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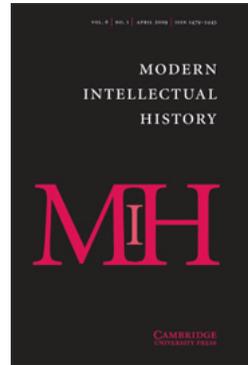
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SYMPATHY AND SEPARATION: BENJAMIN RUSH AND THE CONTAGIOUS PUBLIC*

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This essay considers Benjamin Rush's concern with the political organization of sympathy in post-Revolutionary America and how this concern shaped his response to the threat of post-Revolutionary "mobocracy." Like many of his contemporaries, Rush worried about the contagious volatility of large public assemblies engendered by the Revolution. For Rush, regular gatherings of the people out of doors threatened to corrupt visions both of an orderly and emancipatory public sphere and of the virtuous and independent citizens required by republican government. Rush feared that the unregulated communication of passion between bodies gathered in public might unleash what Michael Meranze has called an "anarchy of reciprocal imitations." It was in eighteenth-century theories of sympathy that this idea of contagious mimesis was most rigorously developed and most widely disseminated. Rush's medico-political understanding of sympathy, acquired during his years as a medical student in Edinburgh, provides an important framework for understanding his post-Revolutionary reform efforts, particularly those focused on the spatial choreography of the American citizenry.

The subjects must be kept apart. That is the first maxim of modern politics.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Essay on the Origin of Languages"¹

On 4 July 1788, the citizens of Philadelphia participated in a grand "Foederal Procession" honoring the ratification of a new federal government under the US Constitution. While Philadelphians had celebrated Independence Day before and were familiar with the politics of processions, parades, and less-organized

* For comments and helpful criticisms I would like to thank Fonna Forman-Barzilay, Charlie Capper, Ruth Grant, Malachi Hacothen, Isaac Kramnick, Tony La Vopa, Kirstie McClure, Michael Meranze, Nicholas Phillipson, Peter Reill, Liz Wingrove, three anonymous reviewers at *Modern Intellectual History*, and audiences at UCLA's Clark Memorial Library and Duke University's Franklin Institute for Interdisciplinary Research.

¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Essay on the Origin of Languages which treats of Melody and Musical Imitation," trans. J. H. Moran, in *On the Origin of Language: Two Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 5–74, 72.

gatherings of the people out of doors, many participants believed this procession carried a greater, almost epochal, significance. It certainly appeared this way to Dr Benjamin Rush—a signatory of the Declaration of Independence and an important early American reformer—who articulated this amplified resonance in a letter published in several newspapers throughout the states. Rush did not simply report the event; instead, he sought to illuminate its “philosophical” significance. His letter offers insight into early American reformers’ emphasis on regulating the aesthetic–affective dimensions of political life, and doing so in part through the spatial choreography of the American citizenry.²

Rush begins his account by comparing the procession favorably with the “splendid processions of coronations in Europe,” signaling at the letter’s outset an unexpected continuity between what American patriots usually derided as the manipulative mummery of monarchy—its slavish attention to fashion, personal distinction, and court rituals—and the power of spectacle still attending republican political forms.³ The dual burden of Rush’s letter was to reveal the continued significance of the aesthetic–affective domain to post-Revolutionary political “innovations,” while also emphasizing the differences between “the effects of a republican and a monarchical government on the minds and bodies of men.” While these regimes equally relied on regulating affect to attain their citizens’ (or subjects’) assent and loyalty, Rush saw important differences in their strategies. Broadly, where monarchical political aesthetics enacted rule through strategies of rank and reliance on invoking mystery, republican aesthetics relied on unification and strategies of transparency and public consensus. This latter reliance, Rush suggests, was nowhere more powerfully evident, or more obviously required, than in the 1788 Philadelphia procession.

No city in post-Revolutionary America was more intransigently divided by partisan politics than Philadelphia. Political divisions over constitutional ratification, articulated in both the press and the streets, deepened the controversy

² Benjamin Rush, “Observations on the Fourth of July Procession in Philadelphia,” *Pennsylvania Mercury*, 15 July 1788. Reprinted in J. P. Kaminski and G. J. Saladino, eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, vol. 18 (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1995), 261–9.

³ Rush himself wrote that he “abhors titles and everything that belongs to the *pageantry* of government.” Such pageantry is “spurious, dramatic, and artificial, no Reality belonging to it.” Benjamin Rush, “Letter to John Adams, June 4, 1789,” in *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, ed. Lyman H. Butterfield, *Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society* 30, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1951), 1: 513–15, 514 (original emphasis); Benjamin Rush, “A Thought on Monarchy and Aristocracy,” in *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush: His “Travels through Life” Together with his Commonplace Book for 1789–1813*, ed. George W. Corner, *Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society* 25 (Philadelphia, 1948), 197–200, 198.

provoked by the radically democratic Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776. Throughout the late 1770s and the 1780s, disputes between Anti-Constitutionalists and Constitutionalsists dramatized the growing differences between the city's civic leaders and its "lower orders," occasionally through acts of startling collective violence. For Rush, an outspoken critic of the Pennsylvania Constitution, the city's 1788 Fourth of July Procession revealed that the political consensus that had hitherto eluded post-Revolutionary Philadelphians, and by extension all American postcolonials, might be at last achieved, and achieved legitimately, through the dynamics and "soft compulsions" of aesthetic experience.⁴ The procession, Rush asserts, "has been the happy means of uniting all our citizens in the government"; the coordinated spectacle of the federal procession achieved a sympathetic identification where particular arguments had failed to bring about a deliberative consensus:

The order of the procession was regular, and begat corresponding order in all classes of spectators. A solemn silence reigned both in the streets and at the windows of the houses. This must be ascribed to the sublimity of the sight, and the pleasure it excited in every mind; for sublime objects and intense pleasure never fail at producing silence!⁵

Rush's emphasis on "the order of the procession" contrasts sharply with the disorder attending many of post-Revolutionary Philadelphia's public gatherings; in place of the clamor of popular voice there is assent signified by silence. The spatial coordination of affective exchange is captured here in the crucial phrase "begat corresponding order in all classes of spectators."⁶ Precisely how, we might ask, was this order "begotten"? The mimetic exchange Rush identifies between the "order of the procession" and the "order of all classes of spectators," as we will see, typifies his medico-political understanding of sympathy. Here this mimetic symmetry is sustained by a sense of the sublime, which, since its original theorization in the works of Longinus, had entailed the sublime object's ability to "transport" subjects without obtaining their rational consent. Rush relies here on the pleasure and awe of sublime spectacle—what Edmund Burke memorably

⁴ Jay Fliegelman takes the term "soft compulsion" from John Quincy Adams's lectures on rhetoric. It captures what Fliegelman describes as "a new model of political submission," representing "not rational assent but a new mesmerist mixture of voluntarism and involuntarism." See Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1993), 39–42, 40.

⁵ Rush, "Observations on the Fourth of July Procession in Philadelphia," 262.

⁶ Susan G. Davis emphasizes this performatively mimetic dimension of political parades and processions, revealing how these spectacles not only reflected social order, but actively shaped it. See Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

called its intermingling of “terror” and “delight”—to achieve political assent.⁷ “Tis done!” Rush exclaims. “We have become a nation.”⁸

This essay explores how Rush employed the medico-political understanding of sympathy that he had acquired as a medical student in Edinburgh to evaluate the behavior of a licentious citizenry, and how this understanding shaped his efforts to reform citizens through acts of spatial choreography. Like many writers in late eighteenth-century America, Rush was troubled by large and volatile public assemblies. The frequency of crowd actions engendered by the events of the Revolution focused critical attention on the unreason attending gatherings of the people out of doors, however quasi-legitimate they were taken to be.⁹ For critics like Rush, these resolutely embodied publics, far from sustaining spaces of reasoned deliberation, corrupted emerging visions of an orderly, emancipatory public sphere. The affective communication between bodies gathered in public threatened to unleash what Michael Meranze has called an “anarchy of reciprocal imitations.”¹⁰

It was in eighteenth-century theories of sympathy that this idea of bodily mimesis was most rigorously developed and most widely disseminated. As many cultural and literary historians have recently argued, sympathy was understood both as the “cement” that cohered the social order and as a perpetually destabilizing threat to that order.¹¹ In John Mullan’s words, eighteenth-century “attempts to detect the fundamental expressions of solidarity were liable to have to deal with expressions of solidarity which were disruptive of social cohesion.”¹² Building on these arguments, but applying them primarily to physical rather than metaphorical public spaces, I argue that in Rush’s writings on sympathy we glimpse the importance of spatial and environmental reform as a part

⁷ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful and Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, ed. David Womersley (New York: Penguin, 1998), 115.

⁸ Rush, “Observations on the Fourth of July Procession in Philadelphia,” 266.

⁹ On the “quasi-legitimacy” of Revolutionary crowds see Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial radicals and the development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765–1776* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1972), 1–26.

¹⁰ Michael Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Revolution, and Authority in Philadelphia, 1760–1835* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 169.

