Introduction

The following chapters stand in little need of introduction, since they are all the work of recognised experts on the history and theory of European republicanism. A word does need to be said, however, about the editorial decisions we have made in respect of the topics we have chosen to cover and the chronological limits of our coverage.

Chronologically our two volumes focus on the period roughly extending from the mid-sixteenth to the late-eighteenth century. This reflects our sense that the earlier history of republicanism in the Renaissance, and the later fortunes of the movement in the nineteenth century, have both been better served in the existing scholarly literature. In particular, it is worth noting that several contributors to these present volumes took part in the production of *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (1990), in which the origins and influence of the Florentine model of the *vivere libero* were extensively surveyed. The basic decision we made in setting up our more recent network was that the period most in need of further study was the one following the demise of the Renaissance city-republics and preceding the recrudescence of republican theory and practice in the era of the French Revolution.

A word next needs to be said about the specific themes on which we have chosen to concentrate. These reflect our sense of how the values and practices associated with European republicanism can most illuminatingly be made to fit together. We accordingly begin, in Part I of Volume I, with the rejection of monarchy. Whatever else it may have meant to be a republican in early-modern Europe, it meant repudiating the age-old belief that monarchy is necessarily the best form of government. We already find this assumption implicitly questioned in some Huguenot political writings of the French religious wars, and we encounter a far more explicit challenge among the enemies of absolutism in eastern Europe, perhaps above all (as Chapter 3 reveals) in

Poland. But it was in the Netherlands, and later in England, that the repudiation of monarchy assumed its most dramatic forms. The Dutch abjured their allegiance to their overlord, Philip II, in 1581 and went on to fight successfully for the establishment of a federated republic, while the English executed their lawfully anointed king, Charles I, in 1649 and set up 'a Commonwealth and Free State'. Chapters 1, 2 and 4 of Part I examine the rôle of anti-monarchical sentiment in the unfolding of these unprecedented events.

We turn in Part II of Volume I to the figure of the citizen, the figure whom we take to be pivotal to the republican politics of early-modern Europe. One crucial fact, duly emphasised by all the contributors to this section, is that the image of citizenship projected by the republican writers of our period was largely drawn from classical and 'civic humanist' sources. This generalisation is shown to hold across much of the European map, from England (Chapter 5) and the Netherlands (Chapter 6) to Germany (Chapter 7) and Poland (Chapter 8).

According to the classical authorities beloved of early-modern republicans, the essence of what it means to be a *civis* or citizen is to be in possession of one's liberty as opposed to being a slave. This assumption not only underlies much of what our contributors have to say about the concept of citizenship in Volume I, but resurfaces in Part I of Volume II in the discussions of freedom (Chapter 1) and its connections with empire (Chapter 2). The predicament of the slave, as we learn from the rubric *De statu hominis* in the Digest of Roman Law, was held to be that of someone condemned to living *in potestate domini*, within the power and hence at the mercy of a master possessed of arbitrary powers. As Hobbes was to complain in *Leviathan*, the republican and 'democratical' writers proceeded to extend this definition in such a way as to argue 'that the Subjects in a Popular Common-wealth enjoy Liberty; but that in a Monarchy they are all Slaves'. If we live as subjects of rulers with arbitrary or prerogative powers, they claimed, we are living at their mercy and hence in a state of servitude.

Hobbes was only the most prominent among numerous defenders of monarchy who raised an obvious objection to this line of argument. How can the mere fact of living under a monarchy limit our options and thereby deprive us of liberty? The answer drawn by the exponents of republicanism from their classical and 'civic humanist' authorities was that slavery inevitably breeds slavishness; that those condemned to a life of servitude will find themselves obliged to cultivate the habits of servility. As Sallust and Tacitus had warned, no deeds of manly courage or great-heartedness can ever be expected from such abject peoples. They will be too fearful of attracting the

