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Professor Anthony O’Hear
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The Western Tradition of Liberty and its Classical-Christian Roots in the Great Books

‘Great men are the ambassadors of Providence, sent to reveal to their fellow men their unknown selves... They come and go, in part a mystery, in part the simplest of all experience... the compelling influence of the truth. They leave no successors. The heritage of greatness descends to the people’.

‘Those teachers who are not pupils are the great minds, the greatest minds (whom we meet) only through the great books... We are compelled to live with books. But life is too short to live with any but the greatest books.’

‘(Reading Milton) you will begin to perceive that what *you* thought was a matter of no serious importance... unless you are a singular person you will have no legitimate right to an “opinion” on any business, except that instantly under your hand. (Modern “Education” for the most part signifies giving people the faculty of thinking wrong on every conceivable subject of importance to them).’

Thus a President of the United States, Calvin Coolidge, a great political philosopher, Leo Strauss, and John Ruskin, the greatest of prophetic thinkers in an age of prophetic thinkers.

Coolidge goes on to include poets, philosophers and painters among his great men, and Ruskin was, among other things, the profoundest writer on art my country has produced, so let us begin by considering a painting, to see what it can tell us about our Classical-Christian roots.

The painting I want to show you was painted around 1575, the time of Camoes and Cervantes, and shortly after the Battle of Lepanto. It is ‘The Flaying of Marsyas’ by Titian, done at the very end of his long life. As you can see, it is a horrific, almost hallucinatory scene, painted with fingers and palette knife as well as brushes in a whirlwind of colour. The satyr Marsyas had challenged the god Apollo to a musical contest, Marsyas’s pipes against Apollo’s strings. In Titian’s painting, the contest is being judged by King Midas, the king of Phrygia who has asses ears from an earlier brush with Apollo, and may be a self-portrait of Titian. Marsyas is being flayed for his audacity, probably by Apollo himself, while above the satyr are his pipes. To the left is a young man (Apollo again?) playing a violin.

The story Titan is drawing on is found in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, where we are told that the woodland gods, fauns, satyrs, nymphs and sheep and cattle wept such copious tears over Marsyas that an underground spring was formed from which the river called Marsyas flowed, hemmed in by sloping banks and down into to the sea. In Ovid, Marsyas cries out ‘Playing a pipe is not worth this: why are you stripping me from myself?’

But Titian’s Marsyas is not just the commanding presence in the painting. He is, in the circumstances, strangely calm, more than resigned, accepting what has to be, what all of us have in a certain sense to undergo. The analogy with a crucifixion is irresistible, and the painter would have been aware of Dante, as well as of Ovid: ‘Entra nel petto mio e spira tue/

si coma quando Marsia traesti/ della vagina delle membre tue'. Dante, on the brink of Paradise is imploring Apollo (the same Apollo) to enter his breast and breathe there as when he drew Marsyas from the scabbard of his limbs. The myth of Marsyas is now a figure for the journey of the Christian soul, a trope mirrored by the uplifted violin, its divine harmony, in neo-Platonic guise, a sign of the soul freed from earthly chains. And, consider too the flaying Apollo, the god, enraptured by Marsyas, linked to him in his suffering, loving him almost, needing him perhaps, merging with him. The Ovidian metamorphosis is now inextricably blended with Christian meaning, a tale of mortal hubris (which is still there) a figure for redemption through affliction, and even divine love, which is something awesome, terrible even.

Hubris and divine retribution is the ostensible subject of another great painting also drawing on Ovid, Velazquez's *The Spinners*, from 1656-8. Arachne, a poor Lydian girl, has challenged Minerva (Athena) to a weaving competition. As if that were not hubristic enough, Arachne's entry to the competition is a tapestry depicting the scandalous episode of Jupiter's (Zeus's) Rape of Europa. Arachne is transformed into a spider, where she may continue her weaving, but presumably in a less provocative manner.

The foreground of Velazquez's painting shows five ordinarily dressed women engaged in spinning and related tasks (hence the title). Behind the human spinners, in a lighted alcove, as on a stage, we see Arachne displaying her tapestry to Minerva, who is about to strike her down, and some other well dressed persons. And Arachne's tapestry is a copy of Titian's *Rape of Europa*, which Velazquez would have known, either in the original or in Rubens' copy.