¹¹ See Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 109; Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and Julia A. Stern, *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹² John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 27.

of the broader moral and political reforms of the post-Revolutionary years. In particular, I argue that the institutional tactics of separation and spatial coordination that Rush pursued aimed to control and regulate—to use Michel Foucault’s word, “canalize”¹³—the potentially disruptive communication of sympathetic affect among the newly nationalized citizenry. This regulation of affective exchange sought not only to limit the new republic’s continued reliance on the politics of the people out of doors, but also to reform the constitutional practices of citizenship and the sentimental structure of citizens themselves. In Rush’s work we see an effort to habituate post-Revolutionary citizens to self-government through an intricate spatial choreography. Rush’s art of sympathy was also an art of separation, entailing the navigation of social proximity and distance capable of producing the self-governing “republican machines” he thought necessary for the new republican regime.¹⁴ It was in part through this spatial choreography of citizenship that Rush pursued his paradoxical project of training the citizenry to moral and political independence.¹⁵

I. SYMPATHY: SOCIAL AND PHYSIOLOGICAL

GREAT GOD! of what materials hast thou compounded the hearts of thy creatures! admire, O my friend! the operation of NATURE — and the power of SYMPATHY!

William Hill Brown, *The Power of Sympathy*¹⁶

In his *Travels through Life* Rush wrote that he considered his two years studying medicine in Edinburgh from 1766 to 1768 as “the most important in their influence

¹³ Michel Foucault, “Space, Knowledge, Power,” in *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984, Volume III: Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1984), 349–64, 361.

¹⁴ Michael Walzer argues that liberalism is characterized by the “art of separation,” by which he means “a certain way of drawing the map of the social and political world.” The art of separation I invoke here is more literal. Rush’s art of separation involves the spatial choreography of citizens. See Michael Walzer, “Liberalism and the Art of Separation,” *Political Theory* 12 (Aug. 1984), 315–30, 315. On the “art of sympathy” see John B. Radner, “The Art of Sympathy in Eighteenth-Century British Moral Thought,” in Roseanne Runte, ed., *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 189–210.

¹⁵ Jay Fliegelman explores the paradoxes of educating to independence in *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority 1750–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

¹⁶ William Hill Brown, *The Power of Sympathy* (New York: Penguin, 1996; first published 1789), 63.

upon my character and conduct of any period of my life.”¹⁷ Aside from the medical education itself, and in particular the powerful influence of his teacher William Cullen, Rush saw these years as politically formative. “For the first moment in my life I now exercised my reason upon the subject of government,” Rush wrote, and concluded that “no form of government can be rational but that which is derived from the Suffrages of the people, who are the subjects of it.” No longer did Rush consider kings “as essential to political order as the Sun is to the order of our Solar System.”¹⁸ While Rush had in 1765 supported colonial protests against Parliament’s Stamp Act—denouncing colonial governors’ attempts to “suppress the spirit of liberty”—it was not until he moved to Edinburgh that the “great and active truth” of republican principles provoked him to “try the foundation of my opinions on many other subjects.”¹⁹ Through his encounters in London and Edinburgh with such political and intellectual luminaries as James Burgh, Adam Ferguson, David Hume, Samuel Johnson, Catherine Macaulay, and John Wilkes; his participation in Edinburgh’s Whiggish Revolution Club; and his studies at Europe’s most distinguished medical school, Rush experienced an intellectual transformation that deepened his principled commitment to the American colonists’ cause. In theory, though he claims not yet in practice, Rush had become a republican.

Rush’s medical and political education in Edinburgh framed his understanding and evaluation of unfolding political developments once he returned to Philadelphia in July of 1769; it indelibly shaped the sentimental republicanism he tirelessly advocated in the 1770s and 1780s.²⁰ While Rush’s participation in the American Revolution and the War of Independence contributed to the further “evolution of [his] republican principles,” and would ultimately lead to a “disorganization” of the “principles of medicine” that he learned from Cullen, the broad outline of these principles remained with him throughout his life. Of particular importance to Rush’s medico-political interventions in the 1770s and 1780s was the Edinburgh-acquired conception of sympathy, understood as a central category of both sociopolitical and physiological analysis. As Evelyn

¹⁷ Rush, *Autobiography*, 43. Also see Douglas Sloan, “From Nottingham Academy to the ‘Edinburgh of America’: Benjamin Rush,” in *idem*, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1971), 185–224.

¹⁸ Rush, *Autobiography*, 46.

¹⁹ Benjamin Rush, “Letter to Ebenezer Howard, November 8, 1765,” in *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1: 18–19, 18; Rush, *Autobiography*, 46.

²⁰ Rush claimed that in 1790 he “determined never again to influence the opinions and passion of my fellow citizens upon political subjects.” Benjamin Rush, “Letter to John Adams, March 23, 1805,” in *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 2: 892–3, 893. See also John A. Schutz and Douglass Adair, eds., *The Spur of Fame: Dialogues of John Adams and Benjamin Rush* (San Marino: Huntington Library Press, 1966).

Forget has argued, the theorization of sympathy in late eighteenth-century Scotland blurred the “distinction between medicine and what became social theory” and thereby established a “logical continuity between physiological and sociological investigation.”²¹ No late eighteenth-century American figure employed this “logical continuity” more rigorously than Rush. His medico-political understanding of sympathy shaped many of his proposed reforms of the human and social body once he returned to revolutionary Philadelphia. Through the conceptual lens of sympathy, Rush argued persistently for the interrelationship of physical and moral or political health; he invariably tied disorder in the polity to derangement in the mind and body. Because I will focus on Rush’s understanding of sympathy’s contagiousness and irresistibility, broader eighteenth-century preoccupations with contagious sympathy are key to understanding Rush’s institutional approach to sympathy as an art of separation.

Sympathy was, of course, a key moral category of anglophone thought during the long eighteenth century, figuring centrally in the moral sentimentalism of Anthony Ashley Cooper (the third Earl of Shaftesbury) and Francis Hutcheson, the essays of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, and the treatises of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers like David Hume and Adam Smith. It was also an essential category of the vitalist medical discourse of the Edinburgh school of Joseph Black, William Cullen, Alexander Munro *secundus*, and Robert Whytt.²² The widespread moral appeal to sympathy in the eighteenth century was part of a larger response to moral theories—especially those of Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Mandeville—premised upon individual self-interest. In place of contractual and interest-based accounts of social and political life, with their mechanistic egoism and the presumed independence of their choosing subjects, eighteenth-century theorists of sympathy asserted constitutive relationality and the self-evidence of human sociability. Despite important differences between these theorists, each envisioned the self as inherently capable of feeling the sentiments and passions of others through recognizably mimetic mechanisms; in all of their work there is evidence of what Walter Benjamin described as the “mimetic faculty” of human beings.²³

²¹ Evelyn L. Forget, “Evocations of Sympathy: Sympathetic Imagery in Eighteenth-Century Social Theory and Physiology,” *History of Political Economy* 35 (2003), 282–308, 282.

²² Christopher Lawrence, “The Nervous System and Society in the Scottish Enlightenment,” in Barry Barnes and Steven Shapin, eds., *Natural Order: Historical Studies of Scientific Culture* (London: Sage, 1979), 19–40; Peter Hanns Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 122–3.

²³ Walter Benjamin, “On the Mimetic Faculty,” in *idem, Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken, 1978), 333–6.

Describing the sympathetic process of natural imitation early in the century, Francis Hutcheson wrote that all passions and emotions are “naturally contagious.” Individuals “not only sorrow with the distressed, and rejoice with the prosperous, but admiration or surprise . . . raises a correspondent commotion of mind in all who behold him. Fear observed raises fear in the observer before he knows the cause, laughter moves to laughter.”²⁴ Elaborating on the mimetic dimension of sympathy, but also emphasizing the role played by physical proximity, Shaftesbury theorized sympathy through its relation to another key term of eighteenth-century moral and political discourse—“enthusiasm.”²⁵ In his influential “Letter Concerning Enthusiasm,” Shaftesbury invoked the contagious dimension of sympathy when situated within the context of the gathered multitude:

One may with good reason call every passion “panic” which is raised in a multitude and conveyed by . . . contact or sympathy . . . in this state their very looks are infectious. The fury flies from face to face, and the disease is no sooner seen than caught. Such force has society in ill as well as in good passions, and so much stronger any affection is for being social and communicative.²⁶

Shaftesbury’s influential account of sympathy emphasizes contagiousness, where the multitude is agitated to such an extent that looks themselves—the external signs of an internal state—become “infectious.” The imitation of “looks themselves” is not a consequence of prior understanding, according to Shaftesbury’s account, but a physical mimesis that generates an internal passionate state. The physical environment here determines its constituents’ affective and internal disposition. The contagious dimension of sympathetic exchange was such a commonplace by the end of the century that the 1797 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* bluntly described sympathy as “an imitative faculty, sometimes involuntary, frequently without consciousness.”²⁷

²⁴ Cited in Radner, “The Art of Sympathy,” 204 n. 1.

²⁵ See James Farr, “Political Science and the Enlightenment of Enthusiasm,” *American Political Science Review* 82/1 (March 1988), 51–69; Jason Frank, “‘Besides Our Selves’: An Essay on Enthusiastic Politics and Civil Subjectivity,” *Public Culture* (Fall 2005), 371–92; Michael Heyd, *Be Sober and Reasonable: The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden, 1995); Lawrence E. Klein, “Sociability, Solitude, and Enthusiasm,” in Lawrence E. Klein and Anthony J. La Vopa, eds., *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650–1850* (San Marino: Huntington Library Press, 1998), 153–78; and J. G. A. Pocock, “Enthusiasm: The Antiself of Enlightenment,” in *ibid.*, 7–28.

