Introduction: English republicanism

> . . . remembring, that we are now put into a better course, upon the *Declared Interest* of a *Free State* or *Common-weal*, I conceived nothing could more highly tend to the propogation of this *Interest*, and the honour of its Founders, then . . . that the People . . . may . . . understand what *Common-weal Principles* are, and thereby . . . learn to be true Common-wealth's men, and zealous against *Monarchick Interest*, in all its Appearances and Incroachments whatsoever.
>
> Marchamont Nedham, *Mercurius Politicus* no. 92, March 1652.[1]

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The historiography of English republicanism is largely a creation of the past half-century. Before Zera Fink's ground-breaking *The Classical Republicans* (1945), such a general phenomenon had scarcely been identified.[2] Attention to English republican thought was largely confined to James Harrington's *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), a work intermittently famous since the year of its publication, and by 1950 at the centre of a renowned dispute about early modern English social development.[3] Against this background it is not surprising that the most powerful impact of Fink's work should have been to furnish the most fertile context to date for our understanding

[1] *Mercurius Politicus* no. 92, 4–11 March 1652, pp. 1457–8.
[2] Fink, *Classical Republicans*. When, in his Fellowship dissertation on *Political Philosophy in England*, F. W. Maitland discussed seventeenth-century ideas of liberty and equality, his reconstruction of contemporary partisanship ranged Milton, Harrington, Sidney and Locke against Filmer, Hobbes, Clarendon and Hume. While describing Harrington as a 'great commonwealthsman', and Milton and Sidney as 'puritans', Maitland found as much connecting these eight theorists as dividing them, and the notion of 'republicanism' played no part in his analysis. *The Collected Papers of Frederic William Maitland*, volume I ed. H. A. L. Fisher (Cambridge, 1911) pp. 4–30.
[3] John Toland, 'The Life of James Harrington', in *The Oceana of James Harrington . . . with An Exact Account of his Life* (1700); H. F. Russell Smith, *Harrington and his Oceana: a Study of a Seventeenth Century Utopia and its Influence in America* (New York, 1971); R. H. Tawney, 'Harrington's Interpretation of his Age', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 27 (1941); H. R. Trevor-Roper, 'The Gentry 1540–1640', *Economic History Review Supplements* no. 1 (Cambridge, 1953).

of Harrington. By 1977, in the hugely influential analysis of John Pocock, Harrington had become not only 'a classical republican', but 'England's premier civic humanist and Machiavellian'.[4]

Pocock's achievement drew upon other important work. This included the identification, by Hans Baron, of the concept of Florentine 'civic humanism', and the application to the history of political thought, by Quentin Skinner among others, of linguistic methodology.[5] To this investigation of early modern history Pocock linked a developing debate about the 'ideological origins of the American revolution'.[6] Putting all of this together with his own prior engagement with historical thought, *The Machiavellian Moment* connected to the Florentine recovery of a classical understanding of politics an 'Atlantic republican tradition' by which this was conveyed, via seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, to colonial America.

Although every detail of Pocock's analysis has now been fiercely criticised, this has largely occurred within the contours of the intellectual geography thus created.[7] The notion of classical republicanism has become hotly disputed. There are the controversies surrounding the particular interpretations by Baron and Pocock of their chosen texts and periods.[8] There is the vigorously contested nature of classical republicanism itself: was it primarily Greek in origin, or Roman? Can it be understood as a language? Did it hinge upon the defence of a particular form of government (a constitutional prescription), a way of life (a moral philosophy) or a still more general view of the world (entailing a natural philosophy and/or metaphysics)? Was it philosophy at all, as opposed to a series of rhetorical or polemical postures? Finally, can any meaningful connection actually be established between the moral and political thought of ancient and modern times? Did early modern classical republicanism exist?[9]

Informed by these developments, wildly disparate readings of Harrington's *Oceana* have proliferated. By 1975 the analyst of contemporary

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[4] Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*; J. G. A. Pocock, 'Historical Introduction', in *The Political Works of James Harrington*, ed. Pocock (Cambridge, 1977) p. 15.

