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0521548071 - Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections - Edited by James Hankins

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Introduction

James Hankins

When in 1925 the young German historian Hans Baron, in a short review in Meinecke's *Historische Zeitschrift*, coined the term "civic humanism" (*Bürgerhumanismus*), he could not possibly have imagined the extraordinary celebrity and influence this expression, and the political ideal it expressed, would come to enjoy by the end of the twentieth century.¹ The term became well known to historians in English-speaking countries only after 1955, when Baron (now fifty-five years old and an American citizen) published his classic work, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny*.² In this study, possibly the most important monograph in Renaissance history written since the Second World War, Baron depicted a Florentine Renaissance that had been inspired to achieve cultural greatness through its devotion to ideals of patriotism, popular government, and public service. These ideals, inherited from ancient Greece and the Roman republic, had been rediscovered and popularized by a politically committed movement of intellectuals and educators whom Baron labeled "civic humanists." Twenty years later, J. G. A. Pocock, in his equally famous work, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*,³ reinterpreted civic humanism (or "classical republicanism") as a distinct tradition in early modern political thought. According to Pocock, civic humanism con-

I should like to thank my colleagues Bernard Bailyn, Mark Kishlansky, and Harvey Mansfield for their help with this introduction.

¹ For Baron's review (of F. Engel-János's *Soziale Probleme der Renaissance*) see R. Fubini, "Renaissance Historian: The Career of Hans Baron," *Journal of Modern History* 64 (1992): 541–74 at 560, which contains a learned analysis of the term's genesis in Weimar culture and politics. For the later development of Baron's thought, see now K. Schiller, "Hans Baron's Humanism," *Storia della storiografia* 34 (1998): 51–99.

² The work was first published in 2 vols. by Princeton University Press, 1955; revised edition in one volume, 1966.

³ Also published by Princeton University Press (1975).

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stituted a distinct political discourse which (via a “Machiavellian moment”) had passed from Renaissance Florence to Oliver Cromwell’s England, and thence to colonial America, where it formed the ideological matrix of the American Revolution. Pocock’s study helped liberate a generation of American historians and political theorists from the unquestioned and unquestionable assumption that American public philosophy descended directly from the liberal tradition of John Locke and seventeenth-century contractarian and rights theorists. In England, recovering the history of republicanism became a central activity of the “Cambridge school,” associated above all with the names of Pocock and Quentin Skinner. Pocock, Skinner, and their followers and colleagues used the study of republicanism to illustrate the merits of their new approach to the history of ideas, which emphasized reconstructing the history of political languages and discourses. In the 1980s, civic humanism passed from the realm of scholarship to that of public policy, where, under the guise of “communitarianism,” it became a rallying-point for political theorists dissatisfied with Marxism, socialism, and liberalism.⁴ In the 1990s communitarianism was hailed, no doubt with considerable exaggeration, as the governing philosophy of both the Clinton administration in America and the Blair administration in the United Kingdom, while in France and Italy Jacques Delors and Romano Prodi were said to be sympathetic to certain themes of the movement.⁵

By any standard, the idea of “civic humanism” has been enormously successful. Yet while politicians and political theorists have been eager to jump on the republican bandwagon, professional historians (to borrow an image from J. H. Hexter) have been busy loading republicanism onto

⁴ The movement has been associated with prominent names in philosophy and political theory such as Alisdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Michael Sandel, Richard Walzer, and Richard Bernstein (not all of whom would accept the label “communitarian”). See Michael Sandel, ed., *Liberalism and Its Critics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984). On the relationship of Pocock’s work to communitarianism, see J. C. Isaac, “Republicanism vs. Liberalism? A Reconsideration,” *History of Political Thought* 9.2 (1988): 349–77. See also Benjamin Barber, “Unscrambling the Founding Fathers,” *New York Times Book Review* (13 January 1985). Barber is closely linked to the Democratic Leadership Council, the “New Democrat” think-tank formerly chaired by Bill Clinton. The term “republicanism,” though commonly used in England, is (like the term “civic humanism”) for obvious reasons more problematic in an American political context.

