very careful not to exasperate the nobles and to satisfy the people and keep them

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<sup>827</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 127.

<sup>828</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 127.

<sup>829</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses on Titus Livy*, Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), I.4.1.

<sup>830</sup> *Ibid.*, I.5.1.

contented; this is one of the most important things for a ruler to do.”<sup>831</sup> Whether this statement by Warren reflects Machiavelli’s view of the common people is dubious, as in later passages of *The Discourses* he argues that “many times the people desires its own ruin” and can be easily deceived by “a false appearance of good.”<sup>832</sup> Based on this first reference, Warren’s use of Machiavelli to defend a bill of rights is more rhetoric than substance.

Warren includes a second reference to Machiavelli in her explanation of the British corruption that precipitated the Revolutionary War:

The celebrated Machiavel, pronounced by some the prince of politicians, has observed, “that every state is in danger of dissolution, whose government is not frequently reduced [232] to its original principles.” The conduct of the British administration towards the colonies, the corruption of the government in every department, their deviations from first principles, and the enormous public debt of the nation, evinced not only the necessity of a reform in parliament, but appeared to require such a renovation of the British constitution, as was not likely soon to take place. Thus circumstanced, many thought it the interest of America, to dissolve the connexion with such a government, and were utterly opposed to delay, or any further application to the British king or parliament, by petition or concession.<sup>833</sup>

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<sup>831</sup> Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 66.

<sup>832</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.53.

Warren refers here to the third book of *The Discourses*, in which Machiavelli argues that the “mode of renewing” “sects, republics, and kingdoms” is “to lead them back toward their beginnings.”<sup>834</sup> This passage of Machiavelli evidently captured the revolutionary imagination. It was quoted by John Dickinson in “Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania” (1768). But it is unclear whether Warren, Dickinson, and other republican thinkers were referring directly to Machiavelli or to a “borrowed citation” popularized in a speech by Lord Camden published in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* on December 31, 1767.<sup>835</sup> Warren makes a far less favorable reference to Machiavelli in *The Group* (1775), when she compares the “effrontery”<sup>836</sup> and deception of Rapatio (the character Warren uses to represent reviled Massachusetts Gov. Thomas Hutchinson) to the arts of Machiavelli. Of Rapatio the character Collateralis asks:

Can you suppose there is yet such a dupe  
As still believes that wretch an honest man?  
The latter strokes of his serpentine brain  
Outvie the arts of Machiavelli himself;  
His Borgian model here is realiz’d,  
And the stale tricks of politicians play’d

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<sup>833</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 127.

<sup>834</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, III.1.2.

<sup>835</sup> Alessandro Arienzo and Gianfranco Borrelli, *Anglo-American Faces of Machiavelli* (Corsano, Milano, Italy: Polimetria, 2009), 394-5.

<sup>836</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act II, Scene 1.

Beneath a vizard fair –  
Drawn from the Heav'nly form  
Of blest religion weeping o'er the land  
For virtue fall'n, and for freedom lost.<sup>837</sup>

These references by Warren indicate a familiarity with Machiavelli and his writings, but offer little insight into whether she adopted his view of *virtu'*. However, in the passage from *The Group* her juxtaposition of Rapatio's "Borgian model" and "blest religion weeping o'er the land / For virtue fall'n and for freedom lost,"<sup>838</sup> Warren connects virtue to religion. The glory of the ancient republics of Greece and the commonwealth of Rome are attributable to a result of "the strictest regard being paid to the worship of their gods, and a sacred observance of their religions rites enjoined."<sup>839</sup> As a result of "sceptical disputes" "the rulers and the people sunk into an indifference of all religion."<sup>840</sup> The Roman commonwealth was "most worthy of the imitation of republicans" when there was "a general regard paid to the worship of their deities."<sup>841</sup> When religious observances were eliminated, "republicanism was extinguished, the commonwealth subverted."<sup>842</sup> The glory of ancient republics relied

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<sup>837</sup> Ibid.

<sup>838</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 680.

<sup>839</sup> Ibid

<sup>840</sup> Ibid.

<sup>841</sup> Ibid.

<sup>842</sup> Ibid.

on religious observance, both as “utilitarian cement”<sup>843</sup> as Berlin suggests, but in Warren’s formulation, also as a vigorous check on tyranny and as a guardian of liberty. Warren’s emphasis on religion reflects as well her notion of the human *telos*, including the Christian belief in eternal life secured through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. She rejects religious skepticism as destructive both to Christian religion and to republican government.<sup>844</sup>

Both Machiavelli and Rousseau insist on civil religion in their republican thought, but what that religion entails differs from that of Warren, who emphasizes the need for a Christian religion in the American republic. As the preceding discussion of the concept of virtue of Machiavelli and Rousseau demonstrates, they view Christian virtue as an enervating force that serves to undermine republics. Rousseau in Book 4, Chapter 8 of the *The Social Contract* specifically rejects Christianity as a possible civil religion for his republic. Rousseau argues that Christianity “does not ... have any assignable point of contact with political society.”<sup>845</sup> Yet according to Rousseau, “no state was ever founded without a religion to serve at its base.”<sup>846</sup> In Rousseau’s understanding of civil religion, “each citizen must have a religion requiring him to cherish his duties. The dogmas of that religion, admittedly, are a concern of the state, as also of its *other* members, only so far as they

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<sup>843</sup> Berlin, “The Originality of Machiavelli,” 37.

<sup>844</sup> For a discussion of Warren’s Puritan theology, see Ch. 2 and Ch. 6.

<sup>845</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Bk. 4, Ch. 8.

<sup>846</sup> *Ibid.*

relate either to morality or to the duties the faithful are enjoined to discharged toward others.”<sup>847</sup> In Rousseau’s civil religion “the sovereign is entitled to fix the tenets of a purely civil *creed*, or profession of faith. These would not be, strictly speaking, dogmas of a religious character, but rather sentiments *deemed indispensable* for participation in society—i.e., sentiments without which no man can be either a good citizen or a loyal subject.”<sup>848</sup> Christianity fails to meet Rousseau’s criteria as a civil religion for a republic because basing a religion on Jesus Christ “undermined the unity of the state.”<sup>849</sup> It tends to be both divisive and enervating. Rousseau further argues, “Worse still: besides failing to tie the citizens’ hearts to the state, it actually cuts them off from it—as from all the things of this world.”<sup>850</sup> Similarly Machiavelli acknowledges the importance of civil religion to republics. For Machiavelli “the criterion of the worth of a religion is its role as a promoter of solidarity and cohesions.”<sup>851</sup> Machiavelli in his advocacy of civil religion rejects the Christian quest for other-worldly salvation, as does Rousseau.

Warren’s understanding of republics shares the importance of religion identified by Machiavelli and Rousseau, but she rejects their excision of Christianity from the American republic. Warren shares their appreciation of the importance of

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<sup>847</sup> Ibid.

<sup>848</sup> Ibid.

<sup>849</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Bk. 4, Ch. 8.

<sup>850</sup> Ibid.

<sup>851</sup> Berlin, “The Originality of Machiavelli,” 37.

religion: “It may be observed in the character of more modern republics, that religion has been the grand palladium of their institutions. Through all the free states of Italy, democracy and religion have been considered in union.”<sup>852</sup> She may be in error in her historical understanding, but her underlying assumptions are clear. Like Machiavelli and Rousseau, Warren agrees that republics depend on religion, but the American republic requires a different religion, one that emphasizes the basic tenets of her New England Puritan tradition. This blending of classical and Christian virtue can be seen throughout Warren’s writings. In her Revolutionary play *The Adulateur*, Brutus (representing Warren’s brother James Otis), encourages the young patriots to valor and courage in the impending war with Great Britain. The character Brutus, although given a name that recalls one of the heroes of Roman republican history, employs the biblical millennial language of Romans 8:37 to remind them that “He who in virtue’s cause remain unmoved / And nobly struggles for his country’s good: / Shall more than conquer – better days shall beam, / And happier prospects crowd the scene again.”<sup>853</sup>

There is little evidence that the Revolutionary generation saw Christianity as an enervating force in a republic or that they separated Christian virtue from ancient virtue in the way that Machiavelli did. Samuel Adams expressed the hope of the Revolutionary generation when he spoke of establishing America as a “Christian

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<sup>852</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 681.

<sup>853</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act III, Scene 3. A more detailed discussion of Warren’s merging of republican virtue and millennial thought is presented in Ch. 9 of this work.

Sparta.”<sup>854</sup> Like many others in her generation, Warren’s writings reflect the conviction that republican virtue in the American context required religious belief and Christian virtue. Her definition of “true, genuine republican virtue” includes a religion that emphasizes “a strict adherence to a sublime code of morals, which has never been equalled by the sages of ancient time, nor can ever be abolished by the sophisticated reasonings of modern philosophers.”<sup>855</sup> This passage suggests her concept of virtue requires the practice of Christianity, the religion unavailable to the “sages of ancient time” and that which the “sophisticated reasonings of modern philosophers”<sup>856</sup> attempt to destroy. Even in Athens, the greatest of ancient republics, heroic virtue was insufficient to maintain republican government. “The rich city of Athens particularly, was early corrupted by the influx of wealth, the influence of aristocratic nobles, and the annihilation of every principle connected with religion.”<sup>857</sup>

The corruption from the “influx of wealth” that presented such a challenge to the Athenian republic posed a considerable threat to the American republic as well. Warren’s use of bourgeois or marketplace virtue as a means to check such corruption demonstrates again her synthesis of differing philosophical threads into her overall concept of virtue. Bourgeois virtue is marked by a number of characteristics or traits. Benjamin Franklin’s list of virtues includes: temperance, silence, order, resolution,

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<sup>854</sup> Samuel Adams to John Scollay, Dec. 30, 1780, in *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, ed. Harry Alonzo Cushing (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 8.

<sup>855</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 648.

<sup>856</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 648.

<sup>857</sup> *Ibid.*, 680.



frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, tranquility, chastity, and humility. These traits we see reflected in Warren's concept of virtue, but she further develops the bourgeois or marketplace element of her concept of virtue as she addresses the problems of corruption in commercial and economic activities.<sup>858</sup> For example, she adopts the classical fear of corruption of avarice, excessive accumulation of wealth, and luxury, to which she attributes the demise of the early republics. Athens had been "corrupted by the influx of wealth."<sup>859</sup> She looks again to ancient Rome, in which virtue arises from character rather than wealth: "It may be asked, are not those states the most likely to produce the greatest number of wise and heroic spirits, where some mark of elevation, instead of pecuniary compensation, is affixed to the name and character of such, as have outstripped their contemporaries in the field of glory or integrity? A Roman knight ennobled for his patriotism or his valour, though his patrimonial inheritance was insufficient for a modern flower-garden, was beheld with more veneration than the most wealthy and voluptuous citizen."<sup>860</sup> Coming from a successful merchant family, she understands the importance of economic development and activity to the young republic. Her concept of virtue in this area assumes a basic level of economic development and prosperity, but it must be tempered by virtue. Warren decries the "folly of the age":

The selfish passions, and the mad'ning rage

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<sup>858</sup> Franklin, *Autobiography*, 68-9. For a further discussion of Warren's concept of bourgeois or marketplace virtue, see Ch. 5.

<sup>859</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 680.

<sup>860</sup> Warren, *HAR.*, 688.

For pleasure's soft debilitating charms,  
Running full riot in cold avarice' arms;  
Who grasps the dregs of base oppressive gains,  
While luxury in high profusion reigns.  
Our country bleeds, and bleeds at every pore,  
Yet gold's the deity whom all adore.<sup>861</sup>

Rather than engage in economic activity solely for the purpose of individual accumulation of wealth, Warren reminds her readers “That virtue only made them brave and free.”<sup>862</sup>

Warren brings traits reflecting classical, bourgeois, and Christian threads of thought to bear on the problem of economic corruption. Most clear among these is the emphasis on bourgeois or marketplace virtue. Evident are threads of bourgeois or marketplace virtue. She calls for industry, moderation, and frugality – reflective of bourgeois virtue. Warren identifies as arising during the later years of the Revolutionary War “a spirit of avarice and speculation”<sup>863</sup> that led to the development of “avarice without frugality, and profusion without taste.”<sup>864</sup> This vice had “banished the simplicity and elegance”<sup>865</sup> of the people. By contrast, virtue then would require

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<sup>861</sup> Warren, “The Genius of America,” 246.

<sup>862</sup> Warren, “The Genius of America,” 247.

<sup>863</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 389.

<sup>864</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>865</sup> *Ibid.*

simplicity and frugality in the face of economic corruption. As she notes in a letter to her son Winslow: “Fortune is a convenience that few would pass by, yet depend upon it, a Man of understanding & taste can never be made happy by that alone.”<sup>866</sup>

But this threat must also be offset by a conception of virtue that contains Christian thread that overlaps and augments bourgeois virtue. As seen in earlier chapters of this work, from Warren’s writings emerges a list of specific traits that she associates with Christian virtue. Among these are: “integrity,” “uprightness,” “benevolence,” “piety,” “purity,” and “simplicity of manners,” all of which reflect “a sublime religion.”<sup>867</sup> To this list of characteristics Warren adds other expressions or traits specifically associated with Christian virtue: “the intrepidity of the christian” or bravery, boldness, and resolute fearlessness;<sup>868</sup> “candor,” “forgiveness,” “a mild spirit” or humility, “benevolent affections towards all mankind,” tolerance of differing religious practices, “the mild virtues of charity and brotherly kindness”;<sup>869</sup> “mildness of manners,” “justice,” “humanity,” and “rectitude of character”;<sup>870</sup> “resignation, fortitude, and piety” in the face of suffering, “manners gentle,” “heart sincere,” “mild [in] his deportment”;<sup>871</sup> “faith, fortitude, and courage”;<sup>872</sup> “fortitude,

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<sup>866</sup> Warren to Winslow Warren, Nov. 11, 1784, in *Selected Letters*, 189-190.

<sup>867</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 409. These and other characteristics Warren associates with Christian virtue are found in the specific footnote references given here, but can be found in numerous places throughout her writing.

<sup>868</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

<sup>869</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>870</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>871</sup> Warren, “Lines” 240.

patience, and self-denial.”<sup>873</sup> This list of traits, however, provides but a starting point for understanding the place of Christian thought in Warren’s conception of virtue.

In this list we see considerable overlap in the traits of virtue Warren points to as necessary in addressing the challenges of economic corruption and reflective of her concept of virtue as a whole. Simplicity is reflected both in Franklin’s list of pragmatic or bourgeois virtues, as well as in Warren’s catalog of traits that reflect Christian virtue. Similarly, all three threads embrace the ideal of moderation – and these are reflected in Warren’s concept of virtue. Luxury is a vice, in classical terms because it undermines public spirit, in bourgeois terms because it undermines usefulness, and in Christian terms because it reflects a love of money as well as a lack of self-denial and moderation. Industry is found among the traits of both bourgeois and Christian virtue. Franklin includes “resolution” among his list of 13 pragmatic virtues, but Warren includes this among the traits of Christians, as well. Self-denial is an important aspect of Christian virtue, yet it is an important aspect of countering excessive accumulation of wealth.

This overlap of characteristics of virtue extends beyond checking economic corruption. Warren uses the trait of “fortitude” to characterize valiant Revolutionary soldiers as well as Christians in the face of suffering. For example in a letter to the widower of a longtime neighbor on the occasion of his wife’s death, Warren notes: “It was the dignity of virtue; it was the fortitude of the christian” that allowed her

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<sup>872</sup> Warren to James Warren, March 10, 1778, in *Selected Letters*, 100.

<sup>873</sup> Warren to Hannah Lincoln, September 3, 1774, in *Selected Letters*, 34.

neighbor to face death with “serene calm.”<sup>874</sup> Similarly, Warren in a letter recalls early colonial history, in which “an intrepid race whose glorious love of liberty prompted them to explore the uncultivated wild and with a degree of fortitude and patience that would have done honour to the annals of Sparta and of Rome.”<sup>875</sup> This reference to Puritan virtue mixes classical thought with its reference to Sparta and Rome, with the courage and fortitude (which Warren assigns to Christians in the earlier passage and here to Puritans), as well as patience, which is often associated with both bourgeois and Christian thought – all within the context of New England Puritanism. These and other examples of overlap of the many characteristics Warren associates with virtue demonstrate her comfortable synthesis of the individual threads of thought.

In her discussions of economic vice, Warren points as well to the need for fair dealing and honesty in contracts and economic dealings. A “spirit of peculation”<sup>876</sup> characterized the republic in the final years of the Revolutionary war. Although not a word in common usage today, “peculation” in Warren’s day meant “to steal, take dishonestly, especially to deceive the trust of others” or to make public property private through misappropriation of public money and a betrayal of public trust.<sup>877</sup> She feared that avarice could “lead to peculation, to usurious contracts, to illegal and

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<sup>874</sup> Warren to John Sloss Hobart, June 9, 1780, in *Selected Letters*, 136.

<sup>875</sup> Warren to Hannah Fayerwether Tolman Winthrop, January 31, 1774, in *Selected Letters*, 25.

<sup>876</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 413.

<sup>877</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, OED Online. March 2011. Oxford University Press.

dishonest projects, and to every private vice.”<sup>878</sup> Here again, Christian virtues of uprightness, integrity, candor, and piety could be brought to bear to check the temptations to dishonesty in economic relations. Another important check is found in the bourgeois virtue traits of sincerity, which Franklin described as engaging in “no hurtful deceit.”<sup>879</sup>

Finally, in her discussion of economic corruption Warren draws the distinction between economic prosperity and economic corruption in republican terms. She distinguishes between economic growth and profit that arises from industry and benefits the common good and that of “a spirit of finance”<sup>880</sup> that seeks private enrichment and excessive accumulation of wealth for purely selfish ends. This distinction is evident throughout her writings, but perhaps is most clear in the closing chapter of her *History*. As she considers the future of the new republic, “the enterprising [433] spirit of the people seems adapted to improve their advantages.”<sup>881</sup> In Warren’s assessment: “the young republic of America exhibits the happiest prospects. Her extensive population, commerce, [435] and wealth, the progress of agriculture, arts, sciences, and manufactures, have increased with a rapidity beyond example. ... The effects of industry and enterprise appear in the numerous canals, turnpikes, elegant buildings, and well constructed bridges, over lengths and depths of

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<sup>878</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 648.

<sup>879</sup> Franklin, *Autobiography*, 69.

<sup>880</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 665.

<sup>881</sup> *Ibid.*, 697.

water that open, and render the communication easy and agreeable, throughout a country almost without bounds.”<sup>882</sup>

Warren continues in her evaluation of the results of this positive “enterprising spirit”:  
“Indeed the whole country wears a face of improvement, from the extreme point of the northern and western woods, through all the southern states, and to the vast Atlantic ocean, the eastern boundary of the United States.”<sup>883</sup> Warren points out as well that “the revolutionary spirit of the times” led to “vast improvements in science, arts, and agriculture,” reflecting the “boldness of genius that marks the age.”<sup>884</sup>  
“[S]ucceeding generations have reason to expect still more astonishing exhibitions in the next.”<sup>885</sup> Yet, with such economic development comes responsibility. As she reminds her readers, “Providence has clearly pointed out the duties of the present generation, particularly the paths which Americans ought to tread.”<sup>886</sup> In her final assessment, the future of the republic “now depends on their own virtue.”<sup>887</sup>

This virtue must be brought to bear on economic corruption that often arises from such conditions of economic prosperity. Warren contrasts her positive view of enterprising economic development, which benefits the common good, with the

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<sup>882</sup> *Ibid.*, 698.

<sup>883</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 698.

<sup>884</sup> *Ibid.*, xliii.

<sup>885</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>886</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>887</sup> *Ibid.*, 692.

“spirit of finance”<sup>888</sup> that she insists leads to corruption and threatens the survival of the republic. As a result of this growing “spirit of finance,” “a train of reckless passions were awakened, that excited to activity, and created a rage for project, speculation, and various artifices, to support a factitious dignity, which finally ruined multitudes of unsuspecting citizens [373]. Hence, a spirit of public gambling, speculation in paper, in lands, and every thing else, to a degree unparalleled in any nation.”<sup>889</sup> She is concerned that “Men unacquainted with or indifferent to the principles of the Revolution ... are ready to barter the fairest advantages ever offered for the Establishment of public happiness to the narrow Views” that reflect “the commercial character” that lower republican standards to “level with the Interests of the selfish individual.”<sup>890</sup> Warren further argues that America

has in a great measure lost her simplicity of manners, and those ideas of mediocrity which are generally the parent of content; the Americans are already in too many instances hankering after the sudden accumulation of wealth, and the proud distinctions of fortune and title. They have too far lost that general sense of moral obligation, formerly felt by all classes in America. The people have not indeed generally lost their veneration for religion, but it is to be regretted, that in the unlicensed liberality of opinion there have been

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<sup>888</sup> Ibid., 665.

<sup>889</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 665.

<sup>890</sup> Warren to Winslow Warren, Nov. 11, 1784, in *Selected Letters*, 190.



some instances, where the fundamental principles of truth have been obscured.<sup>891</sup>

Indeed, the young republic has fallen prey to avarice, ambition, and desire for the accumulation for wealth, “instead of making themselves a national character, marked with moderation, justice, benignity, and all the mild virtues of humanity.”<sup>892</sup> This spirit of accumulation and the corruption it spawns, can be traced to the younger generation losing sight of republican principles and a respect for their Puritan heritage: “[A]midst the rage of accumulation and the taste for expensive pleasures that have since prevailed; a taste that has abolished that mediocrity which once satisfied, and that contentment which long smiled in every countenance. Luxury, the companion of young acquired wealth, is usually the consequence of opposition to, or close connexion with, opulent commercial states. Thus the hurry of spirits, that ever attends the eager pursuit of fortune and a passion for splendid enjoyment, leads to forgetfulness.”<sup>893</sup> Clearly for Warren corruption arises because that early virtue has been lost. The new republic faces threats of “the rage of accumulation,” “luxury,” and “the eager pursuit of fortune” because “the inhabitants of America cease to look back with due gratitude and respect on the fortitude and virtue of their ancestors” who “left England, not as adventurers for wealth or fame, but for the quiet enjoyment of

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<sup>891</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 644.