[5] Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (2 vols. Princeton, 1955); J. G. A Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays in Political Thought and History* (New York, 1971); Quentin Skinner, 'A Reply to My Critics', in James Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Princeton, 1988); Skinner, *Visions of Politics, Volume 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge, 2002).

[6] Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth Century Commonwealthsman* (New Haven, Conn., 1959); Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971).

[7] However, for an explicit attempt to transcend this geography see van Gelderen and Skinner, *Republicanism*.

[8] Hankins, *Renaissance Civic Humanism*; Phillipson and Skinner, *Political Discourse*.

[9] For negative answers to this question, associated with the followers of Leo Strauss, see Paul Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern* (3 vols., Chapel Hill, N.C., 1994); Thomas Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism* (Chicago, 1988).

economic and social change had become the author of a 'Machiavellian meditation upon feudalism'.[10] For many scholars Harrington remains the exemplar of an English classical republicanism which is, however, variously depicted as Platonic, Aristotelian, neo-Roman, 'Virgilianised', Machiavellian, or a synthesis of several of these elements mediated by Polybian constitutionalism.[11] For others Harrington's principal intellectual debt was to Hobbes, the nature of which engagement has been vigorously disputed together with its impact upon his claimed classical republicanism.[12] Still others have depicted Harrington as a Utopian, a Stoic, a natural philosopher, and the author of a civic religion.[13]

A third developing area of study has been investigation of the thought of English republicans other than Harrington. This has involved the extension of attention from John Milton's poetry to his overtly religiously and politically engaged prose.[14] It has built upon the work of Pocock to pay much more attention to the ideological influence of the notorious journalistic

[10] Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment* p. 385. The origin of this phrase, together with that of many other aspects of Pocock's understanding of Harrington as a historical thinker, is to be found in his *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: a Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1958) p. 147.

[11] For Harrington's Platonism see Charles Blitzer, *An Immortal Commonwealth: the Political Thought of James Harrington* (New Haven, Conn., 1970); Eric Nelson, 'The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought', Cambridge Fellowship dissertation submitted to Trinity College, Cambridge, August. 2000 ch. 3; J. G. A. Pocock, 'Introduction' in James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana and A System of Politics*, ed. Pocock (Cambridge, 1992) pp. xx–xxiv. For his Aristotelianism see Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment* pp. 66–80; James Cotton, *James Harrington's Political Thought and its Context* (1991) ch. 2. For his Machiavellianism see Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli: a Changing Interpretation* (1964) ch. 6; Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*. For the Polybian synthesis see Fink, *Classical Republicans* ch. 3; Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*; Blair Worden, 'James Harrington and *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, 1656', in Wootton, *Republicanism*; Arihiro Fukuda, *Sovereignty and the Sword: Harrington, Hobbes, and Mixed Government in the English Civil Wars* (Oxford, 1997). For the neo-Roman Harrington see Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*; for his 'Virgilianised republicanism' see Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic* pp. 357–78.

[12] For Harrington and Hobbes see Raab, *Machiavelli* ch. 6; Cotton, *Harrington* ch. 4; Scott, 'The Rapture of Motion'; Scott, 'The Peace of Silence: Thucydides and the English Civil War', in Miles Fairburn and W. H. Oliver (eds.), *The Certainty of Doubt: Tributes to Peter Munz* (Wellington, 1996); Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern, Volume* II: *New Modes and Orders in Early Modern Political Thought* ch. 5; Glenn Burgess, 'Repacifying the Polity: the Responses of Hobbes and Harrington to the 'Crisis of the Common Law', in Ian Gentles, John Morrill and Blair Worden (eds.), *Soldiers, Writers and Statesmen of the English Revolution* (Cambridge, 1998). See also my review of Fukuda, *Sovereignty and the Sword* in the *English Historical Review* 115, 462 (2000) pp. 660–2.

[13] J. C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society: a Study of English Utopian Writing 1516–1700* (Cambridge, 1981) chs. 8–9; Alan Cromartie, 'Harringtonian Virtue: Harrington, Machiavelli, and the Method of the *Moment*', *Historical Journal* 41, 4 (1988); Scott, *England's Troubles* ch. 14; Mark Goldie, 'The Civil Religion of James Harrington', in Anthony Pagden (ed.), *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1987).