²⁶ Anthony Ashley Cooper, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), ed. Lawrence E. Klein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 10.

²⁷ Cited in Forget, “Evocations of Sympathy,” 285.

Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and other moral sentimentalists asserted a relatively reassuring conception of human nature through their affirmation of a natural “moral sense,” but to their moral rationalist critics this affirmation raised dilemmas regarding human autonomy and the moral role of reasoned reflection and choice. At the risk of oversimplifying the well-developed rationalist critique, critics argued that if the sympathetic communication of sentiment and “fellow feeling” occurred irresistibly, if human passions were “naturally contagious,” then the question of choice threatened to depart the moral sphere.²⁸ Although irresistible sympathy offered a compelling response to moral egoism, it also threatened to undermine the independence of human agency and emerging conceptions of moral autonomy—an issue, as we will see, that also haunted Rush’s efforts to reform citizens into independent “republican machines.” Moreover, sympathy could engender factional associations that undermined social and political stability. “Popular sedition, party zeal, a devoted obedience to factious leaders,” Hume wrote, were “some of the most visible, though less laudable effects of . . . social sympathy in human nature.”²⁹ Because sympathy was understood as both salutary “fellow feeling” and a threat to autonomy, society’s “cement” and a basis for its potential undoing, moral sentimentalists came to argue that sympathy should be subject to deliberate cultivation and discipline. It was only through the “constant and strenuous art of guiding, informing, and deliberately exercising the sympathetic imagination,” John Radner argues, that the “man of feeling” could retain the necessary independence of judgment.³⁰ Eighteenth-century moral sentimentalists thereby emphasized both sympathetic communication and sympathetic cultivation, redirection, and reform: the art of sympathy. Rush also held this view, writing that while the “moral faculty” is “innate” it may nonetheless be “suspended, or directed improperly.” He believed that a “regimen” might “improve, or alter the diseased state of the moral faculty.”³¹ The broad influence of moral sentimentalism on Rush and his contemporaries led many of them to affirm, in Rush’s words, that “sensibility is the sentinel of the moral faculty. It decides upon the quality of actions before they reach the divine

²⁸ Frederick Beiser explores these critiques, and Hutcheson’s response to them, in *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defense of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 307–18.

²⁹ David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 224.

³⁰ Radner, “The Art of Sympathy,” 192.

³¹ Benjamin Rush, “Letter to Granville Sharp, 9 July 1774,” in “The Correspondence of Benjamin Rush and Granville Sharp, 1773–1809,” ed. John A. Woods, *Journal of American Studies* 1 (1954), 1–38, 6–8.

principle of the soul.”³² Because the moral faculty “is quick in its operations, and like the sensitive plant, acts without reflection,” it was essential to give proper form to its perceptions. Rush gloried in the fact that “the intimations of duty and the road to happiness are not left to the slow operations or doubtful inductions of duty, nor to the precarious decisions of taste,” but worried that the reliability of the moral faculty could be corrupted.³³ Like duty and taste, sympathy had to be properly regulated.

As with many of his other frequently used terms—“mixing,” “combining,” “circulating,” “associating”—sympathy for Rush connoted both political and physiological reform.³⁴ Sympathy provides the conceptual lens for understanding the analogical relationship between the physical and the social body in Rush’s thought, and his vision of their mutual regulation and reform. Just as Scottish Enlightenment thinkers like Hume and Smith envisioned the coherence of the social and moral world through the sympathetic “movement of the passions,”³⁵ for influential figures of Scottish medicine sympathy described the communicative organization of the body itself. By the mid-eighteenth century, Edinburgh medicine had departed significantly from the Leiden school’s mechanistic approach. Under Robert Whytt’s intellectual leadership, Edinburgh medical theory had developed an alternative theory of bodily integration based on a vitalist redescription of the human nervous system. Although Whytt died the year Rush arrived in Edinburgh, Rush’s influential teacher William Cullen had adopted the basic outlines of Whytt’s system. According to Christopher Lawrence, Whytt was the first to give the term sympathy “a clearly defined structural and functional significance” in physiology, and Cullen retained “all of the characteristics of Whytt’s sentinel principle—purposeful action, coordinated ability, and, most importantly, unconscious feeling.”³⁶ In their work, sympathy referred broadly to what Rush later described as “a certain connection of feeling in the nerves” that allowed the parts of the (healthy) body to resonate in a harmonious communication.³⁷ It also established “a still more wonderful sympathy,” as Whytt wrote, “between the nervous systems of different persons,

³² Benjamin Rush, *An Enquiry into the Effects of Public Punishments upon Criminals and upon Society* (Philadelphia: Joseph James, 1787), 6. Reprinted in *idem, Essays: Literary, Moral, and Philosophical*, ed. Michael Meranze (Schenectady: Union College, 1988), 79–94.

³³ Benjamin Rush, “Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty,” in *Two Essays on the Mind* (New York: Brunner Mazel, 1972; first published 1786), 2, 13.

³⁴ See Eric T. Carlson and Meredith M. Simpson, “Benjamin Rush’s Medical Use of the Moral Faculty,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 39 (Jan.–Feb. 1965), 22–33.

³⁵ Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 24.

³⁶ Forget, “Evocations of Sympathy,” 291; Lawrence, “Nervous System and Society,” 26.

³⁷ Benjamin Rush, *Lectures on the Mind* (1812), ed. Eric T. Carlson, Jeffrey L. Wollock, and Patricia S. Noel (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1981), 238.

whence various . . . morbid symptoms are often transferred . . . without any corporeal contact of infection.”³⁸ According to Peter Hans Reill, this physiological concept of sympathy “enabled late Enlightenment life scientists to account for action at a distance and simultaneous reaction in widely dispersed parts of the organized body,”³⁹ and to break definitively with earlier mechanistic paradigms. Just as sympathy, in the work of the moral sentimentalists, explained the circulation of binding affections in the social body, physiological sympathy, in the theories of Whytt and Cullen, was conceived as the working currency of a corporeal communicative economy.⁴⁰

According to this theory, the discrete parts of the body not only communicate with directly neighboring organs and nerves (what Rush called a “sympathy of continuity”), but must also be brought into accord based on the organism’s overall functioning (regulated by the mind, and described by Rush as the “sympathy of contiguity”). “From this view of the subject,” Rush wrote,

we perceive that the different parts of the body not only perform their more immediate offices, but also such as are of a general nature and tendency. Just so it is with the wheels of a clock: they turn round as their more immediate function, but by their connection with and action upon each other, they produce the general effect of keeping time.⁴¹

Keeping the differently disposed gears arranged so as to achieve their “general nature and tendency” was an important aspect of Rush’s reforms; the use of the same term for the integrative power of the physical and social body was a key foundation for Rush’s “medical jurisprudence.”⁴²

According to Rush, knowing the regular and irregular contiguities of the body allowed the physician to intervene efficiently. By knowing that the stomach, for example, sympathizes more closely with the trachea than with the lungs, Rush would counsel his students that they “could more certainly cure cynache trachealis than pneumony by means of a puke.”⁴³ But because Rush cautiously departed from Whytt’s and Cullen’s influential writings and understood sympathy to

³⁸ James Rodgers, “Sensibility, Sympathy, Benevolence: Physiology and Moral Philosophy in *Tristram Shandy*,” in L. J. Jordanova ed., *Languages of Nature: Critical Essays on Science and Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 117–58, 140.

³⁹ Reill, *Vitalizing Nature*, 140.

⁴⁰ Lawrence, “Nervous System and Society,” 33; Henry Homes (Lord Kames), *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (Edinburgh, 1751), 17.

⁴¹ Rush, *Lectures on the Mind*, 238–9.

⁴² Forget, “Evocations of Sympathy,” 283.

⁴³ Rush, *Lectures on the Mind*, 244.

occur also outside the strict materialism and natural vitalism of the nerves,⁴⁴ he also formulated a dynamic account of mind–body relations (and salvaged a spiritual element missing from strict Edinburgh materialism) that characterized his medico-political reforms. Because sympathy operated beyond the capacity for strict empirical observation, Whytt called it a *facultas incognita*. For the Edinburgh theorists, sympathy, as Forget notes, “was not observable, either in its social aspects or in its bodily operation. It was visible only in its presumed effects.”⁴⁵ While this quasi-theological attribution of invisible causes to visible effects troubled the strict materialism of Whytt and Cullen, the devout Rush embraced it as proof of the presence of divine will in the workings of nature. Rush rejected his teachers’ immanent materialism, later arguing that “Self-existence belongs only to God.”⁴⁶

Rush’s lifelong faith in a transcendent God and in the truth of revelation was acquired at a very early age. Rush was raised in the Great Awakening context of his mother’s strong evangelical, millenarian beliefs. Before attending the College of New Jersey (Princeton), Rush was educated at Gilbert Tennent’s strongly New Light West Nottingham Academy, and he was a lifelong admirer of George Whitefield. Although Rush became one of early America’s preeminent men of science, he never believed that science posed any challenge to his Christian faith; he always mistrusted the cold secularism of his more deistic colleagues.⁴⁷ Moreover, Rush not only believed in the ultimate compatibility of Christianity and republicanism, he also came to see them as necessarily entailed by one another. “A Christian . . . cannot fail of being a republican,” he wrote, “for every precept of the Gospel inculcates those degrees of humility, self-denial, and brotherly kindness, which are directly opposed to the pride of monarchy and the pageantry of a court.”⁴⁸ To sustain this doctrine of political and religious interdependence, Rush ultimately rejected his early Calvinism in favor of what Donald D’Elia has called the “loving heresy of universal salvation.”⁴⁹ In Edinburgh, Rush’s religious faith led him to disapprove of Cullen’s dismissal

⁴⁴ On the connection between eighteenth-century theories of nerves and the culture of sensibility see G. J. Barker Banfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1–36.

