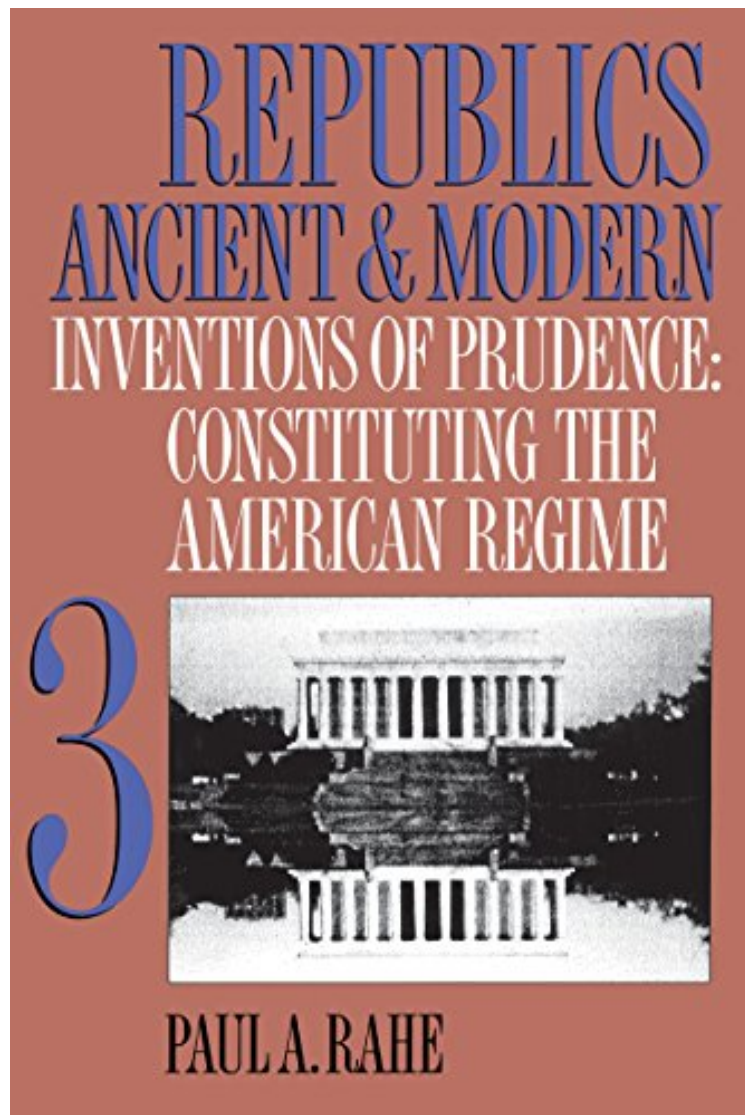


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## Republics Ancient and Modern, Volume III: Inventions of Prudence: Constituting the American Regime

*Paul A. Rahe*

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**Paul A. Rahe : Republics Ancient and Modern, Volume III: Inventions of Prudence: Constituting the American Regime** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Republics Ancient and Modern, Volume III: Inventions of Prudence: Constituting the American Regime:

13 of 17 people found the following review helpful. To Strauss or Not to Strauss, Part 2 By greg taylor Paul Rahe's Republics Ancient and Modern was originally published in hardback in one volume. For the paperback version published in 1994, he has chosen to split his work into three volumes. Each volume deals with one of the three major time periods on which his work focuses. The second volume deal with the early modern period. His use of that phrase covers the Renaissance, the Reformation and the early Enlightenment periods. He focuses on Machiavelli, Montaigne, Descartes, Bacon, Hobbes and Locke but manages to weave Condorcet, Halifax, Mandeville, Hooker, Harrington, Hamilton, Franklin, Madison, Shaftesbury, Tocqueville, Montesquieu, and Mercy Otis Warren along with many others. He introduced me to Paolo Sarpi, a Venetian theologian and freethinker, who seems to have been an extraordinary character. Rahe also brings his mastery of the ancients to the discussion particularly Plato, Aristotle, Polybius and Tacitus in this volume. The third volume continues the discussion through the American founding period. He is especially good on Hamilton in that volume but he manages to also incorporate just about everybody he dealt with in the first two volumes. Really, one of the best ways I can give you an idea of Rahe's breadth and depth is to state that his three volumes could be used as the central texts in a history of Western Political Thought class. As I said in my review of the first volume, Rahe's scholarship is breathtaking. What I would like to focus on in this review is some aspects of Rahe's methodology. In the first volume, he was particularly concerned to counter what he feels has been the baleful influence of Weber and Marx on contemporary social science and history. Rahe feels that both thinkers were economic reductionists who basically had it backwards. Throughout the whole of volume 1, Rahe is utilizing what he calls "regime analysis" which he feels was first exemplified by ancient writers like Polybius. In particular, he wants to assert that it was the way that the Greek city states answered certain questions about the social nature of human thought that led them to design the city states in the way they did. In volumes 2 and 3, Rahe uses a Straussian methodology derived from Strauss' Persecution and the Art of Writing. Rahe is using this to highlight two central weakness of historicist thought. The first weakness is that historicism misses the impact that great individuals have on their culture. They are able to have that impact because of their ability to rise above the limitations of the thought of their period. This quality of critically transcending the culture speaks to the second flaw of historicism. Rahe makes like Zarathustra when confronted by ideas like mentalites, paradigms or languages of discourse. Rahe proposes something quite different. He believes that intellectual history reveals an ongoing conversation among great thinkers that operates on two levels. The Hobbes and Lockes of the world write in such a manner that it has both an esoteric and an exoteric meaning. The exoteric level speaks soothingly to the multitudes. It reassures them of the truth of their beliefs while planting little seeds of doubt for those who can discern them. The esoteric level speaks to the other great spirits who read the work in question. These subtle and careful readers see the critique of the cultural mainstream that is being presented and they can see the revolutionary conclusions that the author is trying to suggest. Why would someone write like that? Easy. Persecution both political and religious. I think Rahe has a real point here. Anyone who has read Radical Empiricism by Jonathan Isreal can appreciate just how dangerous it was (even in a relatively enlightened country like The Netherlands) to publish religious innovations. These men lived in a time when it was possible to die for suggesting something that could be read as atheism or that government derived its authority from the consent of the people (Bush II is still having trouble with that idea). The other great strength is that this approach allows the modern reader to understand why sometimes Locke or Hobbes or Montaigne seem to be contradicting something they said earlier. Using this sort of methodology, Rahe is able to give strong and innovative readings of Bacon, Montaigne, Descartes, Hobbes and Locke. The irony of this approach is that it is improving our understanding of these authors by placing their thought even more squarely in the details of their historical context. They may not have been limited by their times but they cannot be correctly understood out of their own times. The main concern I have with this is that it makes the whole panoply of issues around determining a correct interpretation of any one author that much more complicated. Rahe himself notes this and says that it "enormously" complicates "the scholar's task. The scholar's reading "would always be subject to challenge and open to doubt" (p.6). And yet somehow, I do not read Rahe as seeing his interpretations to be subject to much challenge. This is an odd thing to me about Straussians in general. They can be subtle, powerful, sympathetic and generous readers who just seem to know that they are right. All that talking about natural right has gone to their heads. Sometimes that self-assurance generates a certain attitude. Rahe's writing is sometimes marred by a snide weltchmerz brought on by the inadequacies of the contemporary academy. I grew weary of the undertone. Weltchmerz squared. Yikes. In spite of this (probably private) critique, I really cannot complain about Rahe's methodology too much. I am for as many approaches to history as seem to be useful. My experience that it is not the methodology that makes the insight, it is the merger of the gifts of an individual historian and their methodology that makes for great history writing. Earlier I mentioned Isreal's Radical Empiricism. In spite of the myriad differences of approach, Rahe's volumes and Isreal's book are great companions that serve to support and correct each other. Rahe is a great read. Give him a try. You may even enjoy his twilight sufferings. At the very least, you will be exposed to a dazzling array of thinkers. 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant study of the intellectual foundations of the United States By Malvin "Inventions of Prudence: Constituting the American Regime" by Paul A. Rahe is a brilliant, penetrating study of the intellectual foundations of the United States. As the final book in Professor Rahe's authoritative series "Republics Ancient and Modern", Professor Rahe explains