[14] Fink's *Classical Republicans*, the work of a Miltonist, was an early result of this process. Its most important monument is Milton's *Complete Prose Works*, gen. ed. D. M. Wolfe (8 vols. New Haven, Conn., 1953–82). See also Hill, *Milton*; Nicholas von Maltzahn, *Milton's History of Britain* (Oxford, 1991);

turncoat Marchamont Nedham.[15] It has seen republication of the major
work by Harrington's friend Henry Neville, and new accounts of the life
and thought of Neville's colleague and second cousin Algernon Sidney.[16]
At the same time the spotlight continues to fall on a succession of other
members of the republican literary canon. These include Sir Henry Vane
Jr, John Streater, Edmund Ludlow and Slingsby Bethel.[17]

   In the wake of this work have come several attempts to delineate the con-
tours of English republicanism more generally. Recent writing has done
much to excavate its contemporary social, political and intellectual con-
texts.[18] We have a magisterial treatment of its relationship to poetry, an
analytically acute examination of its understanding of liberty, and a major
attempt to establish its relationship to seventeenth-century politics.[19] This
is a literature still in a rapid state of development. This development is

David Armitage, Armand Himy and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Milton and Republicanism* (Cambridge,
1995). On the contemporary fame of Milton's prose see chapter 12 below.

[15] Pocock, 'Historical Introduction' pp. 33–7; Jonathan Scott, *Algernon Sidney and the English Republic
1623–1677* (Cambridge, 1998) pp. 110–12; Blair Worden, '"Wit in a Roundhead": the Dilemma
of Marchamont Nedham', in Susan Amussen and Mark Kishlansky (eds.), *Political Culture and
Cultural Politics in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 1995); Worden, 'Marchamont Nedham and
the Beginnings of English Republicanism, 1649–1656', in Wootton, *Republicanism*.

[16] Caroline Robbins (ed.), *Two English Republican Tracts* (Cambridge, 1969); Robbins, 'Algernon
Sidney's *Discourses Concerning Government*: Textbook of Revolution', *William and Mary Quarterly*
3rd ser., 4 (1947); Blair Worden, 'The Commonwealth Kidney of Algernon Sidney', *Journal of British
Studies* 24 (January 1985); Scott, *Algernon Sidney and the English Republic*; Scott, *Algernon Sidney and
the Restoration Crisis 1677–1683* (Cambridge, 1991); Paulette Carrive, *La pensée politique d'Algernon
Sidney 1622–1683. La querelle de l'absolutisme* (Paris, 1989); Alan Craig Houston, *Algernon Sidney and
the Republican Heritage in England and America* (Princeton, 1991); Scott Nelson, *The Discourses of
Algernon Sidney* (1993); Pocock, 'England's Cato'.

[17] On Vane see Margaret Judson, *The Political Thought of Henry Vane the Younger* (Philadelphia,
1969). On Streater see Nigel Smith, 'Popular Republicanism in the 1650s: John Streater's "heroick
mechanicks"', in Armitage, Himy and Skinner, *Milton*; Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print
and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago, 1998) ch. 4. For Ludlow and Bethel see Blair Worden,
'Introduction,' in Edmund Ludlow, *A Voyce From the Watch Tower Part Five 1660–1662*, ed. A. B.
Worden (London, 1978). For Bethel as an exponent of mercantile interest theory, see Scott, *Algernon
Sidney and the English Republic* ch. 13; Steve Pincus, 'Neither Machiavellian Moment nor Possessive
Individualism: Commercial Society and the Defenders of the English Commonwealth', *American
Historical Review* (June 1998).