⁵ See “Rebuilding Civil Society,” a symposium in *The New Democrat* (March/April, 1995), a journal associated with the Democratic Leadership Council and the Progressive Policy Institute; “Freedom and Community,” *The Economist* (24 December 1994): 65–8; Chris Wilkens, “Blair’s Tory Agenda,” in the *Guardian* (24 March 1995): 27; Jacques Delors (chairman), *Learning, the Treasure Within: Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century* (Paris: UNESCO, 1996); Pierpaolo Donati, “Può essere la vera alternativa al tramonto del Welfare State,” *Liberal* (January 1996): 105–7. William A. Galston, a major theorist of communitarianism, was a policy adviser in the first Clinton administration.

the tumbrils.⁶ In the two decades since Pocock's *Machiavellian Moment* they have grown increasingly doubtful about the value of such terms as "civic humanism" and "classical republicanism" for describing or explaining the ideological landscape of early modern Europe and colonial America. Such doubts are of more than antiquarian interest. Modern civic republicanism has always claimed to be a uniquely historical movement – to be continuing or reviving a tradition of political reflection based on the actual practice of ancient and early modern polities – and therefore to be free of the tendencies to abstraction, scientism, and utopianism that have helped discredit its chief rivals, liberalism and Marxism. American communitarians have often made strong claims for the rootedness of their political ideas in the ideology of the American Revolution. Doubts about the correctness of these claims, naturally enough, have often come from historians of a liberal or Marxist persuasion.⁷

Historians who criticize the republican thesis have followed several strategies. Some deny that republicanism ever existed as a coherent ideology in the early modern Atlantic world. Recent critics of J. G. A. Pocock, for example, have argued that the language of virtue and corruption, active participation in political life and devotion to the common good coexist in solution, as it were, in premodern political discourse with proto-liberal and proto-capitalistic language; that republicanism, in other words, cannot be said to constitute a distinct tradition or language of political discourse.⁸ In the political literature of

⁶ A funeral oration was pronounced over "the republican hypothesis" in early American history by Daniel T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *Journal of American History* 79 (June, 1992): 11–28. See also Thomas L. Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), esp. 28–39, and Paul A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

⁷ For a critique of the inner coherence of the republican tradition from the liberal side, see Isaac, "Republicanism vs. Liberalism?"; and Alan Patten, "The Republican Critique of Liberalism," *British Journal of Political Science* 26 (1994): 25–44. Peter Berkowitz, *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), argues that communitarianism caricatures the history of liberalism and that its "discourse of virtue" can be situated within the tradition of liberal theory. A Marxist critique of the republican idea in the thought of Hans Baron, William J. Bouwsma, and J. G. A. Pocock is found in R. Pecchioli, *Dal "mito" di Venezia all' "ideologia americana": Itinerari e modelli della storiografia sul repubblicanesimo dell' età moderna* (Venice: Marsilio, 1983); see Pocock's reply in "Between Gog and Magog: The Republican Thesis and the *Ideologia Americana*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48.2 (1987): 325–46.

⁸ A summary statement of Pocock's view can be found in his essay, "Virtues, Rights, and Manners: A Model for Historians of Political Thought," in *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 37–50. For an overview of his work see Iain Hampsher-Monk, "Political Languages in Time: The Work of J. G. A. Pocock," *British Journal of Political Science* 14 (1984): 89–116, with a bibliography of Pocock's writings.

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the time, they claim, there was no strict and necessary opposition between private self-interest, understood as the acquisition of property, and commitment to the common good; men devoted to republican principles could without embarrassment also come to the defense of commercial society.⁹ Other critics point out that early modern “republicans” cannot even be identified with an anti-monarchical position, since some of them, at least, were prepared on Aristotelian grounds to admit a role for the royal principle in a mixed polity.¹⁰ Still others have contested Pocock’s attempt to obscure the role of Locke in the formation of American political ideology. Thanks to recent research on Locke, it is fair to say that his eclipse as a source for American Revolutionary thought has proven to be temporary.¹¹ The ideology of the American Revolution in the latest historical literature is seen to be pluralistic in its sources, making use of a variety of political languages and traditions.¹²

A second line of attack on the republican thesis has sought to bury civic humanism in an unusable historical past. The putatively conservative, hierarchical, elitist, and even racist character of much English and American republican thought has been stressed by some liberal historians of political thought, while others have pointed out the inconvenient implications of traditional republicanism for its modern epigoni.¹³ The