<sup>892</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>893</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 4.

religion and liberty.”<sup>894</sup> Unsurprisingly, Warren calls for a return to virtue – in its many forms – to answer this threat.

“Exemplary Virtue” – tying the three threads of virtue together:

Lester Cohen notes that Warren’s *History* reflects “the eighteenth-century version of the classical ‘exemplary theory of history.’”<sup>895</sup> Warren approached history from the perspective that “history was ‘philosophy teaching by examples,’ as Lord Bolingbroke had written; it ‘inculcates images of virtue and vice,’ and its proper task was to train people, especially young people, in ‘public and private virtue.’”<sup>896</sup>

Writing history for Warren was “less a means of edification than a mode of exhortation” – and specifically, an exhortation to virtue.”<sup>897</sup> Cohen further explains: “If [Warren] frequently painted history in blacks and whites and with broad strokes, she did so in order to make utterly clear to the rising generation that the struggle never ended.”<sup>898</sup>

Virtue provides a public standard of behavior for leaders and citizens alike. In many respects, Warren’s history of the American Revolution consists of her evaluation of how well the figures of the Revolutionary era epitomized republican virtue. Her Revolutionary plays encouraged colonists to learn from the examples of

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<sup>894</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

<sup>895</sup> Lester H. Cohen, “Foreword,” *HAR*, xxi.

<sup>896</sup> Cohen, “Foreword,” *HAR*, xxi.

<sup>897</sup> Ibid.

<sup>898</sup> Ibid., xxii.

virtue in Roman history. Similarly her *History* points to examples from the Revolutionary generation to teach virtue by example. Those she identifies as displaying extraordinary virtue during the Revolutionary era embody characteristics of each thread of her virtue thinking. The previous chapters identify three threads of thought within her concept of virtue – classical republican virtue, bourgeois virtue, and Christian virtue. Warren does not separate them, but rather weaves them together into a unified whole. The three threads are expressed in the lives of virtuous leaders, such as her brother and patriot James Otis, Jr., or in the virtuous character of George Washington. When she writes of her brother James, we see the three threads come together:

This gentleman, whose birth and education was equal to any in the province, possessed an easy fortune, independent principles, a comprehensive genius, a strong mind, retentive memory, and great penetration. To these endowments may be added that extensive professional knowledge, which at once forms the character of the complete civilian and the able statesman.

In his public speeches, the sire of eloquence, the acumen of argument, and the lively sallies of wit, at once warmed the bosom of the stoic and commanded the admiration of his enemies. To his probity and generosity in the public walks were added the charms of affability and improving converse in private life. His humanity was conspicuous, his sincerity acknowledged, his integrity unimpeached, his honor unblemished, and his patriotism marked with the disinterestedness of the Spartan. Yet he was susceptible of quick

feelings and warm passions, which in the ebullitions of zeal for the interest of his country sometimes betrayed him into [86] unguarded epithets that gave his foes an advantage, without benefit to the cause that lay nearest his heart.<sup>899</sup>

Her brother's character reflected classical republican virtue: "patriotism marked with the disinterestedness of the Spartan," "zeal for the interest of his country," and a strong record of public service. It reflects elements of bourgeois virtue. He "possessed an easy fortune" yet his public life was marked with "probity and generosity." A special virtue was expected of affluent individuals, including a beneficent concern for less-fortunate members of society. Wealth posed particular temptations and possible corruption, but that could be offset by a character marked by generosity and concern for the common good. In Warren's estimation, Otis's character likewise was marked by what she saw as Christian character, expressed in his humanity, sincerity, integrity, and honor.

Perhaps Warren's appraisal of George Washington's character best illustrates the role of virtue as a standard of behavior required of political leaders. She evaluates the virtue of other key figures in the American Revolution as well, but Washington provides the clearest standard expected of American leaders. Warren points to Washington as an example of republican virtue worthy of emulation. Her sketch of Washington shows him to personify her three threads of virtue. His character, she writes, was distinguished by "integrity and valor ... moderation and humanity."<sup>900</sup>

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<sup>899</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 49.

<sup>900</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 636.

Warren's character sketch of Washington in her *History* incorporates traits from differing threads of virtue:

Mr. Washington was a gentleman of family and fortune, of a polite, but not a learned education; he appeared to possess a coolness of temper, and a degree of moderation and judgment, that qualified him for the elevated station in which he was now placed; with some considerable knowledge of mankind, he supported the reserve of the statesman, with the occasional affability of the courtier. In his character was blended a certain dignity, united with the appearance of good humour; he possessed courage without rashness, patriotism and zeal without acrimony, and retained with universal applause the first military command, until the establishment of independence. Through the various changes in fortune in the subsequent conflict, though the slowness of his movements was censured by some, his character suffered little diminution of the conclusion of a war, that [234] from the extraordinary exigencies of an infant republic, required at times, the caution of a Fabius, the energy of a Caesar, and the happy facility of expedient in distress, so remarkable in the military operations of the illustrious Frederick. With the first of these qualities, he was endowed by nature; the second was awakened by necessity; and the third he acquired by experience in the field of glory and danger, which extended his fame through half the globe.<sup>901</sup>

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<sup>901</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 128-129.

As the war unfolded, Washington displayed “cool equanimity.”<sup>902</sup> He was “perspicuous and decisive.”<sup>903</sup> He administered justice during the war. As the war ended, Warren notes: “the renowned WASHINGTON, without arrogating any undue power to himself, which success and popularity offered, and which might have swayed many more designing and interested men, to have gratified their own ambition at the expense of the liberties of America, finished his career of military glory, with decided magnanimity, unimpeached integrity, and the most judicious steps to promote the tranquillity of his country.”<sup>904</sup> As general of the colonial troops, he had earned glory, victory, and “the confidence of the people, the applause of the country, the love of the army, the esteem of foreigners, and the warm friendship and respect”<sup>905</sup> of France. Only in Washington’s hands was the new republic able to overcome “old prejudices in favour of monarchy”<sup>906</sup> that threatened to convert the office of president to a monarchy. In her final assessment, Warren acknowledges Washington’s character as reflecting two important threads of thought: classical virtue and Christian virtue: “The commander of the armies of the United States, has been conducted from the field of war, and from the zenith of civil command, to the delicious retreats of peaceful solitude. We now leave him in the shade of retirement,

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<sup>902</sup> Ibid., 482.

<sup>903</sup> Ibid., 484.

<sup>904</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 636.

<sup>905</sup> Ibid., 636-637.

<sup>906</sup> Ibid., 608.

with fervent wishes that he may wind up the career of human life in that tranquillity which becomes the hero and the Christian.”<sup>907</sup>

Looking back to the catalog of characteristics associated with bourgeois virtue and Christian virtue discussed above, Warren again merges these in her evaluation of Washington’s character: she applauds him for his efforts to “promote the tranquillity of his country,” which reflects the virtue of “tranquility” on Franklin’s list; she mentions his “magnanimity” reflecting the trait of “forgiveness” listed among Warren’s characteristics of Christian virtue; she points to his “integrity,” a trait listed among the characteristics of Christian virtue but also reflected in Franklin’s trait of “sincerity”; Washington’s willingness to willingly give up power reflects the model of Cincinnatus (classical virtue), and humility (characteristic of Christian virtue and among Franklin’s virtues). Finally, Warren’s final assessment of Washington as both a “hero and a Christian” again shows the blending of virtue traditions found in classical republicanism and Christian virtue.

Warren specifically identifies a “triple character”<sup>908</sup> in her assessment of Connecticut Gov. Jonathan Trumbull, Sr. She applauds Trumbull’s exemplary character as “a man, a patriot, and a christian.”<sup>909</sup> Among his traits reflecting classical virtue are the traits of patriotism and excellence in his role as governor, in which “his

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<sup>907</sup> Ibid., 674-675.

<sup>908</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 409.

<sup>909</sup> Ibid.

abilities were conspicuous, his comprehension clear, and his judgment correct.”<sup>910</sup>

She incorporates as well Trumbull’s characteristics that reflect bourgeois or marketplace virtue. Warren viewed him to be “the friend of a young growing country, whose manufactures had been checked, her commerce cramped, and their liberties ... curtailed.”<sup>911</sup> Warren’s assessment of Trumbull’s character reflects what she identifies as Christian virtue: “[H]is integrity and uprightness, his benevolence and piety, and the purity of simplicity of his manners, through a long life, approached as near the example of the primitive patterns of a sublime religion, as that of any one raised to eminence of office, who, by the flatteries of their fellow-men, are too often led to forget themselves, their country, and their God.”<sup>912</sup> But that list contains terms that overlap with the characteristics of other threads of virtue: simplicity is one of Franklin’s virtues and can be seen as reflecting Spartan virtue. That Trumbull was immune to the flattery of other men demonstrates the considerable virtue needed to resist the corruption that often attends power and privilege. As the only colonial governor to join the Revolutionary cause, Trumbull demonstrated patriotism and courage. In Warren’s assessment, Trumbull’s virtue was impeccable, because “in no instance did he ever deviate from the principles of the revolution.”<sup>913</sup> Those who are unable to meet the public standard of virtue are painted in less glowing terms. Her appraisal of the character of Gov. Thomas Hutchinson provides a stark contrast to the

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<sup>910</sup> Ibid.

<sup>911</sup> Ibid.

<sup>912</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 409.

<sup>913</sup> Ibid.



virtue exemplified by George Washington. Warren's understanding of history underscores the temptation of those in power to accumulate wealth, power, privilege, and position, at the expense of liberty:

It is neither a preference to republican systems, nor an attachment to monarchic or aristocratic forms of government that disseminates the wild opinions of infidelity. It is the licentious manners of courts of every description, the unbridled luxury of wealth, and the worst of passions of men let loose on the multitude by the example of their superiors. Bent on gratification, at the expense of every moral tie, they have broken down the barriers of religion, and the spirit of infidelity is nourished at the [412] fount; thence, the poisonous streams run through every grade that constitutes the mass of nations.<sup>914</sup>

History provided models of virtue (or lack of virtue). A virtuous people would elect virtuous leaders, who in turn would model virtue in their public role. The example of ancient Rome again provides for Warren a powerful illustration of virtue as an ordering principle. While under virtuous leaders, the citizens of the Roman republic remained free and stable. But self-interested, vicious leaders promoted corruption, disorder, and the eventual demise of republican government. The republic faltered as the people strayed from traditional practices of religion, and corrupt leaders arose. The erosion of religion sets in motion a vortex of degeneration. One of the first steps in the decline of the Roman republic, from Warren's point of view, was the erosion of

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<sup>914</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 685.

established religious foundations and practices and specifically an erosion of virtue. Once religious order was challenged, corruption spread. The rise of the corrupt emperor Caligula and those around him resulted from a perversion of religion. Pointing to the example of the fall of Athens, Warren noted the important lessons: Athens “was corrupted by in the influx of wealth, the influence of aristocratic nobles, and the annihilation of every principle connected with religion.”<sup>915</sup> Only after the annihilation of religious principle could a corrupt leader like Caligula rise to power: “It was then that Caligula set up his horse to be worshipped, as a burlesque on religion, and the sycophants of the court encouraged every caprice of their emperor. The people did not become so universally corrupt as to throw off all regard for religion, and all homage to the deities of their ancestors, until the libidinous conduct of their august sovereigns, and the nobles of the court, set the example.”<sup>916</sup>

The corruption of Caligula provides an example of what happens when virtue is extinguished – both in republican leaders and citizens. Virtue serves as an informal check on the behavior of republican leaders and citizens alike, thus helping to maintain the foundation of republican order. In the face of such corruption, Warren points also to the virtue exemplified in the values of the Revolutionary generation, and she argues that “The principles of the revolution ought ever to be the pole-star of

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<sup>915</sup> Ibid., 680.

<sup>916</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 681.

the statesman, respected by the rising generation; and the advantages [432] bestowed by Providence should never be lost, by negligence, indiscretion, or guilt.”<sup>917</sup>

Just as her brother James Otis Jr. and George Washington exemplify republican virtue, Massachusetts Royal Gov. Thomas Hutchinson is for her the personification of vice – ambitious, rapacious, reptilian, and wickedly deceptive. As Hutchinson biographer Bernard Bailyn noted: “Mercy Otis Warren in her history of the Revolution devoted page after page to the pernicious influence of that ‘dark, intriguing, insinuating, haughty, and ambitious man’ – so diligent a student of ‘the intricacies of *Machiavelian* policy,’ so subtle a solicitor of popular support, so hypocritical in his sanctity and ruthless in his lust for power – and to the fatal consequences of ‘his pernicious administration.’”<sup>918</sup> Hutchinson provided a stark contrast to her paragons of American virtue. In her Revolutionary plays, Hutchinson was portrayed as the rapacious villain, the artful basilisk who could kill with the glance of his eye. He duplicitously sought his own aggrandizement at the expense of the liberty of those he was sent by the King to govern. His administration was “pernicious”<sup>919</sup> and his character marked by “shameless duplicity.”<sup>920</sup> Hutchinson

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<sup>917</sup> Ibid., 696.

<sup>918</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: 1974), 3.

<sup>919</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 45.

<sup>920</sup> Ibid., 47.

was an “Arch Traitor”<sup>921</sup> of the colonies, who “renounced the *quondam* ideas of public virtue, and sacrificed all principle of that nature on the altar of ambition.”<sup>922</sup>

Hutchinson clearly is first among scoundrels in Warren’s assessment, but he is not alone in his lack of virtue. Gen. Benedict Arnold “deserted the America cause,” but in Warren’s estimation he “was a man without principle from the beginning.”<sup>923</sup> “He had sunk a character raised by impetuous valor, and some occasional strokes of bravery, attended by success, without being the possessor of any intrinsic merit.”<sup>924</sup> Arnold had “accumulated a fortune by great crimes and squandered it without reputation.”<sup>925</sup> “[H]is conduct had been remarkably reprehensible,” and “his rapacity had no bounds.”<sup>926</sup> Arnold “had a heart base enough treacherously to betray his military trust.”<sup>927</sup> He “deserted the American cause, sold himself to the enemies of his country, and engaged in their service.”<sup>928</sup> As history attests, Arnold obviously lacked the virtue necessary to his military office and demanded by the republic.

Warren offered an unfavorable character assessment of John Adams following his tenure as ambassador to England during the Washington Administration.

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<sup>921</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act II, Scene 1.

<sup>922</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 45.

<sup>923</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

<sup>924</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 400.

<sup>925</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 400.

<sup>926</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>927</sup> *Ibid.*, 401.

<sup>928</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

Warren's contention was that during Adams's four years in England "a partiality for monarchy appeared, which was inconsistent with his former professions of republicanism. Time and circumstances often lead so imperfect a creature as man to view the same thing in a very different point of light."<sup>929</sup> After returning from England, Adams "was implicated by a large portion of his countrymen, as having relinquished the republican system, and forgotten the principles of the American Revolution, which he had advocated for near twenty years."<sup>930</sup> Warren attributes Adams's "lapse from former republican principles" to "pride of talents and much ambition" that combined with "his prejudices and his passions [that] were sometimes too strong for his sagacity and judgment."<sup>931</sup> Warren's sharp commentary on Adams's character led to a heated exchange of letters and a seven-year breach in their friendship.

Warren's *History* offers harsh assessments of the excesses of British soldiers during the war. For example, Warren recorded British Lt. Colonel Banastre Tarleton's military exploits to be marked by "violence and cruel vigilance."<sup>932</sup> Tarleton was "equally conspicuous for bravery and barbarity," boasting that he had "killed more men, and ravished more women, than any man in America."<sup>933</sup> She noted that British

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<sup>929</sup> Ibid, 675.

<sup>930</sup> Ibid.

<sup>931</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 676.

<sup>932</sup> Ibid., 460.

<sup>933</sup> Ibid.

Gen. G. J. Simcoe's "ferocity and cruelty" equaled Tarleton's.<sup>934</sup> In Warren's assessment, to be truly virtuous a soldier must reflect patriotism and military valor tempered by humanity. "The courage which is accompanied by humanity, is a virtue; but bravery that pushes through all dangers to destroy, is barbarous, is savage, is brutal."<sup>935</sup> Warren also singles out British excesses, guided by cruelty rather than humanity. She points to the murder of "the amiable and virtuous wife"<sup>936</sup> and family of Rev. Caldwell in Elizabeth, Conn. According to Warren, this was an example of "barbarity and ferocious cruelty," "when a British barbarian pointed his musquet into the window of her room, and instantly shot her through the lungs" and "the house of this excellent lady set on fire."<sup>937</sup> Warren's view of military virtue combines classical virtue and Christian virtue, with which she associates the trait of humanity.

Warren identifies two mechanisms for republican virtue. As the preceding character sketches above exemplify, one mechanism for republican virtue is the example provided by virtuous leaders to teach and encourage the people to act virtuously. Writing as a "Columbian Patriot" she reminds her audience, "Every age has its Bruti and its Decci, as well as its Ceasars and Sejani."<sup>938</sup> She points to the importance of virtuous role models in *Observations*: "The happiness of mankind

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<sup>934</sup> Ibid., 324; 634.

<sup>935</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>936</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>937</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 328.

<sup>938</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 135.

depend much on the modes of government, and the virtues of the governors; and America may yet produce characters who have genius and capacity sufficient to form the manners and correct the morals of the people, and virtue enough to lead their country to freedom.”<sup>939</sup>

A second mechanism for obtaining virtue is in training and habituation, especially through the character education of children. She frequently points to the importance of “the cultivation of the mental faculties or strengthening the habits of virtue in the mind.”<sup>940</sup> Much of the responsibility for inculcating virtue in future generations falls to parents. “Fraternal love in every bosom burns; / Each virtue planted in the youthful breast, / The parents smile, in future prospects blest.”<sup>941</sup> By contrast, parents who fail to teach the lessons of virtue properly reap the consequences, creating citizens who are incapable of sustaining the republic. Clearly she is concerned about whether the requisite virtue is being taught to the next generation:

The early creed of lisping girls and boys,  
Is taste, high life, and pleasure’s guilty joys;  
The modish stile the heedless parent taught,  
And sins run rank, from levity of thought;  
Ere the big cloud that shook the north retires,

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<sup>939</sup> Ibid.

<sup>940</sup> Warren to James Warren, Jr., June 1776, in *Selected Letters*, 76.

<sup>941</sup> Warren, “To a Young Gentleman, residing in France,” in *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, 221.

Each generous movement of the soul expires;  
All public faith, and private justice dead,  
And patriot zeal by patriots betray'd;  
While hot bed plants of yesterday shoot up,  
Erect their heads, and reach the cedar's top.<sup>942</sup>

In her many letters to her sons, she reminds them of the early lessons of virtue taught to them when they were young. As they matured, she offered ongoing application of those early lessons – and reminded them of the consequences of abandoning that legacy of virtue she and her husband had instilled in each of them. She took seriously her motherly responsibility to teach republican virtue to her own children. Even as they reached adulthood, she continued to remind her children of those early lessons of virtue. She wrote to her son James as he began his studies away from home: “[M]ay you be more and more careful as you advance to maturity, to improve the passing moments, to ripen your judgment, and mature the principles of virtue, which I hope are implanted deep in your breast.”<sup>943</sup> She reminds him as well of the temptations of life and the need to continually practice the habit of virtue: “Think then my son, whither all your steps tend;--and let not the frequency of ill examples, the clamour of unruly passions, nor the persuasive arguments of evil tongues contaminate your morals. Often reflect on the superior pleasure you will enjoy, if when you have finished your studies, you can look inward and feel no remorse for any criminal

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<sup>942</sup> Warren, “The Genius of America,” 249.

<sup>943</sup> Warren to James Warren, Jr., July 1773, in *Selected Letters*, 18.



action, and outward with a hopeful prospect of advantage to yourself and usefulness to others from an unblemished character and the testimony of a good conscience.”<sup>944</sup> She returned to the theme of virtue many times in letters to her sons. She wrote of virtue and her family in a letter to her husband, who was away during the early years of the war. “I have Endeavored unweariedly [sic] to Implant the purest principles of Morality & Virtue in the Minds of my Children but Heaven alone must Mature the seed & make it productive of such Fruits as we Wish to see in our sons.”<sup>945</sup>

Warren occasionally offered advice to younger women regarding childrearing again focusing on the need to train children in virtue. She wrote to Sarah Gray Cary, a young mother who was busy with “the pleasing occupation of rearing and instructing a young family and endeavoring to make them useful when she must cease to speak to them, but by their recollection of her virtuous example.” She encouraged her young friend, “[G]o on my dear madam in the charming work of instiling those principles of virtue that may deter the youthful circle from slippery paths of vice or the dangerous errors of opinion.”<sup>946</sup> Warren’s emphasis on virtue training is characteristic of the ideal of “republican motherhood” identified among colonial women in the writings of Linda K. Kerber.<sup>947</sup> As she reminded her young friend Mrs. Cary, the early lessons

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<sup>944</sup> Ibid.

<sup>945</sup> Warren to James Warren, [Dec. 30, 1777], in *Selected Letters*, 99.

<sup>946</sup> Warren to Sarah Gray Cary, Aug. 23, 1800, in *Selected Letters*, 249. Misspelling in original.