[18] Patrick Collinson, *De Republica Anglorum: Or, History with the Politics Put Back* (Cambridge, 1990);
Mark Goldie, 'The Unacknowledged Republic: Officeholding in Early Modern England', in Tim
Harris (ed.), *The Politics of the Excluded, c.1500–1850* (2001); Scott, *England's Troubles* chs. 2–6; Blair
Worden, 'Classical Republicanism and the Puritan Revolution', in V. Pearl, H. Lloyd-Jones and
B. Worden (eds.), *History and Imagination* (Oxford, 1981); Markku Peltonen, *Classical Humanism
and Republicanism in English Political Thought 1570–1640* (Cambridge, 1995).

[19] Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*; Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*; in addition to Worden's
four chapters in Wootton, *Republicanism*, see his 'English Republicanism', in J. H. Burns and Mark
Goldie (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450–1700* (Cambridge, 1991); and 'The
Revolution of 1688–9 and the English Republican Tradition', in Jonathan Israel (ed.), *The Anglo-
Dutch Moment* (Cambridge, 1991). See also Scott, *England's Troubles* chs. 10–16.

multi-faceted, argumentative and notable for a tendency to draw in hitherto discrete aspects of early modern studies. There is now a need to draw this literature together, and enter into its key debates, from the standpoint of the broadest analysis of our subject. This is particularly important given that, whatever their positions, few historians have questioned the practice, for the purpose of generalising about English republicanism, of taking Harrington to be its exemplar. To this extent much of the wider debate may turn out to have been sustained by the variety of possible readings of a peculiarly complicated and hybrid text.

The second reason for a holistic approach is that English republican writers were polemicists united, and divided, by their commitment to a cause. Their manuscript or printed utterances were interventions in, and attempts to influence, a struggle going on in practice. This political engagement is one reason for the eclecticism of this literature. Such polemic can be made to yield the single concepts or languages of particular interest to modern political philosophers. But it cannot be reduced to them, or to one use or understanding of them, without diminishing our own grasp of the rhetorical requirements of a rapidly developing practical situation.[20] To understand republicanism as a whole, or even any one text, we need to recover the constellation of ideas informing what came to be known as the 'good old cause'. By what contexts, themes and events was this intellectual phenomenon united? What were the causes, extent and nature of its internal variation?

long-term contexts: intellectual and practical

The first task is to draw together evidence concerning the longer-term contexts of English republicanism. We begin with those which have been the primary focus for historians of ideas. Recent work on English classical republicanism has tended to distinguish Greek from Roman moral

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[20] Quentin Skinner's *Liberty before Liberalism* is open to this criticism (see Worden's review in the *London Review of Books*, 5 February 1998). However, in his subsequent 'Classical Liberty, Renaissance Translation and the English Civil War', the argument that the parliamentarian use of Roman law sources has been neglected by historians preoccupied by common law or natural law traditions avoids the suggestion that these other ideas played no important role (in Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, Volume II: *Renaissance Virtues* pp. 312, 335–9, 342). Similarly the former reconstruction in exclusively neo-Roman terms faced the objection that Hobbes accused parliamentarians of drawing upon 'Greek, and Latine Authors', in particular, '*Aristotle*' and '*Cicero*' (Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge, 1996) pp. 149–50). The later article pays some attention to Aristotle, if only as an influence upon Cicero (Skinner, 'Classical Liberty' pp. 315–6).

philosophy, and to emphasise its Roman rather than Greek character.[21] Yet from Milton's *A Defence of the People of England* (1651) and Harrington's *Oceana* (1656), to Neville's *Plato Redivivus* (1680) and Sidney's *Discourses* (1698), there are few key texts which do not attempt to combine the authority of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Livy and others. Similarly English republicanism combined a powerful debt to Machiavelli's *Discourses* with another to that Greek and Roman moral philosophy by which Machiavelli had himself ostentatiously refused to be bound.

In addition, English republicanism was influenced by other, often related languages of history, philosophy, politics and law, including ancient constitutionalism, natural law theory, natural philosophy, Stoicism and interest theory.[22] Most importantly, there is hardly a single important republican work which is not also fundamentally animated by religious considerations and principles. The greatest shortcoming of the existing literature on English republicanism has been its relative neglect of the religious dimension.[23] The consequent need is not simply to recover the radical protestant republican religious agenda. It is to explain why, when classical republicanism came to England, it did so in the moral service of a religious revolution.