⁴⁵ Forget, “Evocations of Sympathy,” 302.

⁴⁶ Benjamin Rush, *Three Lectures upon Animal Life* (Philadelphia: Budd and Bartram), 52.

⁴⁷ See Donald D’Elia, *Benjamin Rush: Philosopher of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1974), 9–19, 91–101.

⁴⁸ Rush, “On the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic,” in *idem, Essays: Literary, Moral, and Philosophical*, 5–12, 8–9. See also *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1: 582–5.

⁴⁹ Donald D’Elia, “The Republican Theology of Benjamin Rush,” *Pennsylvania History* 33 (April 1966), 187–203, 188.

of the authority of revelation and to condemn Hume's religious skepticism, but while Rush's "sense of sin" may have abated in Edinburgh, it is not true that his discovery of republican ideals there led to a decline in his "thirsting after God."⁵⁰ As we will see, Rush's post-Revolutionary reform efforts were animated by his millennial desire to prepare the way for the "regeneration of our world," and by his commitment to what Robert Abzug describes as the "resacralization of everyday life."⁵¹ For Rush, the sympathetic connections that bound together the social and physical world were a revelatory sign of divine intelligence.

As "the viceregent of divine benevolence in our world," sympathy, for Rush, secured the complicated interdependence of different orders—it structured the great chain of being—and authorized his remarkable reliance on analogical reasoning. To understand better the particularities—and peculiarities—of Rush's "medical jurisprudence" we must first turn to his analogical understanding of the relationship between the human and social bodies. As Rush remarked in a 1797 letter to Thomas Jefferson, he was often "struck by the analogy of things in the natural, moral, and political world,"⁵² and his writings are often organized around such central analogies as that between the physical body and the body politic. This is, of course, one of the founding analogies of Western political thought, but for Rush the analogy was quite literal and physical. In a time and place known for its regular use of corporeal analogies for social and political life,⁵³ Rush's contemporaries singled him out as a particularly obsessive analogist. Samuel Cooper, Rush's colleague at Pennsylvania Hospital, wrote to his friend William Bache that in his controversial theory of disease, Rush "infers all from many circumstances & elucidates the Whole by analogical reasoning for which you know he is remarkably famous."⁵⁴ Indeed, one does not read far in Rush's essays, lectures, letters, and notes before finding government described in terms of human psychology, human psychology in terms of government, and disorder in the state's constitution analogized to disorder of the corporeal constitution. At the outset of his lectures on medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, for example, Rush oriented his audience by declaring that "the human mind may be compared to the British Government," and then proceeded to a detailed

⁵⁰ Robert H. Abzug, "Benjamin Rush and Revolutionary Christian Reform," in *idem*, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 11–29, 15.

⁵¹ Abzug, "Benjamin Rush," 20.

⁵² *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 2: 785.

⁵³ On late eighteenth-century Americans' broad tendency toward analogical argument see Robert Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (New York: Vintage, 1985), 9.

⁵⁴ *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1: 584 n. 13.

elaboration of the analogy.⁵⁵ He would later take the United States Constitution as his model of analogical well-being, believing that its various branches and departments copied “the wisdom discovered in the structure of the human mind of an individual.”⁵⁶

It is misleading to consider Rush’s analogical method as a merely heuristic device, or in contradiction to his commitment to empirical investigation. For Rush, who remained committed to the truth of revelation, it was in the divinely secured association between realms that true, scientific meaning was disclosed and the grounds of reformative intervention secured. The mutual derangements of body, mind, and polity demonstrated this truth for Rush, and the reform of one realm could never succeed without corresponding reform of the others. Consequently, his diagnosis of pathology in one often pointed to causes arising from another. It was this background reliance on analogical interconnectedness that led Rush to assert an “indissoluble union between moral, political, and physical happiness.”⁵⁷ Of central import to these investigations was the interdependence of the spiritual and physical dimensions of individual and collective existence. “How wonderful,” Rush exclaimed, “is the action of the soul upon the body!—Of the body upon the soul!”⁵⁸ To reform the soul, it became clear to Rush, one had to first take hold of the body.⁵⁹ The physical reform of the moral and political life of his fellow citizens distinguished Rush’s efforts once he returned from Edinburgh to an America rushing headlong into revolution.

II. MEDICINE AND MOBOCRACY

Two learned and famous physicians, Sydenham and Rush, have taught us that the plague and the yellow fever, and all other epidemical diseases, when they prevail in a city, convert

⁵⁵ Cited in Manfred J. Wasserman, “Benjamin Rush on Government and the Harmony and Derangement of the Mind,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 33/4 (Oct. 1972), 639–42, 640. For a discussion of how eighteenth-century faculty psychology offered a similarly “powerful analogy . . . between the construction of a polity and the construction of the self,” see Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 78–106, 79.

⁵⁶ Rush, *Lectures on the Mind*, 479.

⁵⁷ D’Elia, *Benjamin Rush*, 68.

⁵⁸ Rush, “Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty,” 35.

⁵⁹ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 76. Foucault writes that in eighteenth-century medical politics “society’s control over individuals was accomplished not only through consciousness or ideology, but also in the body and with the body . . . The body is a biopolitical reality; medicine is a biopolitical strategy.” Michel Foucault, “The Birth of Social Medicine,” in *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984, Volume III: Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1994), 134–56, 137.

all other disorders into plague. I cannot help thinking that Democracy is a distemper of this kind . . .

John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 6 February 1805⁶⁰

Soon after Rush returned to Philadelphia in July 1769 he accepted an academic post as professor of chemistry at the College of Philadelphia, and from this position he began to promote his newly acquired medical theories in pamphlets and newspapers. He was soon “held up to public notice” and “familiar to the public ear” as both a physician and a social reformer.⁶¹ The sentimental republicanism Rush acquired in Edinburgh was practically developed by the “part [he] took in the American Revolution,” which “led [him] to try [his] opinions upon many other subjects as well as that of government.”⁶² While Rush actively participated in the period’s political debates—writing a number of revolutionary articles under the pseudonym “Hamden,” encouraging and titling the publication of Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, and fiercely opposing the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776—he directed his energy primarily toward social rather than governmental reform. In the 1770s and 1780s he publicly advocated for temperance, free public schooling, the abolition of slavery, penal reform, better sanitation, and the reform of public festivals and assemblies. The breadth and depth of his moral, medical, and political reforms is clearly indicated in a 1786 letter he wrote to Richard Price about the unfinished state of the American Revolution: “We have changed our forms of government,” Rush wrote,

but it still remains yet to effect a revolution in our principles, opinions, and manners so as to accommodate them to the forms of government we have adopted. This is the most difficult part of the business of the patriots and legislators of our country.⁶³

Rush dedicated himself to that business for two decades before, in the 1790s, growing disillusioned with public life and the possibilities of social reform.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Schutz and Adair, *The Spur of Fame*, 19–20, 20.

⁶¹ Rush, *Autobiography*, 81.

⁶² Rush, *Autobiography*, 89.

⁶³ *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1: 388.

⁶⁴ The tragic unfolding of the French Revolution and the bitter partisan politics of the Early Republic’s first decade led Rush away from his post-Revolutionary projects of social reform and toward a renewed faith in the power of Christian conversion. “All systems of political order and happiness seem of late years to have disappointed their founders and advocates,” he wrote to John Adams in 1806. “My only hope for suffering and depressed humanity is derived from a belief in a new and divine order of things which we are told will be introduced . . . by the influence of the gospel upon individuals and nations.” Schutz and Adair, *The Spur of Fame*, 24–5, 25, 57.

Rush believed the physician was uniquely positioned to address the physical, moral, and political health of the new nation because he could best understand the physical and physiological dimensions of virtue and vice. “They entertain very limited views of medicine,” Rush wrote, “who suppose its objects and duties are confined exclusively to the knowledge and cure of disease.”⁶⁵ Although biographers have sometimes compared Rush to his friend Paine, noting their equally “uncompromising revolutionary spirit,” Rush was more interested in the business of governance than was Paine and, like many other members of the patriot elite, he worried deeply about the “excesses of democracy” unleashed by the Revolution.⁶⁶ Because he believed republican citizens had to be habituated into a capacity for virtuous self-government, Rush called for the creation of an integrated set of institutions for encouraging moral and physical improvement throughout civil society in the belief that republicanism was more than a form of government, and closer to what Franco Venturi calls a “form of life.”⁶⁷ Republicanism implied a capacity for self-government in many areas of human endeavor.⁶⁸ Rush repeatedly contrasts the healthy capacity for self-government with the loss of individual and collective self-control. “Certain states of society . . . and forms of government,” Rush warns, “have considerable influence in predisposing to derangement.” Monarchy and aristocracy, for example, “corrupt all the powers of the mind.”⁶⁹ Well-organized republican governments, on the contrary, “stimulate the passions, which afterwards act upon the understanding, and impart to it a force, which prevents it from relapsing into the repose of public apathy.”⁷⁰ “Those governments are best accommodated to the nature of man, in which the same kind of powers are exercised over him, which were given to him for the government of himself.” By this, Rush meant government that was “properly balanced and well administered.”⁷¹ If not properly balanced and administered, republican governments too could degenerate into a state of popular licentiousness. For Rush, the corrupting power of popular

⁶⁵ Benjamin Rush, “Introductory Lecture,” in *Sixteen Introductory Lectures, to Courses of Lectures upon the Institutes and Practices of Medicine* (Philadelphia, 1811), 363–95, 363.