⁹ Christopher Nadon, “Aristotle and the Republican Paradigm: A Reconsideration of Pocock’s *Machiavellian Moment*,” *Review of Politics* 58.4 (Fall 1996): 677–99, argues that both liberalism and republicanism can be construed from the Aristotelian tradition, and that Pocock’s strict opposition between republican and liberal paradigms is a distortion of the Western political tradition. Isaac (“Republicanism vs. Liberalism?”) also argues against Pocock’s view that liberalism and republicanism constitute two distinct traditions in the history of political thought. For the view that republican language was being integrated with a new ideology of commercial society in late seventeenth-century England, see Steve Pincus, “Neither Machiavellian Moment nor Possessive Individualism: Commercial Society and the Defenders of the English Commonwealth,” *American Historical Review* 103 (1998): 705–36. On the lack of an “interesting disagreement between liberals and republicans” on the question of liberty, see Patten, “The Republican Critique,” with Quentin Skinner’s response in his recent *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 84. In his review of the latter book (*London Review of Books* [5 February 1998]: 15), Blair Worden similarly maintains that “in those [Whig] commonplaces [of the 18th century] . . . [Skinner’s] neo-roman and negative conceptions of liberty, far from contending with each other, mingled freely.”

¹⁰ See Blair Worden, “English Republicanism,” in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 446–7. On this see also chapter 5, note 22.

¹¹ See Michael P. Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

¹² See Rodgers, “Republicanism: The Career of a Concept.”

¹³ See Don Herzog, “Some Questions for Republicans,” *Political Theory* 14.3 (August, 1986): 473–93, especially his disturbing explication (or rather exposé) of the republicanism of Benjamin Rush. Isaac Kramnick in “Republican Revisionism Revisited,” *American Historical Review* 87 (1982): 629–64, comments (653) that Aristotle, unlike modern republicans, was a “theorist of hierarchy and privilege.”

partisan commitments of most modern communitarians sits ill, for example, with the enthusiasm of traditional republicans for an armed and militant citizenry.¹⁴

A third strategy, particularly favored by Straussian critics, has been to slice up Pocock's long republican tradition into unrelated sections, usually by means of a frontal assault on his interpretation of individual texts. Hence some historians have sought to drive wedges between Aristotle and Machiavelli, or Machiavelli and Harrington, or Harrington and the so-called "neo-Harringtonians."¹⁵ They argue, in effect, that the republicanisms espoused by these writers differ from each other to such an extent that it is sheer equivocation to place them in the same "tradition" of thought. Straussians in particular argue that to create a diachronic unity out of a common political language is purely factitious when it is not expressive of a deeper conceptual unity. Some critics such as Paul Rahe and Pierre Manent have gone further and have argued that both modern republicans and modern liberals share deeply in modernity through their common rejection of Aristotle's idea of nature; for them, the two centuries between Machiavelli and Rousseau constitute a fundamental break in the history of Western political thought.¹⁶

This is not to say that all criticism of the republican idea in early modern thought has come from scholars hostile to civic republicanism. Some of the most trenchant revisionism derives from what might be called the "internal" critique of Quentin Skinner, the most important modern student of classical republicanism. Less dogmatic than Hans Baron, more empirical than J. G. A. Pocock, Skinner has shown a remarkable willingness to rethink fundamental descriptions and categories in his work on the republican tradition. Already in his first major work, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, he subjected Hans Baron's *Crisis* to a searching critique, concluding that many of the ideas Baron credited to his "civic humanists" had a long prehistory in medieval scholastic and rhetorical traditions. Since the early 1980s, he has

¹⁴ See David C. Williams, "Civic Republicanism and the Citizen Militia: The Terrifying Second Amendment," *Yale Law Journal* 101 (1991): 551–615, with references to earlier literature.

¹⁵ Vickie B. Sullivan, "The Civic Humanist Portrait of Machiavelli's English Successors," *History of Political Thought* 15.1 (1994): 73–96; Nadon, "Aristotle and the Republican Paradigm"; Vickie B. Sullivan, "Machiavelli's Momentary 'Machiavellian Moment': A Reconsideration of Pocock's Treatment of the *Discourses*," *Political Theory* 20.2 (May 1992): 309–18; Jonathan Scott, "The Rapture of Motion: James Harrington's Republicanism," in *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, ed. N. Phillipson and Q. Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Gary Remer, "James Harrington's New Deliberative Rhetoric: Reflections of an Anticlassical Republican," *History of Political Thought* 4 (1995): 532–57. See also Isaac, "Republicanism vs. Liberalism?" and the contributions of Athanasios Moulakis, Harvey C. Mansfield and Paul A. Rahe in this volume.

