Ancients and Moderns
and the Public Use of Learning

ROB HARDY

IN 1998, classicists Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath published a book with the provocative title *Who Killed Homer?* in which they argued that professional classicists themselves were responsible for “the demise of classical learning.” They claimed that the profession had ceded the place of the classics at the center of Western civilization and failed to maintain the relevance of the classics, and in particular the “wisdom of the Greeks,” in contemporary American society. In the view of Hanson and Heath, the classics had fallen victim to a combination of professionalism and postmodernism, diluted and distorted with feminist and queer theory (among other things) and shortchanged by the careerism of classics professors. In the process, they argued, we had lost “Classical learning and the Classical spirit as an antidote to the toxin of popular culture” and as moral ballast against “the rise of almost everything antithetical to Greek ideas and values,” such as “the search for material and sensual gratification in place of spiritual growth and sacrifice” and “a complete surrender to the present” (159).

For Hanson and Heath, the classics reinforce conservative notions about society and culture. The Greeks represent a timeless ideal from which we have fallen, and to which a classical education, properly understood, might restore us. Not surprisingly, Hanson is himself a noted neoconservative and was an unofficial advisor to Dick Cheney in the run up to the Iraq War. At a meeting in the fall of 2002, Hanson and Cheney discussed the example of the fourth-century BCE Theban general Epaminondas, who led a successful preemptive strike against Sparta, whose repressive regime had posed a perennial threat against the rest of the Hellenic world. To Hanson, the success of Epaminondas was an example of “real idealism” in foreign policy. The fourth-century Greeks became a model for the twenty-first century American invasion of Iraq.¹
One of the classicists Hanson and Heath single out for criticism is Page duBois. In holding up a passage from one of her books for particular scorn, Hanson and Heath write:

Most “theoretical” Classicists, then, worried over their “privileges,” identify themselves and their research as adamantly anti-Western and try to exhibit as many credentials, to claim as many affinities, to list as many identities as possible to ensure they are not associated in any shape or form with traditional admiration for the Greeks and their legacy. Ultimately, within this new self-interested approach, we learn little of the Greeks from today’s theorists, but a great deal about their own all-encompassing narcissism. (96)

To Hanson and Heath, these “self-interested” and narcissistic classicists are more concerned with themselves than with the Greeks.

A few years later, duBois responded with *Trojan Horses: Saving the Classics from Conservatives* (2001), in which she argued that the Greeks themselves were more diverse, multicultural, and subversive than the conservatives cared to admit. In a later book, *Out of Athens: The New Ancient Greeks* (2010), duBois argued that the study of the classics should be approached “as a stimulus for contemporary theory, for contestation of our current inherited arrangements of power and hierarchy” (175). For duBois, the classics have value as a jumping off point for theorists and cultural critics like Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler, whose aim is not to understand the past, but to change the present. What interests duBois is the ongoing “engagement with antiquity,” the “elaborate, rich, palimpsestic layerings” of meaning that make the classics “a powerful subject for contemporary resistance” (199). For Hanson and Heath, the target is cultural and moral relativism; for duBois, the target is privilege.

Hanson and Heath and duBois share a belief that classical learning should be useful in the public sphere—whether that means supporting or undermining traditional assumptions and beliefs. Both would condemn mere learning for learning’s sake, without a conception of how that learning is to be brought forward into the public sphere. Hanson and Heath write that the goal of classicists should not be to train still more classicists, “but to educate the public” (209). Classicists should be public intellectuals.

These ideas and attitudes—both on the conservative and liberal ends of the spectrum—are not new. In the eighteenth century, the development of the “public sphere” intensified the discussion of the practical and public function of education. Part of this discussion involved reexamining the role of the classics in education and in public life.