⁶⁶ D’Elia, *Benjamin Rush*, 18; Rush, *Autobiography*, 114.

⁶⁷ Franco Venturi, *Utopia and Reform in the Enlightenment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 71.

⁶⁸ See Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 95–109.

⁶⁹ Rush, *Autobiography*, 197.

⁷⁰ Benjamin Rush, “On the Influence of Physical Causes in Promoting an Increase of the Strength and Activity of the Intellectual Faculties of Man,” in *Two Essays on the Mind* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1972), 89–120, 111.

⁷¹ Cited in Eric T. Carlson and Jeffrey L. Wollock, “Benjamin Rush on Politics and Human Nature,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 236 (5 July 1976), 73–7, 75.

government was best exemplified by the revolutionary politics of the people out of doors, which, by the 1780s, seemed to Rush and many others to threaten post-Independence political institutions. Because of the “political insanity” of insurgents like Daniel Shays, Rush feared post-Revolutionary Americans were entering a “wilderness of anarchy and vice.”⁷²

Rush’s commitment to popular government was tempered, then, by warnings about the people’s unhealthy, immoral tendencies to vice. “Is not history as full of the vices of the people,” Rush asked, “as it is of the crimes of kings? . . . The people are as much disposed to vice as their rulers, and . . . nothing but a vigorous and efficient government can prevent their degenerating into savages.”⁷³ “In our opposition to monarchy,” Rush wrote, “we forgot that the temple of tyranny has two doors. We bolted one of them by proper restraints; but we left the other open, by neglecting to guard against the effects of our own ignorance and licentiousness.”⁷⁴ Rush believed that the weakness of post-Revolutionary governments, along with the popular “passion for liberty,” had engendered an unhealthy political culture, exemplified and encouraged by the radical Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776, which Rush believed had resulted from revolutionary enthusiasm and established the institutional environment for its perpetuation. “Our people (intoxicated with the *must* or first flowings of liberty),” Rush wrote, “have formed a government that is absurd in its principles.”⁷⁵ Writing under the pseudonym “Ludlow,” a prominent radical of the English Civil War, Rush published a series of essays attacking the 1776 Constitution for its incautious neglect of “the ancient habits and customs of the people of Pennsylvania,” and its dangerous exposure of “laws and government to frequent and unnecessary innovation.”⁷⁶ His critique was focused on the Constitution’s radically democratic elements: its creation of an annually elected unicameral legislature, the septennial election of a “Council of Censors” empowered to nullify legislation, the abolition of property requirements for adult male suffrage, the open publication of proposed laws before legislative votes, and the popular election of magistrates and militia officers. In fact, Rush was so much associated with the Constitution’s conservative critics that the painter Charles Wilson

⁷² *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1: 460–61.

⁷³ *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1: 454.

⁷⁴ Benjamin Rush, “Address to the People of the United States,” *American Museum*, Jan. 1787, reprinted in J. P. Kaminski and G. J. Saladino, eds., *Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, vol. 13 (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1981), 46–9.

⁷⁵ *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1: 137 (original emphasis).

⁷⁶ These essays were assembled in a pamphlet by Rush entitled *Observations upon the Present State of the Government of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Steiner & Cist: 1777).

Peale depicted him in 1783 as metaphorically opposing the Constitution as an “earthquake” that threatened society’s foundations.

Underwriting these dangerous innovations, Rush believed, was an “excess of the passion for liberty” as well as a misconceived understanding of popular sovereignty. Making an argument that he would elaborate on ten years later in the debates over constitutional ratification, he urged his fellow citizens in 1777 not to confuse the idea that “all power is *derived* from the people” with the revolutionary idea that “all power is *seated* in the people.” “Government supposes and requires a delegation of power,” Rush wrote. “The idea of making the people at large judges of the qualifications necessary for magistrates, or judges of laws, or checks for Assemblies proceeds upon the supposition that mankind are all alike wise, and just, and have equal leisure.”⁷⁷ Rush worried that self-created popular authority would rob citizens of the capacity for deliberative political judgment and subject them to the sway of popular passions. A government that relies on the regular elicitation of the public passions prevents the establishment of independent, virtuous character that Rush associated with republican citizenship. Since physicians have “frequent opportunities of witnessing the destructive effects of the passions upon the human body,” Rush wrote, they must “advocate those governments only which filter laws most completely from the passions of legislators, judges, and the people.”⁷⁸

For Rush, the crowd’s attack on James Wilson’s house in Philadelphia in 1779 was evidence of the Pennsylvania Constitution’s tendency to engender the popular derangement he associated with the behavior of the people out of doors. As a prominent member of the conservative Republican Society (formed in opposition to the 1776 Constitution), Wilson had continually opposed attempts by radicals in the supreme executive council and the assembly to regulate prices.⁷⁹ The gathering of two hundred militiamen who paraded through Philadelphia on 4 October, and eventually confronted Wilson and other “gentlemen” at his house (and were then fired upon by men inside, killing six and wounding many), was motivated both by direct economic incentive and by the perceived political inefficacy of the “lower” part of the population. In a letter written shortly after the incident, Rush blamed it on the government’s creation of a public environment that favored or elicited mob politics:

Poor Pennsylvania! has become the most miserable spot on the surface of the globe. Our streets have been stained already with fraternal blood—a sad prelude we fear of the future mischiefs our Constitution will bring upon us. They call it a democracy—a mobocracy in

⁷⁷ Rush, *Observations*, 15 (original emphasis).

⁷⁸ Rush, *Lectures on the Mind*, 717.

⁷⁹ See John K. Alexander, “Fort Wilson Incident of 1779: A Case Study of the Revolutionary Crowd,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 31 (1974), 589–612.

my opinion would be more proper. All our laws breathe the spirit of town meetings and porter shops.⁸⁰

Inspired by events like the “Ft. Wilson riot,” Rush eventually developed a quasi-physiological theory of the popular politics that tied political disorder to derangement of mind and body. In “An Account of the Influences of the Military and Political Events of the American Revolution upon the Human Body” (1789) Rush traced the unique impact of the “novelties” of the Revolution not simply upon the “understandings, passions, and morals of the citizens of the United States,” but “upon the human body, through the medium of the mind.”⁸¹ As a Revolutionary War doctor, Rush was well placed to observe the effects of war on the body of the soldiery. There were the obvious effects of “thirst” and “pulmonary consumption,” but also a fortitude excited by the “sense of danger,” and the “Nostalgia” or “homesickness” that seemed to be a particular threat “among the soldiers of the New-England states.”⁸² The political life of the Revolution also produced a frenzied energy in the body politic; it “deposed the moral faculty, and filled the imagination in many people, with airy and impracticable schemes of wealth and grandeur.”⁸³ The Revolution made people prone to “a peculiar species of extempore conduct.” Rush diagnosed this irregular conduct as a disease brought on by “the dissolution of civil government,” which continued after the peace of 1783, when Americans found themselves “wholly unprepared for their new situation.” “The excess of the passion for liberty, inflamed by the successful issue of the war, produced, in many people,” Rush wrote, “opinions and conduct, which could not be removed by reason nor restrained by government.”⁸⁴ The very passions that had engendered and sustained the Revolution and War of Independence, Rush feared, would undo their capacities to exercise independent judgment necessary for republican citizenship. Rush characterized this disease of participatory excess and this rage for liberty as a “species of insanity” named “*anarchia*.”

Rush’s myriad projects of moral, medical, and political reform must be understood against the backdrop of his concerns with post-Revolutionary “mobocracy,” “anarchia,” and “democratic excess.” Although the people were to be granted rights and would form the basis of legitimate public authority, they also had to be disciplined into this very capacity for delegated self-government.

⁸⁰ *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1: 244.

⁸¹ Benjamin Rush, “An Account of the Influence of the Military and Political Events of the American Revolution on the Human Body,” in *idem*, *Medical Inquiries and Observations, upon Diseases of the Mind* (Philadelphia, 1789), 186–96, 188.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 189–90.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

“The business of education,” Rush argued, “has acquired a new complexion by the independence of our country,” insofar as it had to train citizens capable of the responsibilities of citizenship.⁸⁵ Education broadly conceived had to “convert men into republican machines,” Rush wrote, “if we expect them to perform their parts properly, in the great machine of the government of the state.”⁸⁶ Donald D’Elia has persuasively argued that “Rush’s positive conception of government as the molder of men through institutions was the key principle of his social thought.”⁸⁷ Although post-Revolutionary thinkers often disagreed about what virtues should be cultivated or what institutions best suited a republican citizenry, they widely presupposed a “formative” conception of politics.⁸⁸ Rush’s medico-political emphasis on the role of environmental considerations and physical regimen distinguishes his reform efforts, but it also illuminates his understanding of the necessity of combining social and political reforms in order to produce the “republican machines” required by a well-regulated popular government. These social and political reforms, moreover, would help prepare the way for “the approaching regeneration of our world,” which Rush and many of his contemporaries believed the Revolution had heralded.⁸⁹ “It is possible we may not live to witness the approaching regeneration of our world,” Rush wrote, “but the more active we are in bringing it about, the more fitted we shall be for the world where justice and benevolence eternally prevail.”⁹⁰

III. RUSH AND REVOLUTIONARY REFORM

In America, everything is new and yielding. Here, genius and benevolence may have full scope. Here the benefactor of mankind may realize all his schemes.