<sup>947</sup> The role of the “republican mother” to train children in the virtue necessary to republican citizenship was first identified by Linda K. Kerber in “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment – An American Perspective,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer, 1976), 187-205. Her concept of

of virtue “may sometimes lie dormant in the whirl of business or passion—but I am persuaded they are never lost. They return to the aid of our children in all their afflictions and support them in the hour of Death—a rich reward for the most laborious exertions of maternal tenderness.”<sup>948</sup> Virtue had to be learned and practiced, or it could be easily lost. In *The Adulateur*, Rapatio’s minion Limput laments his loss of virtue: In youth when all my soul was full of virtue, / And growing age had not matured my practice, / I felt a pang and shuddered at a crime. / But thoughts like these have long since slept; old habits / Have seared my conscience -- Vice is now familiar.”<sup>949</sup>

Ultimately, future generations must look to the virtue of the Revolutionary generation if they are to preserve and perpetuate the new republic: “The principles of the revolution ought ever to be the pole-star of the statesman, respected by the rising generation; and the advantages [432] bestowed by Providence should never be lost, by negligence, indiscretion, or guilt.”<sup>950</sup> As the character sketches of Otis and Washington demonstrate, those leaders most reflective of true republican virtue embody the three threads found in Warren’s concept of virtue.

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“republican motherhood” is further developed in *Women in the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

<sup>948</sup> Warren to Sarah Gray Cary, Aug. 23, 1800, in *Selected Letters*, 249.

<sup>949</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act II, Scene 4.

<sup>950</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 31.

## CHAPTER 8

### Virtue as an Ordering Principle

*Emancipated from a foreign yoke, the blessings of peace just restored upon honorable terms, with the liberty of forming our own governments, framing our own laws, choosing our own magistrates, and adopting manners the most favourable to freedom and happiness, yet sorry I am to say I fear we have not virtue sufficient to avail ourselves of these superior advantages.*

Mercy Otis Warren to John Adams, December 1786<sup>951</sup>

A decade after the outbreak of the Revolutionary War and a year before the new constitution would be drafted, Warren expressed doubts whether the American people had “virtue sufficient” to support and maintain the new republican government. She was not alone in her doubts about the enduring success of the fledgling republic. At the close of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, Benjamin

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<sup>951</sup> Warren to John Adams, December 1786, in *Selected Letters*, 210.

Franklin was asked by a woman standing outside the convention hall, “What have you given us, Dr. Franklin?” “A republic,” Franklin replied, “if you can keep it.”<sup>952</sup> Warren reported in her *History* that as Washington signed the new constitution, he remarked that “it was an experiment on which the destiny of the republican model of government was staked.”<sup>953</sup> Many in Warren’s generation shared the view that republics were fragile and prone to degeneration and death. Virtue reflected for Warren an essential means of preserving order in this context of republican cycles, the movement from order to disorder, and in republican terms, from energetic republican government to degeneration. Well-versed in the historical lessons of the demise of ancient republics, American republican thinkers knew that corruption from within posed a very real threat to even a well-framed government with the best of laws. Law, in and of itself, is insufficient to maintain social and political stability. As French author Alexis de Tocqueville in 1835 warned, “Laws are always unsteady when unsupported by mores; mores are the only tough and durable power in a nation.”<sup>954</sup> Although writing during the American founding era, Warren too identifies the need for an informal ordering principle to support the formal legal structure. This steady support for law, which Tocqueville attributed to “mores,” Warren finds in virtue.

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<sup>952</sup> Terence Ball, “A Republic—If You Can Keep It,” in *Conceptual Change and the Constitution*, 137.

<sup>953</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 663.

<sup>954</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Mayer, trans. by George Lawrence (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2000), 274.

Warren's *History* presents her understanding of American "civil, political, and religious institutions, and the moral and social ties that connect society."<sup>955</sup> In her writings we see the differentiation and sources of order providing the framework for Warren's republican political philosophy. Warren incorporates into her political thought three sources of order: universal order and its attendant laws of nature, which are created by God and known through human reason; formal or legal order found in the U.S. Constitution and man-made, positive law; and informal order, found in virtue. These three forms of order provide for Warren the foundation of republican government and are essential to offsetting its fragility. Understanding the origin and structure of each form of order, and the relationships between these ordering structures, helps explain the preeminence of virtue in her republican vision. Virtue provides an informal ordering principle that operates in two specific ways within Warren's political thought: First, it provides an objective public standard for proper behavior within the republic. Second, it provides an internal guide to proper behavior for each republican citizen within the more formal structures of order. Virtue as an ordering principle both enables the individual citizen to be self-governing in a way that checks vice and benefits the republic, and at the same time it offers a public standard for behavior that reinforces private behavior and the behavior of individuals within their public or civic role within the republic. As a public standard, it provides the basis by which to judge the actions of public officials, such as elected representatives, in their role within the larger political community. We see Warren

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<sup>955</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 31.

implementing this standard as she judges the main figures in her *History*. Likewise, we see her using virtue, based on that universal objective standard, as a guide for individual behavior.

As the epigraph introducing this chapter indicates, the system of formal order embodied in the nation's constitution and laws was not enough to guarantee the success of the new republic. A constitution, laws, and good governmental institutions are maintained through the informal ordering principle of virtue. Warren's Congregational context led her also to see the American republic as rooted in the context of God's eternal or universal order. But her republican framework requires an informal system of order as well – what I call “the ordering principle of virtue” – to serve as an objective standard of public behavior and to act as an internal guide for actions and behavior of individual citizens.

For Warren, these three forms of order undergird liberty and political stability, and offer the promise of an enduring republic. Warren often expressed apprehension about the virtue of the post-Revolutionary generation and the uncertain long-term prospects of the republic. Identifying her inter-related ordering structure helps explain Warren's growing unease about the future of the republic, which deepened as she saw the essential foundations of order threatened. She expressed concern, for example, about the corrosive influence of philosophical skepticism on the religious and moral order of the nation. Warren answered this threat with the familiar call to Christian virtue – as a means of checking the corrosive influence of skepticism and of maintaining the universal order necessary to republican government. Similarly, as she

witnessed the colonial mercantile economy transforming into a booming capitalist economy, threatening to radically re-order economic relations and colonial society, her warnings against luxury and avarice increased. Her response was to issue a call for bourgeois or marketplace virtue, as a means of checking the corrosive influence of economic vice, but also to maintain the existing economic and social order of the republic. Even after the formal order of the Constitution and the laws of the nation were established, these corrupting influences still threatened the other forms of order essential to her republican vision. As the pace of change increased, as challenges to the existing order intensified, Warren sought to preserve the existing forms of order, all three of which were interconnected and essential to the maintenance and survival of the republican vision.

The formal framework of order, God's universal order, the Constitution, and the laws, were already established. But these in and of themselves were insufficient to the maintenance of republican government. Virtue provides an informal ordering principle as a support to those formal ordering structures. Warren knew from experience, as well as from her study of history, that human beings were susceptible to vice, which could undermine the rule of law and reduce liberty to despotism and tyranny. The existence of formal order – the Constitution, the rule of law, and God's laws – could not curb vice. Individuals and society required guidelines for choosing public and private actions within the formal structure. She had witnessed in the Massachusetts colony the erosion of the British rule of law by ambitious and avaricious men, such as Gov. Thomas Hutchinson and others. The yoke of tyranny

required resistance and revolution. Exercising virtue, then, was necessary to check corruption and to maintain the order essential to republican government. The following will evaluate Warren's view of universal and legal forms of order and then will consider virtue as an informal ordering principle within those two structures.

### Universal Order

For Warren, the fundamental system of order necessary to social and political order was already in place. Hers was a divinely ordered universe, governed by God's laws and the laws of nature which he created. This provides for human beings an overarching eternal order in which to live and flourish. Human beings are born into a world created and ordered by God and continue to be ruled by "the infinitely divine system of his providential government."<sup>956</sup> Warren recognized God as creator and His laws as immutable. God is the source of the laws of nature, which Warren says are "the immediate gift of the Creator."<sup>957</sup> God was also the source of natural law and natural rights. "Self-defence," Warren acknowledges, "is a primary law of nature, which no subsequent law of society can abolish."<sup>958</sup> She further asserts: "[T]his primaeval principle [is] the immediate gift of the Creator."<sup>959</sup> In Warren's understanding of universal order, God created a divine universal government and he

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<sup>956</sup> Warren to Margaret Cary, January 1, 1814, in *Selected Letters*, 254.

<sup>957</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 118.

<sup>958</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>959</sup> *Ibid.*



continues to play an ongoing governing role in the affairs of men. As the Revolutionary War broke out, Warren encouraged others to remember the providence of God, “who rules creation with a glance.”<sup>960</sup> She refers to God in her *History* as “the Supreme Governor of the universe,”<sup>961</sup> the “*Great Governor of the Universe*,”<sup>962</sup> and “the supreme Ruler of the universe.”<sup>963</sup> Acknowledging His continuing governance of human affairs, she writes of God as “the Superintending Power which governs the universe, and whose finger points the rise and fall of empires.”<sup>964</sup> On learning of the death of her brother James Otis Jr., Warren writes a letter of condolence to his daughter, Elizabeth Otis Brown. Although “his great soul was instantly set free ... by a flash of Light’ning,” Warren writes that both she and her niece can be comforted by the confidence that the “Government of Omnipotence is inscrutable, yet the system is perfect.”<sup>965</sup> God, she concludes her letter, is the “sovereign arbiter”<sup>966</sup> of the fate of men.

In Warren’s view, human beings are governed by different types of authority. She wrote to her brother James Otis Jr. after he was violently attacked by a political enemy following a speech to the Massachusetts Assembly: “Thanks to the enering

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<sup>960</sup> Warren to Dorothy Quincy Hancock, April 1776, in *Selected Letters*, 73.

<sup>961</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 630.

<sup>962</sup> *Ibid.*, 168 [italics in original].

<sup>963</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>964</sup> Warren to Janet Livingston Montgomery, April 1792, in *Selected Letters*, 235.

<sup>965</sup> Warren to Elizabeth Otis Brown, June 15, 1783, in *Selected Letters*, 172.

<sup>966</sup> *Ibid.*

hand which directs and overrules every event, the blow was not fatal.”<sup>967</sup> Fearing her brother’s perception that the attack impugned his honor, Warren admonished him against resorting to a duel with his attacker. “Whatever may have been said of the laws of honour, false honour indeed—I am certain that the law of reason and the laws of God as well as man strictly forbid the practice of dueling.”<sup>968</sup> Along with her embrace of a universe created and ordered by God, this passage in her personal correspondence indicates an understanding of different types of law, including the laws of God, natural laws discovered through reason, and those created by man (positive law). A similar differentiation of law is made by her brother James: “The law of nature was not of man’s making, nor is it in his power to mend or alter its course. He can only perform and keep or disobey and break it. The last is never done with impunity, even in this life, if it is any punishment for a man to feel himself depraved, to find himself degraded by his own folly and wickedness from the rank of a virtuous and good *man* to that of a brute, or to be transformed from the friend, perhaps father, of his country to a devouring lion or tiger.”<sup>969</sup>

Sandoz suggests such differentiation and hierarchy of law is characteristic of colonial thinking leading up to the Revolution. According to Sandoz, the passage in Otis’s *Rights of the British Colonies* (1764) reflected a common colonial understanding of the differing obligations of man. When considering Otis’s passage

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<sup>967</sup> Warren to James Otis, Jr., Sept. 10, 1769, in *Selected Letters*, 4.

<sup>968</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>969</sup> James Otis, *Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* (Boston, 1764), quoted in Ellis Sandoz, *Republicanism, Religion, and the Soul of America* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 59-60.

specifically Sandoz writes: “What comes to view ... is the Great Chain or hierarchy of being with man’s place in it an intermediary one between God and brute, obliged to obey natural and divine law, to be obedient to human authority as divinely ordained unless to do so violates God’s law, in which circumstance at least passive resistance is demanded if not an appeal to heaven that may end in the deposition of the tyrant.”<sup>970</sup> Warren’s view of the law reflects a similar understanding of the types of law ordering human life. Her writing is filled with references to God’s omnipotent government, natural law created by God and knowable by man through reason, and human or positive law.

Considering the political and religious context in Massachusetts, it is scarcely surprising that Warren based her understanding of natural law on a belief in God and universal order. Colonial thinking represented a union of the temporal and spiritual communities. Warren’s Massachusetts had a long tradition blending secular and religious thought, including annual Election Day Sermons, which began in 1634 and ended in 1884, and spanned Warren’s lifetime. In these public sermons, leading ministers would address the politics of the day within the context of Congregational teaching and tradition. Historian Perry Miller called the election sermon “the most important single form of publication concerned with the theory of society.”<sup>971</sup>

Themes of natural law and natural rights are developed in Congregational election

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<sup>970</sup> Sandoz, *Republicanism, Religion, and the Soul of America*, 60.

<sup>971</sup> Miller quoted in *The Wall and the Garden: Selected Massachusetts Election Sermons from 1670-1775*, ed. A.W. Plumstead (Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1968), 14.

sermons in the years leading up to the Revolution. Warren was well-read, religiously devout, and politically connected; such sermons likely informed her views.

In the Puritan political tradition, all social and political order is rooted in the providential order of God. John Winthrop, one of the earliest Massachusetts political thinkers and Massachusetts' Bay first colonial governor in 1629, set forth the Puritan tradition of social and political order founded on the belief in God. What might seem more surprising to contemporary readers, Winthrop connected providential thought to compact theory. Winthrop's writing rings with themes typically associated with the social contract theory of John Locke.<sup>972</sup> Winthrop wrote in a later letter: "it is clearly agreed, by all, that the care of safety and welfare was the original cause or occasion of common weales and of many familys subjecting themselves to rulers and laws; for no man hath lawfull power over another, but by birth or consent."<sup>973</sup> Winthrop denounced democracy as "the meanest and worst of all formes of Government"<sup>974</sup> and expressed a preference for a "mixt Aristocracie."<sup>975</sup> In this formulation, Winthrop defended inherited rule, but significant in this passage was his recognition of consent as a second means of legitimizing authority. Colonial republicans later would reject inherited rule in favor of consent as the foundation of republican government.

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<sup>972</sup> John Locke (1632-1707) was not a direct influence on Winthrop (1588-1649), but both drew upon Calvinist teachings and resistance writings.

<sup>973</sup> John Winthrop, *Life and Letters of John Winthrop: from the embarkation for New England in 1630, with the Charter and Company of the Massachusetts Bay, to His Death in 1649*, Vol. II, ed. Robert Charles Winthrop (Boston, MA: Ticknor and Fields, 1867), 182.

<sup>974</sup> *Ibid.*, 430.

<sup>975</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

Winthrop famously invoked providential or millennial themes when addressing the Puritans first arriving to the Massachusetts's colony on the *Arabella* in 1629, when he reminded them that they are “a City on a Hill.”<sup>976</sup> Finally, Winthrop draws an important distinction between natural and civil liberty, which further connected it to the role of civil authority: “There is a twofold liberty, natural ... and civil or federal. The first is common to man with beasts and other creatures. This is that great enemy of truth and peace ... which all the ordinances of God are bent against ... [Civil liberty] is the proper end and object of authority, and cannot subsist without it; and it is a liberty to that only which is good, just, and honest. ... This liberty is maintained and exercised in a way of subjection to authority.”<sup>977</sup> Despite differences in the concept of liberty and binding obligations of community and religion, his writings demonstrate that within Puritan thought can be found an early contract view of government, a view that would be commonly held among eighteenth-century American political thinkers including Warren.<sup>978</sup>

Providential themes animated religious and political thought in Massachusetts from its colonial beginning. In an election sermon in 1676, for example, the Reverend William Hubbard told his audience that “It suited the wisdom of the infinite and

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<sup>976</sup> Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity,” in *The Journal of John Winthrop, 1630-1649*, ed. James Savage, Richard Dunn, and Latitia Yaendle (Boston, MA: President and Fellows of Harvard College and The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1996), 10.

<sup>977</sup> Winthrop, “Governor Winthrop’s Speech,” [also known as “A Little Speech”] in *Life and Letters of John Winthrop*, 340-31.

<sup>978</sup> Stanley Gray, “The Political Thought of John Winthrop,” *The New England Quarterly* 3, No. 4, (1930), 683.

omnipotent Creator to make the world of differing parts, which necessarily supposes that there must be differing places for those differing things to be disposed into, which is order.”<sup>979</sup> Flowing from the principle of *sola Scriptura* introduced by Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, in the early Puritan churches there was a system of checks and balances that placed God’s truth at the center of their experience. Members of a congregation “promised to sacrifice their own will and obey the teachings of their spiritual superiors as long as these were compatible with Scripture.”<sup>980</sup> Individual members were responsible for understanding the teachings of Scripture “to make sure their ministers held true to Biblical doctrines.”<sup>981</sup> Although the force of individual responsibility would vary over the course of Puritan history, the principle that civil laws must conform to God’s laws was outlined in Winthrop’s writings, and the early Puritan church believed church government should be consistent with Scripture.<sup>982</sup> Secular laws, too, were to be similarly scrutinized in light of the laws of God. This emphasis on the authority of Scripture and its connection to civil authority would resurface within a broader tradition of self-governance in the early 1700s. Congregational minister John Wise, for example, argued in a 1717 essay “Democracy is Founded in Scripture,” in favor of a

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<sup>979</sup> Plumstead, *Wall and the Garden*, 20.

<sup>980</sup> Stout, *The New England Soul*, 19.

<sup>981</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>982</sup> See Gray, “The Political Thought of John Winthrop,” 696.

democratic mode of church government.<sup>983</sup> Puritans often coupled this democratic theme with recognizable republican principles. Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* (1835) remarked on the dual democratic-republican character of the young nation and attributed it to its Puritan heritage:

The Americans had the chances of birth in their favor; and their forefathers imported that equality of condition and of intellect into the country whence the democratic republic has very naturally taken its rise. Nor was this all; for besides this republican condition of society, the early settlers bequeathed to their descendants the customs, manners, and opinions that contribute most to the success of a republic. When I reflect upon the consequences of this primary fact, I think I see the destiny of America embodied in the first Puritan who landed on those shores, just as the whole human race was represented by the first man.<sup>984</sup>

In the politically charged environment of the early 1770s, arguments about natural law and natural rights began to fill colonial newspapers and pamphlets. This shift was reflected in the tone and content of Massachusetts Election Day Sermons. A representative example of colonial blending of secular and religious is Samuel Cooke's 1770 Election Day Sermon.<sup>985</sup> Massachusetts was the epicenter of conflict between colonial and British rule. Although a woman and unable to vote in colonial

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<sup>983</sup> John Wise, "Democracy is Founded in Scripture (1717)," in *American Political Thought*, ed. Kenneth M. Dolbeare and Michael S. Cummings (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2004), 18-23.

<sup>984</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 290.

<sup>985</sup> Samuel Cooke, "Massachusetts Election Day Sermon May 30, 1770," in *The Wall and the Garden*, 326-346.

elections, Warren was 42 years old, living in Plymouth, and deeply embroiled in Massachusetts Revolutionary politics. The Committees of Correspondence would be formed in her home two years later. Her husband, James Warren Jr., in 1770 had served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives for five years, and likely sat in the audience as Cooke delivered the sermon. Warren remained closely connected to colonial politics as her husband in 1775 succeeded Dr. Joseph Warren (no relation) as president of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, the highest position in the revolutionary government.

Cooke's sermon reflected a merging of political thought and religious teaching and bears a strong similarity to what we see in Warren's political writings. Echoing Lockean social contract theory, Cooke described the need for government that arises in the state of nature: "The laws of nature, though enforced by divine Revelation, which bind the conscience of the upright, prove insufficient to restrain the sons of violence who have not the fear of God before their eyes."<sup>986</sup> Inadequate and uneven enforcement of the laws of nature poses a threat to safety and "to their social being"<sup>987</sup> and must be remedied through government authority determined by the members of the society. "The people, the collective body only, have a right under God to determine who shall exercise this trust for the common interest, and to fix the bounds of their authority."<sup>988</sup> Cooke further insisted that "Justice requires of all rulers

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<sup>986</sup> Cooke, "Massachusetts Election Day Sermon May 30, 1770," 328.

<sup>987</sup> Ibid.

<sup>988</sup> Ibid.



in their legislative capacity that they attend to the operation of their own acts and repeal whatever laws, upon an impartial review, they find to be inconsistent with the laws of God, the rights of men, and the general benefit of society.”<sup>989</sup> Resonating with the themes in Warren’s view of God’s universal order, Cooke argues that “The religion of Jesus teacheth the true fear of God and marvelously discloseth the plan of divine government.”<sup>990</sup> The political leader of good character “fixes his dependence upon the aid of the Almighty, in whose fear he rules. How excellent in the sight of God and man are rulers of this character!”<sup>991</sup> Turning to the experience of the Massachusetts colonists, Cooke noted: “They left their native land with the strong assurances that they and their posterity should enjoy the privileges of free, natural-born English subjects, which they supposed fully comprehended in their Charter. The powers of the government therein confirmed to them they considered as including English liberty in its full extent.”<sup>992</sup> This Charter guaranteed to the colonists not only the privileges, but also to the “rights and liberties of free, natural-born English subjects.”<sup>993</sup> As Cooke stressed, “The New England Charter was not considered as an act of grace, but a compact between the Sovereign and the first patentees.”<sup>994</sup> The

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<sup>989</sup> Ibid., 333.

<sup>990</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>991</sup> Cooke, “Massachusetts Election Day Sermon May 30, 1770,” 337.

<sup>992</sup> Ibid., 338.

<sup>993</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>994</sup> Ibid.

colonists' growing dissatisfaction with British rule was based on what they saw as flagrant violations of the claims "founded in nature—in compact—in their rights as men—and British subjects."<sup>995</sup>

Charles Turner's election sermon three years later similarly "concentrated on arguments from argued natural law and the English constitution that all 'Americans' shared."<sup>996</sup> Turner argued that "it is incumbent on the people ... to fix on certain regulations, which if we please we may call a *constitution*, as the standard measure of the proceedings of government."<sup>997</sup> The 1775 Election Day sermon delivered by Harvard President Samuel Langdon restated the themes of natural law, natural rights, and the connection between civil and religious authority, but it also directly challenged the tyranny of British rule. Speaking with the authority of the pulpit, Langdon argued: "We have lived to see the time when British liberty is just ready to expire; when that constitution of government which has so long been the glory and strength of the English nation is deeply undermined and ready to tumble into ruins; when America is threatened with cruel oppression, and the arm of power is stretched out against New England, and especially this Colony, to compel us to submit to the arbitrary acts of legislators who are not our representatives."<sup>998</sup> Langdon insisted that British royal authority was being administered by men "whose principles are

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<sup>995</sup> Ibid., 345.