¹⁶ Pierre Manent, *La cité de l'homme* (Paris: Fauard, 1994).

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moved gradually away from the description of civic humanism formulated by Pocock. Skinner now recognizes – in contrast with Pocock – that Renaissance republican theorists did not promote “positive liberty,” participation in politics as a mode of self-realization, or (to be more Aristotelian) as a way of perfecting one’s nature through the exercise of reason and virtue. Instead, he believes that Renaissance theorists (primarily Machiavelli) advocated active citizenship, not as a “primary good” (in Rawls’s sense), but because it contributes to the maintenance of “negative liberty,” i.e., freedom from arbitrary power and corruption.¹⁷ This recognition implies a further distancing from Pocock, who characteristically sees Machiavelli, and civic humanists in general, as constituting a revival and continuation of the Aristotelian tradition, a tradition distinct both from the theologically based politics of the scholastics and modern liberalism and socialism. Skinner, too, sees Renaissance republicanism as a middle way, but now prefers to find its roots in Roman writers like Cicero, Sallust, and Seneca rather than in Aristotle.¹⁸ His emphasis on the Roman sources of civic humanism, and his recognition that not all civic humanists were anti-monarchical, seem to have led Skinner in his most recent book to a significant change in terminology, for he now appears to prefer the label “neo-Roman” to “classical republican.”¹⁹

Among scholars of the Italian Renaissance, however, Skinner’s openness to revision is the exception rather than the rule. While seminars devoted to early modern republicanism have been ringing with lively debate, the papers of most Renaissance scholars on the same subject are received with a silent chorus of nodding heads. Especially in

¹⁷ This view was first adumbrated in Skinner’s article, “Machiavelli on the Maintenance of Liberty,” *Politics* 18 (1983): 3–15; see also “The Idea of Negative Liberty: Philosophical and Historical Perspectives,” in *Philosophy in History*, ed. R. Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Q. Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 193–221. The fullest expression of this conception is in his “The Republican Idea of Liberty,” in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. G. Bock, Q. Skinner, and M. Viroli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 293–309. For a criticism of this view as a reading of Machiavelli, see John Charvet, “Quentin Skinner on the Idea of Freedom,” *Studies in Political Thought* 2 (1993): 5–16. In *Liberty before Liberalism*, Skinner moves away from this “instrumental republicanism” to embrace a concept of negative liberty as “non-domination,” a view indebted to the work of the modern republican theorist Philip Pettit; see the latter’s *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹⁸ Skinner, “Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Artist as Political Philosopher,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 72 (1986): 56: “It was from these humble origins, far more than from the impact of Aristotelianism, that the classical republicanism of Machiavelli, Guicciardini and their contemporaries originally stemmed. The political theory of the Renaissance, at all phases of its history, owes a far deeper debt to Rome than to Greece.”

¹⁹ See his *Liberty before Liberalism*, esp. 11, 54–5; for Blair Worden’s criticism of Skinner’s new terminology see his review in *London Review of Books*, 5 February 1998.

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Introduction

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Quattrocento studies, the Baronian model of Renaissance republicanism remains virtually unchallenged. The irony, as William J. Connell points out in the first essay of the present volume, is that republicanism as a subject of historical study was practically the invention of Renaissance scholars. So perhaps we are simply witnessing the phenomenon, observed by historians of technology, whereby the cultures that are the first to innovate are the last to update. In any case, historians of Renaissance political thought have made few serious attempts to revise the orthodox view of civic humanism as established by Baron and Pocock. Certain generalizations as well as facts and interpretations relating to particular texts have been challenged, it is true,²⁰ but attempts to move beyond technical criticisms to a broader reinterpretation of humanist political thought and its role in the development of Western political theory have not made much headway.²¹ The relative absence of serious revisionism within Renaissance studies is attested by the numerous examples of more or less unreconstructed Baronianism one can find in the recent historical literature, even in the work of well-informed scholars.²²

This book aims to challenge that complacency. It hopes to stir up new debate on civic humanism among scholars of the Italian Renaissance, to take stock of where recent research has brought us, and to press further along the various paths of exploration and reappraisal that have opened

²⁰ See my article, "The Baron Thesis After Forty Years," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995): 309–38, for a conspectus of the criticisms made of Baron's *Crisis* since 1955.