how the Founding Fathers drew inspiration from the ancient Greeks but architected a radically new system of government based on Enlightenment principles. Written with scholarly precision and supported with extensive documentation, Professor Rahe's book offers deep insight and perspective into the American colonists' struggle to form a more perfect union and what it might still mean to us today. Professor Rahe reminds us that James Madison and his associates were keenly aware that no government had ever been founded on the 'consent of the governed' before. Professor Rahe shows how the authors of *The Federalist* drew on the work of Enlightenment thinkers including Bacon, Locke, Montesquieu and many others to make the case for a strong federal government that would succeed by safeguarding the liberties of all citizens. Although the existence of slavery mocked the idea of inalienable rights, the founders succeeded in charting a new course forward for humanity. Professor Rahe explains how the system of representative government proposed by the Founding Fathers consciously differed from the direct democracy model of ancient Greece. The Revolutionaries understood that the ancients secured their allegiances through religious fanaticism, coercion, and violence. Therefore, to effectively break away from the power of the monarchy and the church in their own time, the Founders sought to set faction against faction in the hope that no single entity could gain the upper hand. For example, Professor Rahe discusses how religious freedoms were expressly intended to encourage diversity. Although the Founding Fathers tended to value organized religion for the role it played in disseminating morality, some feared that a superstitious population might quickly derail the fledgling democracy. By creating a free market for religious expression, it was assumed that fanatics would be quickly discredited and moderate discourse encouraged. I found most interesting Professor Rahe's discussion of Alexander Hamilton versus Thomas Jefferson on which many of the crucial questions of the day were settled. Hamilton thought that the federal government should encourage a manufacturing sector that in turn would create a labor force to consume the nation's agricultural bounty, thereby mutually reinforcing the urban/rural economy. However, Jefferson feared that propertyless laborers might rise up against the property holders of industry. Jefferson asserted that a nation of independent small farmers would be more compatible with the kind of democratic system the Founders had envisioned. With the Louisiana Purchase, Jefferson practically won the debate by providing millions of midwestern farmers with an outlet to European markets by way of the Mississippi River and the Port of New Orleans. In this, Professor Rahe believes that Jefferson made a critical miscalculation: by privileging agriculture over manufacturing, Jefferson enabled the slave economy to survive, all but guaranteeing that a future crisis would have to be resolved by Civil War. Indeed, through reading Professor Rahe, one might come to understand that the basic tension of American democracy is to be found on this point. The founders sought to create a space where technology, industry and peace would flourish by allowing individuals to exercise their own faculties concerning 'the advantageous, the just and the good'. The problem is that organized factions might hold opinions that are incompatible with the maintenance of a civil society; by way of example, the slave holders of the 19th century did not see themselves as wrong. Professor Rahe asks: do Americans today have the capacity to come together to resolve a national crisis when we seem to lack a 'fixed concord regarding loved things held in common'? This is the intriguing question that has been posed to us by one of the great historians of our time. I highly recommend this exceptional book to all serious students of U.S. history.

2 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Delightful presentation of a truly fantastic era. By A Customer Paul Rahe depicts in nearly perfect form the ways and wonders of the ancient world. A wonderful informative on the political and economic intricacies of ancient Athens and Sparta, as well as surrounding Greek city-states, with brief allusions to our modern society. The only reason why I do not give this book a 5 is because, alas, no one is perfect. A must have in any classics library.