<sup>996</sup> Stout, *New England Soul*, 279.

<sup>997</sup> Stout, *New England Soul*, 279.

<sup>998</sup> Samuel Langdon, "Massachusetts Election Sermon of 1775," in *The Wall and the Garden*, 358.

subversive of our liberties.”<sup>999</sup> After highlighting British acts of oppression and tyranny, Langdon issued a jeremiad, calling on colonists to repent of vice and sin in order to restore the “great blessings to the people by whom you are constituted, to New England, and all the united colonies.”<sup>1000</sup> As he closed his sermon, Langdon invoked what would be to his colonial audience familiar millennial themes and renewed promises of God’s faithfulness: “May the Lord hear us in this day of trouble and the name of the God of Jacob defend us; send us help from his sanctuary; and strengthen us out of Zion. We will rejoice in his salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners; let us look to him to fulfill all our petitions.”<sup>1001</sup>

These sermons illustrate the congruence of Warren’s thought with Puritan political thought. Warren embraced the view that God provided “the divine ordering principle” of the universe and her political thought is based on a “Christian understanding of the Universe.”<sup>1002</sup> This emphasis on God’s universal ordering framework flows from Warren’s personal beliefs and upbringing in the Congregational church, but it permeated much of colonial republican and Revolutionary thought as well. In many ways, this emphasis on a universal, divine source of order reflects the predominant worldview of the early colonial period. Religious thought in general and the Bible in specific were important influences in the thinking and worldview of New England. Sandoz, for example, argues that “Bible

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<sup>999</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1000</sup> Ibid., 371.

<sup>1001</sup> Samuel Langdon, “Massachusetts Election Sermon of 1775,” 373.

<sup>1002</sup> Shirley Robin Letwin, “Hobbes and Christianity,” *Daedalus* 105, No. 1 (Winter, 1976), 3.

reading was ubiquitous in America throughout the period formally identified as ‘the founding.’<sup>1003</sup> Similarly Donald S. Lutz’s empirical analysis of important literary sources during the Revolutionary Era quantifies the influence of a biblical worldview on colonial thinking, and finds that biblical citations account for approximately 34 percent of all quotations in important political writings from 1700 to 1800. References to the bible represented 44 percent of citations found in the Revolutionary writings of the 1770s.<sup>1004</sup> New England Puritan thought was one of the predominant influences in Revolutionary thinking.<sup>1005</sup>

Warren stands firmly in the tradition of New England Puritanism. She frequently points to how “the works of nature and providence proclaim that the great author of the intellectual system designed his creation.”<sup>1006</sup> She speaks of how human beings “silently acquiesce in the designations of Providence and adore the sovereign arbiter of the fates of men.”<sup>1007</sup> Warren remained consistent in those beliefs throughout her lifetime. Less than a year before her death, Warren admitted feeling “very, very deficient in the knowledge of God, and the infinitely divine system of his

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<sup>1003</sup> Sandoz, *Republicanism, Religion, and the Soul of America*, 78.

<sup>1004</sup> Donald S. Lutz, “The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought,” *The American Political Science Review* 78, No. 1 (Mar., 1984), 192.

<sup>1005</sup> For further discussion of the religious colonial context, see Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). Also see: Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967), in which Bailyn lists New England Puritanism as one of the main intellectual influences, along classical republican thought, English Common Law, Enlightenment Rationalism, and the radical Whig tradition. See Bailyn Ch. 2, “Sources and Traditions,” 22-54, especially pages 32-33.

<sup>1006</sup> Warren to Sarah Brown Bowen, April 1775, in *Selected Letters*, 48.

<sup>1007</sup> Warren to Janet Livingston Montgomery, January 20, 1776, in *Selected Letters*, 65.

providential government.” Even in her recognition of finite human intellect and her own limited ability to “fathom the immensity of the Deity,” Warren still acknowledged God’s system of order and the existence of his “providential government.”<sup>1008</sup>

#### Formal Law / Constitutionalism

Central to Warren’s republican thought is the place of formal, written law to safeguard liberty against arbitrary expression of power and tyranny. The Revolutionary generation embraced the maxim that a republic must be “a government of laws, not of men.”<sup>1009</sup> This language permeated colonial republican discourse, from John Adams’s political writings to debates over the proposed constitution. Rather than relying on the arbitrary whims of those in political power, the Revolutionary generation saw laws to be “the sole guardians of right.”<sup>1010</sup> For Warren and her generation, law provided an objective guarantor of liberty. This theme is central to Warren’s political thought. Liberty is threatened by those who “riot on right

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<sup>1008</sup> Warren to Margaret Cary, Jan. 1, 1814, in *Selected Letters*, 254.

<sup>1009</sup> Noah Webster, “An Examination into the leading principles of the Federal Constitution proposed by the late Convention held at Philadelphia, With Answers to principle objections that have been raised against the system. By a citizen.,” in *Pamphlets on the Constitution of the United States, published during its Discussion by the People*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford (Brooklyn, NY: 1888).

<sup>1010</sup> *Ibid.*

/ and trample on the law,”<sup>1011</sup> by those who “mangle law and reason, / And nobly trample on the highest ties,”<sup>1012</sup> as well as by those who “tread on divine and human laws.”<sup>1013</sup> In a letter to her British friend Catherine Macaulay, Warren on the eve of the Revolution defended colonial resistance against the “Vindictive Hand of Lawless power”<sup>1014</sup> of British colonial authorities. Great Britain was “a Mighty Empire (long the dread of distant Nations) tottering to the very foundations,” thus forcing colonists to resist the likelihood of becoming “the slaves of Arbitrary power.”<sup>1015</sup> The rule of law in republican thought provided a bulwark against the threat of tyranny and despotism by establishing an enduring legal framework for non-arbitrary expression of limited, defined political authority.

The most basic form of political order for Warren was that created by a constitution. Republican order was predicated on the creation of a sound constitution as the primary objective source of formal political order. Such constitutionalism characterizes American political thinking generally and Revolutionary republican thought in particular. As constitutional historians note, the American constitutional tradition pre-dates the drafting and ratification of the U.S. Constitution in 1787 and 1788. Important patterns in American constitutionalism are evident in early colonial

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<sup>1011</sup> Warren, *The Defeat*, Act II.

<sup>1012</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act I, Scene 2.

<sup>1013</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act II, Scene 3.

<sup>1014</sup> Warren to Catherine Sawbridge Macaulay, Dec. 29, 1774, in *Selected Letters*, 37.

<sup>1015</sup> Warren to Catherine Sawbridge Macaulay, Dec. 29, 1774, in *Selected Letters*, 39.

charters dating back to the Mayflower Compact of 1620. Donald S. Lutz traces the origins of American constitutionalism to “the covenant tradition of the Old Testament.”<sup>1016</sup> As colonial political leaders sought to establish formal systems of political order, Lutz argues that “a close reading” of the Bible provided them with “an effective method for establishing communities.”<sup>1017</sup> According to Lutz, “[T]he American constitutional tradition will be found to have derived much of its form and content from the Judeo-Christian tradition as interpreted by the dissenting Protestant sects that made up such a high percentage of the original European settlers in British North America.”<sup>1018</sup> The development of colonial government from covenant to political compact from 1620 through the early 1700s was heavily influenced by Judeo-Christian covenant tradition and in Massachusetts by the Puritan religious context. Lutz argued that it was but a short step from early covenant thought to political compact, requiring “only the secularization of the covenant through the introduction of popular sovereignty in the place of God.”<sup>1019</sup>

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<sup>1016</sup> Donald S. Lutz, “Religious Dimensions in the Development of American Constitutionalism,” *Emory Law Journal*, 39, No. 21 (1990), 22.

<sup>1017</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

<sup>1018</sup> Lutz, “Religious Dimensions in the Development of American Constitutionalism,” 23.

<sup>1019</sup> *Ibid.*, 28. Alison L. LaCroix makes a similar argument in *Ideological Origins of American Federalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). LaCroix ties American Constitutionalism and specifically the doctrine of federalism to four ideological traditions: to the early Anglo-American constitutional debates dating back to the English Act in Restraint of Appeals of 1533; to the continental political theory as far back as Roman thinkers Cicero and Plutarch; to the later experiments of colonial union, beginning with the New England Confederation of 1643; and the Scottish and Irish examples under the consolidation of the British Crown at the turn of the eighteenth century.

Similarly, the theory of the social contract “translated into secular terms the Puritan idea of the social covenant.”<sup>1020</sup> Lutz argues that although reflective of social contract theory, the early American covenantal tradition that was at its height in 1645 was not directly influenced by the social contract thinking of John Locke, whose influential *Two Treatises on Government* would not be published until 1690, well after most colonial charters had been established. (Lutz points out that Locke would have been only nine years old when most colonies were drafting their governing covenantal agreements). In John Winthrop’s writings we see pre-Lockean suggestions of contract theory. Locke was influential, however, in the formulation of the colonial justification for revolution, the content of later state constitutions, the drafting of the Declaration of Independence, and the writing of the U.S. Constitution in 1787. Lutz’s examination of important sources in the revolutionary period finds Locke cited most by colonial writers during the 1760s, but surpassed by citations of Montesquieu and Blackstone from the 1770s through 1805. Rather, the Bible consistently was the most quoted written work of every decade from 1760 to 1800.<sup>1021</sup> True to her Puritan and colonial lineage, Warren’s constitutionalism reflects the covenantal thought of the early Puritans, the social contract theory of Locke, and the constitutional thought as developed by the English Whigs, the European Enlightenment, Scottish

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<sup>1020</sup> Alan S. Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind, from the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 241.

<sup>1021</sup> Lutz, “The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought,” 194.



Enlightenment, and English Common law and applied throughout the early American colonial experience

A recurring theme in the Puritan political tradition was that of covenant. Early church charters invariably reflected “the appropriation of the biblical covenant idea by the dissenting Protestants and the centrality of religion to their lives.”<sup>1022</sup> This form of church government was seen throughout New England and other early colonial settlements, and it was also the form that colonists chose when forming their political charters. This covenantal theme is found in Warren’s political thought as well. She recognizes the importance of covenants in the early history of the Massachusetts Colony, particularly with the establishment of the Mayflower Compact in 1620. The fallen nature of man required the creation of a formal governing structure bound by a written constitution and the rule of law. Warren notes that the first Plymouth settlers arrived in “a forlorn wilderness, without any governmental restrictions.” To address the need for formal political and social order, Warren notes that the Mayflower Compact “laid the stable foundations of those extensive settlements”<sup>1023</sup> that would follow in colonial America. Establishing social and political order took priority and was among the Plymouth settlers’ first actions. As Warren explains, “Though dispirited by innumerable discouraging circumstances, they immediately entered into engagements with each other to form themselves into

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<sup>1022</sup> Lutz, “Religious Dimensions in the Development of American Constitutionalism,” 24.

<sup>1023</sup> Lutz, “Religious Dimensions in the Development of American Constitutionalism,” 24.

regular society, and drew up a covenant, by which they bound themselves to submit to order and subordination.”<sup>1024</sup>

Warren notes further that the survivors of the voyage voluntarily “entered into covenant for [the] necessary purpose” of adopting “some measures for order and subordination.”<sup>1025</sup> She describes the Mayflower Compact as “a short code, but replete with rules of equity and authority, sufficient to maintain peace among themselves, in their infant state.”<sup>1026</sup> The text of the Mayflower Compact made evident the colonists’ understanding of covenantal agreements:

Having undertaken for the Glory of God and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour of our King and Country, a Voyage to plant the first colony in the northern Parts of *Virginia*; Do by these Presents, solemnly and mutually, in the Presence of God and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil Body Politick, for our better ordering and Preservation ... And by Virtue hereof, do enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions, and Officers, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general Good of the Colony; unto which we promise all due Submission and Obedience.<sup>1027</sup>

(Mayflower Compact 1620)

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<sup>1024</sup> Warren, “Appendix to the Volume First,” *HAR*, 341.

<sup>1025</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1026</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1027</sup> The Mayflower Compact (1620).

The Mayflower Compact marked the “first explicitly political use of the church covenantal form” and would provide the basis of political covenants and constitutions to follow.<sup>1028</sup> The people voluntary organize into “civil Body Politick” for the purposes of both advancing their faith and of providing a formal governing system. Although the Plymouth settlers left England to escape arbitrary rule and government incursion into their religious freedom, in Warren’s view they were not fleeing England to escape all legal or governmental restrictions. Rather, their first official act was to create a covenant agreeing to form a government by which to order their lives and maintain social and political peace.

Although the earliest colonists established a form of government separate from that of England, they also acknowledged the governing colonial charter they had with England. Explaining the resistance of the colonies to arbitrary power in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War, Warren noted that the colonists recognized a covenantal relationship with England: “Though the operation of this system in its utmost latitude was daily threatened and expected, [145] it made little impression on a people determined to withhold even a tacit consent to any infractions on their charter. They considered the present measures as a breach of a solemn covenant, which at the same time that it subjected them to the authority of the king of England, stipulated to them the equal enjoyment of all the rights and privileges of free and natural born subjects.”<sup>1029</sup> The colonies “wished ardently to keep the way open to a reunion”<sup>1030</sup>

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<sup>1028</sup> Lutz, “The Religious Dimensions in the Development of American Constitutionalism,” 24.

<sup>1029</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 80.

with England, but the “oppressive Hand of power”<sup>1031</sup> abrogated the “sacred sanctions of compact”<sup>1032</sup> between them. Colonists were forced to resist British oppression in order “to preserve inviolate, and to transmit to posterity, the inherent rights of men, conferred on all by the God of nature, and the privileges of Englishmen.”<sup>1033</sup>

Considering her embrace of the covenant-constitutional tradition, it is not surprising that Warren writing in 1805 insisted that “strict adherence” to “the present excellent constitution” was “the best security of the rights and liberties of a country that has bled at every vein, to purchase and transmit them to posterity.”<sup>1034</sup> But a sound constitution was also capable of preserving “the freedom of the people, the virtue of society, and the stability of their commonwealth.”<sup>1035</sup> Despite voicing ardent opposition to many aspects of the new Constitution, even the Antifederalist “Columbian Patriot” saw the necessity of constitutional guarantees to the future health of the republic. Antifederalist sentiment arose from a shared recognition of “the necessity of strong and energetic institutions, and a strict subordination and obedience to law.”<sup>1036</sup> The most stringent opposition arose because of a shared

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<sup>1030</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>1031</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>1032</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>1033</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1034</sup> Ibid., 688.

<sup>1035</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 629.

<sup>1036</sup> Ibid., 658.

concern that “every thing should be clearly defined; they were jealous of each ambiguity in law or government or the smallest circumstance that might have a tendency to curtail the republican system.”<sup>1037</sup> Republican thinkers typically merged early covenantal thought with constitutionalism, and Warren’s emphasis on both is reflective of this pattern.

The Constitution provides the governing framework, but the formal ordering of governing authority does not stop at the Constitution. Non-constitutional legal order in the form of laws must be established as well. Republican theorists emphasize the importance of the rule of law. As John Adams famously described the character of republicanism in his *Thoughts on Government*: “[T]here is no good government but what is republican. That the only valuable part of the British constitution is so; because the very definition of a republic is 'an empire of laws, and not of men.' That, as a republic is the best of governments, so that particular arrangements of the powers of society, or, in other words, that form of government which is best contrived to secure an impartial and exact execution of the laws is the best of republics.”<sup>1038</sup>

Warren’s republicanism recognized the importance of the rule of law, as expressed by Adams and other republican thinkers of her day. Colonial resistance was justified because Parliament had violated the original “sacred compact”<sup>1039</sup> with the colonists. This abrogation was manifest in the many specific laws passed against the

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<sup>1037</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1038</sup> Adams, “Thoughts on Government,” 484.

<sup>1039</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 690.

colonies, as well as the despotic expression of power by royal authorities who had little regard for the rule of law. The colonists had no choice other than to resist or to “submit to mandates of an overbearing minister of state.”<sup>1040</sup> Warren argued that whenever British “prerogative began to stretch its rapacious arm beyond certain bounds, it was an indispensable duty to resist.”<sup>1041</sup> The list of British violations of colonial rights and common law protections was long indeed, the first of which was the Stamp Act of 1765 imposing internal taxes on the American colonies. Other impositions of British authority continued, but Revolutionary fervor reached its peak following the British tax on tea in 1773 and the Boston Port Act of 1774 (also known as the Coercive Acts or the Intolerable Acts), which closed Boston’s port to all commerce as punishment for the Boston Tea Party the previous year. The British official overseeing this rising ferment in the Massachusetts colony was royal Gov. Thomas Hutchinson, appointed to that position in 1770.

For Warren, the epicenter of British corruption in the colonies was Gov. Hutchinson, and his fatal sin was to exercise arbitrary power that undermined the rule of law and threatened the legal protections enjoyed by the colonists as British subjects under earlier British rule. Hutchinson plays the arch-villain in her Revolutionary dramas and the source of arbitrary despotism that necessitated the firmest of patriotic resistance. Warren describes him in her *History* as “dark, intriguing, haughty and

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<sup>1040</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>1041</sup> Ibid.

ambitious, while the extreme of avarice marked each feature of his character.”<sup>1042</sup> On becoming governor Hutchinson “seized the opportunity to undermine the happiness of the people” and “to barter the liberties of his country by the most shameless duplicity.”<sup>1043</sup> Assuming a “more high-handed and haughty tone than his predecessor,”<sup>1044</sup> Gov. Hutchinson established an “arbitrary system”<sup>1045</sup> of rule over the Massachusetts colony and specifically Boston. One of his first acts as the new governor was to establish an “unconstitutional stipend”<sup>1046</sup> for his provision. He refused to consider colonial legal arguments requesting the removal of British soldiers from the capital, and instead placed additional garrisons of troops in Boston. Under his authority, British troops were consistently employed in civil matters and the inhabitants of Boston “had suffered almost every species of insult from the British soldiery”<sup>1047</sup> and citizens endured “their own private wrongs.”<sup>1048</sup> Rather than being ruled according to law, under Gov. Hutchinson “all authority rested on the point of the sword, and the partizans of the crown triumphed for a time in the plenitude of [92] military power.”<sup>1049</sup> Warren takes greatest offense at Gov. Hutchinson’s actions

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<sup>1042</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 45

<sup>1043</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>1044</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1045</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>1046</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>1047</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 52.

<sup>1048</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>1049</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

following the Boston Tea Party, including his complicity in closing the port of Boston and imposing martial law. She also opposed his “frequent dissolution of the general assemblies,” which precluded “all public debate”<sup>1050</sup> of these colonial matters. In large part Warren assigns responsibility for the ultimate breach between the colonies and Great Britain to Gov. Hutchinson, who was “the principal author of the sufferings of the unhappy Bostonians, previous to the convulsions which produced the revolution.”<sup>1051</sup> Just as Parliament broke its “sacred compact”<sup>1052</sup> with the colonies, Hutchinson repeatedly violated the rule of law, leaving the colonists no choice but to resist the tyranny of arbitrary power in the hopes of restoring their rights and their liberty.

Like other republican theorists, Warren was committed to the rule of law. Her reading reflects an emphasis on the law and demonstrates her familiarity with important legal writings and legal thinkers of her day. From these works, Warren conceived of proper constitutional arrangements designed to check arbitrary power and the tendency toward despotism that is all too evident in the history of earlier republics. Like many Revolutionary thinkers, Warren turned to William Blackstone’s authoritative *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-1769) in her writings. Blackstone was the thinker most cited in eighteenth century American political

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<sup>1050</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>1051</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>1052</sup> Ibid., 690.



thought from the 1760s through the early 1800s.<sup>1053</sup> Warren's primary authority for the importance of trial by jury in the newly drafted Constitution was Blackstone and "his excellent commentaries on the Laws of England."<sup>1054</sup> She relies on Blackstone to defend trial by jury as yet another safeguard of liberty: "This mode of trial the learned Judge Blackstone observes, 'has been coeval with the first rudiments of civil government, that property, liberty and life, depend on maintaining in its legal force the constitutional trial by jury.'"<sup>1055</sup>

Her understanding of formal law is demonstrated in her reading,<sup>1056</sup> which includes numerous and varied works on the law: natural law theorist Samuel Pufendorf's writings, including *Of the Law of Nature and Nations* (1729); Allan Ramsay's *Historical Essay on the English Constitution* (1766); John Adams's many works on constitutional thought, including *Dissertation of the Feudal and Canon Law, Novanglus* (1774-5), *Thoughts on Government* (1776), and *Defense of the Constitution of the United States* (1787); Cesare Beccaria's *On Crime and Punishment* (1764); "An Examination of the Constitution of the United States" (1788) by Tench Coxe, Pennsylvania delegate to the Continental Congress; John Dickinson's *Essay on a Frame of Government for Pennsylvania* (1776); William Henry Drayton's *Letters of Freeman* (1774), which denounced the British Townsend Acts as unconstitutional; John Fortescue's *A Learned Commendation of the Politique Laws of*

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<sup>1053</sup> Lutz, "Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century Political Thought," 193.

<sup>1054</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 630.

<sup>1055</sup> Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution*, 123.

<sup>1056</sup> See Cibbarelli, "Libraries of the Mind" and Chapter 2 of this work for Warren's reading in this area.

*England* (1567); Hugo Grotius's *The Law of War and Peace* (1625); *The Law of Nations, Or the Principles of Natural Law* (1758) by Emmerich de Vattel; the collected legal and political writings of her brother, James Otis, including *Vindication of the Rights of the Province of Massachusetts Bay Colony* (1762), *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* (1765), and *A Vindication of the British Colonies* (1765); and others.