²¹ The present writer has attempted a fresh valuation in "Humanism and the Origins of Modern Political Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Krave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 118–41. For a reinterpretation of the period of Baron's "crisis," see John Najemy, "The Dialogue of Power in Florentine Politics," in *City States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy*, ed. A. Molho, K. Raaflaub, and J. Emlen (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 269–88. Many scholars have noted the tendency of Baron's critics to become bogged down in technical issues, but this was a tendency inherited from Baron himself: see Najemy again in "Baron's Machiavelli and Renaissance Republicanism," *American Historical Review* 101.1 (February, 1996): 128, where he speaks of Baron's "tendency to displace problems of interpretation onto puzzles of chronology."

²² Unreconstructed Baronianism is more common in Italy than in England or America: see, for example, Cesare Vasoli, "Leonardo Bruni alla luce delle più recenti ricerche," *Atti e memorie della Accademia Petrarca di lettere, arti e scienze di Arezzo* 50 (1988): 3–26; Eugenio Garin, "Leonardo Bruni: politica e cultura," in *Leonardo Bruni cancelliere della repubblica di Firenze*, ed. P. Viti (Florence: Olschki, 1990), 3–14; Antonio Lanza, *Firenze contro Milano: Gli intellettuali fiorentini nelle guerre con i Visconti* (Rome: De Rubois, 1991); Paolo Viti, *Leonardo Bruni e Firenze: Studi sulle lettere pubbliche e private* (Florence: Bulzoni, 1992), esp. chapter 1. Despite many reservations and modifications, a fundamentally Baronian perspective is maintained by Albert Rabil, Jr., "The Significance of 'Civic Humanism' in the Interpretation of the Italian Renaissance," in *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), I: 141–74; and by Ronald G. Witt, "The *Crisis* after Forty Years," *American Historical Review* 101 (February, 1996): 110–18.

up in the last two decades. The essayists in this book have no new grand thesis to replace the “Baron thesis.” Unlike Pocock, they propose no sweeping new visions of the history of republicanism. In their own politics they represent a broad ideological spectrum and are united only by a common discomfort with current orthodoxies. Attentive readers will notice that the authors in this volume often disagree with each other, sometimes sharply. Yet despite the diversity of backgrounds, methods, and conclusions represented here, certain consistent themes have emerged from our research and reflection.

The first theme concerns the relationship of Renaissance civic humanists to the medieval tradition. It is now well established that many of the republican ideas Baron claimed had emerged around 1400 in the writings of Italian humanists had, in fact, a long prehistory in the medieval scholastic and rhetorical traditions. In his essay for this volume James Blythe takes this revisionist line much further, showing that the relationship of humanists to scholastics was not that of republicans to monarchists, but of popularizers to theorists. The late medieval scholastic tradition boasted a very rich republican (or commonwealth) tradition, including both monarchical and anti-monarchical republicans, who took their analysis from Aristotle’s *Politics* but applied that analysis to contemporary society. Ptolemy of Lucca, the most extreme republican of the later Middle Ages, was, in Blythe’s analysis, a much more populist figure than any civic humanist of the Quattrocento. Long before Leonardo Bruni, late medieval scholastics had produced a “desacralized” account of Roman history, and had criticized the Roman empire of the Caesars as tyrannical and corrupt. They had defended the value of the active life against the monastic and neo-Platonic traditions and insisted on the value of participation in political life. Where Pocock saw a strict separation between the scholastic juridical tradition (the source, in his view, of the liberal stress on rights and negative liberty) and the civic humanist tradition’s discourse of virtue and participation, Blythe demonstrates that on a doctrinal if not a discursive level this supposed dichotomy is difficult to defend.²³

The lack of any clear break in doctrinal terms between late medieval scholastics and civic humanists raises in acute form the issue of Machiavelli’s relationship to the humanists of the Quattrocento. As William J. Connell suggests in his essay, the efforts of Baron, Pocock, and Skinner to assimilate Machiavelli to the civic humanist tradition have grown

²³ On this point see also Blythe’s *Ideal Government and the Mixed Constitution in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

increasingly problematic in recent years.²⁴ The thesis of an unbroken “republican tradition” stretching from Aristotle to Jefferson, as was said above, has sustained numerous attacks from historians of political theory, who emphasize the differences between major figures in the supposed tradition on key points of doctrine, such as participation and the analysis of human nature. Cary J. Nederman tries to resolve this problem by pointing to the pluralistic character of the republican tradition, especially the tension between “discursive” and “rational” republicanism found in the writings of the greatest Roman republican, Cicero. The unity of the republican tradition can be saved, he suggests, if it is recognized that that unity embraces considerable diversity.