First published in 1992 and now available in paperback in three volumes, Paul Rahe's ambitious and provocative book bridges the gap between political theory, comparative history and government, and constitutional prudence. Rahe challenges prevailing interpretations of ancient Greek republicanism, early modern political thought, and the founding of the American republic. '[An] extraordinary book. . . . It is a great achievement and will stay as a landmark.'--*The Spectator* (London) 'This is the first, comprehensive study of republicanism, ancient and modern, written for our time.'--Harvey Mansfield, Harvard University 'A stunning feat of scholarship, presented with uncommon grace and ease--the sort of big, important book that comes along a few times in a generation. In an age of narrow specialists, it ranges through the centuries from classical Greece to the new American Republic, unfolding a coherent new interpretation of the rise of modern republicanism. . . . World-class, and sure to have a quite extraordinary impact.'--Lance Banning, University of Kentucky

Volume I: *The Ancien Regime in Classical Greece* Where social scientists and many ancient historians tend to follow Max Weber or Karl Marx in asserting the centrality of status or class, Rahe's depiction of the illiberal, martial republics of classical Hellas vindicates Aristotle's insistence on the determinative influence of the political regime and brings back to life a world in which virtue is pursued as an end, politics is given primacy, and socioeconomic concerns are subordinated to grand political ambition.

Volume II: *New Modes and Orders in Early Modern Political Thought* Where many intellectual historians discern a revival of the classical spirit in the political speculation of the age stretching from Machiavelli to Adam Smith, Rahe brings to light a self-conscious repudiation of the theory and practice of ancient self-government and an inclination to restrict the scope of politics, to place greater reliance on institutions than on virtuous restraint, and to give free rein to the human's

capacities as a tool-making animal. Volume III: Inventions of Prudence: Constituting the American Regime Where students of the American founding are inclined to dispute whether the Revolution was liberal, republican, or merely confused, Rahe demonstrates that the American regime embodies an uneasy, fragile, and carefully worked-out compromise between the enlightened despotism espoused by Thomas Hobbes and the classical republicanism defended by Pericles and Demosthenes.

A work of magisterial erudition.--Journal of American HistoryRahe has written a seminal work that will for a long time put students of political thought in general, and of the ideas of the American founding in particular, in his debt. In a way that even evokes comparison with such masterworks of philosophy, history, and social science, as those of Aristotle, Niccolo Machiavelli, and Baron de Montesquieu, Rahe brings to our contemplation the complex fabric of republican political inquiry from Plato to Thomas Jefferson.--Ralph Ketcham, William and Mary QuarterlyThis is the first comprehensive study of republicanism, ancient and modern, written for our time. Among its many virtues is a rediscovery of the difference between ancient and modern republicanism and a critique of the notion of civic humanism.--Harvey Mansfield, Harvard UniversityThis extraordinary book enters the generation-old controversy concerning the influence of classical republicanism on the American Revolution. . . . Rahe's text is a splendid series of learned lectures for interested citizens, while his notes are a home school course for graduate study in the foundation of the American republic.--Journal of the Early Republic[An] extraordinary book. . . . It is a great achievement and will stay as a landmark.--Patrick Leigh Fermor, The Spectator (London)The subject is enormously important and terribly difficult, requiring a detailed knowledge of the ancient world, of the thinking and experience of the Founding Fathers of the American republic, and of the entire history of western political thought through the eighteenth century. Rahe has that knowledge, an original and convincing understanding of the realities and thinking of life in ancient Greece, and a powerful and compelling thesis that explains how ancient republican ideas have changed almost totally as they have been transformed into the modern republic.--Donald Kagan, Yale UniversityA stunning feat of scholarship, presented with uncommon grace and ease--the sort of big, important book that comes along a few times in a generation. In an age of narrow specialists, it ranges through the centuries from classical Greece to the new American Republic, unfolding a coherent new interpretation of the rise of modern republicanism. . . . World-class, and sure to have a quite extraordinary impact.--Lance Banning, University of KentuckyFrom the Back CoverWhere many intellectual historians discern a revival of the classical spirit in the political speculation of the age stretching from Machiavelli to Adam Smith, Rahe brings to light a self-conscious repudiation of the theory and practice of ancient self-government and an inclination to restrict the scope of politics, to place greater reliance on institutions than on virtuous restraint, and to give free rein to the human's capacities as a toolmaking animal.About the AuthorPaul A. Rahe is professor of history at the University of Tulsa.