Benjamin Rush to William Peterkin, 27 November 1784⁹¹

⁸⁵ Rush, “On the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic,” 5.

⁸⁶ Rush, “On the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic,” 9. For other discussions of this aspect of Rush’s work see Michael Meranze’s introduction to Rush’s *Essays: Literary, Moral, and Philosophical*, i–xxxii; Ronald Takaki, “Republican Machines,” in *idem, Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 17–27; and Colleen Terrell, “‘Republican Machines’: Franklin, Rush, and the Manufacture of Civic Virtue in the Early American Republic,” *Early American Studies* 1/2 (Fall 2003), 100–32.

⁸⁷ D’Elia, *Benjamin Rush*, 128.

⁸⁸ See Michael Sandel, *Democracy’s Discontent: America in Search of a Public Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 129–33, 321–5.

⁸⁹ Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 75–115.

⁹⁰ *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1: 620.

⁹¹ Benjamin Rush, “Letter to William Peterkin, November 27, 1784” in “Further Letters of Benjamin Rush,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 78/1 (1954), 3–45, 27.

Environmentalisms of various kinds were central to the thought of many canonical eighteenth-century social and political theorists.⁹² Montesquieu's reflections on climate in the *Spirit of the Laws* and the "four-stage theory" of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers like Ferguson and Smith are just two well-known examples of how environment was believed to structure social and political practices, and to organize subjectivity itself. In the eighteenth-century American context it was perhaps J. Hector St John de Crèvecoeur who most eloquently expressed the environmentalist ideal in his *Letters from an American Farmer*. There Crèvecoeur announced the birth of a "new man," likening his fellow Americans to "machines fashioned by every circumstance around us."⁹³ Rush similarly believed that in America "everything is in a plastic state." "Human nature," he wrote, "here (unsubdued by the tyranny of European habits and customs) yields to reason, justice, and common sense."⁹⁴ The *tabula rasa* empiricism of Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* provided the philosophical foundations for these explorations of the environmental formation of subjectivity, but Rush drew less immediately on Locke's work than on that of his more pious popularizer David Hartley.⁹⁵ From Hartley's theory of medullary vibrations and ideational associations, Rush learned how transformation in the physical environment could structure bodily practices and channel sympathy, giving form to the proper mental association of ideas and leading to the development of character appropriate to a free republic.⁹⁶

Rush bridled at the realization that in America "hitherto the cultivation of the moral faculty [had] been the business of parents, schoolmasters and divines," and insisted that in an enlightened republic such formative obligations would "be equally the business of the legislator, the natural philosopher, and the physician."⁹⁷ "God," he wrote, "has committed our moral conduct to more than

⁹² See Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

⁹³ J. Hector St John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), ed. Susan Manning (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 75.

⁹⁴ *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1: 315.

⁹⁵ Rush calls Hartley's associationism "the germ of [his own] system of physiology." See Rush, *Autobiography*, 94. See also Donald D'Elia, "Benjamin Rush, David Hartley and the Revolutionary Uses of Psychology," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 114 (1970), 109–18.

⁹⁶ David Hartley, *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations*, 2 vols. (London: S. Richardson, 1749). For a useful summary of Hartley's theory of association see Barbara Bowen Oberg, "David Hartley and the Association of Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37/3 (July 1976), 441–54.

⁹⁷ Benjamin Rush, "An Enquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty," in *idem*, *Two Essays on the Mind*, 1–40, 36.

a single legislative power.”⁹⁸ This moral cultivation would target not only the citizenry’s corrupted principles, but, more importantly for Rush, their corporeal habits and dispositions: “it was as useless to attack the ‘vices’ or diseases of the mind with lectures on morality,” he wrote, “as it was to berate a person sick with fever.”⁹⁹ Rush thought there was no moral cost to this appeal to “purely mechanical” habituation over rational principle. “If the habits of virtue, contracted by means of this apprenticeship to labor, are purely mechanical, their effects are, nevertheless, the same upon the happiness of society, as if they flowed from principle.”¹⁰⁰ “A physical regimen,” Rush wrote, “should as necessarily accompany a moral precept, as directions with respect to air—exercise—and diet, generally accompany prescriptions for the consumption and the gout.”¹⁰¹ What is needed “is the proper direction of those great principles of human conduct: sensibility, habit, imitation, and association.”¹⁰²

Rush’s “Inquiry into the Influences of Physical Causes upon Morals” detailed his medical understanding of the mutual conditioning of mind and body and the resulting impact of the physical environment on moral development, thus outlining a bio-political program in which “the American physician should no longer be confined to the knowledge and treatment of disease but extended to include every aspect of health and virtue in the new republic.”¹⁰³ His work as a physician and as a political reformer was unified through his conception of “medical jurisprudence” and his distinctive medico-political conceptualization of sympathy.¹⁰⁴ “I am fully persuaded,” he wrote,

that from the combined action of causes, which operate at once upon reason, the moral faculty, the passions, the senses, the brain, the nerves, the blood and the heart, it is possible to produce such a change in the moral character of man, as shall raise him to a resemblance of angels—nay more, to the likeness of GOD himself.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Ibid., 29.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 21.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 36.

¹⁰² Rush, “On the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic,” 9.

¹⁰³ Lisbeth Haakonssen, *Medicine and Morals in the Enlightenment: John Gregory, Thomas Percival, and Benjamin Rush* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 200.

¹⁰⁴ Benjamin Rush, “The Study of Medical Jurisprudence,” in *idem*, *Sixteen Introductory Lectures to Courses of Lectures upon the Institutes and Practice of Medicine* (Philadelphia: Bradford and Innskeep, 1811), 363–95, 363.

¹⁰⁵ Rush, “Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty,” 37. Rush eventually abandoned this Enlightenment faith in the perfectibility of man, reaffirming the more pessimistic teachings of his New Lights upbringing. See note 64 above.

The startling perfectionism of such passages is more reminiscent of Enlightenment radicals like Helvétius and Condorcet than of the moderate and cautious reformism of the moral sentimentalists who had influenced Rush. The millennialist enthusiasm that animated his post-Revolutionary reforms committed him to a formative politics that belies familiar portrayals of late eighteenth-century America as simply an “age of realism.”¹⁰⁶ Rush recognized that some of his contemporaries would criticize his reliance on the environmental formation of virtuous character for its embrace of human malleability and for dangerously neglecting the consent of reformed citizens. After all, his beliefs meant that the principles of virtuous republican citizenship could be produced aside from the striving or reasoned reflection of citizens. The question was whether “copying the features and external manners” of the virtuous could itself create virtue.

Rush’s answer to this question was an enthusiastic and largely unqualified “yes.” Through imitation, habit, and association, citizens could be made to adopt the comportment constitutive of virtuous citizenship. Rush believed habits and associations inculcated according to Enlightened and scientific specifications would save post-Revolutionary Americans from their democratic licentiousness. Indeed, he so hated prevailing American customs that he once proposed having “schools established, in the United States, for teaching *the art of forgetting*.”¹⁰⁷ Rush, in other words, believed that a corrupt citizenry must paradoxically be forced into the human capabilities supporting free citizenship.

Rush set out to form his “republican machines” through a variety of institutional reforms. His invocation of the integrated machinery of government, in which the “wills of the people . . . must be fitted to each other by means of education before they can be made to produce unison and regularity in government,” is sometimes taken as proof that he sought a distinctly non-Madisonian empire of uniformity in the New Republic.¹⁰⁸ The metaphor, however, actually suggests more similarity than difference between Rush and Madison.¹⁰⁹ Rush did seek “regularity and unison in government,” but uniformity was to arise from the operation of multiple and distinct “parts.” “The wills” of

¹⁰⁶ Richard Hofstadter, “The Founding Fathers: An Age of Realism,” in *idem, The American Political Tradition: And the Men Who Made It* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 3–22.

¹⁰⁷ Benjamin Rush, “Thoughts upon the Amusements and Punishments, Which Are Proper for Schools,” in *idem, Essays: Literary, Moral, and Philosophical*, 34–43, 42 (original emphasis).