Her reading also includes many commentaries and reports on current events: the *British Annual Register*, the *Journals of Congress, Parliamentary Debates* (she refers specifically to editions from 1766 and 1775); and numerous periodicals and newspapers of her day, which would have included important legal and political news. She also read commentaries and pamphlets by leading political and legal figures of her day, including William Pitt's "Speeches in the House of Commons" January 4, 1778 and November 18, 1778; Josiah Quincy's "Observations on the Act of Parliament commonly called the Boston Port Bill" (1774); Joseph Warren's "Oration delivered March 6, 1775, on the Boston Massacre." She also read and cited Radical Whig thinkers John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, John Milton, Lord Bolingbroke, and Algernon Sidney.

Warren's commitment to formal legal order is tied to her view of human nature. Arbitrary power arises from fallen human nature; fallen men are prone to aggrandize power and are driven by ambition and avarice, desiring both power and position. The rule of law provides the essential check on arbitrary power. As the colonial experience proved, tyranny and despotism arise when the basic governmental

compacts and the rule of law are violated. Her primary criticism of Parliament and the appointed colonial royal authorities is the arbitrary exercise of power outside the context of the rule of law. Warren also emphasizes the importance of natural law. Again this emphasis is evident in her reading dossier, which contains writings by John Locke, Pufendorf, Grotius, and in William Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*.

Warren's understanding of constitutional arrangements and human law is rooted in her embrace of natural law and natural rights. She often adopts the language of natural law theorists, including the first law of nature being self-preservation. Just as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke posited the law of self-preservation among the primary laws of nature, Warren similarly points to the law of self-preservation in her defense of colonial resistance. As the security of colonists' property, liberty, and lives was increasingly threatened by arbitrary British rule, she argued "the great law of self-preservation has made it necessary to select some by mutual consent, to rule over others, but when that power is abused by a cruel and arbitrary sway, the same law authorizes a resistance" and "a manly opposition to the strides of wanton power."<sup>1057</sup> Although initially reluctant to act against Great Britain, the colonies were "struggling to retrieve and permanently secure the rights of nature, seized or curtailed by the strong hand of power."<sup>1058</sup>

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<sup>1057</sup> Warren to Hannah Lincoln, September 1774, in *Selected Letters*, 35.

<sup>1058</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 150.

In this context of created universal order, natural law pre-exists human political society, governs the state of nature, and is known through human reason. Accordingly, government and human law must be established within those boundaries of natural law. Warren makes explicit the existence of natural law and its connection to natural rights, as well as it being conditional for political legitimacy. As Lester H. Cohen notes:

Mercy Warren presented perhaps the clearest case for the relationship between historical necessity and the Natural Right-Natural Law Thesis when she observed that the American people “considered [Britain’s] measures as the breach of a solemn covenant; which at the same time that it subjected them to the authority of the King of England, stipulated to them all the rights and privileges of free and natural born subjects.” When such a solemn covenant is broken, when the King demands subjection at the same time refusing to acknowledge the people’s rights, then the obligation to obey is annulled and, as Warren stated it, the people must “hazard the consequences of returning to a state of nature, rather than quietly submitting to unjust and arbitrary measures continually accumulating.”<sup>1059</sup>

#### Informal Order – Virtue as an Ordering Principle

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<sup>1059</sup> Lester H. Cohen, “The American Revolution and Natural Law Theory,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39, No. 3 (July-Sept. 1978), 494.

For Warren the formal order established by the constitution and the rule of law alone are insufficient to sustain the new republic. Achieving a congruity between constitutionalism and positive law founded on universal natural law frames a better political order, but Warren still finds it wanting. In her *History* Warren demonstrates her support for the Constitution once adopted,<sup>1060</sup> but in private communication, Warren despaired for the new Republic: “It is true we now have a government organized and a Washington at its head;--but we are too poor for Monarchy, too wise for Despotism, and too dissipated, selfish, and extravagant for Republicanism.”<sup>1061</sup>

Americans simply no longer embodied the virtue necessary to sustain the republican government they had created. A good constitution is not enough. The constitution and the laws order political and governmental power, but the day-to-day living of individual citizens within the republic must be guided by virtue as an ordering principle, and the actions of public officials must be held to a public standard of virtue. Law is an essential guarantor of freedom and order, but it is insufficient to regulate the passions and desires of human nature. For this, only virtue can suffice. As she reminds her son Winslow: “[I]f the barriers of virtue are planted around the heart and fixed on the solid basis of principle, though every temptation is heightened by the glare of novelty and the road to vice decorated by all that can charm the eye or fire the imagination of youth, he may yet be safe by calling into action those philosophic maxims which are beautiful in theory, but in practice

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<sup>1060</sup> I discuss this shift in her thinking in Chapter 3.

<sup>1061</sup> Warren to Catherine Sawbridge Macaulay Graham, July 1789, in *Selected Letters*, 222.

sublime.”<sup>1062</sup> Virtue is an informal regulating system that operates in tandem with the written constitution, positive law, and natural law. Virtue checks individual vice and corruption and, in Warren’s mind, must animate republican citizens. It provides an internal guide for individual self-government. Much in the same way that “mores” provide stable support for laws in Tocqueville’s analysis, virtue supports the overall republican governing structure, in both private and public spheres. In private life, it serves as a check on individual behavior, providing a mitigating force between human reason and human passion. But virtue also enables individuals to recognize and check corrupt behavior in their governing officials. It provides both external and internal standards of conduct: for citizens in their private, public, personal, economic, and political activities; and for governing officials, so that they can be judged by citizens and can be held accountable for their representation.

As the existing legal, moral, religious, and economic order was threatened, Warren relied on virtue as an informal ordering principle to provide stability and right action against such threats. We see virtue’s informal ordering functions in a variety of contexts. First, virtue emboldened the colonists, moving them to action against British tyranny and to re-establish both their natural rights and a predictable legal order. Second, it checked skepticism’s erosion of the existing religious or universal order, as well as the tendency of fallen man to give in to passions and moral corruption. Third, virtue provided a necessary hedge against avarice, luxury, and other vices that Warren associated with the new nation’s growing capitalist economy. And fourth, virtue

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<sup>1062</sup> Warren to Winslow Warren, March 25, 1789, in *Selected Letters*, 130.

provided a standard by which public officials could be judged and held responsible for their actions.

Patriotic virtue was required to resist British oppression and to awaken “the cold inactive spirit / That slumbers in its chains.”<sup>1063</sup> The patriots rise up “in virtue’s cause” against British oppression, exemplifying classical virtues of patriotism, valor, and honor. After a difficult day of battle, the old patriot Brutus reminds Senate members to “learn an useful lesson”:

He who in virtue’s cause remain unmov’d,  
And nobly struggles for his country’s good:  
Shall more than conquer---better days shall beam,  
And happier prospects crowd again the scene.<sup>1064</sup>

Warren used an appeal to classical virtue in her Revolutionary plays as a means to restore formal order. British tyranny, especially the arbitrary exercise of power by Gov. Hutchinson, had perverted the rule of law and had displaced British law over the colonies. Reluctant colonists could be motivated to fight British oppression by appeals to classical republican virtue: patriotism, valor, and willing self-sacrifice for the cause of freedom and virtue. Warren views virtue as the surest means of defeating those “who dare enslave, / A generous, free and independent people.”<sup>1065</sup> It is

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<sup>1063</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act I, Scene 1.

<sup>1064</sup> *Ibid.*, Act III, Scene 2.

<sup>1065</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act V, Scene 1.

“Virtue’s Friends / Who ever have their Country’s Good at Heart.”<sup>1066</sup> The threat of tyranny necessitates vigilant virtue by leaders and citizens. As British citizens, the colonists could point to a long tradition of rights and protections of civil and religious liberty. But the colonists’ experience forcefully demonstrated that even these formal protections could be eroded by political authorities bent on exercising arbitrary power and by a citizenry lulled by comfort, luxury, and habit.

Within the ordering principle of virtue is the practice of religion. Warren pointed to the decline of religion as a turning point in Roman republican history: “Survey the Roman commonwealth before its decline, when it was most worthy of the imitation of republicans. Was not a general regard paid to the worship of their deities, among this celebrated people, and a superstitious attention observed, relative to omens, prodigies and judgments, as denounced and executed by their [403] gods, until republicanism was extinguished, the commonwealth subverted, and the sceptre of a single sovereign was stretched over that vast empire?”<sup>1067</sup> Thus, the corrosive effects of skepticism and the threat it posed to the New England religious traditions needed to be checked by virtue. Warren fears the appeal and growing influence of “the sceptics” on the younger generation. She warns of “the snares of vice and the contagion of bad example, which like an army lie in wait to destroy.”<sup>1068</sup> She offers counsel to her son James Jr., upon his graduation from Harvard: “May the Great

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<sup>1066</sup> Warren, *The Defeat*, Act I, Scene 1.

<sup>1067</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 680-81.

<sup>1068</sup> Warren to James Warren, Jr., September [?] 1772, in *Selected Letters*, 7.



Gardian of Virtue, the source, the fountain of everlasting truth watch over and ever preserve you from the baleful walks of vice, and the devious and not less baneful track of the bewildered sceptic.”<sup>1069</sup> Vigilance and virtue are the sure guards against the temptations of “the clamour of youthful passions,” which “plead for deviations and ever stand ready to excuse the highest instances of indulgence to depraved appetites.”<sup>1070</sup> In her Revolutionary dramas, Warren similarly identifies skepticism as a threat to virtue and liberty. In *The Defeat* (1773) the nefarious design of corrupt colonial officials can be furthered by the writings of “Some wretched scribbler, bartering for gold, / Truth, freedom, peace, and honor, sacred ties / Confounding all things with the sceptics art.”<sup>1071</sup>

Warren recognized that skepticism threatened to undermine existing religious and moral order, and virtue offered a sure guard against its temptations. Her concern about the influence of skepticism, especially fashionable among educated youth in Europe at the time, is illustrated in the poem “To Torrismond, A young Gentleman educated in Europe, recommended to the Author’s acquaintance, by a Friend of Distinction.” As she opens the poem, Warren makes clear her concern about erosion of religious and moral truth: “My soul is sicken’d when I see the youth, / That sports

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<sup>1069</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>1070</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1071</sup> Warren, *The Defeat*, Act I, Scene 2.

and trifles with eternal truth.”<sup>1072</sup> She warns, “Some visionary souls have lost their way,” having been

Nurs’d in refinements of a sceptic age,  
They spurn the precepts of the sacred page  
Hold revelation but a dream of pride,  
The wish of man to be to God ally’d,  
Thus the vain reptile of a fleeting hour,  
Presumes he knows the plenitude of power.<sup>1073</sup>

Such skepticism threatens to lead young men such as Torrismond to destruction:

Lost in wild passion—prattling much of fate,  
... His brutal wishes, pride or love of fame,  
Alternate drag him with magnetic force,  
Till infidelity’s his last recourse.<sup>1074</sup>

Warren’s advice to Torrismond and other youth is clear:

Come, my young friend, forsake the sceptic road,  
And tread the paths superior genius trod;  
Leave all the modern metaphysic fools,  
To reason on by false logic rules;  
Leave all the quibblers of a mimic age,

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<sup>1072</sup> Warren, “To Torrismond,” 183.

<sup>1073</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>1074</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-186.

By rote to cavil at th' inspired page;  
Let learned trash their arguments sustain,  
While common sense, ejected from their brain,  
They through each jarring incoherence run,  
Until entangled in the web they've spun,  
They all things doubt but their superior sense,  
And live and die the dupes of dark suspense.<sup>1075</sup>

Warren reminds him to instead look to the intellectual endeavors of great British thinkers who embraced God, especially those of Sir Isaac Newton, who

By vast exertions of his godlike mind ...  
While investigating nature's laws,  
He still defended virtue's sacred cause;  
At once he taught philosophy to shine,  
Own'd and rever'd the oracles divine.<sup>1076</sup>

She offers similar advice in the poem, "To a Young Gentleman, residing in France." Although "sceptic fools deny" the principles of virtue as "old ideas quite out of date," she reminds him that happiness and success can only be realized by exercising "Each virtue planted in the youthful breast."<sup>1077</sup> She expresses concern about the effects of skepticism in her *History* as well, identifying it as among the "causes that have led to

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<sup>1075</sup> Warren, "To Torrismond," 186.

<sup>1076</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>1077</sup> Warren, "To a Young Gentleman, residing in France," in *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warrens*, 222.

a disposition among some part of mankind [to] reject the obligations of religion, and even deny their God.”<sup>1078</sup> She saw skepticism as a destructive fashion among intellectuals of her day that could only be combated by a return to established standards of religion and virtue:

It may be imputed to the love of novelty, the pride of opinion, and an extravagant propensity to speculate and theorize on subjects beyond the comprehension of mortals, united with a desire of being released from the restraints on their appetites and passions; restraints dictated both by reason and revelation; and which, under the influence of sober reflection, forbid the indulgence of all gratifications that are injurious to man. Further elucidations, or more abstruse causes, which contribute to lead the vain inquirer, who steps over the line prescribed by the Author of nature, to deviations from, and forgetfulness of its Creator, and to involve him in a labyrinth of darkness, from which his weak reasonings can never disentangle him, may be left to those who delight in metaphysical disquisitions.<sup>1079</sup>

Such destructive intellectual speculation undermined and eliminated the informal ordering principle of virtue, which in Warren’s estimation inevitably leads to individuals succumbing to their appetites and passions, and falling into “a labyrinth of darkness, from which his weak reasonings can never disentangle him.”<sup>1080</sup>

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<sup>1078</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 686.

<sup>1079</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1080</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 186.

Despite her pointed criticism of skepticism and elucidation of its follies, Warren was well-aware of its persuasive power and appeal to those in the younger generation: “[H]as not the cause of Christianity suffered by the fascinating pen of a Gibbon, whose epithets charm while they shock, and whose learned eloquence leads the believer to pause and tremble for the multitudes that may be allured by the sophistry of his arguments, his satirical wit, the eloquence of his diction, and the beautiful antithesis of many of his periods.”<sup>1081</sup> Understanding skepticism’s corrosive power leads Warren to consistently call for virtue as the means for checking the threat it posed to the larger social and political order.

Virtue similarly provides the informal ordering principle that guides individual citizens to check the propensity to the vices of economic prosperity, especially greed, luxury, avarice, and rapacious materialism. She identifies economic corruption among the reasons for the fall of ancient republics: “The republic of Athens, the most conspicuous among the ancients, corrupted by riches and luxury, was wasted and lost by the intrigues of its own ambitious citizens.”<sup>1082</sup> Such economic corruption similarly threatened the young American republic, as Warren notes in the introduction to her *History*: “The progress of the American Revolution has been so rapid, and such the alteration of manners, the blending of characters, and the new train of ideas that almost universally prevail, that the principles which

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<sup>1081</sup> Ibid., 685.

<sup>1082</sup> Ibid., 678.

animated to the noblest exertions have been nearly annihilated.”<sup>1083</sup> Those “principles which animated to the noblest exertions”<sup>1084</sup> are embodied in virtue, which remains for Warren the surest means of sustaining the Constitution and laws of the new nation.

Finally, virtue provides a public standard of behavior for leaders and citizens alike. In many respects, Warren’s history of the American Revolution consists of her evaluation of how well the figures of the Revolutionary era met these public standards of republican virtue. History taught that even in the greatest republics, constitutions, and laws could be corrupted if virtue failed. The example of ancient Rome provides for Warren a powerful illustration of virtue as a necessary informal ordering principle. While under virtuous leaders, the Roman republic remained free and stable. But self-interested, vicious leaders led to corruption, disorder, and the eventual demise of republican government. The exemplary method of history and its importance to Warren’s republican thought is discussed in the preceding chapter, but its importance extends beyond her synthesis of the three philosophical threads into her concept of virtue. Virtue provides a standard of judgment and accountability for leaders and citizens alike, and history provided models of virtue (or the lack thereof). Virtuous people would elect virtuous leaders, who in turn would serve as models of virtue in their public roles. Warren sees republican virtue exemplified in the lives of George Washington, of her brother James Otis, Jr., and of others. As leaders they

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<sup>1083</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 4.

<sup>1084</sup> *Ibid.*, 692.

embodied the republican virtue necessary to sustaining the nation. Warren makes repeated calls for a return to the principles of the republican generation, which she sees as being imbued with the virtue necessary to future republican generations.

As Warren surveyed republican history, she knew that republics faltered as the people strayed from traditional practices of religion, allowing corrupt leaders to arise. In such a context, the republic no longer had a sustaining informal order of virtue and was extinguished. All republics relied on a religious foundation, whether the pagan religion of Rome or the Christian religion of the republic Warren inhabited. Warren sought to establish the American republic on the unique universal principles that provided the foundation of virtue in her setting. The erosion of the existing religion sets into motion a vortex of degeneration. For Warren, the universal principles of New England Puritanism provided an objective source and standard of virtue, which in turn provided an informal ordering principle that could augment formal law and sustain the republic.

Warren expressed hope that the erosion of the informal ordering principles of society would be stopped or would be delayed for generations to come. As she notes, the observing world “might reasonably have expected” the perpetuation of virtue in the American colonies, which arose “in consequence of their attachment to the religion of their fathers, united with a spirit of independence relative to civil government.”<sup>1085</sup> That alone, she argued, might be enough to sustain the “honorable

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<sup>1085</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 686.

principles”<sup>1086</sup> necessary to the republic. The watching world might think “From the sobriety of their manners, their simple habits, their attention to the education and moral conduct of their children, they had the highest reason to hope, that it might have been long, very long, before the faith of their religion was shaken, or their principles corrupted, either by the manners, opinions, or habits of foreigners, bred in the courts of despotism, or the schools of licentiousness. This hope shall not yet be relinquished.”<sup>1087</sup> Although optimistic in her evaluation, Warren was clear about the future prospects of the new nation. Even with a well-drafted Constitution and good laws, the republic remained susceptible to corruption. As Warren notes:

“Notwithstanding the advantages that may be derived, and the safety that may be felt, under so happy a constitution, yet it is necessary to guard at every point, against the intrigues of artful or ambitious men, who may subvert the system which the inhabitants of the United States judged to be most conducive to the general happiness of society.”<sup>1088</sup>

She noted that early on American citizens understood the importance of virtue to maintaining their republic in the face of developing threats of corruption and vice:

“At the same time that these wayward appearances began early to threaten their internal felicity, the inhabitants of America were in general sensible, that the freedom of the people, the virtue of society, and the stability of their commonwealth, could

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<sup>1086</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1087</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1088</sup> Ibid, 692.



only be preserved by the strictest union; and that the independence of the United States must be secured by an undeviating adherence to the principles that produced the revolution.”<sup>1089</sup> The spread of false principles and vice can threaten any political system, but are especially pernicious to the republican government established in the new nation: “It is necessary for every American, [414] with becoming energy to endeavor to stop the dissemination of principles evidently destructive to the cause for which they have bled. It must be the combined virtue of the rulers and of the people to do this, and to rescue and save their civil and religious rights from the outstretched arm of tyranny, which may appear under any mode of government.”<sup>1090</sup> Virtue provides for Warren the essential informal ordering principle to guide the behavior of citizens and leaders alike. In her republican thinking, virtue as an informal ordering principle is not codified, as is the arrangement of the institutions of republican government and its laws. But it is just as essential to the continued existence of the republican political order she envisioned, one which guarded the freedom of the people, the virtue of society, and the stability of the republic.

## CHAPTER 9

### Warren’s Millennial Vision and the Republican Jeremiad

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<sup>1089</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 629.

<sup>1090</sup> *Ibid.*, 686-7.

*Freedom and virtue shall united reign,  
And stretch their empire o'er the wide domain.*  
--Mercy Otis Warren, "A Political Reverie," 1774<sup>1091</sup>

Mercy Otis Warren stands firmly in the New England millennial tradition, tying the fulfillment of what she sees as the young nation's special destiny to the virtue of its people.<sup>1092</sup> Evaluating Warren's writings within the framework of millennialism helps to identify two important elements of her political thought. First, Warren incorporates into her writings many of the themes identified with American millennial thought, not only Puritan or religious millennialism, but also the civil millennialism associated with the Revolutionary era. Warren sees America as a "favored nation" "remarkably directed by the finger of Divine Providence"<sup>1093</sup> throughout its history to fulfill His purposes. She presents a vision of an American future as the fulfillment of a divine destiny, one in which "freedom and virtue shall united reign, / And stretch their empire o'er the wide domain."<sup>1094</sup> Also within this millennial framework, we can understand more fully her appeal to virtue in the face of all forms of corruption. As is the case with much of her political thought, her millennialism reflects a republican synthesis of various traditions in the American context. Second, Warren incorporates the language of the Puritan millennial tradition,

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<sup>1091</sup> Warren, "A Political Reverie," 190.

<sup>1092</sup> The development of this tradition is traced by Ruth H. Bloch in *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>1093</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 641.

<sup>1094</sup> Warren, "A Political Reverie," 190.

specifically the jeremiad, into her republican thought. The “jeremiad” is a form of religious sermon named after the biblical lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah: “I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into a degenerate plant of a strange vine to me?” (Jer. 2:21).<sup>1095</sup> It follows a typical pattern: recognition of a people falling short of a biblical standard of public behavior or activity; identification of ways in which the standard has been violated through sin; a call to repentance and a return to behavior consistent with the standard to achieve a specific biblical ideal, such as God’s blessing or a providential future. The jeremiad mixes messages of both fear and hope: fear that continued sin carries severe, irretrievable consequences, and the hope that through repentance, God’s blessings and favor can be restored, and His promises can yet be achieved. The purpose of the New England jeremiad was “to direct an imperiled people of God toward fulfillment of their destiny, to guide them individually toward salvation, and collectively toward the American city of God.”<sup>1096</sup>

Warren’s incorporation of this pattern of jeremiad into her political thought helps to explain her unwavering calls for virtue to check corruption – whether it is her call to classical patriotic virtue to fight British oppression, her call to Christian virtue to check the spread of skepticism and moral corruption, or the need for bourgeois or marketplace virtue to check the excesses of avarice and luxury in the colonies’ dynamic economy. Just as early New England clergy invoked the jeremiad to call a

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<sup>1095</sup> All biblical references are from the King James translation.

