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Review

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cals were in the forefront of political change during the American Revolution. Some of them raised questions about slavery prior to the Missouri Compromise, and many joined its public defense later. It is probably also true, as Calhoun asserts, that the creation of religious institutions in the South paralleled and interacted with the process of state- and nation-making that was taking place in the youthful republic. The fact remains, however, that the evangelicals he writes about are usually thinking about religion and the conservatives are almost always worried about politics. Evangelicalism and conservatism seem not so much intertwined as growing on separate poles in the same garden. Nor does Calhoun provide a consistent and encompassing interpretation to explain the nature of interaction between evangelicalism and conservatism.

The interpretative problem is highlighted at the end of the book when Calhoun asserts that the legacy of early southern evangelicalism affected politicians as diverse as Woodrow Wilson, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jimmy Carter, and Jesse Helms. That seems accurate, but it also suggests that evangelicalism is a limited tool when it comes to explaining political attitudes.

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*Thomas Paine*. By A. J. Ayer. (New York: Atheneum, 1988. xii + 195 pp. \$19.95.)

Why would A. J. Ayer, the late noted and knighted professor of the philosophy of mind and logic, have written a book in 1987 on Thomas Paine? Ayer acknowledges that he admires Paine and takes his ideas seriously. To his credit, he also makes it clear that he is a critic of the English political and social landscape, a friend of Michael Foot, and a supporter of the Thomas Paine Society.

Addressed primarily to an English audience, this book is clearly meant to update Paine for the 1980s, times that have apparently tried the logic of men as much as they have their souls. Ayer states that the book is "a sketch of Paine's life and character" combined with "a critical examination of his political and religious standpoints." American historians should not expect

to find in it a substantial work of historical analysis or an advance upon, much less an absorption of, the current understanding of the subject. Drawing on but two sources—Moncure D. Conway's edition of Paine's writings (1894–96) and A. Owen Aldridge's *Thomas Paine's American Ideology* (1984)—it is instead a commentary on the logical consistency and current standing of Paine's ideas.

On its own terms this has its rewards, which consist chiefly of the author's intelligence and personal charm. His touch is chatty and gentlemanly, his glosses on Paine's thinking conscientious and sometimes engaging, his reasoning clear, logical, and judicious. He is as often critical of Paine's contradictions and literal-mindedness as he is respectful of his democratic hopes. He recognizes Paine's lack of theoretical originality and notices his tremendous popular impact. And with some sensitivity to the past, he considers the question of Paine's legacy and of his connection with the present.

Nevertheless, Ayer relies too much on the authority of personal opinion and on an apparently idiosyncratic agenda. Although the book has a chronological organization, it strays far and fast, declaring on everything from eighteenth-century political philosophy to the growing power of the police in Margaret Thatcher's England. Developing no central argument, it reduces Paine's thought to its parts, and to the political and religious ones at that. Despite a chapter on the well-known social section of *Rights of Man*, the book as a whole devotes too little attention to Paine's social and economic thinking. And while it provides some background, it does not place Paine within a specific and changing social and historical context. Without this, even at his most logically consistent, Paine can be almost anything to anybody.

To take stock of Paine after 250 years requires comparative analysis, as much social interpretation as biographical exposition, and more attention to the comprehensiveness of Paine's ideology than to the cogency of his "standpoints." Historians ought to take up the challenge and pick up where the logician has left off.

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