envious attention of their rulers and thereby bringing ruin instead of glory upon themselves. Nor can they be expected to benefit themselves and their country by winning great fortunes from daring ventures of exploration or commerce. Since they know that whatever gains they accrue will always be subject to arbitrary confiscation with impunity, they will scarcely trouble to take the risks or expend the energies required. It accordingly became a trope of republican writing to claim that nothing but torpor and sullen acquiescence can be expected from the subjects of absolute monarchies. We must expect to find them – as a revealing series of neologisms put it – discouraged, dis-heartened, dis-spirited. By contrast, the freedom of the republican citizen was taken to consist essentially in being secured against such arbitrary domination or interference. The republican citizen was consequently said to enjoy something far more substantial in the way of *libertas* than mere *de facto* absence of constraint. He was said to enjoy protection from the possibility of suffering such constraint. Republican citizens could be governed, but not mastered. This was taken to be the most precise way of distinguishing between genuine citizens and mere subjects. The espousal of this exacting vision of civil liberty brought with it some fundamental questions about forms of government. What type of constitution is best suited to upholding both the liberty of citizens and the stability of commonwealths? Under what form of constitution, in other words, will it be possible to ensure that the laws are duly enforced but that citizens are at the same time immune from arbitrary domination or interference on the part of their government? These are among the issues to which our contributors turn in Part III of Volume I, our section entitled 'The Republican Constitution'.

As one might expect, many republicans took it to be obvious that, whatever else is true of such constitutions, they must eschew any vestiges of monarchical authority. This was because, as the English Act of 1649 abolishing kingship put it, there is an inherent tendency for regal power 'to oppress and impoverish and enslave the subject'. Paradoxically, however, the upholding of civic liberty was not invariably taken to require a republican constitution in the strictest sense. Sometimes it was conceded that, if one could have a Doge-like monarch, subject to election and bereft of prerogative powers, this might offer the best prospect of assuring the right combination of public order and civil liberty. This paradox echoes throughout the early-modern period. We encounter it in Machiavelli's question as to whether a *republica* can be sustained 'per via di regno', and we hear it again in Hume's suggestion that the progress of the arts and the maintenance of liberty may often fare better under 'civilised monarchies'.

Whatever view was taken of this issue, it was generally agreed that, in order to avoid the dangers of tyranny, it will always be essential to prevent our rulers from imposing their wills on us arbitrarily and without check. This was taken to follow from the cardinal assumption that subjection to unchecked power is equivalent to servitude. These commitments help in turn to explain why so many republican theorists – as we learn from Part III of Volume I – were preoccupied by two constitutional problems above all. One was the question of how best to frame a mixed constitution, a *respublica mixta*, in such a way as to deploy power to balance power. The other was the associated question of how to ensure that the people are able to make their voice heard – at least by representation – in the process of law-making, so that whatever laws are enacted may be said to reflect their wills as opposed to being arbitrarily imposed upon them. As a number of chapters in Part III of Volume I reveal, these problems were eclectically solved by reference to whatever sources seemed most serviceable, including local custom, classical theory and the exemplary instance of the Jewish commonwealth, a constitution widely believed to reflect God's own political preferences. Republican writers generally agreed that, so long as arbitrary power is duly outlawed and representation assured, we can legitimately claim to be living in 'a free state'. As this terminology reveals, the republicans took as seriously as possible the alleged analogy between natural and political bodies. Just as natural bodies are said to be free if and only if they are moved to act by their own wills, so too with political ones. To live in a free state is to live under a constitution in which the body politic is never moved to act except by the will of the citizen body as a whole.

If we have the good fortune to live under such a constitution, this will not only have the effect of securing our civil rights; it will also emancipate us from the servility that comes of living under any form of absolute government. To put the point another way, the liberty enjoyed by republican citizens was at the same time held to be an inducement to civic virtue. Freed from the dread of the mighty, we can hope to undertake great and courageous deeds. Freed at the same time from any fear that our property may be taken away from us with impunity, we can likewise hope to pursue our fortunes without anxiety and thereby benefit our community as well as ourselves. Just as the subjects of arbitrary power become disheartened and discouraged, so the constitution of a free state helps to hearten and encourage its citizens to expend their best energies in their own and the public's interests. One consequence of these assumptions was that many defenders of free states became proponents of expansionist policies, seeking in James

Harrington's words to establish commonwealths not merely 'for preservation' but 'for increase'. As we learn from a number of the contributions to Volume II, however, the question of empire always remained for republicans a vexed and difficult one. On the one hand, a number of free states, including the Netherlands after independence and Britain in the 1650s, took the view that liberty at home should be matched by greatness abroad, and turned themselves into enthusiastic and successful imperialists. But on the other hand, many republicans feared that the acquisition of an overseas empire might undermine the conditions of virtuous citizenship at home. They were worried about the large armies needed for policing extended frontiers, partly because such forces undermined the traditional identity between soldier and citizen, but even more because they offered governments a tempting means of seizing absolute power. But they also feared moral contamination at the hands of the conquered, a fear as old as Sallust's concern that the introduction of what he called 'Asiatic habits' might bring about the corruption of European *mœurs*. We are left pondering the various ways in which early-modern republicans conceived of the relationship between the values of the *patria* and those of other and wider communities.