<sup>1096</sup> Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 9.

sinful people to repentance to secure God's favor and blessing, Warren similarly calls a corrupt republican citizenry to virtue to secure the blessings of republican government and to fulfill the nation's destiny. This combination of religious millennialism and republican thought I call her "republican jeremiad." Within the structure of this republican jeremiad Warren identifies various forms of corruption within the political system, and then delivers a call to return to virtue to check corruption, making possible the fulfillment of America's destiny.

Warren intends her vision of American destiny to provide a beacon of hope and liberty to the rest of the world. Consistent with the language of civil millennialism, Warren intertwines her republican concept of virtue with Christian belief to develop an animating vision of America's future that is divinely inspired – glorious – but only possible with virtue. The Puritan millennial vision saw America as a "New Israel, New World, new heaven and new earth."<sup>1097</sup> This view was secularized and popularized in the Revolutionary millennialism echoing in Puritan sermons, which increasingly encouraged the colonies to break from Great Britain to fulfill their destiny as a beacon of liberty and prosperity to the world. As the rift with Great Britain intensified, millennialism streamed from the New England pulpits into secular political discourse, providing much of the emotional impetus for the Revolution. Warren develops a future vision for the new republic, one in which virtue and liberty reign. These millennial themes are woven throughout Warren's writings,

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<sup>1097</sup> Bercovitch, 113.

and even after the Revolutionary War, casting this type of hopeful millennial vision for the new nation remained a distinctive feature of her political thought.

A number of historians have called attention to this fusion of New England millennialism and republican ideology during the Revolutionary era. Edmund S. Morgan, for one, refers to this constellation of ideas, values, and attitudes as the “Puritan ethic”<sup>1098</sup> and identifies the significance of the Puritan influence on the Revolutionary generation and beyond. Morgan argues that as the Revolution neared, much of the religious context of the Puritan ethic was diluted, yet its underlying values and ideals were “reinforced by a reading of history that attributed the rise and fall of empires to the acquisition and loss of the same virtues that God had demanded of the founders of New England.”<sup>1099</sup> Nathan O. Hatch describes this phenomenon as “civil millennialism,” identifying it as the “amalgam of traditional Puritan apocalyptic rhetoric and eighteenth-century political discourse”<sup>1100</sup> that developed between the colonial wars with France ending in 1763 and the Revolutionary War. New England clergy often presented their millennial hopes within the context of the Revolutionary struggle. As Hatch notes, “the most striking feature of this millennial language in the Revolutionary era is the way it adapted the framework of apocalyptic history to

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<sup>1098</sup> See Edmund S. Morgan, “The Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 24, No. 1 (Jan., 1967), 3-43.

<sup>1099</sup> Morgan, “The Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution,” 6.

<sup>1100</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, “The Origins of Civil Millennialism in America: New England Clergymen, War with France, and the Revolution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, No. 3 (Jul., 1974), 408.

commonly held political ideas.”<sup>1101</sup> Further, “Sermons during the war stressed repeatedly that American liberty was God’s cause, that British tyranny was antichrist’s, and that sin was failure to fight the British. With the coming of peace many ministers envisioned Christ’s thousand-year reign on earth as an extension of the civil and religious liberty established in America.”<sup>1102</sup>

Hatch identifies the overarching structure and key themes of civil millennialism during the Revolutionary era.

Other historians identify a similar fusion of Puritan and Revolutionary ideas, but call it by different names. For example, Ruth H. Bloch identifies the melding of religious and republican ideals as “revolutionary millennialism” that developed in the colonies as “a fully millennial interpretation of the imperial crisis rose to the fore as American patriots finally moved from resistance to revolution.”<sup>1103</sup> Bloch argues that this millennial interpretation “articulated for a diverse population the visionary dimension of American revolutionary ideology.”<sup>1104</sup> Bloch further contends, “Without this visionary dimension, it is difficult – perhaps even impossible – to imagine the development of an American revolutionary ideology at all.”<sup>1105</sup>

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<sup>1101</sup> Hatch, “The Origins of Civil Millennialism in America,” 408.

<sup>1101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1103</sup> Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 75.

<sup>1104</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>1105</sup> Ibid.

Republican thinkers used millennial imagery to spark support for the Revolution. Conversely, “the clergy came to sustain republican political values as religious priorities.”<sup>1106</sup> Revolutionary millennialism infused republican ideals with the power of Biblical prophecy and in so doing provided the emotional impetus necessary to secure independence.

Sacvan Bercovitch in *American Jeremiad* likewise identifies this fusion of secular and sacred at the time of the Revolution, but evaluates specifically its use of the language of the Puritan jeremiad which “set out the sacred history of the New World; the eighteenth-century jeremiad established the typology of America’s mission.”<sup>1107</sup> The language of the Puritan jeremiad characterized much of the Revolutionary rhetoric.<sup>1108</sup> “By all accounts, the jeremiad played a central role in the war of independence.”<sup>1109</sup> During the Revolutionary era, “[T]he widespread use of the jeremiad to mobilize the country attests to its efficacy. Never did the voice of Jeremiah sound more loudly in the land than in the springtime of the republic.”<sup>1110</sup>

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<sup>1106</sup> Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 70.

<sup>1107</sup> Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 93.

<sup>1108</sup> Duncan Sheldon Ferguson’s *Biblical Hermeneutics: an Introduction* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1986) offers a helpful discussion of the role of typology in biblical hermeneutics. “Typology” in Scriptural hermeneutics “can be defined as the establishment of connections between persons, events, or objects in the Old Testament and persons, events, or objects in the New Testament.” Typology assumes “a correspondence between the Old Testament and the New Testament” that helps to explain current events in the context of biblical history. “Behind the use of typology is the theological premise that it is God who controls all of history and who causes earlier individuals or events to embody characteristics which later are caused to reappear.” See especially Ferguson, p. 86.

<sup>1109</sup> Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 132.

<sup>1110</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

Religious and secular thinkers alike incorporated the language of the American jeremiad into their calls for independence. The patriots were called to shake off the yoke of British oppression so that the promise of America's divine destiny – “at once sacred and historical”<sup>1111</sup> – could be realized. Reiner Smolinski calls this phenomenon the “millennial impulse,” in which “the blending of apocalyptic fervor with civil liberty forged expectations of a civil millennium that climaxed in the American Revolution.”<sup>1112</sup> This “millennial impulse” was prevalent in early American literature, and Smolinski identified it as characteristic of the poetry of Mercy Otis Warren.

J. G. A. Pocock and Gordon S. Wood acknowledge millennialism in the Revolutionary context, but argue that its influence faded after the war. Pocock notes the “evolution of the Puritan millennial consciousness”<sup>1113</sup> in the writings of the radical Whigs. It appeared in James Harrington's *Oceana* (1747) and other writings, and remained an identifiable theme in republican thought in the American colonies. Yet, Pocock questions the influence of millennialism on early American political thought. “The apocalyptic dimension, however, while apparent in the rhetoric of the Revolution, is hardly dominant there. Americans of that generation saw themselves as

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<sup>1111</sup> Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 123.

<sup>1112</sup> Reiner Smolinsky, “General Introduction,” *The Kingdom, the Power, & the Glory: The Millennial Impulse in Early American Literature* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1998), xxxv. Smolinski includes in this collection of millennial literature four poems by Mercy Otis Warren: “A Political Reverie,” “The Squabble of the Sea Nymphs; or the Sacrifice of the Tuscararoës,” “To the Hon. J. Winthrop, Esq.,” and “Simplicity,” pp. 560-580.

<sup>1113</sup> Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 385.



freemen in arms, manifesting a patriotic virtue, rather than as covenanted saints.”<sup>1114</sup> American political thought after the Revolution became increasingly secular, as the millennial passions of the war faded. Similarly Gordon S. Wood identifies the emergence of a strong “millennial tone” among Revolutionary clergy, who embraced the idea that “the Americans, like the Israelites of old, were God’s chosen people”<sup>1115</sup> and that the coming Revolution might mark the establishment of Christ’s Kingdom in the world. As tensions with Great Britain intensified, “Independence became not only political but moral. Revolution, republicanism, and regeneration all blended in American thinking.”<sup>1116</sup> Wood argues that during the Revolutionary era, “The city upon the hill assumed a new republican character. It would now hopefully be, in Samuel Adams’s revealing words, ‘the Christian Sparta.’”<sup>1117</sup> Yet both Wood and Pocock argue that once the Revolution passed, so did its rhetorical appeal, and the secular commitment to America’s millennial destiny faded. In more recent scholarship, Nicholas Guyatt identifies millennialism as “revolutionary providentialism.” In Guyatt’s analysis: “American Patriots reworked existing providential ideas and assumptions in light of two pressing priorities: the need to persuade Americans that their new nation might not only resist but eclipse Britain,

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<sup>1114</sup> Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 513.

<sup>1115</sup> Wood, *Creation of the American Revolution*, 115.

<sup>1116</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>1117</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

and the need to secure political and military support from the public.”<sup>1118</sup> In this perspective, “Patriots thus leveraged the bright future of the United States against its perilous present, insisting all the while that independence and imperial greatness were not only possible but necessary in God’s overruling scheme.”<sup>1119</sup> Millennialism was widespread during this time; its influence “was hardly limited to sermons or the writing of religious professionals: it shaped political addresses, orations, newspaper articles, and numerous other forms of Patriot propaganda.”<sup>1120</sup> But Guyatt and others argue that adoption of millennialism by the Revolutionary generation was as much pragmatic as it was religious. Guyatt distinguishes the idea of “revolutionary providentialism” from Puritan millennialism, arguing that the view of American Revolutionaries was not in a strict sense “millennial” because it reflects “very little of the explicit and immediate millenarianism that marked the Puritan revolution in England in the seventeenth century.”<sup>1121</sup> Some historians argue that much of the Revolutionary generation adopted the symbolism but not the substance of Puritan millennialism.

The fusion of the Puritan millennial traditional and republican thought provided a powerful animating force for the Revolutionary generation – and Warren’s writing exemplifies this merging of religious and Revolutionary ideals. New England

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<sup>1118</sup> Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607-1876* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 104.

<sup>1119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1120</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>1121</sup> Ibid., 107.

millennialism embraced the idea of America as “an elect nation under God.”<sup>1122</sup> In a religious context, millennialism is the “idea that human history is divinely ordained and will lead to a period of heavenly perfection on earth.”<sup>1123</sup> In the Puritan context, millennialism is based on a reading of Holy Scripture, which anticipates the defeat of the Anti-Christ and the millennial reign of Christ on Earth for 1,000 years.<sup>1124</sup> It was typical for New England Puritans to see their emigration to America as “a preparatory stage in the drama of world redemption through their errand into the wilderness, whose mission would be realized in the future glory of an American millennium.”<sup>1125</sup> Although the interpretations of the theological doctrine of millennialism varied, it translated into the political realm as a vision of America being set apart or specially blessed by God for His purposes. Early colonists saw that “the blessings of Providence distinguished the United States from other nations.”<sup>1126</sup> Early Puritan clergy often used the metaphor of an “errand in the wilderness”<sup>1127</sup> to describe the first colonial settlements and the idea that God had providentially led them into the

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<sup>1122</sup> Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, xxi.

<sup>1123</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>1124</sup> The Biblical reference to Jesus Christ’s millennial reign is Revelation 20:1-6. Numerous references to the millennium can be found in both the Old and New Testaments, specifically in Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, the Book of Psalms, Isaiah, and Romans.

<sup>1125</sup> Mason I. Lowrance, Jr., *The Language of Canaan: Metaphor and Symbol in New England from the Puritans to the Transcendentalists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 117.

<sup>1126</sup> John F. Berens, *Providence & Patriotism in Early America, 1640-1815* (Charlottesville, NC: University Press of North Carolina, 1978), 6-7.

<sup>1127</sup> Perry Miller traces the use of the “errand into the wilderness” in *Errand Into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956).

wilderness, provided for their needs while in the wilderness, and promised to deliver them out of the wilderness as the new nation took shape. The metaphor of the errand in the wilderness was based on the example of John the Baptist in the New Testament forsaking the comforts of life to live an ascetic existence in the wilderness as preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ.<sup>1128</sup> It was employed in the 1670 sermon “Brief Recognition of New England’s Errand into the Wilderness” preached by Samuel Danforth. The theme was adapted by Samuel Sherwood in his influential 1776 sermon, “The Church’s Flight Into the Wilderness,” calling patriotic colonists to action to defend their sacred rights of religious freedom and political liberty. In the American story, the early pilgrims had ventured bravely into the wilderness, in obedience to God and as a means of preserving both religious and civil liberty. They credited God for divine guidance and for the success of this “errand into the wilderness.” As the colonial crisis with Great Britain intensified, the idea of the America’s divine errand in the wilderness was deeply embedded in New England thinking.

The idea of the divine errand was merged as well with the idea of liberty as God’s cause. Resisting British tyranny to preserve liberty was a sacred obligation of patriotic colonists. New England congregational ministers frequently depicted liberty as the cause of God, and political principle became increasingly infused with religious language, metaphor, and fervor. Public sermons as early as the 1750s tended

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<sup>1128</sup> Found in Matthew 11: 7-9 (KJV).

to revive Puritan “animosities against tyranny.”<sup>1129</sup> As the texts of Massachusetts Election Day sermons demonstrate, it was not unusual for prominent clergymen to advocate resisting British oppression, dressing that political admonition in religious garb. “A clergyman could argue effectively for resistance to tyranny as a sacred duty; a Samuel Adams in the audience would apply the Christian lesson to his secular cause, and be strengthened.”<sup>1130</sup> “The New England clergy’s arguments for resistance to English misrule contributed much to colonial unity on the eve of independence.”<sup>1131</sup>

A number of important Puritan millennial themes characterized colonial thought, including the view of America as God’s New Israel and as having a divine mission, the revolutionary cause of liberty as God’s cause, the jeremiad tradition, and the fusion of colonial history with millennial expectations. The colonists saw it as part of their providential mission to defeat British tyranny: “In the Revolutionary era patriotic colonists maintained and expanded the central themes, that God had uniquely blessed the New World as a land of civil and religious freedom and that, as the New Israel, America had a divine mission which concerned the preservation and perpetuation of those freedoms.”<sup>1132</sup> As the Revolutionary War approached, a

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<sup>1129</sup> H. Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 62.

<sup>1130</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>1131</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>1132</sup> Berens, *Providence & Patriotism in Early America*, 2-3.

specifically political or “civil millennialism”<sup>1133</sup> merged colonial political hopes with Puritan millennial thought. Unlike the Puritan millennialist who put his hope in the final spiritual defeat of the Anti-Christ, the “Revolutionary millennialist ... based his apocalyptic hopes on the civil and religious liberty that American victory over Britain would ensure.”<sup>1134</sup> The millennial visions tended to focus not on theological themes or disputes, but instead “served to define and affirm general values – the highest and most widely held millennial aspirations of the American Revolution.”<sup>1135</sup>

Against this backdrop, the Revolutionary War became an epic struggle between good and evil, liberty and tyranny. Liberty was God’s cause, and British tyranny was equated with the forces of darkness and the Anti-Christ. Once victory and independence were achieved, the patriots envisioned a future that would be a time of perfect peace and freedom, a future free from British tyranny. Millennial rhetoric fueled patriotic fervor and permeated Revolutionary political discourse. “Millennial aspirations became a prominent feature of American revolutionary consciousness.”<sup>1136</sup> It explained “how many Americans understood the ultimate meaning of the revolutionary crisis and birth of the American nation.”<sup>1137</sup> It helped

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<sup>1133</sup> The term “civil millennialism” is developed by Nathan O. Hatch in “The Origins of Civil Millennialism in America: New England Clergymen, War with France, and the Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 31, No. 3 (July 1974), 407-430.

<sup>1134</sup> *Ibid.*, 409.

<sup>1135</sup> Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 81.

<sup>1136</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>1137</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

ease fear of the unknown, what the American future would look like free of British rule. “[M]illennialism provided the main structure of meaning through which contemporary events were linked to an exalted image of an ideal world.”<sup>1138</sup>

Historically, colonial millennialism was a product of Anglo-American radicalism arising during the Glorious Revolution in England in 1688-9 and its adaptation by Puritan clergy in the new land. “Millennialism and civic republicanism gained ascendancy together in revolutionary England, and together they also gave rise to American revolutionary ideology during the next century.”<sup>1139</sup> Although much of the Anglo-American revolutionary tradition reflected classical and Renaissance thought, it also inherited “the endemic millennialism of English Puritanism.”<sup>1140</sup> Both traditions recognized inevitable cycles of deterioration: republican fragility described by Machiavelli, renaissance republicans, and historians of classical republics, and the inevitable fall into sin and patterns of jeremiad in the Puritan tradition. Both traditions relied on virtue (albeit in somewhat different forms) as the only possible antidote to check the inevitable cycle of corruption and deterioration. Classical republicans saw in the lessons of the Roman Republic the demise of liberty through corruption. Although Puritan millennial thinkers were gravely concerned about the consequences of sin, they opted for a more optimistic outcome: The creation of a heavenly paradise on earth in which Christ would return to reign on earth and usher in “a new

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<sup>1138</sup> Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, xiii.

<sup>1139</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>1140</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

dispensation realizing the Edenic possibility of human virtue, physical comfort, and spiritual grace.”<sup>1141</sup>

New England Puritans “were at the forefront of early seventeenth-century millennial thought.”<sup>1142</sup> Although overtly religious millennialism tended to fade in the English context after the Glorious Revolution, it continued to animate Puritan thought in the New World. The idea of America as an “Elect Nation” can be seen in American political thought dating to John Winthrop’s conception of the Massachusetts Bay Colony as “a City on a Hill” in 1630. This millennial vision recalled the words of Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:14: “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.” American Puritan millennialism was “culturally persistent” in the New World, and seventeenth-century Puritan settlers developed the idea of “the new American Israel”<sup>1143</sup> that animated religious and political thought well into the Revolutionary period. In the development of Revolutionary ideology that precipitated revolution and energized the war effort, “[s]ecular visions of enduring happiness, liberty, virtue, knowledge, plenty, and peace, whether on a universal or national scale, contained many of the same elements as biblical millennialism interpretations of the

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<sup>1141</sup> Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 6.

<sup>1142</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>1143</sup> *Ibid.*



Revolution.”<sup>1144</sup> Warren’s writing is reflective of this combination of religious and secular language of Revolutionary millennialism.

Colonial discourse embodied the idea of liberty as a sacred cause. This view of liberty during the Revolutionary era and throughout colonial religious thought can be traced in large degree to the religious and classical training of clergy at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton colleges. “These schools continued to inculcate a common cultural core that could be popularized and transmitted by word of mouth to the surrounding settlements.”<sup>1145</sup> This struggle for liberty is reflected in the tensions between the colonists and Great Britain mounted during the Stamp Act Crisis of 1764 and reached a high point following the Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770. New England ministers used the events to recall the colonies’ history of liberty under the direction and sovereign protection of God, “giving expression to a new rhetoric of social order and political authority that upheld the people in their jealous defense of liberty and legitimated their resistance to unjust tyranny.”<sup>1146</sup>

The cause of civil liberty was God’s sacred cause, and the messages from pulpits became increasingly political in Massachusetts. “[N]ever before had oratory and the sermon played a more pivotal role than when counseling and upholding New Englanders on their perilous road to revolution.”<sup>1147</sup> The Reverend Henry Cumings

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<sup>1144</sup> Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 92.

<sup>1145</sup> Stout, *The New England Soul*, 259.

<sup>1146</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>1147</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

succinctly stated in a 1775 sermon in Worcester, Massachusetts: “The cause of liberty is ... the cause of God.” New England clergy helped to turn colonial resistance to British tyranny into “a righteous cause.”<sup>1148</sup> This millennial interpretation motivated American patriots to move from resistance to revolution. In a fundamental way, the colonists of Warren’s day accepted a providential basis for republican ideology: a millennial destiny ordained and guided by the hand of God. “Patriots may have had only a century (or less) to work with, but from that century’s events, they managed to extract a confirmation of their conviction that Divine Providence had singled out America for a glorious mission involving the promotion of liberty. This idea of mission became one of the key ingredients of American patriotism during and long after the era of the American Revolution.”<sup>1149</sup> This early Puritan millennialism came to incorporate the optimism of the colonies of the early eighteenth century, as “eighteenth-century Jeremiahs justified both the Israelites and the Puritans by reference to their own progress.”<sup>1150</sup> Colonial history was recited as proof of God’s blessing: brave pilgrims embarking on the errand in the wilderness, sustained by God and exceptional virtue stood as proof of America’s divine mission and destiny. These “eighteenth-century Jeremiahs” emphasized the role of God or Providence in early colonial history and “invoked the example of the [Massachusetts] Bay emigrants – ‘those heroes of virtue,’ as Jonathan Mayhew said in 1754, ‘smitten with a Love of

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<sup>1148</sup> Henry Cumings, “A Sermon, Preached in Billerica, on the 23d of November, 1775 (Worcester, MA [1776]), 23.

<sup>1149</sup> Berens, *Providence & Patriotism in Early America*, 57-58.,

<sup>1150</sup> Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 117.