Once again, then, we have a classical theme and a classical lesson (hubris), but interpreted for another time. The five spinners in Velazquez's drama have been variously interpreted, the two in the foreground as Minerva, facing us (as an old woman, as in Ovid) and Arachne with her hack to us. The three other women may be the three Fates of mythology, Clotho (the spinner), Lachesis (the dispenser of fate, with her face obscure?) and Atropos (the cutter). And there is almost certainly a self-aggrandising reference in the depiction of the spinning wheel and the cording to Pliny's praise of those very few artists who could capture movement in their static productions, while the reference to Titian may be an act of homage, yes, but also, surely, an implication that Velazquez is at least the equal of the great Venetian, and free from the threat of divine retribution.

I do not want to deny the mythological reading of Velazquez's foreground figures. Reams have been written on the subject, and by scholars far more knowledgeable than I. However there is surely also and pre-eminently a feature of those figures so obvious that it may seem not worth even stating. Whoever they are, and whatever they represent, they are fundamentally ordinary women doing ordinary tasks, and doing them, it seems, pre-eminently well. They may be Minerva, Arachne and the others, but Velazquez's Minerva and Arachne are ordinary women, or, perhaps ordinary women have become divine. This is not a message we could read in classical books, but Christianity here supersedes Ovid once more.

And so we turn to another painting by Velazquez, the so-called *Immaculate Conception* of 1618-9. I say so-called, because, while it may represent Mary the Mother of God, it also represents the figure at the centre of the *Book of Revelation*, the mysterious Woman Clothed with the Sun from *Revelation* 12. She is, as *Revelation* tells us, crowned with twelve stars. She is enveloped in sunlight and the moon, the symbol of human futility and fickleness, is

under her feet. And she is also the woman who is depicted in John's vision in Velazquez's companion piece, *St John the Evangelist on the Island of Patmos*. But look at the woman, and her face. Serene and beautiful as she is, she is no ethereal Madonna of earlier times, she is an ordinary girl, such as might have been seen in the streets of Seville in 1618 (and might even have been Velazquez's fiancé). And here Velazquez is drawing on a slightly older tradition, for in his famous lithograph illustrations to *Revelation*, of 1498, Albrecht Durer had also portrayed the divine (?) Woman Clothed with the Sun as an ordinary, everyday girl.

I have been saying something about Classical-Christian motifs in Western art, about how in the paintings we have been looking at, we can find an amalgam and blending of themes, the hubris and fallibility of humans, divine redemption and punishment, the elevation, even the divinisation of the everyday, and perhaps too the supersession of the old gods in a more humane account of the relation between gods and men. It would, of course, be impossible to give an adequate account of the western tradition of liberty in a few phrases, but the following would have to feature prominently: the sacredness of the individual, a suspicion of hierarchies and over-mighty rulers, humble spinners being of as much account as princes and gods, the danger of hubris along with human imperfection, and consequent need for a structure of order and law, and always the balance to be struck between human greatness – closeness to God, perhaps – and human pride and over-reaching. We see here the inevitable and continual dialectic between liberty and responsibility, between the assertion of individuality and the recognition of our own inevitable limitations, individual and collective. And, more controversial though this might be, I would add that liberty and the rights and equality of the individual have their foundation in the divine order to which, in their different ways, our artists are all appealing. As the American declaration of independence has it, 'all men are created equal, ... endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights'; as Samuel Adams put it at the time (as Coolidge remained us), 'the people seem to recognize this resolution as though it were a decree from heaven'. Or, as somewhat earlier, the thirteenth century jurist Henry de Bracton put it, in the spirit of Magna Carta, 'the king has a superior, namely God. Also the law by which he is made king. Also his curia, ... if he is without bridle, that is without law, ought to put the bridle on him'.

So, if after looking at the Classical-Christian thread in art, what do we find in the Great Books themselves? Right at the outset, we should note a point made by Leo Strauss, that 'the community of great minds is rent by discords', and echoed by Coolidge, who says that in a struggle of nature, not all good men or patriots are on one side. There is, in fact, an advantage here pointed out by Strauss, that if we take the Great Books as our beacons, we will not be indoctrinated. We will have choose between some of the things said in them, which would help us to find merit in Coolidge's assertion that no government can be successful which outlaws any good influence, whatever it its source, whatever it is called. This open spirit which the Great Books should help to foster is, in fact, a cornerstone of the Western tradition of liberty, and so highly pertinent to our theme.

