Phileleutheros, Northampton *Hampshire Gazette* 21 May 1788 (excerpts)

Quid miseros toties in aperta Pericula Cives, prosius.

—VIRGIL.

I have somewhat to say in regard to a piece under the signature of *Philanthrop*, inserted in the Hampshire Gazette of April 23, intended as an answer to the three gentlemen, who have lately published their reasons of dissent from the Federal Constitution—Herein I shall study brevity. . . .

He says, "he hopes if charity obliges them to bless the negroes, it will not lead them to curse the Convention"—this is evidently intended as a sarcasm upon the gentlemen, for vindicating the injured rights of the Africans. Why is it thus? Is it because their colour is not so fashionable in this country as in Africa? Or that their features are not supposed to be so beautifully arranged as those of the Americans, and therefore not to be treated with that humanity which it is generally thought belongs to white people? Or does Philanthrop suppose, with some scoffers at sacred history, that those Africans did not proceed from the loins of the same parent with himself, and so on that score to be treated like brutes? He seems to charge them with cursing the Convention, only because they said that body voted for those barbarities which are exercised towards the Africans. Does this amount to a curse? can rehersing a plain matter of fact, concerning any man or body of men, by good logic, be construed into a curse? Did not the Convention vote, that the Congress should not have it in their power to prohibit the slave-trade until the year eighteen hundred and eight? Were they not sensible, therefore, that this trade would be carried on, with all those barbarities annexed to it? Did they not very generally confess that it was a most wicked piece of business? Where then is the great crime in saying such barbarities were voted for? If it is so, let Philanthrop point out the criminality of it, and no doubt he will obtain credence. If he make a charge he ought certainly to adduce some proof to support it. He must be possessed of some entirely new constructed spy-glass, else he never could have spied out curses where there were none. As little ground had he to dream, from any which dropped from the gentlemen, that they had a desire to return back to Great-Britain, as he had to tax them with cursing the Convention. Two constitutions were offered to the people of Massachusetts before one could obtain. Must we infer from thence, that those who opposed the first, did it with a view of becoming subject to Great-Britain! Let him answer, if he please.

I wish, seeing Philanthrop thought fit to take the matter up, that he had made use of less false reasoning—I will give an instance of it. He says, "While under Great-Britain, we heard nothing from the gentlemen, because that nation more than any under heaven, carried on that trade:" and "that whenever a neighbour had imported a slave, their duty was either to drive him out of the country or to quit it themselves." It would not, one would think, require a degree of

discernment far beyond mediocrity, to discover the falacy of this argument. Will the gentleman pretend there is no difference between a man's being born under a government, in the framing of which, consequently he could have no hand, and in making one himself? If a man in a state of nature assists in forming a constitution, which gives countenance to iniquity and all kinds of cruelty, does he not by his own act incur guilt to his conscience? But if he is born under such a government, where is the guilt? Neither hath he any right to take upon himself the office of an executioner, and so undertake to punish those who are guilty, as Philanthrop would suppose—all he can have any right to is to remonstrate and exhort. He indeed may share in the calamities which may fall upon the community in consequence thereof; but he has this consolation, that those calamities are not derived through his means, and therefore he cannot share in the guilt.

When a man is called to establish a frame of government, it ought to be such an one as his conscience will justify, or he must give his voice against it. I must say the whole Philanthrop has said on this subject is falacious, from the foundation to the top-stone. His first position seems calculated to deceive the people, whether designedly or not, I do not say—the purport of which is evidently this, that by civil connections people cannot become partakers of each others sins. What is the import of "civil connections?" Let them import what they will, it is evident Philanthrop would have us think, that in establishing this constitution, we have no more connection in the wickedness which the southern states may commit, with our hearty and free consent and engagements to support them in, than we should be with any one nation under heaven in their inequities, provided we had connected with them for the sake of their trade, &c. But these are not parallel—I wish Philanthrop had ingenuity enough to confess it. It is idle for him to pretend, that establishing this constitution is no more than barely establishing certain civil connections with the southern states; was this the case I would agree with him. I am sensible America may enter into a treaty and connect with Spain for certain purposes, and still not become partakers in the iniquity of the inquisition. But if America and Spain were about to form themselves into one politic national body, and America should in that case pledge to Spain their lives and fortunes for the support of the inquisition, ([a]cousin german, to the slave-trade) I should certainly suppose, upon good grounds, they would become partakers of the sin, connected with the inquisition. But lest I should be too lengthy, I shall wave what I have to say further upon Philanthrop's piece, until another opportunity, only adding my wish, that if he writes again, his sentiments may better agree with his signature.

(a) *Rather twin brother.*

[June 4] I have but a word to say at this time to Philanthrop—It would seem by his discourse that he would not be thought a friend to the cruelties exercised in carrying on the Slave-Trade—but yet rather than lose his darling constitution, he would have that trade carried on—Here I am reminded of some conversation to which I was lately a witness. A gentleman lately conversing upon this matter said he disliked [the?] Slave-Trade, but he would not have the Constitution set aside on that account—he was asked the question whether, if he had a son a slave in Georgia, he would not overset the Constitution if he could? his reply was "Indeed I would"—This I doubt not is the case with Philanthrop, and every other advocate of the Constitution—I could wish him to reconcile this with humanity—perhaps Philanthrop wishes to reap the benefits arising from the Slave-Trade and let the southern States bear the iniquity—I once heard of a certain man who sent a horse to market by his neighbour—the horse was sold and the returns made, which were

so much more than the owner expected or thought he was worth, he had doubt upon his mind whether he ought to receive the whole proceeds—he called a council of neighbours to determine the matter—the result upon the whole was, seeing the horse was sold and the pay made, he who sent him to market should keep the amount for which he was sold—and he who sold him, should bear all the sin—this is the only way I can conceive of, for Philanthrop to get out—and a pretty miserable *get out* too, if I rightly judge of the matter—If we cannot connect with the southern states without giving countenance to blood and carnage, and all kinds of fraud and injustice, I say let them go—Often do we see unhappy convicts led forth to execution for only taking the property of another—The Congress by the new Constitution are to make laws for the punishment of piracy and murder upon the high seas—But all this seems only to respect white people—the Africans may be pirated, hacked and tortured, and all with impunity. The killing a negroe in the southern states is no more accounted of, than the killing a dog—this is a fact.

> "Is there not?["] sure there is, "some chosen curse,
> "Some hidden thunder in the stores of heaven,
> "Red with uncommon wrath, to blast the men."
> Who sport with lives and drain out human blood.

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