Two sixteenth-century contexts for the answer lay in Christian humanism and radical protestant reformation.[24] Both informed the practical identity of the republican experiment as an attempted reformation of manners. So did the rational Greek moral philosophy, as indebted to Plato as to Aristotle, common to certain humanist and Christian political languages. Consequently, Levellers, Diggers, Quakers and republicans shared many aspects of a common political, religious and social agenda. All came to oppose not only tyranny but monarchy, agreeing upon a substantially

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[21] Quentin Skinner, 'The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty', in Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli (eds.), *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge, 1990); Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*; Peltonen, *Classical Humanism*; Martin Dzelzainis, 'Milton's Classical Republicanism', in Armitage et al., *Milton*; Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*; Andrew Fitzmaurice, *Humanism and America: an Intellectual History of English Colonisation 1500–1625* (Cambridge, 2003).

[22] Scott, *Algernon Sidney and the English Republic* chs. 2–3, 12–13; Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572–1651* (Cambridge, 1993).

[23] A point noted by David Loewenstein, *Representing Revolution in Milton and his Contemporaries* (Cambridge, 1991) p. 4. Loewenstein's response is, however, to restore the missing component, rather than focus upon the relationship between Christian and classical. The most important exception to this generalisation is the work of Worden (see, for instance, 'Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, and the Restoration', in Gerald Maclean (ed.), *Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration* (Cambridge, 1995); 'Classical Republicanism'. Yet even Worden has done more to distinguish the humanist and 'puritan' components of English republicanism than to integrate them. For an alternative emphasis prefiguring that developed here, see Scott, *Algernon Sidney and the English Republic*, ch. 2.

[24] Scott, *Algernon Sidney and the English Republic* pp. 17–30; Margo Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 21; Scott, *England's Troubles* ch. 11; Michael Baylor (ed.), *The Radical Reformation* (Cambridge, 1991).

shared definition of liberty. All did so in the church as well as the state (that is to say, all demanded liberty of conscience). It was the fact of a revolution within which liberty and virtue had powerful religious as well as political content which required these writers to connect a Graeco-Roman commitment to civic action to a Platonic epistemology and metaphysics. In the words of Sidney to Jean-Baptiste Lantin in Paris in 1677: 'après la Theologie, ou la connoisance de Dieu et de la Religion, il n'y avoit point de sciance qui fut plus digne de l'application d'un honneste homme, que la politique'.[25]

This is to emphasise the extent to which the intellectual and practical contexts of English republicanism were intertwined. The most important practical context was the military collapse of English monarchy. This had been prefigured by Stuart military impotence on the European stage between 1624 and 1629.[26] With rebellion in Scotland, and subsequently Ireland and England, it became politically immobilising. The English civil war was an unsuccessful attempt by the king to undo this disaster. In this respect Harrington correctly noted that '*the dissolution of this government caused the war, not the war the dissolution of this government*'.[27] Thus Marchamont Nedham spoke mockingly in 1645 of the need 'to fill up that *roome* in the *Monarchie*, which hath been too long *empty* . . . Where is King Charles? What's become of him? . . . it were best to send a *Hue and Cry* after him.'[28] As with the church, the drastic diminution of monarchy as a practical force pre-dated by some years the constitutional 'settling of the government of this nation for the future in way of a Republic, without King or House of Lords'.[29]

This demise of the crown had not only religious and political, but economic and social contexts. Most important was a state of fiscal weakness with its roots in the Europe-wide social and economic changes of the period 1540–1640, including price inflation. They lay more particularly in the failure of Tudor and early Stuart monarchs to respond to these successfully.[30] Meanwhile, it was in the localities that social, economic and

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[25] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Fr. MS 23254, Jean-Baptiste Lantin, 'Lantiniana' p. 101. On this Platonism see Pocock, 'England's Cato' pp. 917–21.

[26] Scott, *England's Troubles* chs. 3–6.

[27] James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, in *The Political Works of James Harrington*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge, 1977) [hereafter *Oceana*, in *Political Works*].