Liberty’ – in order to inspire their countrymen to still greater deeds.”<sup>1151</sup> Relying on their reading of colonial history as evidence of God’s divine plan and their destiny, Jonathan Edwards wrote: “the Most High has made his hand manifest, in a most apparent and marvelous manner ... it being perhaps a dispensation of providence, the most remarkable in its kind, that has been in many ages ... and a great argument ... that we live in an age, wherein divine wonders are to be expected.”<sup>1152</sup> Millennialism framed the colonists’ “conviction that history is drawing to its glorious conclusion, when the world would be transformed into a paradise for the righteous.”<sup>1153</sup>

#### Warren’s Millennialism

Warren’s writings reflect this fusion of millennial and republican thought. Although direct influence is difficult to prove, Warren’s religious context suggests that as a Congregationalist she was immersed in New England millennial thought. New England Congregationalists wrote most of the millennial literature in late eighteenth-century America and regularly included millennial themes in their sermons and teachings. Rev. Chandler Robbins, pastor of Plymouth First Church attended by Warren and her family, is identified firmly within the Revolutionary millennial tradition.<sup>1154</sup> Highlighting the fusion of millennial and Revolutionary

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<sup>1151</sup> Bercovitz, *American Jeremiad*, 117.

<sup>1152</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>1153</sup> Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, xiv.

<sup>1154</sup> Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 128.

ideology, “the vast majority (87%)” of writers of millennial literature “were strong patriots.”<sup>1155</sup>

Warren’s reading included a number of notable millennial writers, including the poet Joel Barlow, known as “one of America’s earliest epic bards.”<sup>1156</sup> His early works strike a number of millennial themes, including the development of a millennial version of American history under the guidance of providence. Barlow’s “Enlightenment optimism increasingly replaces his millennialist components”<sup>1157</sup> of his earlier works. His early millennial works include: *The Vision of Columbus* (1787) with “roots in such providence books” as Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702); “The Prospect of Peace” (1778); and “The Conspiracy of Kings” (1794).<sup>1158</sup> Warren takes special note of the work of Isaac Newton in the appendix of her *History*. Newton wrote the millennial *Observations on Daniel and the Apocalypse of Saint John* (1733) – who with his “pen defended the Christian system on principles of reason and argument”<sup>1159</sup> and mentions “Newton’s godlike mind”<sup>1160</sup> in her poetry. An avid reader, Warren likely was familiar with the millennial writings of the Revolutionary soldier, poet, and pamphleteer Philip Morin Freneau (1752-1832), the

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<sup>1155</sup> Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 391.

<sup>1156</sup> Smolinski, *The Kingdom, the Power, & The Glory*, 590.

<sup>1157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1159</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 685.

<sup>1160</sup> Warren, “On a Survey of the Heavens,” in *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren*, 198.

poet John Trumbull (1750-1831), the Congregational clergyman Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), and the Connecticut poet David Humphreys (1752-1818). Humphreys's millennial "A Poem on the Happiness of America, addressed to the citizens of the United States" (1786) was wildly popular and went through nine publications in the four years after its initial publication.<sup>1161</sup>

I have already identified a number of key themes associated with American millennial thought: the active role taken by God or Providence in American history; liberty as God's cause; America as both a chosen nation and a beacon of liberty to the world; a pattern of jeremiad; and America's unique millennial future. These themes run through Warren's political thought, placing her squarely within this American millennial tradition. She also expresses a unique republican jeremiad in her political thought. In earlier chapters of this work I established in some detail Warren's view of God's providential actions within American history. She viewed God as creating a divine plan for human beings and as being actively engaged in the history of the colonies. New England millennial themes animate Warren's plays, poems, and personal correspondence, and it is evident in what is arguably her most important work, her *History of the American Revolution*. She writes in her *History* that the colonies "seemed to have been remarkably directed by the finger of Divine Providence, and led on from step to step beyond their own expectations, to exhibit to the view of distant nations, millions freed from the bondage of a foreign yoke, by that spirit of freedom, virtue, and perseverance, which they had generally displayed from

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<sup>1161</sup>Smolinski, *The Kingdom, The Power, & the Glory*, 590.

their first emigrations to the wilderness, to the present day.”<sup>1162</sup> This passage evokes clear millennial themes: divine direction over the sojourn into the wilderness and America as an example of freedom to the world, or in Winthrop’s words, as “a city upon a hill.” Reminders of the early Puritan “errand into the wilderness” led to the development “a wave of filio Pietism about New England origins which became the most distinctive theme of Revolutionary sermons.”<sup>1163</sup> Warren recalls for her readers those early days and the many dangers lurking in the wilderness, as a reminder of what their forebears had suffered and survived to secure God’s blessings of liberty for the new nation. The ideals of the Revolutionary generation embodied “the principles which the ancestors of the inhabitants of the United States brought with them from the polished shores of Europe, to the dark wilds of America.”<sup>1164</sup> A desire for religious and civil liberty animated the colonists’ divine mission during their errand into the wilderness, and theirs was also God’s cause during the Revolutionary era. Patriotic resistance was obligatory as British tyranny increasingly “threatened the new world with a yoke unknown to their fathers.”<sup>1165</sup> Colonists were called by God to resist the “yoke of despotism,” which “once riveted, no human sagacity can justly

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<sup>1162</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 641.

<sup>1163</sup> Hatch, *Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 76.

<sup>1164</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 631.

<sup>1165</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

calculate its termination.”<sup>1166</sup> Warren envisioned the new republic manifesting a special destiny as an “asylum of freedom.”<sup>1167</sup> America was

a country where the standard of freedom had recently been erected, to allure the liberal minded to her shores, and to receive and to protect the persecuted subjects of arbitrary power, who might there seek an asylum from the chains of servitude to which they had [303] been subjected in any part of the globe. Here it might rationally be expected, that beside the natural increase, the emigration to a land of such fair promise of the blessings of plenty, liberty, and peace, to which multitudes would probably resort, there would be exhibited in a few years, a population almost beyond the calculation of figures.<sup>1168</sup>

Similarly, Warren argues that God established the American colonies to be a beacon of liberty to the world. “It is a pleasing anticipation, that the American Revolution may be a means in the hands of Providence, of diffusing universal knowledge over a quarter of the globe, that for ages had been enveloped in darkness, ignorance, and barbarism.”<sup>1169</sup> Warren saw the period of British salutary neglect that allowed the colonies to establish a pattern of independence as part of God’s providential plan for the new nation. It was a time during which “the seeds of separation were sown, and

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<sup>1166</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 80.

<sup>1167</sup> *Ibid.*, 625.

<sup>1168</sup> *Ibid.*, 628.

<sup>1169</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

the *ball* of empire rolled westward with such astonishing rapidity, that the pious mind is naturally excited to acknowledge a superintending Providence, that led to the period of independence, even before America was conscious of her maturity.”<sup>1170</sup>

Recalling the outcome of the Battle of Trenton in 1776, Warren draws parallels between God’s protection of the Israelites, His Chosen People, in the Old Testament. She found it inexplicable why the British commander, having a clear opportunity to defeat the colonial army in this early battle, had hesitated. Victory was within his hands, yet the British commander “stopped short on the borders of the [354] river, as if afraid the waters of the Delaware, like another Red Sea, would overwhelm the pursuers of the injured Americans, who had in many instances as manifestly experienced the protecting hand of Providence, as the favored Israelites.”<sup>1171</sup>

Warren’s use of biblical language to describe the role of Providence in the colonial war effort can be found throughout her *History*. Other strong millennial themes drawn directly from biblical prophecy emerge throughout her writings, especially as Warren points out the parallels between American history and the promises of God to His chosen people.

Let me pause her a few moments, and survey the vast continent of America, where the reflecting mind retrospects and realizes the beautiful description of the wide wilderness, before it became a fruitful field; before “the rivers were

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<sup>1170</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 97.

<sup>1171</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.



open in high places, and fountains in the midst of the vallies;” [Is. 41:18] and

He who created them pronounced,

*I will plant the cedar, the myrtle, and the oil-tree; I will set in the desert the fir-tree, and the pine, and the box-tree together; that all may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it [Is. 41: 19-20].*<sup>1172</sup>

Warren draws further on the language of the Book of Isaiah as she continues her historical analysis. The recognition of the involvement and blessings of God in the history of the United States produces a requisite obligation among its citizens to possess and practice virtue: “Let the striking contrast, since the forest has been made to blossom as the rose [Is. 35:1], be viewed in [329] such an impressive light, as to operate on the mind of every son and daughter of America, and lead to the uniform practice of public and private virtue.”<sup>1173</sup> This passage from her *History* explicitly invokes biblical references from the Book of Isaiah 35:1, as well as language characteristic of the Puritan jeremiad.

Warren’s writing reflects the language and structure of jeremiad associated with American Puritan thought, but she uses it within a distinctly republican political context. In this sense, Warren’s warnings about corruption followed with calls for a return to virtue, is the expression of a unique American “republican jeremiad” that fuses the jeremiad of the Puritan tradition with republican fears of the threat of

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<sup>1172</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 641 [italics in original].

<sup>1173</sup> *Ibid.*

corruption. As a student of history and a republican thinker, Warren understood the tendency of republics to degenerate. Only with the aid of virtue could the American republic survive this threat. Her lamentation over encroaching corruption and her subsequent calls for virtue in the face of that threat reflect her lifelong embrace of this American republican jeremiad. Her consistent appeals to virtue – in the face of British tyranny during the Revolutionary period, as a counter to skepticism and attacks on the verity of Christian and religious teaching, as the one sure guard against excessive ambition and desire for political position, and as a way to prevent avarice and luxury during times of commercial expansion – reflect a fundamental republican concern about degeneration. From this concern flows what I call Warren’s “republican repentance,” necessary to securing the political promise of the young republic. Her republican jeremiad is a call to reject corruption and to act according to virtue. No matter the threat, republican liberty – indeed, the republic itself – could only survive if its citizens were vigilant and virtuous.

The jeremiad, as we have seen, was a form of sermon employed by Puritan clergy to call their people to repentance from sin, both to avoid God’s punishment and to restore His blessings. “The Jeremiad . . . was a lament for the loss of virtue and a warning of divine displeasure and desolation to come.”<sup>1174</sup> (Edmund S. Morgan, *Puritan Ethic*, 6) According to Puritan theology, in a fallen world sinful individual believers are prone to temptation and all too often to sin. The clergy saw it as their

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<sup>1174</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, “The Puritan Ethic and the America Revolution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 24 No. 1 (Jan., 1967), 6.

duty to help the people recognize temptation in all its guises and call them to repentance, in hopes of avoiding sin, restoring their relationship with God, and thereby reaping the reward of His promises and blessings. The New England clergy delivered “sermons in the tradition of the prophet Jeremiah that lamented the backsliding of the present generation.”<sup>1175</sup> The Puritan tradition tied the need for repentance to the fulfillment of the unique purpose or mission from God. This promise or mission can take the form of Winthrop’s “city on a hill” or as in Seward’s election, the fulfillment of America’s unique destiny that began with the “errand into the wilderness.”

The purpose of the Puritan jeremiad “was to direct an imperiled people of God toward the fulfillment of their destiny, to guide them individually toward salvation, and collectively toward the American city of God.”<sup>1176</sup> Warren’s writing often follows a similar pattern of jeremiad, but her fusing of the Puritan jeremiad and her republican political thought may be more accurately thought of as a republican jeremiad. In the republican jeremiad, the precedent is rooted not in Scripture but in republican norms of virtue, and the remedy found not in repentance from sin, but in the turning from vice to virtuous behavior. For Warren, the promise or mission

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<sup>1175</sup> Denise Lardner Carmody and John Tully Carmody, *The Republic of Many Mansions: Foundations of American Religious Thought* (New York: American House, 1990), 22.

<sup>1176</sup> Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 9.

merged her republican thought into a vision for an American future in which “freedom and virtue together would reign.”<sup>1177</sup>

Warren’s apparent pessimism about the future of the young republic is connected to her concern whether there was sufficient virtue to counter the threat of corruption in its many forms. Just as a Puritan clergyman would address the problem of congregational sin with a religious jeremiad, Warren approached the endemic republican problems of corruption with her unique language of republican jeremiad. While the Puritan jeremiad identifies the problem of sin, Warren’s republican jeremiad focuses on the threat of corruption. For Warren, corruption has its foundations in ambition and avarice: “Thus when we look over the theatre of human action, scrutinize the windings of the heart, and survey the transactions of man from the earliest to the present period, it must be acknowledged that ambition and avarice are the leading springs which generally actuate the restless mind. From these primary sources of corruption have arisen all the rapine and confusion, the depredation and ruin, that have spread distress over the face of the earth from the days of Nimrod to Cesar, and from Cesar to an arbitrary prince of the house of Brunswick.”<sup>1178</sup> Warren shares with other republican thinkers the view that “[o]nce corruption begins among individuals, it will, left unchecked, become systemic.”<sup>1179</sup> In *The Sack of Rome* she warns: “Empire decays when virtue’s not the base, / And doom’d to perish when the

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<sup>1177</sup> Warren, “A Political Reverie,” 190.

<sup>1178</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 3.

<sup>1179</sup> Cohen, “Introduction,” *HAR*, xxii.

parts corrupt.”<sup>1180</sup> Her catalog of corruption includes a long list of vices: avarice and ambition, speculation, luxury, rapacity, pride, party prejudice, injustice, vanity, venality, a thirst for revenge, and pursuit of private interest. She warns repeatedly of the “corrupt influence of Avarice or Ambition”<sup>1181</sup> – and stresses the need for bourgeois or marketplace virtue. As she closes her *History*, Warren invokes her republican jeremiad: “Let it never be said of such a favored nation as America has been, as was observed by an ancient historian, on the rise, the glory, and the fall of the republic of Athens, that ‘the inconstancy of the people was the most striking characteristic of its history.’ ... We wish for the duration of her virtue; we sigh at every appearance of her decline.”<sup>1182</sup> The language of her republican jeremiad is clear – American decline is possible as the constancy of the people wanes, and virtue remains the salvific weapon against corruption. The repeated recourse to use of the jeremiad in Warren’s writings reflects her concern about the ever-present and increasing threat of corruption to republican government. A return to virtue is a means of checking corruption, the political disease that had proven fatal to fragile republican governments throughout history. Fear of corruption is characteristic of republican thought.<sup>1183</sup> Corruption entails “several related meanings having to do

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<sup>1180</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act V. Scene 2.

<sup>1181</sup> Warren to James Warren, June 14, 1777, in *Selected Letters*, 97.

<sup>1182</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 641.

<sup>1183</sup> Dagger, *Civic Virtues*, 14.

with decay, degeneration, disintegration, and debasement.”<sup>1184</sup> For republican thinkers, corruption is “the great enemy of virtue.”<sup>1185</sup> Corruption is the inevitable decline and decay of the republican polity. When the citizenry is “influenced by the most malignant and corrupt passions, they lose sight of the sacred obligations of virtue.”<sup>1186</sup> In Warren’s view, the corruption of British officials within the colonies and in England led to tyranny and despotism. On the eve of the Revolution, “the primary threat of corruption remained external to the American colonies themselves.”<sup>1187</sup> This corruption necessitated resistance if colonial liberty and virtue were to survive. British authorities wielded arbitrary and despotic power against the colonies, threatening the colonists’ liberty.

But for a republican thinker such as Warren, the threat of corruption poses a threat from within as well. “Corruption is a disease of the body politic. It has less to do with individual malfeasance than with systematic and systemic degeneration of those practices and commitments that provide the terms of collective self-understanding and shared purpose.”<sup>1188</sup> Warren similarly sees corruption as a degenerative force that “weakens the sinews of the state.”<sup>1189</sup> If corruption is allowed

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<sup>1184</sup> J. Peter Euben, “Corruption,” in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. Terence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989; 1995), 222.

<sup>1185</sup> Dagger, *Civic Virtues*, 14.

<sup>1186</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 677.

<sup>1187</sup> Hatch, *Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 85.

<sup>1188</sup> Euben, “Corruption,” 222.

<sup>1189</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 646.

to continue, it becomes systemic and leads to the demise and ultimately the death of republican government. Although the most immediate threat of corruption was embodied in despotic British rule, internal corruption likewise needed to be identified and resisted. As an historian Warren saw the fall of the Roman republic epitomizing the consequences of both internal and external corruption.

Warren's recognition of corruption within the colonial political context prompts repeated republican jeremiads. When British officials, specifically Gov. Thomas Hutchinson, become corrupt, she calls patriotic colonists to "rescue virtue."<sup>1190</sup> Her character Brutus tells his fellow patriots "if we chance to fall, we fall for virtue."<sup>1191</sup> He further reminds them that

He who in virtue's cause remain unmoved  
And nobly struggles for his country's good:  
Shall more than conquer -- better days shall beam,  
And happier prospects crowd again the scene.<sup>1192</sup>

This struggle "in virtue's cause" checks corruption and keeps the colonies on the road to their millennial destiny. Employing biblical language from Romans 8:37 and a clearly millennial vision, the character of Brutus argues that the colonists will be more than conquerors, and "better days shall beam / and happier prospects crowd the

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<sup>1190</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act II, Scene 2.

<sup>1191</sup> *Ibid.*, Act II, Scene 1.

<sup>1192</sup> *Ibid.*, Act III, Scene 3.

scene again.”<sup>1193</sup> Warren comfortably mixes Puritan millennial language, specifically biblical references, with heroic virtue and ancient republican thought. Nowhere is this more evident than when her characters with classical Roman names, such as Brutus, quote passages from the Bible.

We see a strong expression of republican jeremiad in the closing chapters of her *History*. Despite its providential history, marked by the blessings and direction of God, Warren is concerned about corruption following the Revolutionary War. In a larger sense, she fears the continual threat posed by corruption to republican government. Although she laments the loss of virtue among the citizenry at large, she expresses faith that there is a virtuous remnant that still affirms Revolutionary values and ideals and thus is capable of preserving republican virtue: “Many indeed, at the present period, seem to have lost sight of their primeval ideas and obligations; yet they were not eradicated from the intelligent, the virtuous, and well-informed mind: the genial flame of freedom and independence blazed in its original luster, in the breasts of man, long after the termination of the revolutionary war.”<sup>1194</sup> But residual patriotic spirit alone will not sustain the new republic as it faces the corruption associated with unchecked economic prosperity, the attendant vices of avarice and luxury, and the very real possibility of a new younger aristocracy arising from new wealth. Economic prosperity must be achieved within a context of marketplace virtue. Self-interest cannot become selfishness with no concern for others or the common

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<sup>1193</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act III, Scene 3.

<sup>1194</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 625.



good. Those with wealth are expected to act with generosity and benevolence. Progress and economic development are desirable, but not excessive accumulation of wealth, luxury, or ease. Similarly, she bemoans the degeneration of American virtue after the war: “She has in a great measure lost her simplicity of manners, and those ideas of mediocrity which are generally the parent of content. The Americans are already in too many instances hankering after the sudden accumulation of wealth, and the proud distinctions of fortune and title. They have too far lost that general sense of moral obligation, formerly felt by all classes in America.”<sup>1195</sup>

Warren again identifies the erosion of virtue in the marketplace and economy. She is supportive of economic development and prosperity, but criticizes unchecked vices specific to excessive wealth – avarice, speculation, unfair or deceptive business practices. Virtue in the marketplace is the only mechanism for checking the vice associated with economic activity. She is cautiously optimistic about the future of the America republic because its citizens have not “generally lost their veneration for religion”<sup>1196</sup> and a thread of her concept of virtue that continues to operate as a check on corruption. Just as she attributes the corruption of virtue before the Revolutionary War to the influence of Great Britain, Warren similarly assigns the degeneration of morals after the war to corrupting foreign influences. She fears that arising in the new republic is “the readiness of many, to engraft [334] foreign follies and crimes with their own weak propensities to immigration and to adopt their errors and fierce

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<sup>1195</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 644.

<sup>1196</sup> *Ibid.*

ambition.”<sup>1197</sup> Warren encourages the new nation instead to make for “themselves a national character, marked with moderation, justice, benignity, and all the mild virtues of humanity.”<sup>1198</sup> She further laments

If, instead of the independent feelings of ancient republics, whose prime object was the welfare and happiness of their country, we should see a dereliction of those principles, and the Americans ready to renounce their great advantages, by the imitation of European systems in politics and manners, it would be a melancholy trait in the story of man: yet they, like other nations, may in time, by their servility to men in power, or by a chimerical pursuit of the golden fleece of the poets, become involved in a mist ascending from the pit of avarice. This may lead to speculation, to usurious contracts, to illegal and dishonest projects, and to every private vice, to support the factitious appearances of grandeur and wealth, which can never maintain the claim to that rich inheritance which they so bravely defended.<sup>1199</sup>

To avoid becoming “involved in a mist ascending from the pit of avarice,”<sup>1200</sup> she issues a republican jeremiad with her calls for a turning from European degeneracy and an embrace of virtue. Throughout her history of the American Revolution, the likelihood of American degeneration continues in the forefront of Warren’s thinking.

Again invoking the rhetoric of the republican jeremiad, she warns: “If this should

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<sup>1197</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 644.

<sup>1198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1199</sup> *Ibid.*, 648-9.

<sup>1200</sup> *Ibid.*, 648.

ever become the deplorable situation of the United States, let some unborn historian [337] in a far distant day, detail the lapse, and hold up the contrast between a simple, virtuous, and free people, and a degenerate, servile race of beings, corrupted by wealth, effeminated by luxury, impoverished by licentiousness, and become the *automatons* of intoxicated ambition.”<sup>1201</sup>

Warren presents her vision of the citizenry of the new republic – a simple, virtuous, and free people – in stark contrast with the corruption of wealth, luxury, licentiousness, and ambition of a degenerate and servile race of people. She makes yet another resounding call to virtue as a defense of the new republic against corruption: “All who have just ideas of the equal claims of mankind to share the benefits of a free and benign government, and virtue sufficient to aid its promotion, will fervently pray, that narrow passions of the selfish, or the ambitious views of more elevated minds, may never render fruitless the labors of the wise and vigilant patriot, who sacrificed much to this noble purpose.”<sup>1202</sup> Corruption will cost America its hard-won freedom, and the only check against such corruption, Warren, warns is virtue. In the early days of the new republic arose a growing “spirit of finance” that threatened to establish “a national debt that would hang on the neck of America to the latest generation.”<sup>1203</sup> There also was awakened “a train of restless passions” within the body politic that “created a rage for project, speculation, and various artifices, to

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<sup>1201</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 646.