¹⁰⁸ Rush, “On the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic,” 9.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Meranze and Thomas Dumm both suggest this reading. See Thomas Dumm, *Democracy and Punishment: Disciplinary Origins of the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 87–112; Meranze’s introduction to Rush’s *Essays: Literary, Moral, and Philosophical*, i–xxxii.

the people remain plural even if they must be “fitted to each other.” In this and similar passages, Rush seemed to demand a very positive and differential practice of political self-government: all have parts to perform in the government, and activity on multiple levels of state and civil society is to be elicited rather than passivity enforced. Rush’s emphasis on properly manifested “vitality” and “excitation” is also relevant here. Rush was wary of imposing one vision of the good on a republic composed of vital differences. In order to utilize rather than diminish difference, and to activate rather than immobilize the machine’s different parts—one thinks here again of the “sympathy of contiguity” and the resonant workings of Rush’s body-clock—these parts would have to be harmonized in accordance with scientific principles. In both the human and social body this was a matter of understanding the sympathetic communication between parts, arranging the parts to produce a harmony within the whole. The resulting mode of governance was not primarily about imposing restrictive laws, but rather aiming toward the proper disposition of things.¹¹⁰ Rather than restricting human behavior, Rush’s reforming institutions would enhance and foster it. For Rush, promoting virtue—“the living principle of the republic”—could not be achieved by “laws for the suppression of vice and immorality,” but only through “disseminating the seeds of virtue and knowledge through every part of the state.”¹¹¹

Rush’s reform proposals were often preoccupied with regulating and encouraging the circulation of meanings throughout the body politic and they entailed creating not only large-scale networks of public education—perhaps Rush’s single greatest concern—but also detailed proposals for controlling public significations. He counseled editors, for example, to avoid the spread of intrigue in the nation’s newspapers because it threatens to “destroy the delicacy of mind, which is the safeguard of a young country,” and instead to “let the [socially useful] advancement of agriculture—manufactures—and commerce” be their principal objects.¹¹² Similarly, when he proposed governmental departments he included mottoes elaborately declaring (one might say belaboring) their purpose.¹¹³

Of particular concern for Rush was the post-Revolutionary persistence of unregulated public spaces. In a 1789 address to “the ministers of the Gospel of every denomination in the United States,” he was at pains to point out “a few of

¹¹⁰ Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality with Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, ed. G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 95.

¹¹¹ Rush, “Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty,” 40.

¹¹² Rush, *Essays: Literary, Moral, and Philosophical*, 396.

¹¹³ Rush, “A plan of a Peace Office for the United States,” in *idem, Essays: Literary, Moral, and Philosophical*, 106–9.

those practices, which prevail in America, which exert a pernicious influence upon morals.” Of the eight principal sources of “public vice” Rush listed, six involved poorly regulated gatherings: “the meeting of citizens for militia exercises,” the “Pandora’s box” of public fairs, popular attendance at trials, the “vulgar sports” of horse-racing and cockfighting, “clubs . . . where the only business of the company is feeding,” and public amusements on the Sabbath.¹¹⁴ Rush feared that such invitations to public debauchery, alongside the extra-institutional politics of the people out of doors, posed a threat to the millennial future that he and many contemporaries envisioned for America. Rush saw American “mobocracy” as a pernicious side effect of the Revolution itself, and he hoped that the “citizens of the United States” might “discover as much wisdom in adopting a vigorous federal government to *preserve* their liberties as they did zeal and fortitude in *defending* them.”¹¹⁵

That said, Rush believed that properly orchestrated public spectacles were of value to republican governments for their educative power and their ability to elicit the political attachments of the citizenry. In a 1782 letter that prefigures many of the themes elaborated in his “philosophical” account of the grand “Foederal Procession” of 1788, Rush described the French *fête* for the dauphin’s birthday as “truly republican,” even though celebrating the “birth of a prince.”¹¹⁶ Rush detailed the dynamics that prevented this public gathering from degenerating to “the occasion of a riot or some troublesome proceedings.” The French minister who planned the *fête* “was not unmindful of this crowd of spectators” (“amounting, probably, to ten thousand people,” Rush notes). In order to provide a pedagogical spectacle for the “curious and idle . . . who were not invited to the entertainment,” the minister had “pulled down a board fence” to “gratify them with a sight of the company.” It is this exemplary display in which Rush seems most interested: how a truly mixed company of guests—“a world in miniature. All the ranks, parties and professions in the city, and all the officers of government were fully represented”—could nonetheless orchestrate a social harmony that was “truly republican.” “The company was mixed, it is true, but the mixture formed the harmony of the evening,” he writes:

A decent and respectful silence pervaded the whole company. Intemperance did not show its head; levity composed its countenance . . . and the simple jest, no less than the loud laugh, were unheard at any of the tables. So great and universal was the decorum . . . that

¹¹⁴ Rush, “An address to the ministers of the Gospel of every denomination in the United States upon subjects interesting to morals,” in *idem, Essays: Literary, Moral, and Philosophical*, 67–72, 68–9.

¹¹⁵ *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1: 244 (original emphasis).

¹¹⁶ Benjamin Rush, “The French Fête in Philadelphia in Honor of the Dauphin’s Birthday, 1782,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 21 (1897), 257–62, 259.

several gentlemen remarked that the “company looked and behaved more as if they were worshipping than eating.”

A delicate social navigation of gratification and self-denial characterized the worshipful proceedings. The entertainment was “delightful,” but also “rational.” Just as the 1788 “Foederal Procession” begat “corresponding order” between its participants and spectators, so did Rush suggest a similarly sympathetic order would arise between “idle” observers and participants in the *fête* for the dauphin.

Rush makes it clear that public gatherings could be crucial for securing as well as disrupting order; they could provide either patriotic environments inspiring sympathetic loyalty to the state or unregulated spaces that undermine such loyalties. The Revolution’s “unruly rites of rebellion,” as David Waldstreicher has put it, had to be transformed into “ruling rites of assent.”¹¹⁷ Questions of proximity and distance, mutuality and solitude, manifest themselves repeatedly in Rush’s work, most famously in his influential account of juridical judgment and penal reform. Rush was at the forefront of Philadelphia’s penal reform movement in the 1780s and 1790s, and was also the preeminent theorist of this reform. According to Rush, assemblies for public punishments threatened to corrupt individuals’ natural sympathy for each other, and to undermine legal authority. Punishments presented a socially corrosive rather than edifying public spectacle and encouraged a disordered sympathetic communication. In an address that became the basis of his subsequently successful efforts at penal reform, delivered at the home of Benjamin Franklin to Philadelphia’s Society for Promoting Political Inquiries, Rush wrote that “by an immutable law of nature distress of all kinds, when *seen*, produces sympathy, and a disposition to relieve it.”¹¹⁸ “Active sympathy,” which is connected with agency, “can be fully excited only through the avenues of the eyes and the ears.”¹¹⁹ Public punishments provided a spectacle of sympathetic identification that could not be gratified—the convict could not be assisted—resulting in what Rush called “abortive sympathy.” When crowds gathered to witness state executions, their sympathetic identification with the criminal went unfulfilled, and the sentiment withered over time like an unused muscle. Rush had earlier argued that slavery had a similar hardening effect on the capacity to sympathize.¹²⁰ The sympathetic identification between crowd and criminal also threatened to undermine the authority of the juridical power behind the punishment. Moreover, the spectacle of punishment threatened to

¹¹⁷ David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 18.

¹¹⁸ Rush, *Enquiry into the Effects of Public Punishments*, 6 (original emphasis).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11 (original emphasis).

¹²⁰ Benjamin Rush, *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America upon Slave Keeping* (New York: Hodge and Shober, 1773), 29.

contaminate the assembled public with the sympathetic presence of the convict's body. When viewers sympathize with the criminal, they "secretly condemn the law which inflicts the punishments—hence arises a want of respect for laws in general, and a more feeble union of the great ties of government."¹²¹ Sympathy "secretly" threatened both the social order's integrity and the self's inviolability. It had to be at once practiced and selectively resisted.¹²² Removing the body of the convict from the stage of "active sympathy," Rush hoped, could work to advantageously "suspend the action of sympathy altogether" where it was not socially beneficial.¹²³

Michael Meranze has persuasively argued that the fear of sympathetic communication with the criminal in public spaces provided an important justification for establishing penitentiaries in the Early Republic. "Mimetic corruption" endangered the communicative economy of an increasingly representational public. The penal reformers of post-Revolutionary Philadelphia, following the associative account of sentiment sketched above, understood the body itself as a social character of excessive signification. As a result of this excess, Meranze writes, "critics of public labor reimagined the city itself as a hall of mirrors where vice and criminality spread through mimicry and contagion."¹²⁴ Robert Sullivan similarly argues that late eighteenth-century American debates over public punishment were concerned with enforcing new forms of political subjectivity. In contrast to the public shaming practices of civic republican penal systems, such as the pillory, the increasing emphasis on penal isolation, which Sullivan associates with a nascent liberalism, aimed to produce "an isolated being who is anything but the embedded, fettered, citizen of classical early modern republicanism."¹²⁵ For Sullivan, the penal practices of seclusion and imprisonment, of which Rush was a prominent advocate, seem directed to produce the very subject liberal political philosophy demands: independent, deliberative, and removed from the anarchic and affective reciprocations of bodies gathered in public.

Rush believed solitude had a profound reformatory power. In a 1789 letter to the clergyman Enos Hitchcock, Rush wrote

¹²¹ Rush, *Enquiry into the Effects of Public Punishments*, 12.

¹²² Rush also emphasized his need to resist sympathetic identification with infected patients for fear of contamination, thereby making sympathy and contagion almost synonymous. "I . . . use every precaution . . . to prevent taking the infection. I even strive to subdue my sympathy for my patients; otherwise I should sink under the accumulated loads of misery." *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 2: 641.

¹²³ Rush, *Enquiry into the Effects of Public Punishments*, 11–12.