The intellectual history of the Middle Ages had been a story of the long process of reconciling the learning and literature of the pagan Greeks and Romans with Christianity. In the fourth century, St. Jerome had a nightmare that God rebuked him with being a Ciceronian rather than a Christian, and Jerome’s nightmare
was emblematic of the intellectual anxieties of the age. The power and allure of the ancients was irresistible, and over the centuries the creative tension between the classics and Christianity fused Aristotelianism with Christianity to produce scholasticism, tinted Christian mysticism with Neoplatonism, and influenced the late medieval poetry of Petrarch and Dante. But in the early modern period, the scientific revolution shook these medieval foundations. Once again, the need arose to reconcile past and present—to reconcile not only the new science and the old religion, but also the classical learning of the past with the scientific learning of the present. More fundamentally, there was a need to reconcile the authority of tradition with the freedom of inquiry that the scientific revolution made possible.

A central figure in the decisive shift from medieval scholastic to modern scientific modes of thought was Sir Francis Bacon. It was Bacon who introduced the simple and influential test of learning that commonly defines education in the modern world: is it useful? Applied to the classics, this test of utility resulted in the gradual dismantling of the traditional classical curriculum. At the end of the eighteenth century, Dr. Benjamin Rush opposed the compulsory study of the classical languages as difficult, dull, and damaging to a republican form of government. “It is only by rendering knowledge universal,” Rush wrote, “that a republican form of government can be preserved in our country” (25). Because of the difficulty of learning the ancient languages, the study of Latin and Greek could never be the basis of a universal, democratic education. The ancient languages were also obstacles to “propagating useful knowledge,” and stifled creativity and innovation. “We shall never equal the sublime and original authors of antiquity,” Rush wrote, “until we cease to study them” (27). Instead of imitating the classics, Rush urged, we should follow nature: “Nature is always the same. Let us yield to her inspiration alone” (28).

Ancients and Moderns

Should we follow nature or the classics? Not everyone in the eighteenth century would have agreed with Rush that nature is the best source of inspiration. Early in the century, in his Essay on Criticism, Alexander Pope says: “Learn hence for the Ancient Rules a just Esteem; / To copy Nature is to copy Them” (139–40). For Pope, the ideal is not to discover new truths through the study of nature itself, but to perpetuate old truths through the imitation of a classical ideal. As he says in his Discourse on Pastoral Poetry (1717): “If we would copy Nature, it may be useful to take this Idea along with us, that pastoral is an image of what they call the Golden age. So that we are not to describe our shepherds as shepherds at this day really are, but as they may be conceiv’d to have been, when the best of men follow’d the employment” (38–43). Pastoral represents a moral and aesthetic ideal, rather than reflecting the direct observation of nature. This is the argument that Winckelmann would make later in
the century about Greek art, that it represented an ideal beauty achieved by applying human reason and imagination to the raw material of nature.

Pope was responding, in part, to a contemporary debate about the best kind of learning. As the eighteenth century opened, the sides were drawn between the Ancients and the Moderns, between those who considered the learning of the ancient world unrivalled, and those who backed the idea of progress in science, literature, and the arts. It was an age of neoclassicism, but it was also an age of scientific revolution, when the works of Bacon and Newton, though written in Latin, represented a decisive break with the medieval scholastic scientific method based on the ancient learning of Aristotle. The shift was from a deductive method based on a priori propositions to an inductive method based on the direct observation of nature. Instead of claiming knowledge based on the authority of an ancient theory or text, the modern scientist appealed directly to nature.

In this controversy, the cause of the Ancients had found an early champion in Sir William Temple, the author of *An Essay on the Ancient and Modern Learning* (1690). A large part of Temple’s purpose in taking up the cause of the Ancients was to criticize the moral failings of his contemporaries, and he concludes the essay with a condemnation of two of these failings: avarice and pedantry. Temple argues that “the humour of Avarice and greediness of Wealth have been ever and in all Countries where Silver and Gold have been in Price and of current use,” and that avarice has increased in Britain as a result of the wealth flowing in from the West Indies (39). He calls avarice “of all Passions the most sordid,” and holds it responsible for hindering the progress of learning: “‘Tis no wonder, then, that Learning has been so little advanced since it grew to be mercenary, and the Progress of it has been fettered by the cares of the World, and disturbed by the Desires of being Rich or the fears of being Poor.” He concludes his essay with a dissection of pedantry, the “shallow” and “superficial” learning of scholars “pretending to more than they had, or to more esteem than what they had could deserve” (40).