<sup>1202</sup> *Ibid.*, 693.

<sup>1203</sup> *Ibid.*, 665.

support a factitious dignity, which finally ruined multitudes of unsuspecting citizens.”<sup>1204</sup> Warren also identifies the growth of “a spirit of public gambling, speculation in paper, in lands, in everything else, to a degree unparalleled in any nation.”<sup>1205</sup> Her republican virtue is necessary to check the threat of corruption that flows from vices in the economic realm. Warren again invokes her republican jeremiad in the face of religious skepticism:

The people should be economical and sober; and the clergy should keep within their own line, which directs them to enforce the moral obligations of society, and to inculcate the doctrines of peace, brotherly kindness, and the forgiveness of injuries, taught by the example of their Divine Master. . . . Such a happy combination of propriety and dignity in each department might prevent all apprehensions of danger to religion from the sceptical absurdities of unprincipled men; neither the foolish, the learned, or licentious, would be able to sap the foundations of the kingdom of Christ.<sup>1206</sup>

She casts her vision of America as a future beacon of liberty and a happiness that comes through religion. She remarks in her *History*:

These reflections may justify a short digression, that only means to hint at the happy consequences that might result, if a nation extends its power, and carries its arms to the extremities of the globe, would transmit with them, that

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<sup>1204</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 665.

<sup>1205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1206</sup> *Ibid.*, 693.

mildness of manners, that justice, humanity, and rectitude of character, that would draw the inhabitants of the darker regions of the world, from their idolatry and superstition. Thus nations who had long been immersed in errors, might be led to embrace a religion, admirably adapted to the promotion of the happiness of mankind on earth, and to prepare a rational agent for some higher stage of existence, when the drama on this tragic theatre is finished.<sup>1207</sup>

Warren's embrace of a millennial vision, the idea of liberty as the sacred cause of God, and the republican jeremiad can be seen in many passages of her *History*, but these themes animate her poetry and plays as well. Her poetry is included in Reiner Smolinski's collection of early American millennial literature. Warren's millennial themes are exemplified in her poems, "Political Reverie" and "Simplicity." Smolinski describes her poem "Political Reverie" as "a visionary celebration of America's rising glory and success in battle against tyrannical Britannia."<sup>1208</sup> Reflective of her republican jeremiad, "Primitive Simplicity" "is at once a warning to America and a reminder to the English to eschew sumptuous living, courtly elegance, and moral corruption."<sup>1209</sup> "Political Reverie" echoes strong millennial themes. The narrator looks to the west, toward the British colonies

with rapture at the distant dawn,

And view the glories of the opening morn,

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<sup>1207</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 339.

<sup>1208</sup> Smolinkski, *The Kindom, The Power, &The Glory*, 560.

<sup>1209</sup> *Ibid.*

When justice holds his scepter o'er the land,  
And rescues freedom from a tyrant's hand;  
When patriot states in laurel crowns may rise,  
And ancient kingdoms court them as allies;  
Glory and valour shall be here display'd,  
And virtue rear her long dejected head;  
Her standard plant beneath these gladden'd skies,  
Her fame extend, and arts and science rise;  
While empire's lofty spreading sails unfurl'd.  
Roll swiftly on towards the western world.<sup>1210</sup>

The goddess Virtue continues west and “Visits Columbia's distant fertile plains / where liberty, a happy goddess, reigns.”<sup>1211</sup> Great Britain had a storied legacy of freedom of the mother country, but as the narrator's gaze turns back to the mother country, she finds it rampant with corruption. “Virtue turn'd pale. And freedom left the isle, / When she stretch'd out her avaricious hand, / And shew'd her sons her hostile bloody wand.”<sup>1212</sup> The narrator laments:

But while methought this commonwealth would rise,  
And bright Millennial prospects struck my eyes,  
I wept Britannia, once Europa's pride,

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<sup>1210</sup> Warren, “Political Reverie,” 189.

<sup>1211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1212</sup> Ibid., 192.

To fame and virtue long she stood ally'd;  
This glorious queen, the mistress of the isles,  
Torn up by faction, and intestine broils,  
Be became the pray of each rapacious arm,  
Strip'd and disrob'ed of every native charm.<sup>1213</sup>

The narrator is escorted from Britain to the New World by a seraph, “who beckon'd me through vast measured space”<sup>1214</sup> to look upon the colonies on the eve of the Revolution. As the scene unfolds, the narrator comes to realize that corruption has spread throughout the British empire, threatening the colonies' freedom and virtue:

I cry'd—‘Oh! sacred form forgive,  
Or me from yonder nether world remove;--  
Has freedom's genius left Britannia's shore?  
And must her sleeping patriots live no more?  
Arise, ye venerable shades! Inspire,  
Each languid soul with patriotic fire;  
'Till every bosom feels a noble flame,  
And emulates a Locke, or Sydney's name.<sup>1215</sup>

The seraph shows her the future:

The glow from breast to breast is spread,

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<sup>1213</sup> Warren, “Political Reverie,” 190.

<sup>1214</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>1215</sup> Ibid., 191-192.

From sire to son the latent spark's convey'd  
... United millions parried back the blow,  
Britain recoil'd, and sadly learnt to know,  
Cities with cities leagu'd, and town with town,  
She trembled at her fate when half undone.<sup>1216</sup>

Although patriot victory over Britain seems implausible, the seraph reminds her:

Think not this all a visionary scene,  
For he who wields the grand, the vast machine,  
... Who holds the balance—who stretch'd out the line—  
O'er all creation form'd the grand design  
... Yet still presides and watches o'er the fates,  
Of all the kingdom's that his power creates.<sup>1217</sup>

The seraph foretells the suffering and bloodshed will come during the “civil war” against Great Britain. But reminds her of the day

Then this far distant corner of the earth,  
Shall boast her Decii's and Fabii's birth;  
When the young heroes, wondering, shall be told,  
That Britain bartered worth for lust of gold.<sup>1218</sup>

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<sup>1216</sup> Warren, “Political Reverie,” 192-193.

<sup>1217</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>1218</sup> Ibid.



The millennial themes of a visionary future are evident in this pre-Revolutionary poem, as well as the conviction that God is on the patriot's side. A similar theme is struck in another poem included in the collection, "To the Honorable J. Winthrop, Esq." (1774), in which Warren writes, "And Heaven looks down, and sanctifies the deed, / They'll fight for freedom, and for virtue bleed."<sup>1219</sup>

Similarly, millennial themes and the pattern of republican jeremiad are developed in the poem "Simplicity." Warren first sets forth a republican vision, an "ideal golden age" founded on virtue and truth, where

The rosy finger'd morn, and noontide ray,  
The streak'd twilight, or the evening grey,  
Were passed alike in innocence and mirth ...  
Unclouded reason guided all their way,  
And virtue's self sat innocently gay.<sup>1220</sup>

The idyllic vision soon is "in dark oblivion lost,"<sup>1221</sup> which Warren attributes the loss of this idyllic vision to the fallen nature of man. Virtue will always be required.

Expressed imperfectly by fallen man, virtue enables him to be useful in this life until he secures salvation and his virtue is perfected in the next. "But now, alas! in dark oblivion lost, the sons of Adam know it to their cost; / Since God forbad the mother

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<sup>1219</sup> Warren, "To the Honorable J. Winthrop, Esq.," 212.

<sup>1220</sup> Warren, "Simplicity," 230.

<sup>1221</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

of mankind / To taste the fruit to which she most inclin'd."<sup>1222</sup> Fallen man is prone to prefer "fruits luxuriant" and "the rich profusion that all Eden pours"<sup>1223</sup> to the virtue of simplicity. The loss of simplicity represents lost virtue. "As from simplicity he deviates, / Fancy, prolific, endless wants creates; / Creates new wishes, foreign to the soul, Ten thousand passions all the mind control."<sup>1224</sup> In this republican jeremiad, Warren first identifies corruption and the vices of luxury and avarice. Also invoking the pattern of jeremiad, the "sin" that must be repented of is equally clear. The cause of the fatal corruption is "Commerce! the source of every narrow vice," which leads to "soft refinement, and the love of gold, / Faction and strife grew emulous and bold."<sup>1225</sup> She sees further evidence of corruption: "High wrought refinement—usher'd in replete, / With all the ills that sink a virtuous state."<sup>1226</sup> After identifying the growth of corruption and vice, Warren invokes the lessons of the fall of the Roman republic: "No longer liv'd the ancient Roman pride, / Her virtue sicken'd, and her glory di'd."<sup>1227</sup> She further warns: "Empires are from their lofty summits rent, / And kingdoms down to swift perdition sent, / By soft, corrupt, refinements of the heart, / Wrought up to vice by each deceptive art."<sup>1228</sup> She reminds her readers of the

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<sup>1222</sup> Warren, "Simplicity," 231.

<sup>1223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1224</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>1225</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>1226</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>1227</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>1228</sup> Ibid., 232.

threat of corruption: “While time rolls on, and mighty kingdoms fail, / They, peace and freedom on their heirs entail, / ‘Till virtue sinks, and in far distant times, / Dies in the vortex of European crimes.”<sup>1229</sup> The message of Warren’s republican jeremiad is clear: the colonies must resist the encroaching British and European commercial corruption, abandon their desire for luxury and excessive “love of gold”<sup>1230</sup> and return to the virtue of simplicity that checks such vice. Only virtue can check excessive self-interest and preserve the republic.

These themes arise in her dramatic works, as well. In *The Defeat* Warren identifies colonists’ “Native freedom”<sup>1231</sup> to be “The grant of heaven to our pious fathers, / Transmitted down in characters of blood.”<sup>1232</sup> Similarly, America is a unique haven of freedom. In the opening scene of *The Adulateur* (1773), the old patriot Brutus laments his nation’s loss of liberty at the hands of the despotic Rapatio: “Is this the once famed mistress of the north / The sweet retreat of freedom? Dearly purchased!”<sup>1233</sup> Warren envisions America’s future if the colonists succeed in their battle for liberty against British tyranny: “But the conflicts glorious / Should we

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<sup>1229</sup> Warren, “Simplicity,” 234.

<sup>1230</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>1231</sup> Warren, *The Defeat*, Act III, Scene 2.

<sup>1232</sup> *Ibid.*, Act I, Scene 1.

<sup>1233</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act II, Scene 4.

succeed, a happy tide of comfort / Flows on the soul – new scenes of joy await us /  
And gild the evening of our days.”<sup>1234</sup>

The pattern of republican jeremiad and hope of a glorious American future characterizes much of Warren’s writings. Perhaps the most striking example of this aspect of her writing is found in the closing paragraph of Warren’s *History*. The passage incorporates a number of key millennial themes and aspects of the republican jeremiad, including her view of America as an example of righteousness to the world, a nation that is improving and expanding under direction of God, and a millennial vision for America’s future that invokes explicit biblical language of the Book of Revelation, specifically Rev. 10:5. It is a lengthy passage, but is quoted here in its entirety because of how clearly it exemplifies the millennialism and the republican jeremiad in Warren’s political thought:

Indeed the whole country wears a face of improvement, from the extreme point of the northern and western woods, through all the southern states, and to the vast Atlantic ocean, the eastern boundary of the United States. The wisdom and justice of the American governments, and the virtue of the inhabitants, may, if they are not deficient in the improvement of their own advantages, render the United States of America an enviable example to all the world, of peace, liberty, righteousness, and truth. The western wilds, which for ages have been little known, may arrive to that stage of improvement and perfection, beyond which the limits of human genius cannot

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<sup>1234</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act II, Scene 4.

reach, [436] and this last civilized quarter of the globe may exhibit those striking traits of grandeur and magnificence, which the Divine Economist may have reserved to crown the closing scene, when the angel of his presence will stand upon the sea and upon the earth, lift up his hand to heaven, and swear by Him that liveth for ever and ever, that there shall be time no longer.<sup>1235</sup>

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<sup>1235</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 698.

## CHAPTER 10

### Warren's Conception of Virtue – Concluding Thoughts

*[G]ive me but virtue,  
That sun-shine of the soul – enough – I'm happy.*  
-- Third Senator of Servia, *The Adulateur* (1773)<sup>1236</sup>

We have seen the extent to which virtue animated the republican thought of Mercy Otis Warren. As one of the most formidable intellectuals of the founding generation, Warren wrote passionately about republican liberty, about the beauty of republican ideals, and as this study I hope demonstrates, she consistently advocated the central place of virtue in a free and well-ordered republic. As a poet, playwright, historian, and republican thinker, Warren draws upon several seemingly disparate philosophical traditions within the colonial context, and weaves together the elements of virtue she believed necessary to the fledgling republic. But Warren was hardly alone in her insistence on virtue in the new republic. The necessity of virtue permeates discussions of republican government in the American Revolutionary political culture. Hers was a generation convinced that without virtue, republican government was impossible. In republican thought, liberty is found in non-dependence, self-sufficiency, and self-government. Virtue provides a guide for constraining the passions and human irrationality that make self-government impossible. Corruption in its many forms – excessive self-interest, ambition and avarice, thirst for the accumulation of wealth, and many others – posed an ever-present threat to republican government. Familiar with the history of ancient

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<sup>1236</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act II, Scene 2.

republics, the founding generation recognized that without virtue, corruption spreads, and republican government eventually devolves into tyranny. Only with virtue is corruption stopped. Only with virtue is republican liberty possible. Virtue is the energetic, sustaining force that points citizens from self-interest to the common good, from passions to reasoned self-rule, and from vice and corruption to true liberty. Warren shared this understanding that republican liberty, indeed republican government itself, depended on virtue. But what did the founding generation mean when they emphasized the need for virtue? More specifically, what specifically did Warren have in mind when she wrote of virtue in the American republican context?

Warren's conception of virtue in many ways is representative of the intellectual milieu of the American founding. The Revolutionary generation drew on a variety of legal, political, and philosophical arguments to justify their break with Great Britain, and later to explain how the new republic should be constituted. They were influenced by a number of ideological traditions, especially the ideas of classical antiquity, Enlightenment rationalism, English common law, New England Puritanism, and the radical Whig or "country" ideology. In this intellectual context of the emerging republic, Warren develops a complex, multi-thread conception of virtue that reflects the many available philosophical traditions at the founding. Within the constellation of political concepts that Warren employs in her republican thought, virtue is predominant – whether fueling patriotic fervor as the Revolutionary War approached, pointing citizens to sacrificial commitment to the common good, or preserving republican liberty and order under the new Constitution.

I argue that Warren develops a three-thread concept of virtue that employs classical republican virtue, bourgeois or marketplace virtue, and Christian virtue. Classical republican virtue is reflected in the heroic societies of the Homeric tradition (military valor, courage, patriotism), the ancient Roman republic (devotion to the common good, civic engagement, non-dependence, and fear of corruption), and also in Plato's recitation of the four cardinal virtues (wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice). Bourgeois or marketplace virtue considers what is necessary to maintain republican government within the context of a developing commercial society. Christian virtue is reflected in the traits of faith, hope, charity, and in Warren's formulation, a long list of other traits exemplifying the Christian faith.

The first step of my analysis in this project identified each of these threads of thought and evaluated how Warren employed them in her conception of virtue and in her republican thought. In her Revolutionary plays, when addressing the challenges of the impending war with Great Britain, Warren emphasizes the heroic virtue of antiquity and the need for heroic self-sacrifice, even the ultimate sacrifice to defeat British tyranny. But her use of classical virtue is not limited to her Revolutionary writings or to her *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* published in 1805. Warren continues to employ the ideals of classical virtue as a check on corruption in the new republic. In the face of the increasing threat of corruption from a growing American economy, Warren again turns to virtue as a necessary check for republican government. Here, she points positively to bourgeois virtue and its emphasis on industry, frugality, and moderation, but she points as well



to the need to check the excesses of avarice, the thirst for accumulation of money, and the desire for luxury that can accompany economic prosperity. I identify two important aspects of Warren's use of bourgeois or marketplace virtue: First, she draws a distinction between economic activity that benefits the individual and also contributes to society as a whole, and what she calls the "spirit of finance" driven by excessive individual self-interest and the thirst for the accumulation of wealth, with no benefit to the common good. The first case reflects what she sees as proper economic activity; the second, a form of economic activity that leads to corruption and threatens the republic. Second, in this context Warren merges bourgeois virtue, republican concern for the common good and Christian virtue as a means of checking economic corruption. Her criticism of the rampant desire for the accumulation of wealth is an example of the biblical warning, that the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil. In addressing the problems of corruption in an increasing commercial context, Warren deploys all three threads of her conception of virtue. Finally, to meet the challenge from skepticism and other forms of spiritual corruption, Warren points to Christian virtue, especially the obligation to understand and act in a way consistent with that tradition.

As the preceding analysis demonstrates, identification and discussion of each of these threads of virtue in Warren's thinking is helpful in understanding how she uses each to address the many threats of corruption in the American context. But separating these threads of thought for analysis offers only a starting point for understanding Warren's conception of virtue and the understanding of virtue in the

American founding generation. From our modern perspective, we often make distinctions between the various philosophical, legal, and political traditions employed at the founding. We identify tensions among the various ideological traditions, even points at which reconciliation of the various threads seems problematic, if not impossible. For example, political theorists often identify the republican writings of Niccolo' Machiavelli and Jean-Jacques Rousseau as a point of separation at which Christian virtue was removed from the modern republican framework. Although they recognize the importance of a civil religion, Christianity, they allege, is not a desirable religion in a republic.

This formulation of republican virtue points to potential tensions between the philosophical threads employed by Warren in her conception of virtue. In my analysis, I argue that in her conception of virtue and in her overall republican thought Warren makes no such distinction between Christian and republican thought. I base this analysis on three arguments: First, I argue that Warren's view of the human *telos* prioritizes within her conception of virtue the Christian thread. She embraces an explicitly Christian view of the human *telos* and from this starting point develops her overall conception of virtue as well as her republican framework. Second, I argue that Warren's understanding reflects the combination of classical and Christian virtue in Revolutionary political discourse. As the Revolutionary War approached, secular and sectarian discourses merged. Puritan pulpits thundered with appeals to patriotism to fight for God's cause of liberty against British tyranny. This Revolutionary merging of philosophical traditions counters the modern republican allegation that Christian

virtue cannot create the patriotic or heroic virtue necessary to republican government. Revolutionary political discourse demonstrates again that the founding generation, and Warren in particular makes no such distinction between ancient and Christian virtue in its republican framework. Specifically, in Warren's conception of virtue, we see none of the tensions suggested by Machiavelli and Rousseau. Because her starting point is her Christian worldview, she prioritizes Christian virtue within her overall conception of virtue. Warren comfortably combines these three threads of thought and synthesizes them into one seamless conception of virtue. I argue that in this respect, her conception of virtue represents the "republican synthesis" of ideas identified as characterizing the American intellectual landscape at the founding. Warren's concept of virtue furthers our understanding of this republican synthesis. I close my analysis of her synthesis of virtue with a consideration of how she ties the three threads of thought together in her use of "exemplary virtue" as a mechanism for inculcating republican virtue. Those figures of American history that most exemplify republican virtue tend to demonstrate all three threads of virtue.

I identify two other significant aspects of Warren's conception of virtue. First I argue in Chapter 8 that Warren views virtue as an essential informal ordering principle within republican government. Formal order, such as universal natural law, the Constitution, and the rule of law, provides an objective legal basis for governing the republic. This formal order, although essential in republican thought, is insufficient in itself to maintain and sustain the republic. If it were sufficient, Warren in her writings after the ratification of the Constitution would no longer insist upon

virtue in the new republic. But her calls for virtue continue. In her republican framework, formal order such as the Constitution and the rule of law provide an important framework for maintaining liberty, but virtue provides an essential objective guide for proper behavior in everyday life. Virtue is the informal ordering principle that helps to check the passions and irrationality that make self-government impossible. If human beings are incapable of self-government, then law must check individual behavior. Virtue checks corruption; without virtue corruption flourishes, which in Warren's estimation leads to arbitrary expressions of power, erosion of the rule of law, and ultimately to tyranny. Thus, in republican government, formal ordering structures alone are insufficient to maintain republican liberty and the republic itself. Without the informal ordering principle of virtue to guide the daily actions of individuals and leaders, even in the best constituted government liberty eventually would deteriorate into tyranny. Virtue is both indispensable and essential to republican government. Second, Warren sees virtue as essential to America achieving its millennial destiny. The language of Puritan millennialism pervades American political discourse from its earliest days, and Warren's writings reflect this millennial tradition found in early American political thought. In this context, Warren sees the republic as having a special destiny, ordained by God. In her political thought, only virtue makes achievement of this millennial destiny possible.

Warren's conception of virtue merges three identifiable threads of virtue – classical republican virtue, bourgeois or marketplace virtue, and Christian virtue. In many ways, her conception of virtue reflects the ideological milieu in which she

lived. Throughout her life, Warren was dedicated to defending the principles of republican government and insisting on the importance of virtue. No matter what the challenge or threat, for Warren the solution was always the same: virtue. She saw virtue as the only means of rescuing the colonies from the corruption and tyranny of Great Britain and Europe. She saw virtue as setting the new nation apart from the rest of the world, indeed America's "magnanimity, valour, and virtue ... made her an object of curiosity throughout the world."<sup>1237</sup> And in her mind, only virtue could sustain the republic. As she considered the future of the American people and the republic, Warren characteristically offered a cautiously optimistic view: "It now depends on their own virtue, to continue the United States of America an example of the respectability and dignity of this mode of government."<sup>1238</sup> We hear echoing in this passage of her *History* the consistent rejoinder of a lifetime of republican thought and writing, as Warren had reminded the Revolutionary generation twenty-five years earlier – "virtue only made them brave and free."<sup>1239</sup>

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<sup>1237</sup> Warren to Catherine Sawbridge Macaulay, July 1789, in *Selected Letters*, 222.

<sup>1238</sup> Warren, *HAR*, 692.

<sup>1239</sup> Warren, "The Genius of America," 247.

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