However, authorial discord aside, it is possible to find some liberal and liberating themes constantly appearing in the Great Books of our tradition. Let us begin at the beginning, with *The Iliad*. At one level this is an epic of military valour and the values of war, remorseless and unsparing in its descriptions and judgements. But look just a little deeper, and you will see that, and to my knowledge uniquely so, it is a case where a national epic is also an account of a great crime on the part of the victors. *The Iliad* is indeed about war, but it is also about peace, the peace of a civilised city which we know the Achaeans are going to destroy, killing the men and taking the women as booty and the children captive. Although *The Iliad*

itself is about only three days of fighting, with the death of Hector we know that all is up for the Trojans, and Hector's death – and Achilles' insane cruelty - is told with great poignancy, no more so than when Homer describes Andromache, behind the city wall is anticipating her man's return by preparing a bath for her him at the very moment his corpse is being dragged around the outer walls of Troy. 'Foolish one', says Homer of Andromache, 'she knew not that he was now far from hot baths, and that Athena had laid him low by the hand of Achilles'.

We know that *The Iliad* is about the wrath of Achilles – Homer tells us that right at the start, and we see it all the way through. But it is also about the tempering of that wrath, when in Book 24, the broken Priam humiliatingly begs Achilles for the return of his son's body. Achilles, still mourning bitterly for the loss of Patroclus, for whom he had re-entered the battle and brought about the death and humiliation of Hector, relents, at least for the moment: 'Poor man, how much you've borne, pain to break the spirit... Let us put our griefs to rest in our own hearts, raw as we are with mourning...' and he goes on to speak of the gods determining our fates, and Zeus with his two great urns, one full of blessings and the other filled with miseries, mixing both for all of us here below. This notion of Zeus's two urns presiding neutrally over our destiny can be applied to Homer's treatment of the Trojan War itself. Greek/Achaean as he was, it is impossible to discern in his writing a bias in favour of the Greeks, who are depicted as fantastic fighting machines, yes (at least when Achilles is with them), but not as particularly admirable in other ways. Homer is remarkably even-handed in his treatment of the warring parties, even perhaps with a slight bias in favour of Troy: but this is because, in contrast to the armed camp of the Greeks, he shows us the domestic and civilised realm the fractious and remorselessly vengeful Greeks are going to lay waste. One has little doubt that if the boot had been on the other foot, Homer would still have shown us what was being fought for by the besieged and defending party, and not as reflecting credit on the besiegers had their case been as tenuous as was the Greeks' and their conduct in the war so pitiless.

So in Homer we find a number of features central to the Western tradition of liberty: praise for a realm of settled peace and domesticity and an implied lament for its destruction, an impartiality and exercise of just judgement between warring parties, a sense of a shared humanity transcending war itself. Even within what is a national epic we can find liberal and humanitarian values we now see as universal, even if not universally applied. And impartiality of the sort we find in Homer, which is implicitly critical of the Greeks, we also find in later Greek tragedy, in Aeschylus's *The Persians*, for example, and in Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, in which the Greeks are shown as brutally tossing the child Astyanax over the walls of Troy. This was Hector's little son, who had been portrayed by Homer as being frightened by his father's helmet, as Hector departs for battle for the last time. As Euripides' chorus has it: 'This child the Argives killed because/ they feared him'. An inscription to make Hellas blush.' But blush they did not, because *The Trojan Women* was the response of Euripides to the Athenian's massacre of the Melians in 416BC, and it failed to win the prize at the Great Dionysia the following year. But an even more corruscating and anti-Athenian reflection on that episode, is to be found in Thucydides so-called Melian dialogue, which has become one of the cornerstones of western political thought. In their Great Books, if not in their behaviour, the ancient Greeks had that sense of the impartiality of justice and of its transcendence of any naturalistic law of nature, which is central to our tradition of liberty.

For, as we see in a tragedy such as Sophocles' *Antigone*, the ancient Greeks, or the best of them, did have a sense of a higher law than that of the naturalistic realpolitik, to which the

Athenians appealed in addressing the Melians, and of the power of the principled individual, however powerless she might be in political terms. The character of Antigone can indeed be seen as the archetypal pure soul, who is prepared to speak truth to power, and to die for it. It is noteworthy that Jean Anouilh prepared his own version of *Antigone* for performance in Paris in 1944, during the Nazi occupation (though perhaps more noteworthy that the censors permitted it). But for all her courage and integrity, or perhaps because of it, Antigone is not a comfortable person, nor is she altogether admirable, and certainly not very likeable – she is cruel to her sister Ismene, and unforgiving of weaker souls, most of us in fact, who are or would be prepared to compromise.