For Temple, who had a career as a statesman during the reign of Charles II, the purpose of an education was to prepare men for public life and service. Latin was still the language of diplomacy, and Latin authors still provided a stylistic model that served statesmen and courtiers well. Sir William was concerned that modern learning would lead to a devaluing of the gentlemanly education of which he was a product. Like Hanson and Heath, he attacks self-interested scholars who seemed to have more interest in personal advancement than in the advancement of learning. The corruption of scholarship and the decadence of society went hand-in-hand.

Unfortunately, Temple’s own classical scholarship was not particularly sound. In his essay, he lavished praise on the *Epistles of Phalaris*, attributed to the sixth-century BCE Sicilian tyrant Phalaris, saying that the letters “have more Race, more Spirit, more Force of Wit and Genius, than any others I have ever seen, either ancient or modern” (35). But the *Epistles* were, in fact, spurious, as the scholar Richard
Bentley (1662–1742) laboriously demonstrated in his *Dissertation on the Epistles of Phalaris* (1697).

Bentley was a contentious and unpleasant man who became an easy target for the champions of the Ancients. He was the kind of “verbal critic” Alexander Pope singled out in his *Essay on Criticism* for being so attentive to linguistic minutiae that he failed to see the bigger aesthetic picture. According to Pope, critics like Bentley focused on the part rather than the whole, and failed to see the forest for the trees. Understanding and appreciation of literature were sacrificed to linguistic hairsplitting. Swift wrote ironically of Bentley that “the learned World is therefore most highly indebted to a late painful and judicious Editor of the Classicks,” explaining that “every Author by his Management, sweats under himself, being over-loaded with his own Index, and carries, like a North-Country-Pedlar, all his Substance and Furniture upon his Back, and with as great Variety of Trifles” (15). Bentley represented a significant step toward the professionalization of classical philology as an academic discipline. Instead of leaving the classics to enthusiastic amateurs like Sir William Temple, Bentley insisted that classical texts be subjected to scientific scrutiny by trained professionals like himself. In doing so, Bentley called into question “the very integrity and usefulness of the classical ideal” by removing the classics from public life and cloistering them in the scholar’s study (Levine 161).

For the champions of the Ancients, it mattered little whether the *Epistles of Phalaris* was a sixth-century BCE original or a second-century CE forgery, so long as its style was pleasing and its example instructive. Their interest was not in historical philology, but in imitation of ancient models. Bentley, on the other hand, asserted that “the chief Province of a Critick [was] to detect Forgeries” (Ruthven 58). The contest between the Ancients and the Moderns also pitted the authentic or original against the spurious or derivative.

Soon after Bentley exposed the *Epistles of Phalaris*, his friend Sir Isaac Newton was appointed Warden of the Royal Mint, where he engaged in a relentless campaign of rooting out and prosecuting counterfeitors. Newton’s responsibility was to ensure that the coin of the realm was genuine and its value based on precise measurement. But at the same time that Newton was working to establish a stable currency, he was also, along with many of his countrymen, speculating wildly on the stock market (which also included a market in what we would now call “derivatives”). Ironically, while he was working to move Britain toward the gold standard, he was also engaged in making and losing a fortune based entirely on paper.

In the early eighteenth century, mercantilism and the rise of joint stock companies were generating massive fortunes, and consumerism was on the rise in Britain. Discoveries in the New World had brought new wealth and resources into Britain, and had opened up lucrative new markets for trade—one of the aspects of modern society that Sir William Temple criticized in his essay on Ancient and Modern learning (39). But the same years also brought war between the major
European powers, and with war came massive debt. In 1711, a scheme was formed to finance the public debt incurred during the War of the Spanish Succession by converting it into shares in the South Sea Company. A flood of investments created a financial bubble that collapsed in the late summer of 1720, causing the world's first stock market crash.