[28] *Mercurius Britanicus* no. 72, 24 February–3 March 1645, pp 575–6; *Mercurius Britanicus* no. 92, 28 July–4 August 1645, p. 825.

[29] Quoted in Austin Woolrych, 'Dating Milton's *History of Britain*', *Historical Journal* 36, 4 (1993) p. 933.

[30] Scott, *England's Troubles* chs. 3 and 16; Scott, 'What the Dutch Taught Us' pp. 4–6.

religious changes had been grappled with most keenly.[31] Local government survived the upheavals of 1640–60 and republican writing paid significant attention to the local government dimension. Equally, many of its themes reflected the longstanding struggle by a traditional society to respond to unsettling forces of social and economic change.[32] Drawing upon all of these contexts, republican writers attempted to oppose not only private interest politics, embodied by monarchy or tyranny, on behalf of the publicly interested virtues of a self-governing civic community. This was part of a more general critique of private interest society; an attempt, from pride, greed, poverty and inequality, to go beyond the mere word 'commonwealth' and reconstitute what Milton called 'the solid thing'.[33] At the same time, following successful parliamentary statebuilding between 1642 and 1649, many republican writers became preoccupied with the themes of empire and trade.[34] It is the power actually wielded by the English republic which helps to explain the otherwise surprising conjunction in many writers of the formidable moral forces of Plato and Machiavelli.

INTELLECTUAL CONTENT: ENDS AND MEANS

It is the second purpose of this study to offer a comparative thematic analysis of republican writing. Existing treatments have noted certain pre-occupations connecting the thought of Nedham and Harrington, Vane and Ludlow, or Milton and Sidney. Yet what are the principal distinguishing features of English republican thought? What were the points of similarity, and of difference? What is the intellectual framework within which these may be identified? It is in relation to these questions that we may note both the nature and extent of internal variety and, thereafter, of development over time.

One approach has been to study republican thought as language.[35] While descriptively useful, this is less satisfactory when deployed to include

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[31] In addition to Collinson, *De Republica* and Goldie, 'Unacknowledged Republic', see Steve Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, c.1550–1640* (Basingstoke, 2000); Michael Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England c.1550–1700* (Cambridge, 2000); Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven, Conn., 2000).

[32] Whitney R. D. Jones, *The Tudor Commonwealth 1529–1559* (London, 1970); Andrew McRae, *God Speed the Plough: the Representation of Agrarian England, 1500–1660* (Cambridge, 1996); Scott, *England's Troubles* chs. 10–12.

[33] John Milton, *Of Education* (1644) in *Complete Prose Works* vol. I, pp. 407–8.

[34] Scott, '"Good Night Amsterdam"'; David Armitage, 'The Cromwellian Protectorate and the Languages of Empire', *Historical Journal* 35, 3 (1992) pp. 534–5; Pincus, 'Machiavellian Moment'.

[35] See, for instance, Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time*; Skinner, 'Sir Thomas More's Utopia and the Language of Renaissance Humanism', in Pagden, *The Languages of Political Theory*.

some writers in, and exclude others from, a linguistically defined canon. No seventeenth-century republican wrote in one political language only, and most combined several, spanning the intellectual terrains of human-ism, Christianity, science and law.[36] Moreover, to identify the terminology deployed by a writer is not thereby to determine the use to which it was being put. Many of the most important early modern writers (includ-ing Machiavelli, Hobbes and Harrington) put conventional contemporary political language to startlingly unconventional use.[37] To this extent, draw-ing a distinction beloved of seventeenth-century radicals themselves, lin-guistic analysis may tell us more about the form of a contemporary text than about its substance. If so, a history of politics as language may not be best equipped to analyse what was, among other things, an anti-formal revolution of manners. This was precisely Milton's point in putting classi-cal republican language into the mouth of the republican moral anti-type Satan in *Paradise Lost*.[38]