Sophocles sets *Antigone* up as a struggle between Creon, the ruler of Thebes, desperately trying to hold the city together after an invasion which is in effect a civil war between the sons of Oedipus following Oedipus's blinding and departure from the city, and Antigone, the daughter of Oedipus, who puts family loyalty and the law of the gods above political necessity. (The law of the gods requires that she bury her brother Polynices, the one who had invaded Thebes with foreign forces, and whose burial Creon has expressly forbidden, in order to symbolise the new political order he is determined to uphold.) As the play develops Creon's sense of what is needed to maintain order becomes inflexible and inhuman, unnecessarily so. His son tells him that he would make a good ruler but only in a deserted land, as Creon, having begun as the epitome of pragmatic reasonableness, becomes increasingly irritable, petulant even. There are clearly parallels here with the careers of all sorts of anti-liberal strong men dictators, whose rule so often declines into sour and repressive spite.

There is little doubt where Sophocles's ultimate loyalty lies. The play places the divine law and humanity above political expediency and merely human law, which was, of course, the traditional view of the ancient Greeks (as expressed in the final chorus of *Antigone*): 'The greatest part of happiness is wisdom;/ Divine laws man ought always to uphold./ To boastful tongues sure punishment will follow,/ And wisdom we learn only when we're old.' There are obvious prefigurings here of the medieval post-Magna Carta thought that the ruler is to be seen as sub lege and sub-Deo and also of the American revolutionary stress on the source of our inalienable rights being the Creator. It is as if liberty needs a divine underpinning and endorsement to prevent it degenerating into anarchy or dictatorship.

We have already touched a little on artistic re-workings of Ovid in the Christian era, but it is Virgil's *Aeneid* which is the Roman Great Book par excellence. And it is both Roman and great, and celebrating the greatness of Rome, in particular the Roman ideal of universal peace and peace crowned with law, as Anchises puts it to Aeneas, ideals, especially the second part, which have clearly a staple aspect of the Western tradition of liberty. Whatever might be said about the Roman imperium, for those, whether Roman or not, who lived under it and enjoyed its peace and its law, its destruction in the dark ages was a disaster morally and materially. Whatever might be said: *The Aeneid* is often seen as a paean of praise to Rome and its incipient Empire and its first Emperor, Augustus, and not incorrectly. Octavian/Augustus was a patron, even a friend of Virgil, and there are constant tales of Virgil at the end of his life being unhappy with the adulatory tenor of his epic, and wanting it to be destroyed.

But to see *The Aeneid* purely as uncritical adulation of Augustus's regime and the image of Rome he was propagating is to mis-read it. It is far more subtle and nuanced, and in ways which bear on the tradition of liberty. The most striking evidence of this is the end itself. Remember that the last book of *The Iliad* has the wrath-filled, furor-freighted Achilles

manifesting compassion and a sense of a shared humanity with Priam with whom he is united in grief before the implacability of fate and the gods; *The Aeneid* ends with the pious (i.e. god following) Aeneas showing remorseless and insane furor as he slaughters the defenceless Turnus. And remember that this pious Aeneas is not merely the hero of the epic; he is the founder of Rome and the figure to whom Augustus and all the other rulers of Rome looked: a hint here of the corruption of power, and the need for its tempering by humanity and law? Is Virgil reminding his readers, at least those who could see that far beneath the surface of his text, that Rome itself was founded on violence and conquest, not just the killing of Turnus, but more widely on the violence involved in the invasion of Latium and the defeat of the Latins by Aeneas's Trojans. These events are summed up by Virgil in the prophecy given to Aeneas by the Sybil that the Roman/Trojan supremacy would be preceded by fields of blood, with the Tiber itself rolling with a purple flood. And there is also Aeneas' cruel impiety at the court of Dido in Carthage, which Virgil underlines when his Dido as disdainfully ignores Aeneas in Hades when the latter tries to excuse himself for his treachery, and, as all the readers of Virgil in his own time would have known, these events led ultimately to the Roman/Trojans treating the rich civilisation of Carthage just as the Achaean/Greeks had Troy.