In finance, in religion, in literature, and in learning, one of the fundamental questions of the time was whether there ought to be a fixed standard—a standard of value, or morality, of style and taste. Newton seems to reflect the tension between insistence on a standard (a monetary standard based on gold) and the impulse toward freedom of speculation. One of the characteristic religious movements of the eighteenth century, deism, also reflects that tension, combining acceptance of moral standards (based on nature and reason) with a rejection of the trappings of traditional religious authority. In *The Principles of Deism Truly Represented*, for example, Francis Gastrell argues that there must be “common Rules which all Men are oblig’d to conform to,” but he rejects the notion that the “Standard Authors” (he names Aristotle and Cicero, among others) “are to be believed upon their own Word.” Such men “were great Men in their Times, and have made a great many wise Reflexions, and laid down several good Rules: But a Man must use his own Discretion in chusing and applying them to himself” (73). There is an interesting tension here between insistence upon a standard of conduct and a rejection of the classic authorities on whom that standard is often based.

In the entertaining *Letter of Advice to a Young Poet* (1721), attributed to Jonathan Swift, the author acknowledges that modern poets are “free-thinkers” (often a code word for “atheists”), but nonetheless encourages his young poet to be thoroughly familiar with Scripture—not for its moral teaching, but for its stock of language and allusion. “Far be it from me to desire you to believe them,” he writes, “or lay any great stress upon their Authority (in that you may do as you think fit) but to read them as a Piece of necessary Furniture for a Wit and a Poet; which is a very different View from that of a Christian.” In an extreme application of the test of utility, the author argues that the Scriptures don’t need to be believed, but they do need to be used. Making a fascinating allusion to the recent collapse of the South Sea Bubble, the author writes:

Shut up the Sacred Books, and I would be bound our Wit would run-down like an Alarm, or fall as the Stocks did, and ruin half the Poets in these Kingdoms. And if that were the Case, how would most of the Tribe, (all, I think, but the immortal Addison, who made a better Use of his Bible, and a few more) who dealt so freely in that Fund, rejoice that they had drawn out in Time, and left the present Generation of Poets to be the BUBBLES. (8)
On the one hand, the author acknowledges the need for a standard, a common cultural point of reference. On the other hand, he later writes: “I am for every Man’s working upon his own Materials, and producing only what he can find within himself, which is commonly a better Stock than the Owner knows it to be” (13). He dismisses the “approv’d Standard—Authors of Antiquity” as full of maggots, like old cheese. There is an unresolved tension between derivativeness and originality that dissolves in Swiftian laughter.

George Berkeley on Pedantry, Avarice, and Free-Thinking

In the aftermath of the South Sea Bubble, the philosopher George Berkeley published *An Essay Towards Preventing the Ruine of Great Britain* (1721), in which he wrote: “Industry is the natural sure way to Wealth...Money is so far useful to the Public, as it promoteth Industry; and Credit having the same effect, is of the same value with Money. But Money or Credit circulating through a Nation from Hand to Hand, without producing Labour and Industry, is direct Gaming” (5). The problem, as Berkeley diagnosed it, was that money was being valued for its own sake, rather than as a means to promote industry. Money was generating more money, without producing real benefits like higher employment, and the collapse of the bubble proved that this kind of pyramid scheme was unsustainable.

I approach Berkeley with some trepidation, conscious that I am wading into deep waters. I am not a philosopher. I am primarily interested in Berkeley as an example of an eighteenth-century public intellectual, as someone who wrote not just for other philosophers, but for a wider public, as he did in response to the South Sea Bubble. Indeed, as one scholar has noted, “Berkeley’s interest in philosophy seems to have waned” during the period between 1713 and 1729, but not so his interest in using his philosophical ideas in public discussions of important issues (Berman 14).