¹²⁴ Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue*, 127.

¹²⁵ Robert R. Sullivan, "The Birth of the Prison: The Case of Benjamin Rush," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31/3 (1998), 333–44, 337.

too much cannot be said in favor of SOLITUDE as a means of reformation, which should be the only end of all punishment . . . A wheelbarrow, a whipping post, nay even a gibbet, are all light punishment compared with letting a man's conscience loose upon him in solitude . . . For this reason, a bad man should be left for some time without anything to employ his hands in his confinement. Every *thought* should recoil wholly upon *himself*.¹²⁶

Since “the powers of the human mind appear to be arranged in a certain order like the strata of the earth,” Rush wrote in his commonplace book, “they recover these powers when they assume their natural place, in isolation from others.”¹²⁷ While Rush famously recommended solitary confinement to “persons who are irreclaimable by rational or moral remedies,” his larger concern was with a navigation of proximity and distance that can be best likened to a spatial choreography. Isolation allows for a recalibration of the sympathetic economy, but so too do company, conversation, and polite interaction.¹²⁸ On these points Rush's views are connected to broader eighteenth-century movements to reform the social and physical environment, and to corresponding worries over the corrupting power of excessive proximity, including familiar concerns that animated debates over constitutional ratification and reform.¹²⁹

IV. CONCLUSION

It has been argued that at the close of the anglophone eighteenth century the “center of moral life becomes the constant and strenuous art of guiding, informing, and deliberately exercising the sympathetic imagination.”¹³⁰ The ameliorative imperative of physical separation and coordination should be understood as one important aspect of this art: for Rush and some of his contemporaries the art of sympathy was also an art of separation. Concerns with cultivating subjectivities appropriate to republican citizenship were questions not simply of self-fashioning, but of institutional production, and spatial distribution was one important tactic for organizing an environment capable of producing the citizenry sought by early architects of American social and political institutions, including the citizenry sought by proponents of the constitutional state itself. While Rush's work does not easily fit familiar descriptions of early American political thought as fundamentally “realist,” or those that emphasize its eminently

¹²⁶ *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1: 512 (original emphasis).

¹²⁷ Rush, *Autobiography*, 185.

¹²⁸ For an illuminating discussion of solitude in broader late eighteenth-century American political culture see Eric Slaughter, “Being Alone in the Age of the Social Contract,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 62/1 (Jan. 2005), 31–66.

¹²⁹ *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 2: 824.

¹³⁰ Radner, “The Art of Sympathy,” 192.

“practical, unsentimental appreciation of the givenness of human beings,”¹³¹ his work does cast an illuminating light on the period’s well-known preoccupation with the advantages of American space to sustaining a viable modern republic and engendering new forms of republican citizenship. Rush’s work reveals how sympathy played an important but usually neglected role in these discussions.

The vast expanse of American space was, of course, often considered the key to understanding America’s exceptionalism and to providing the necessary environmental conditions of free and independent citizenship. The focus is generally on the availability of Western land, and its importance to sustaining a yeoman republic. However, the discussions of the spatial distribution of citizens sometimes also focused on the dangers of contagious passion and sympathy in a small republic or in large public assemblies. In his *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States*, John Adams, for example, wrote that because Americans “are sprinkled over large tracts of land, they are not subject to those panics and transports, those contagions of madness and folly, which are seen in countries where large numbers live in small places.”¹³² This concern with contagious proximity and its corruption of judgment also helped shape the political thought of the “Father of the Constitution,” James Madison himself.

Madison made this argument apparent in his *Vices of the Political System of the United States*, written in April of 1787 as he was preparing for the Philadelphia Convention. There Madison wrote, “the conduct of every popular assembly acting on oath . . . proves that individuals join without remorse in acts, against which their consciences would revolt if proposed to them under the like sanction, separately in their closets.” The judgment-distorting force of passions is, Madison continued, invariably “increased by the sympathy of a multitude.” Elaborating on the consequences of this insight for the extended republic of the United States, and in terms that seem to echo Adams, Madison wrote, “it may be inferred that the inconveniences of popular States contrary to the prevailing Theory, are in proportion not to the extent, but to the narrowness of their limits.”¹³³ Popular governments were not threatened by the dispersion of an “extended sphere,” as suggested by “the prevailing Theory” of small republics, but by too much proximity.

¹³¹ Gordon S. Wood, “Interests and Disinterestedness in the Making of the Constitution,” in Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter II, eds., *Beyond Confederation: The Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 69–112, 81.

¹³² John Adams, “Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States,” in Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams*, vol. 4 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1856), 587–8.

¹³³ James Madison, “The Vices of the Political System of the United States,” in *The Papers of James Madison*, ed. W. T. Hutchinson et al., vol. 9 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 348–57, 357.

During the “great national discussion” of 1787 and 1788 Madison elaborated on these arguments. He wrote that the “schema of representation” established by the proposed Federal Constitution would serve as a necessary “substitute for a meeting of the citizens in person,” but that it would nonetheless preserve a representative body bound by “an intimate sympathy with the people” represented.¹³⁴ Sympathy and separation could be institutionally coordinated, Madison argued, to achieve positive collective ends. Madison’s well-known appeal to a “schema of representation” alongside the development of his arguments for “extending the sphere” of government were proclaimed significant improvements over ancient political examples—both democratic and republican—and are often seen as distinctive, if not defining, features of the “new science of politics” pursued in *The Federalist* as a whole.

Expressing a concern with excessive proximity in public assemblies as well as in the territory of the republic, Madison argued that political deliberations within large public assemblies—even were these assemblies composed entirely of philosophers—would inevitably lose their reasoned character: “In all very numerous assemblies, of whatever characters composed, passion never fails to wrest the scepter from reason,” Madison wrote. “Had every Athenian citizen been a Socrates; every Athenian assembly would still have been a mob.”¹³⁵ When Madison proclaimed the inherent irrationality of “all very numerous assemblies,” their inevitable descent into a non-deliberative “mob,” he was invoking a familiar image of the crowd as a contagious carrier of untempered passion and potential violence. As far back as *The Republic*, Socrates had warned young men of philosophical inclination to avoid the irresistible compulsions of the mob. When a student finds himself among the multitude, Socrates counsels, “he gets carried away and soon finds himself behaving like the crowd and becoming one of them.”¹³⁶ Similar invocations of the irrational contagion of large popular assemblies are found in the histories of Polybius, Tacitus, Livy, and more.¹³⁷ While images of contagious publics certainly circulated widely in the political discourses of the period, the conception of contagious sympathy, and the mechanisms of its spatial coordination, show that there was also a powerful contemporary argument behind Madison’s striking assertion.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ “The Federalist no. 52,” 8 Feb. 1788, in *The Federalist*, ed. Jacob E. Cooke (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 53–9.

¹³⁵ “The Federalist no. 55,” 13 Feb. 1788, 372–8.

¹³⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, ed. Desmond Lee (New York: Penguin, 1962), 492.

¹³⁷ See J. S. McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob: From Plato to Canetti* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

¹³⁸ Richard K. Mathews argues that this famous passage provided the “linchpin to [Madison’s] entire edifice,” but that this “linchpin” relied upon an “unchallenged philosophical

Deep and abiding tensions haunted these discussions about the spatial coordination of public sympathy and the communication of popular passions. Such arguments suggested not only that the passions that sustained the Revolution might rob the newly independent citizenry of their capacity for self-government, but that the spatial choreography of citizenship that responded to this danger might subsequently diminish the citizenry's capacity for collective action. While Rush was a firm proponent of the United States Constitution, for example, he also worried that the "extent of territory" it governed was the "one path that can lead the United States to destruction"; he worried that a "scattered" citizenry would have "no means of acting in concert with each other" to defend its liberties.¹³⁹ These are some of the political dilemmas that sprang from Rush's attempt to successfully navigate the political tensions between sympathy and separation, between a productive and a self-destructive political proximity.

Scholars have placed Rush's life and work in a number of different and revealing historical contexts, many of them mentioned above: Christian republicanism, abolition, penal reform, American medicine and psychology, medical policing, and public health. This essay's focus on Rush's concerns with the contagious public and his post-Revolutionary environmental reform efforts also place him in a tradition of political reflection focused on how the organization and design of public and political spaces shape the quality and the character of citizenship. Rush's understanding of sympathy gave a medico-political and sentimentalist inflection to long-standing and enduring discourses connecting the quality of public life and civic loyalty to the organization of public space and the orchestration of public spectacle. In North America this tradition goes back to seventeenth-century Puritan reflections on the interdependence of township and moral order, and, after Rush, to such nineteenth-century contributions as Walt Whitman's aesthetics of urban encounter, Frederick Law Olmstead's landscape philosophy, and the work of Daniel Burham and the "City Beautiful" movement. In this, Rush's post-Revolutionary theories and reform projects not only shed a different light on early American political thought and culture, highlighting its aesthetic-affective dimension and its commitment to formative politics, but also provide a provocation to further thinking about how a polity's spatial order—in both the territory and the township—contributes to the production of certain kinds of citizens.

assumption." I agree with Mathews concerning the passage's importance, but believe there was a more fully developed discourse behind it than he recognizes. See Richard K. Mathews, *If Men Were Angels: James Madison and the Heartless Empire of Reason* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995), 24, 66.

¹³⁹ Rush, "Address to the People of the United States," 48.