Virgil himself lived through two civil wars and saw the effective winding up of the Roman republic. No wonder he celebrated the idea of peace under law, and Augustus himself if this was what he was to bring, but his epic is cognisant of the cost and also of the temptations afforded by ungoverned power. In the overall tone of *The Aeneid* he appears awed by the power and even the glamour of Augustus, which is certainly celebrated there, but I think that in *The Aeneid* there is an esoteric message as well as the exoteric one. Leo Strauss reminds us that the great writers do not always agree among themselves, but in reading them we need also to remember Strauss's other message, that they are often write between the lines; there is, as Ruskin said a 'cruel reticence in the breasts of great men which makes them always hide their deeper thought'. In the discipline they impose on us and themselves they move us way from the impulsive rush to judgement and action, and the sloganizing and impetuous rhetoric which is so often the enemy of liberty.

To turn now to the Christian era, after the writers of the New Testament, the first great writer was St Augustine. For our purposes there are in his *Confessions* and in *The City of God* central themes which are highly relevant to the Western tradition of liberty. The *Confessions* breaks new ground from a literary point of view in its focus on the inner development of the individual, and the remorseless examination of motive and feeling. There is also the essentially Christian message, deriving no doubt from Paul (especially in the *Epistle to the Romans*), of man's inherent sinfulness and his inability to do the good without divine grace. In so far as the Western tradition of liberty stresses human individuality, cherishing the development of the individual, one of its key sources is undoubtedly the *Confessions* of Augustine. Where some modern individualists may differ from Augustine is on human perfectibility. Augustine's stress on concupiscence, on original sin (even in little children) and on ineradicable human imperfectibility may not appeal to us to-day, if like thinkers of the European Enlightenment we believe in the perfectibility of humanity and human institutions through natural reason, or, like Rousseau and his myriad followers, we believe in the essential goodness and innocence of children. There are certainly streams in our tradition of liberty which move in an anti-Augustinian direction, particularly any which put faith in planning for a perfect society or in the unlimited potential of self-help and other psychological practices.

But, aside from more pessimistic readings of human psychology, such as that of Freud, there is a more hard-headed, realistic even, strain in liberal thought, which stresses the imperfectibility of man and his institutions and the consequent dangers of over optimistic planning (which it will be argued we have seen too much of since 1789). We can, of course, think here of eighteenth century thinkers such as Hume and Edmund Burke, as well as de Tocqueville himself, down to more recent writers such as Popper, Hayek and Michael Oakeshott. What this strand of liberal thinking is acutely aware of is what the nineteenth century theological writer J.I.Mombert tellingly referred to as ‘the imperfection which marks all human effort, especially where it aims to avoid it’. Hence the need for limited government, for checks and balances in the constitution, for the rule of law, as well as a due modesty in those running institutions of power.

But the philosophical and theological underpinning for all of this was laid down by Augustine himself, in *The City of God*. The City of God is already here on earth, in the hearts of those who have been saved by divine grace, but it is never completely realised in the here and now. Satan may be bound, as *Revelation* tells us, but his depredations and influence leak out everywhere, even into the Church itself, where we may least expect it. We are all, even the redeemed, subject to Satanic temptation; before the end of time there will be many false prophets, many an Antichrist promising a false peace and a phoney millennium. We are to imagine Christ himself coming like a thief in the night, and never to acquiesce in the illusion that we can create the City of God, the New Jerusalem, here on earth. For Augustine, for Christian (or other) thinkers to think that they can would itself be a manifestation of the corrupting effect of original sin. For the ancient Greeks it would be a hubristic temptation calling down the wrath of the Gods. For Edmund Burke and those who have watched the progress of revolutionary politics since 1789, the conclusion would be that ‘their liberty is not liberal, their science is presumptuous ignorance, their humanity if savage and brutal’.

Dante is the greatest poet of the Christian middle ages, maybe the greatest Christian writer of all time, and, in view of his sensitive introduction of Virgil and other figures from classical antiquity, can reasonably be regarded as Classical-Christian. Obviously the *Divine Comedy* is an all-encompassing work, but that it is not mainly or primarily concerned with the political should not be taken to imply that it contains no political ideas or reflection. Rather to the contrary, indeed; in it is reflected the fruits of Dante’s own bitter political experience, as he moved from a Guelph (pro-Papacy) position to the Ghibelline hope that a secular Emperor would redeem Europe so as to allow for a proper practice of religion. Dante had become convinced through his dealings with the Papacy (and in particular in the form of his nemesis Boniface VIII) that nothing but the corruption and adulteration of true religion could come about from the Popes involving themselves as they were in secular affairs and taking secular power, enriching themselves and their dynasties thereby. That way the purity of religion was sullied by their involvement in all the messy compromises inherent in secular rule to say nothing of temptations to simony and worse, while endowing a secular power with a religious authority would give it an eminence beyond what it merited, making its capture a prey to the ambitions of princes, which was very much the situation in Dante’s own time.

