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BOOK REVIEWS

Smith-Pangle, L. & Pangle, T.L. (1992). *The learning of liberty: The educational ideas of the American founders.* Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 350 pp. (hardcover). $35.00.

This is an excellent book, but it is not easy to say just why. The difficulty arises partly from uncertainty about what is accomplished here, a matter foreshadowed by the ambiguities of the title itself — *The Learning of Liberty.* Such gerundic phrases always leave one pondering whether the intended thought is mostly substantive or mostly verbal. Is "the learning of Liberty" simply the content of what Liberty, our tutelary deity, knows and teaches? Or is "the learning of liberty" the story of how liberty was cultivated, the account of what the founders of the Republic thought was needed to advance the spread of liberty?

This book began as a senior thesis on some ideas of Thomas Jefferson. The present version has another placement. It goes far beyond Jefferson, but also links the ideas of the Founders with current efforts at educational reform. The "modest contention" is that "thoughtful reaction to or dialogue with the Founders' reflections" should reveal anew the problems of shaping educational goals in a Republic and perhaps even reveal chances of responding to those problems in ways that the founders did not or could not (p. 7). So we are to place this book within current movements of reform but in what may be the most neglected area of current concern, namely the renewal of civil education. Preparing the nation for "world class" competition and for economic growth is painfully familiar public talk. But education for a full and rich cultural and civic life, for public service and service to neighbor, is, by comparison, speech heard hardly at all.

Even less *au courant* is the old fashioned idea that education might aim at the spread of virtue. Still, that is the context for this book.

It is framed in four parts: (1) The Legacy, (2) Schools for the Emerging Republic, (3) Institutions Beyond the School, and (4) Education through Emulation. Beginning with the reception of a complex legacy the book ends with a discussion of education as emulation — education modeled upon the representative humanity of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington.

The legacy in question is the still troubled effort to incorporate incompatible elements of a European tradition and out of them to shape a coherent view of civic education. That legacy includes the aristocratic European ethos in which education and public service are firmly rooted in notions of honor, an understanding rooted in societies of rank, and almost entirely abandoned nowadays except in a few military schools and academies of the South. It includes also the familiar fascination that persisted even when the underlying ideas were severely modified by Lockean notions of rational self-interest and social contract — modified, that is, by ideas expressing an individualism characteristically American, and not classical. And to all this one must add the legacy of what for the time was a powerful Puritan commitment to public education.

It is, I believe, the treatment of this complicated inheritance in Part I of their book that drives the remainder. The book ends, as I have said, with the idea of education as emulation, hence certain prototypes or models — Franklin, Jefferson, and Washington, persons that embody the goals that the Pangles suggest must be incorporated in "any comprehensive and fully humane education" (p. 285). These three figures are taken to present a suitable balance of several elements implicit in the beginning legacy, a balance among the demands of civic virtue, private happiness, and moral discipline, between public roles and local roots. These iconic figures offer a kind of *via media* between the tendency to turn toward dogmatic education with "tidy lessons and clean heroes," on the one hand, and today's education, on the other hand, that our authors describe as offering an "openness so relativistic," or "a debunking so persistent ... as to leave students with no moral grounding and with a contemptuous disbelief in truth that saps the impetus to serious thought" (p. 287).

Skepticism will surely be roused and its arousal just as certainly will be justified whenever the value of an historical study is identified by its relevance to current concerns, as though to say, "Here are lessons to be learned." If relevance of that sort matters, it ought to be, like style, something displayed, but not paraded. Such doubts are moderated, however, in this case by strengths that would carry this book even were it without any connection to current problems of reform.

One virtue is its complexity. Another its inclusiveness. A third is the fact that it is simply a pleasure to read. This is a work not of history so much as the history of ideas. And it is no mere text-book account of the Founders' ideas. It includes judicious and critical remarks on major expositors of the history, Lawrence Cremin, for example (p. 69). It includes a remarkably (maybe excessively) sensitive and sympathetic account of Franklin's views on moral discipline, and the harmony of private interest and public service, a view in stark contrast to the acerbic and cynical accounts that philosophers and historians are prone to present. It contains an unusually extended discussion of the ideas and work of Benjamin Rush, attempts at developing a National University. In addition this volume contains an unusually useful bibliography, almost worthy of study by itself.

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Ashman, A.F. & Conway, R.N.F. (1993). *Using cognitive methods in the classroom.* New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall. 195 pp. (hardcover), $74.95.

The aim of this book is twofold: first, to outline the conceptual basis of a cognitively-based instructional approach, designed by the authors, and second, to show how the approach can be used in a range of educational contexts. The goal of bridging from research to practice is laudable. It is not clear, however, if Ashman and Conway have succeeded in this endeavor.