In his treatise *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), Berkeley says that the philosopher ought to “think with the learned, and speak with the vulgar” (51), giving the example of someone who accepts the Copernican system, but continues in ordinary conversation to speak of the sun rising and setting. This seems to me a good eighteenth-century rendering of the call for public intellectuals to make their work “intelligible to nonacademics” (Bérubé 176). Significantly, Berkeley began this period (1713–1729) with essays in *The Guardian*, intended for a wide and non-specialist audience, and ended the period by starting work on the *Alciphron* (published in 1732), a philosophical work written in a more accessible dialogue form which, according to one scholar, portrayed “the process whereby high-level philosophical discourse became popularized” (Prince 111). But Berkeley was not content with simply popularizing his philosophical ideas. He also sought to influence public policy, and public morality, as is clear in his essay following the South Sea Bubble and later in *The Querist* (1735), in
which he makes specific recommendations regarding banking, taxation, and other
economic matters.

In 1713, while living in London and moving in the same circles as Pope and
Swift, Berkeley contributed a series of essays to Richard Steele’s *The Guardian.*
In one of these essays (no. 77), Berkeley brings together his interest in the proper use
and value of money with one of the major issues in the dispute between the Ancients
and Moderns—the proper use and value of learning. To Berkeley, these were related
issues. While Sir William Temple had drawn an implicit connection between
pedantry and avarice, Berkeley made that connection explicit, tracing both to the
same fundamental error of judgment. Berkeley’s aim in the essay was to expose the
“short-sightedness” of critics and misers, which in both cases arises from “the pursuit
of means,” which are purely instrumental, rather than the pursuit of an end which “is
in it self desirable” (284).

The purpose of learning, according to Berkeley, is pleasure and profit—by
which he means moral and intellectual advantages, not monetary rewards. “The
Exercise of the Understanding, in the discovery of Truth,” he writes, “is likewise
attended with great Pleasure, as well as immediate Profit. It not only strengthens our
Faculties, purifies the Soul, subdues the Passions, but besides these Advantages there
is also a secret Joy that flows from intellectual Operations.” But learning purely for its
own sake, “the meer Exercise of the Memory as such,” brings no pleasure or benefit,
only “vain Irksomeness and Fatigue.” Learning Greek and Latin, in particular, is such
a “dry and painful Operation” that there is no point in doing it except “as Means to
convey more useful and entertaining Knowledge” to the mind (285). Pedants, on the
other hand, pursue only the means, not the end:

They look on the ancient Authors, but it is with an Eye to Phraseology, or certain
minute Particulars, which are valuable for no other reason but because they are despised
and forgotten by the rest of Mankind. The divine Maxims of Morality, the exact
Pictures of Human Life, the profound Discoveries of the Arts and Sciences, just
Thoughts, bright Images, sublime Sentiments, are overlooked, while the Mind is
learnedly taken up in verbal Remarks. (285)

The focus of pedants is on language itself as an end of study, rather than on what can
be done with language, on language as a means to convey ideas and prompt actions.
Their efforts are private (“forgotten by the rest of Mankind”) rather than directed
toward a public good.

Berkeley goes on to argue that avarice arises from “the same Weakness, or
Defect of the Mind” as pedantry (286). To make this argument, he turns to his theory
of signs. “Words and Money,” he says, “are both to be regarded as only Marks of
Things.” Neither words nor money have any *intrinsic* value, but are only markers of
the value of the things they represent, and are of no use “unless directed at some
further end.” Words and money are both conventional and instrumental; as Berkeley explains: “A mutual Commerce could not be carried on among Men, if some common Standard had not been agreed upon, to which the Value of all the various Products of Art and Nature were reducible, and which might be of the same use in the conveyance of Property, as Words are in that of Ideas” (286). Common standards are necessary because they regulate the world of social interaction. But the miser makes the mistake of valuing money for its own sake rather than as an instrument of commerce, just as the pedant makes the mistake of valuing words as an end in themselves rather than as the means for social intercourse. In other words, as Hanson and Heath would say, pedants and misers are self-interested and narcissistic.