So in the *Divine Comedy* we see various Popes, including Boniface, consigned to Hell for simony, while in *Purgatorio* there is the complex image of a harlot (who is both the Whore of Babylon and the papacy) kissing a giant (Philip IV of France) who is taking her away in a seven headed chariot to his own domain (=the removal of the Papacy to Avignon in 1305, with the heads symbolising ecclesiastical greed for power and wealth). Part of the chariot is being torn away by a dragon (=Mahomet), while over it are falling the feathers of an eagle,

which symbolise the Donation of Constantine, a fraudulent document which was widely believed in Dante's time to be from the Emperor Constantine giving secular power to the Papacy. Against this corrupting intermingling of the sacred and the secular, Dante advocated a purely secular Emperor and a purely spiritual Church, the Church detached from secular involvement attending to its proper mission the eternal salvation of souls, while the Emperor, as titular secular over-lord, presides over a Europe-wide peace, allowing men to work out their salvation for themselves under a purely religious Church – a set-up not too distant from the separation of Church and State envisaged in the US Constitution. In neither dispensation is there a negation of religion or of the role of religious belief in underpinning the polity, but a separation of spheres of influence, so as to allow each to fulfil its proper part in the life of the whole.

Having referred to Botticelli's depiction of Dante, we will end by glancing briefly at Botticelli's most famous image, *The Birth of Venus*, first because it is a perfect Christian-Classical synthesis. Venus, the goddess of love is born from the sea, as a result of the castration of Uranus. So she results from the dispersal of divine seed and its re-constitution in her perfect form, as Beauty descending to give charm to the physical and at the same time re-ascending to the super-sensible (as Marsilio Ficino suggests in his commentary on Plato's *Philebus*). As new born she is being blown by the winds to the shore, where she will be clothed by the waiting goddess of Spring in a garment decorated with beautiful flowers. To the Platonic mind the physical Venus in her earthly beauty is the road to divine beauty, and in the interpretation of Pythagorean thinkers later than Plato himself in her person and her birth she manifests a continuum between the spiritual/divine and the material/human. There is no abyss to be jumped here, and we might be reminded at this point of Dante's concluding image at the end of the Comedy of God in a human face. This divine Venus also represents humanitas in its most elevated form, love, charity, dignity, liberality, temperance, honesty, charm and splendour. For the neo-Platonic circle in which Botticelli moved, it would not be hard to Christianise much of this. Venus arising from the sea evokes not the first Eve so much as the new Eve, who is the star of the sea, stella maris, maris/Mary, with all of Mary's qualities, including that of being the gateway to the divine, while when she is clothed with the garment held out for her Venus could represent the Church, while the scallop shell from which she is stepping is the traditional Christian symbol for pilgrimage. And in seeing Venus in Christian terms, if that is what he has enabled us to do, Botticelli has re-enlivened the physical world after centuries of the dominance of ascetic denial.

It is hard to be certain of any of this, beyond the undoubted fact that at the time *The Birth of Venus* was painted Botticelli was steeped in the Florentine neo-Platonic school in which ever more arcane attempts were made to intertwine Christian and pagan beliefs. Perhaps the detail of this attempt is not as important as its spirit, encapsulated by the dictum of Marsilio Ficino, that the sight of Beauty inspire love more than words can do, and by Beauty and love Ficino intended both sensual and spiritual manifestations.

Has this high point of our Classical-Christian tradition any bearing on our tradition of liberty? Certainly it is easy to see Botticelli as one of Coolidge's ambassadors of providence, but I think that Botticelli provides us with an image of humanity which seems to require a civilised republic of free and responsible individuals in which to flourish. Looked at from the opposite point of view, and however much there are countervailing tendencies in us, we could also say that only a race endowed by its Creator with the capacity to produce the qualities of humanity we find in Botticelli's Venus could also be seen as being a bearer of inalienable rights.