A second approach is to focus upon conceptual content. The two most important republican concepts were liberty and virtue (or the virtues). It has been one ('Greek') view that 'it is as a politics of virtue that [English] republicanism most clearly defines itself'.[39] It has been a contrasting ('neo-Roman') view that it is a shared 'analysis of civil liberty' which 'constitute[s] the core of what is distinctive . . . [and] marks the[se writers] out as the protagonists of a particular ideology, even as the members of a single school of thought'.[40] In either case at least as much rigour needs to be applied to distinguishing the moral philosophies of Machiavelli, Nedham, Milton, Harrington and Sidney as has been employed in linking them. Thus the shared championship of austerity, frugality and activity over luxury, effemi-nacy and sloth was common to much ancient morality from Plato onwards and does not encapsulate Machiavelli's shocking new conception of *virtu*. If all these writers shared an exclusively 'neo-Roman' understanding of liberty, it is difficult to understand the central use made by all of them of Greek sources and examples.[41]

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[36] Scott, 'The Rapture of Motion' pp. 143–4; Scott, Review of Peltonen, *Classical Humanism*, Armitage et al. *Milton*, and Sidney, *Court Maxims*, in *English Historical Review* 62, 448 (1997); Conal Condren, *The Language of Politics in Seventeenth Century England* (Basingstoke, 1994).

[37] Scott, *England's Troubles* p. 326.

[38] J. C. Davis, 'Against Formality: One Aspect of the English Revolution', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 3, (1993). See chapter 8 below. Also see the different but not incompat-ible discussion of Milton's anti-formalism by William Walker in '*Paradise Lost* and the Forms of Government', *History of Political Thought* 22, 2 (2001).

[39] Worden, 'Marchamont Nedham' p. 46.   [40] Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* pp. 22–3.

[41] Worden, 'Marchamont Nedham' pp. 57–8, 70–1; Skinner, 'The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty' p. 306.

The range of English republican moral philosophy reflected not only
the complexity of the classical republican heritage, but also the diversity of
contemporary intellectual contexts. Adherents to the good old cause were
more effectively united by its practical context than by its philosophical
content. This is not to deny that we will discover very important shared
characteristics of this moral philosophy as a whole. One is a relationship
between liberty and the virtues (however understood) as one of means to
ends. In the virtues we are considering the positive moral good which the
republican experiment proposed to itself. To these virtues, liberty was the
indispensable precondition.[42] For some writers particularly influenced by
Roman sources and/or Machiavelli, those virtues had a further end in glory.
According to Aristotle the life of virtue (*eudaimonia*, usually translated as
'happiness') was itself the end (*telos*) of human life.

For their political realisation liberty and virtue required a constitutional
framework. The historiography of English republicanism has been dom-
inated by constitutional analysis. This reflects the influence not only of
Harrington's *Oceana* but of Fink's *The Classical Republicans*.[43] Yet for most
English republicans, constitutional prescription, where it existed, was far
less detailed than in Harrington and secondary to the enunciation of general
moral principles. This reflected aspects of the classical, humanist and radical
protestant content of this thought, and was both cause and consequence of
the interregnum's constitutional instability. Yet even such anti-formalism,
shared with Machiavelli, did not preclude constitutional generalisation.
Moreover, between 1653 and 1660, as instability threatened the republic,
a range of writers entered a debate concerning not simply the appropri-
ate constitution, but the role to be played within republican politics by
constitutional prescription.

In the *Discorsi* Machiavelli introduced a distinction between free states,
not simply in terms of their constitutional composition, but (by distinguish-
ing between two routes to *grandezza*) in relation to their ends. 'Either you
have in mind a republic that looks to founding an empire, as Rome did; or
one that is content to maintain the *status quo*. In the first case it is necessary
to do in all things as Rome did. In the second case it is possible to imitate

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[42] Scott, *England's Troubles* chs. 13–16.
[43] This is particularly evident in the work of Worden, for whom 'All . . . [English republicans] saw repub-
lican architecture as the necessary precondition of the recovery of liberty and virtue' ('Marchamont
Nedham' p. 46), and of Fukuda, for whom 'the essence of [Harrington's understanding of] ancient
prudence is to be identified as the Polybian idea of mixed government' (*Sovereignty and the Sword*
pp. 5–6).