The important question for Berkeley is how words or money are to be used: for private gain or for the benefit of others. The same question could be asked about liberty. Does liberty belong to the individual, giving her the right to do and act as she pleases, for her own pleasure and profit? Or is liberty to be understood as a social, or public good? Berkeley turns to this question in a later essay in the Guardian (no. 83), in which he extends his criticism of pedants and misers to “free-thinkers.” After reviewing what he has said about critics and misers, Berkeley says: “The Free-thinkers plead hard for a Licence to think freely; they have it; but what Use do they make of it?” (305). Do they contribute to the well-being of their fellow humans? His answer is no.

Berkeley’s essay came on the heels of Anthony Collins’ controversial Discourse on Free-Thinking (1713), in which Collins argues for the use of human reason in religious matters, and against deferring to religious authority. Free-thinking was another consequence of “the ideology of the scientific revolution,” which to critics “seemed a dangerous encouragement to individuals to place their beliefs in conflict with the accepted practices of the community” (Miller 599). Collins’ critics, including Berkeley, saw free-thinking as the top of a slippery slope to atheism and anarchy. Free-thinkers argued that nature, not tradition and authority, should be the guide of human conduct. But the problem with nature itself, as Pope had pointed out, is that it doesn’t conform to a high ideal.

The eponymous interlocutor in Berkeley’s Alciphron, a free-thinker, exclaims: “O nature! Thou art the fountain, original, and pattern of all that is good and wise” (62). He says this after arguing that the pursuit of individual pleasure is a “natural good.” He and his fellow free-thinkers in the dialogue go on to argue that vice is beneficial (it stimulates the economy) and that the tenets of Christianity are old-fashioned prejudices that ought to be questioned and cast off. To Berkeley, all of this is anathema. The proper end of human life is not individual happiness, his spokesman Euphranor argues, but collective happiness. Nature itself is a system of interconnected parts, so to follow nature is to consider the good of the whole. Euphranor sums up: “Man ought not to consider himself as an independent individual, whose happiness is not connected with that of other men; but rather as the part of a whole, to the
common good of which he ought to conspire, and order his ways and actions suitably, if he would live according to nature” (63).

In constructing his argument against freethinking, Euphranor positions himself on the side of the Ancients. He bases his argument not only on observable nature, but also on ancient authorities like the Stoics, who argued for the unity and interdependence of the cosmos. When one of the free-thinkers, Crito, argues that men should be absolved “from all ties of conscience and religion,” Euphranor responds: “As much as I love liberty, I should be afraid to live among such people; it would be, as Seneca somewhere expresseth it, in libertate bellis ac tyrannis saeviore.”

“What do you mean by quoting Plato and Seneca?” [Lysicles, another free-thinker, asks.] “Can you imagine a free-thinker is to be influenced by the authority of such old-fashioned writers?”

“You, Lysicles, and your friend,” [Euphranor responds] “have quoted to me ingenious moderns...to whose merits I am a perfect stranger. Suffer me in my turn to cite such authorities as I know, and who have passed for many ages upon the world.” (74)

Berkeley insists on the relevance of the classics because they are carriers of time-honored moral and cultural values. In order to prevent society from falling apart, in Berkeley’s view, there needs to be a set of standards that members of the society have agreed upon—as they have agreed upon the value of a currency—and the classics reflect those standards. When Lysicles cites modern authors to which Euphranor is a stranger, and Euphranor cites classical authors for whom Lysicles has no regard, Berkeley illustrates the difficulty that arises when a lack of common standards impedes discussion and social interaction.

At issue in the debate between Ancients and Moderns was whether traditional values and authority would continue to be upheld in a period of significant political, social, scientific, and economic change. Would political liberty be allowed to devolve into licentiousness? Would the scientific method undermine the doctrines of religion? The Ancients seemed like a bulwark against these dangerous changes.