A further important topic raised in Part I of Volume II concerns the character of the virtuous citizen. As constructed by the theorists of free states, the republican citizen was undoubtedly a figure of powerful energies and commitments. His concern for liberty made him a vigilant critic of governmental encroachment (Chapter 1), while his belief in the equal standing of citizens made him at least potentially a friend of religious toleration (Chapter 3). By the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, we find his limitations as a moral exemplar increasingly exposed to criticism and even ridicule. His vaunted free-speaking and contempt for courtliness were both challenged by new ideals of politeness and urbanity (Chapter 5), while his fierce insistence on the need for independence was overtaken by new conceptions of civility and sociability (Chapter 6).

We bring our volumes to a close by considering in greater detail the two most important limitations of the republican citizen and his system of values. One stemmed from the fact that his virtue was very much the classical *virtus* of the *vir civilis*, and was consequently viewed as an eponymously male attribute. A construction of masculinity undoubtedly underpinned the ideology of 'civic humanism'. What place did this leave for women in the republic? How was the public space of the republic gendered? These are the questions addressed in Part II of Volume II, in which we examine the confrontation between the republican image of virtue and the demand

for greater sexual equality. The other limitation on which we focus arose in a similar way from the classical sources of republican thought. As we have seen, the ancient moralists believed that freedom acts to release all kinds of energies, including those which enable prudent and courageous men to amass fortunes for themselves. But they also believed that the highest duty of the *vir civilis* is to employ his energies for the good of his community, whether in a civil or a military capacity. This latter commitment prompted most republicans to insist on honour and glory as the proper goals of the *vir civilis*, and this in turn frequently prompted them to speak disparagingly of the acquisition of wealth as a base and even an unpatriotic pursuit.

The ambiguous implications of this inheritance for the relationship between republicanism and the rise of commerce form the subject of our concluding section in Volume II. We end with the figure of Adam Smith, and with the confrontation between republican principles and commercial realities. With Smith's reflections on our theme, we begin to move away from early-modern debates about virtue and commerce and to enter a more recognisably modern world.

One question that cannot be ignored in discussions about our republican heritage is how far we are confronting a usable past. In our own case these discussions gave rise to a further editorial decision which the present volumes reflect. We resolved to exclude such questions as far as possible, and we further resolved to consider them at a separate conference and, eventually, in a separate book. As we note in our Acknowledgments, this additional *convegno* duly took place, and a volume arising from it has already been published. By contrast, our aim in the present volumes has been to stand back from the politics of republicanism and to produce a series of purely scholarly studies aimed at furthering an historical understanding of this aspect of our intellectual heritage.

Part I

The Rejection of Monarchy

1

'That a Republic is Better than a Monarchy': Anti-monarchism in Early Modern Dutch Political Thought

Wyger R. E. Velema

Historical scholarship has not been very generous in its treatment of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Dutch republicanism. Whereas it is hard to keep track of the continuous stream of studies devoted to early modern Italian or English republicanism, publications on the political thought of the Dutch Republic have remained few and far between. Indeed, although the situation has somewhat improved in recent years, it may still be stated without exaggeration that large areas of early modern Dutch political thought remain entirely unexplored. There are, leaving aside the remarkable fact that the history of political thought has never been a prominent field of study in Dutch academia, at least two reasons for this rather unsatisfactory state of affairs.

First of all, there is the deep-seated conviction that the Dutch have always been a thoroughly practical, pragmatic, and commonsensical people, not much inclined to theory. Thus, in a recent overview of early modern Dutch republicanism, Herbert Rowen once again ends with the time-worn cliché that Dutch political theory did not match Dutch political practice. 'Can it be', his concluding rhetorical question goes, 'that those who possess liberty – as the Dutch did in these two centuries more than any other people in Europe – are not driven to philosophize about it?' (Rowen 1994: 340). Quite an amazing verdict, one cannot help thinking, on a culture that produced not only Grotius and Spinoza, but also an astonishingly rich political pamphlet literature – see for instance Knuttel 1889–1920.