Harvey Mansfield and Paul A. Rahe take a different approach to “situating Machiavelli.” Building on recent literature, both represent Machiavelli as a radically modern figure. Mansfield’s point of comparison is the *Laudatio Florentinae urbis* of Leonardo Bruni. Bruni, for him, is still a traditional figure, firmly within the Aristotelian cosmos. He uses a traditional rhetoric of idealization, whereas Machiavelli uses a rhetoric of rationalization: deeds justify words, not vice versa. Bruni wants to imitate the ancients in a gestural, external way, by recovering their thought and language; Machiavelli rejects their ideology but wants to find out the secrets of their power. Bruni is a republican; Machiavelli is not, at least in any unequivocal sense. Neither is a civic humanist, less because they fail to fit Baron’s description than because, on a deeper level, the civic is irreconcilable with the humanist. Rahe agrees that Machiavelli is to be classed with the moderns, but takes Aristotle as his primary point of comparison. Aristotle is ancient because of the political anthropology he shares with other ancient writers, both Greek and Roman. The purpose of a polity is to perfect human nature by maximizing the scope for virtue and rationality. Since individuals and populations differ in virtue and rationality, politics is a matter of prudence: choosing the regime that allows the best people to be fully human in a given set of circumstances. Machiavelli is modern because his reason is purely instrumental; like Hobbes and Hume, he thought reason should be the slave of the passions. The republican constitution is preferable, not because it provides a focus for “common meanings and purposes,” but because it has a greater chance of satisfying both the desire of the nobles to rule and that of the populace to live in security. Machiavelli’s republic therefore embodies both positive and negative liberty. But

²⁴ For a fascinating account of how Baron came to see Machiavelli as a civic humanist, see Najemy, “Baron’s Machiavelli and Renaissance Republicanism,” 119–29.

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liberty does not exist to enable the exercise of the Good Life, but subserves an illimitable desire for survival, profit, and acquisition.

If Machiavelli is radically modern and represents in many respects a rejection rather than a continuation of the civic humanist tradition, it is natural to ask if his generation's new understanding of human nature and the instrumental role of reason have their roots in some other Florentine tradition of political reflection. Athanasios Moulakis and Alison Brown address this question in their contributions to this volume. Both authors see the thought of Machiavelli and Guicciardini as emerging from what Moulakis calls "realist constitutionalism," a tradition of thought associated with the political practice of Florentine statesmen, rather than with the normative, exhortatory writings of the humanists. Realist constitutionalism was nourished by the political culture of fifteenth-century Florence, which was marked by a "quasi-permanent abrogation" of her constitutional order. Oligarchic and later Medicean statesmen sought to solve the problem of how a state whose *ordinamenta* were descended from the corporatist guild republicanism of the late Middle Ages could refashion itself in such a way as to be both legitimate and effective. As Alison Brown suggests, part of the answer lay in the appropriation and manipulation of images, which went together with a growing consciousness of the conventional character of terms such as "liberty." The burgeoning consciousness of liberty, not only as a political ideal, but also as a "system of representation," led, in Guicciardini's *Dialogue on the Government of Florence*, to "one of the earliest and most incisive attacks" on the republican idealism of the civic humanists. The new realism implies, according to Moulakis, a new political anthropology wherein politics is seen as artificial and unnatural. Men are forced into politics by necessity, not by a desire to realize their nature; political activity is motivated by ambition and shaped by rational calculation. Virtue is a power of canalizing necessity, not a *physis* in the Aristotelian sense, a principle of self-realization.

If Machiavelli and Guicciardini cannot be readily situated within the tradition of classical and late medieval republicanism, and if Quattrocento republicanism is indistinguishable on a doctrinal level from the republicanism of the late medieval scholastics, it remains to establish whether or to what extent the civic humanists of the fifteenth century may be said to represent a new departure. It remains, in other words, to determine how they are related to modernity. It has been suggested that the innovations of the civic humanists were chiefly a matter of audience and language, of selecting and reshaping materials already present in