Conclusion

Writing a year before Hanson and Heath, with whom I opened this essay, Joan DeJean located the origins of the “culture wars” of the 1990s—in which Hanson and Heath and duBois were intellectual combatants—in the quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns at the end of the seventeenth century. Like the champions of the Ancients, Hanson and Heath seem to favor a return to an eighteenth-century view of the classics as representing a set of standards that defend against moral and cultural relativism and other perceived pitfalls of modern life. DuBois, whose engagement is
as much with “contemporary high theorists of a left-leaning sort” as with the classics themselves (174), seems to fall into the tradition of the Moderns and free-thinkers. Instead of turning to the classics for universal, unchanging standards, she turns to them for examples of resistance.

Looking back to the late seventeenth century, DeJean sees the champions of the Ancients similarly engaged in using literature “as a means of preserving the status quo”—for example, through the attempt to create and control a durable literary canon of “standard authors” (22). The Moderns, on the other hand, “conceived of literature... as the principal means by which culture could be made ever more public and by which a new public—increasingly diverse in terms of gender as well as class—could be brought into the cultural mainstream and be encouraged to participate in the development of public opinion” (duBois 22).

Can the tension between the Ancients and Moderns, and between standards and freedom, ever be resolved? For Kant, at the end of the eighteenth century, this tension is central to the project of Enlightenment, and to the public intellectual’s role in promoting it. Enlightenment, he argues, is the process of learning to think for oneself and freeing oneself from authority. At the same time, Kant argues, obedience to authority is necessary to maintain civil order while most of society is in an state of immaturity—that is, before it has reached a state of Enlightenment. The public intellectual’s role is to question authority as a scholar, even as he continues to obey authority as a citizen. Gradually, the public intellectual will advance Enlightenment in the rest of society, and its members will become “more capable of acting in freedom.” Drawing on Kant, John McGowan succinctly frames the difference between the conservative and liberal intellectual perspectives (as illustrated by Hanson and Heath on the one hand and duBois on the other):
In short, conservatives believe we already possess a common humanity and unity under the appearance of differences—and that that commonality serves as a standard to rein in the production of novel differences and to condemn various existing differences. Liberals, on the other hand, think that commonality is out in front of us, something to be achieved through the attainment of an ideal rationality. (50)

To Hanson and Heath, the Greeks represent universal truths of human nature; to duBois, they represent questions and possibilities and strivings toward something as yet unachieved.

In the eighteenth century, the Founding Fathers were conditioned by their classical education to find in the classics, and especially among the ancient Romans, models of conduct and political organization. At the same time, they were engaged in a revolution against the authority of the British crown and parliament, and drew upon traditions of free thought in their pursuit of political liberty. The Ancients, especially late Republican Romans like Cicero, were the intellectual allies of the Founders in their revolt against British rule, and models for their conduct as citizens and statesmen. The American experiment continues to be defined by this creative (and sometimes explosive) tension between Ancients and Moderns—between standards and authority on the one hand, and freedom and resistance on the other.

Carleton College

NOTES

1 See Victor Davis Hanson, “Idealism and its Discontents: Thinking on the Neoconservative Slur (http://victorhanson.com/wordpress/?p=4507) on Hanson’s meetings with Cheney, see Jacob Heilbrunn, “Winds of War” (http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/15/books/review/Heilbrunn2.t.html).

2 For the attribution to Berkeley, see A.A. Luce, “Berkeley’s Essays in the Guardian.”

3 On money as a sign or token, see also Berkeley’s Querist, Query 2; on money as a stimulant to labor or industry, see Querist, Query 32. For Berkeley’s philosophy of money, see Constantine G. Caffentzis, Exciting the Industry of Mankind.

4 Euphranor is quoting from Seneca’s Moral Epistles CIV, in which Seneca advises his friend Lucilius to study the thought and examples of the great philosophers; the quotation is from his discussion of Socrates, who lived “in [a period of] liberty [that was] more savage than wars or tyrants”—that is, during the radical Athenian democracy of the fifth century BCE (206).
WORKS CITED


———. *The Querist, Concerning Several Queries Proposed to the Consideration of the Public.* 1735. Dublin, 1735. Print.