Even more important than this strangely tenacious myth however, is the fact that those relatively few scholars who decided to ignore it have, until quite recently, attempted to study the history of early modern Dutch political thought with the sole purpose of identifying a particularly and exclusively Dutch form of political discourse. This was the dominant (and severely

limiting) perspective both in Ernst Kossmann's classic 1960 monograph – the first, it should be mentioned in passing – on the political thought of the Dutch seventeenth century and in the Dutch debate following the publication of J. G. A. Pocock's *Machiavellian Moment* in 1975.[1] Kossmann's conclusion in the exchange last mentioned that there was no 'Dutch paradigm' in early modern political thought may very well be true, but the question it answers does not seem to be particularly fruitful or enlightening, for there were very few if any early modern European nations with totally original and entirely exclusive traditions of political thought or language (Kossmann 1985). The dominant early modern political languages were, to a large extent, international. The interesting question, therefore, is how and why they were applied, rejected, adapted or extended in various national and international contexts and under different circumstances. Fortunately, such an approach is now at last slowly gaining ground in the study of Dutch political thought, the pioneering effort in this respect being E. O. G. Haitsma Mulier's 1980 monograph on *The Myth of Venice and Dutch Republican Thought* (Haitsma Mulier 1980).

The above general observations on the study of early modern Dutch republicanism all strongly apply to the subject of the present article, the anti-monarchical element in early modern Dutch political thought. First of all, this evidently crucial aspect of Dutch republicanism has so far not been subjected to systematic study. Secondly, it is eminently suited to dispel the myth that the Dutch were disinclined to give political matters much thought. There can be no doubt that the anti-monarchical literature in the Dutch Republic, ranging from popular and cheap pamphlets to learned treatises, was enormously rich, both in quantity and in quality. It would, of course, only have been surprising had this not been the case in a country that originated in a revolt against a monarch and prided itself on its republican liberty ever since.[2] Thirdly and finally, even the most superficial perusal of Dutch anti-monarchical writings immediately makes it clear that Dutch theorists did not operate in national isolation. Just as they liberally used French Huguenot theories of resistance during the sixteenth-century struggle with Philip II, they borrowed from Machiavellian republicanism, Cartesian psychology, and Hobbesian philosophy in the course of the seventeenth century (Van Gelderen 1992; Kossmann 1960; Haitsma Mulier 1980). In the eighteenth century in turn they adapted Addison and Steele's spectatorial politeness, utilised Montesquieu's new typology of the forms of government, and absorbed Paine's anti-monarchism

1. Kossmann 1960. Pocock 1982.
2. Early modern Dutch concepts of liberty are discussed in Haitsma Mulier and Velema (eds.) 1999.

(Buijnsters 1991; Velema 1997; Leeb 1973; Klein 1995). To look for a purely Dutch and entirely original form of anti-monarchism would, it is clear, be both useless and nonsensical.

The interesting question to be asked, then, is not whether Dutch anti-monarchical theorists did or did not use predominantly non-Dutch authors as their sources of inspiration, but how they adapted the various available international political languages to their own needs and circumstances. Here it needs to be pointed out with some emphasis that the circumstances the early modern Dutch found themselves in were rather exceptional.[3] In an age that saw the growth of various forms of territorially extended and more or less centralised monarchy, the Dutch inhabited a small, decentralised, commercial republic. The first function of their reflections upon the monarchical form of government was therefore to increase their understanding of the organisation of their own state by comparing it to the political life of the countries surrounding the Dutch Republic. Had this been all, Dutch anti-monarchism might never have become as intense as it did. What provided the stimulus for the most principled and fervent rejections of monarchy from the mid-seventeenth century on, however, was not international comparison, but the rôle of anti-monarchism in domestic political dispute.

The state that had emerged from the Dutch Revolt was a republic in which the assemblies of the States, variously composed in each province, were held to be sovereign. At the same time, however, and for a variety of reasons, the function of Stadholder was retained in the new political system. Throughout the history of the Dutch Republic the position of the Stadholder remained, as Herbert Rowen has remarked, 'an improvisation' (Rowen 1988: ix). It was based on an ill-defined assembly of special rights, privileges, usurpations and informal influence. Despite or because of the opaque nature of their position, the Stadholders, elected by each province separately, succeeded in accumulating a considerable amount of symbolic and real power on both the national and the provincial level. Particularly important in this respect was the fact that their function combined substantial political power and the supreme military command in one and the same person. It was precisely this combination that made William II such a formidable opponent in his 1650 conflict with the province of Holland and that prompted the abolition of the Stadholderate in that most important of all the Dutch provinces – and several

3. All previous general histories of the Dutch Republic, both in English and in Dutch, have now been superseded by Jonathan Israel's magisterial work (Israel 1995). Illuminating reflections on the history of the Dutch Republic in comparative perspective are offered in Davids and Lucassen (eds.) 1995.