The Historical Journal, 41, 4 (1998), pp. 987–1009 Printed in the United Kingdom

HARRINGTONIAN VIRTUE: HARRINGTON, MACHIAVELLI, AND THE METHOD OF THE *MOMENT**

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ABSTRACT. *This article presents a reinterpretation of James Harrington's writings. It takes issue with J. G. A. Pocock's reading, which treats him as importing into England a Machiavellian 'language of political thought'. This reading is the basis of Pocock's stress on the republicanism of eighteenth-century opposition values. Harrington's writings were in fact a most implausible channel for such ideas. His outlook owed much to Stoicism. Unlike the Florentine, he admired the contemplative life; was sympathetic to commerce; and was relaxed about the threat of 'corruption' (a concept that he did not understand). These views can be associated with his apparent aims: the preservation of a national church with a salaried but politically impotent clergy; and the restoration of the royalist gentry to a leading role in English politics. Pocock's hypothesis is shown to be conditioned by his method; its weaknesses reflect some difficulties inherent in the notion of 'languages of thought'.*

The progress of the English revolution was baffling and amazing to its contemporaries. Its very unaccountability helped to legitimate it; to Oliver Cromwell himself and many of his fellow puritans, the startling sequence of events was a sign of God's approval. In such a situation, a writer who accounted for the monarchy's collapse could hope for a receptive readership. James Harrington's achievement was not just to render what happened more comprehensible, but to support his story with a brilliant sociological conception. The ownership of land, he claimed, entailed control of military power, and hence the control of the state. During the middle ages, when ownership of land was shared between the king, the nobles, and the church, the history of England was a continual 'wrestling match' between the monarch and nobility. This 'Gothic balance' ended when Henry VII encouraged the break-up of large holdings; in the time of Henry VIII, the dissolution of the monasteries ensured that yet more wealth in land passed into the hands of the people. The upshot, in the reign of Charles I, was that the crown's pretensions had no military support, and that the monarchy was doomed as soon as it encountered armed resistance.

The paragraph above will have been recognized by many readers as nothing but a summary of an old-fashioned view of Harrington. To English scholars down to Trevor-Roper (scholars elsewhere were less content with this jejune

* I am grateful to Quentin Skinner for his comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

and insular account), it seemed entirely obvious that what was interesting in *Oceana* was what Hume called 'his general principle, *that the balance of power depends on that of property*'.[1] In this they were at one with his immediate audience. This was the aspect of his thought that was politically usable, not least because it lent itself to popularization. As is well documented, it drew on Francis Bacon's account of the nobility's decline;[2] it also supported the commonplace claim that the parliamentarian side was the party of the backbone of the nation: respectable small proprietors among the 'middling sort'.[3] Republican members of parliament not only welcomed his account of English history, but spoke about it in the House when opposing Richard Cromwell in 1659.[4] That June, an anonymous pamphlet could maintain that 'from the legal distribution and over-balance of propriety deriveth naturally all government. Which maxim hath had such a general reception, is so obvious to every capacity, and so manifested by experience, that it stands not in need of any further explanation.'[5] The troubles of the English commonwealth could easily, the author held, be cured, if 'Mr Harrington's writing be diligently and seriously read'.[6]

The economistic view of Harrington was not at all absurd, and has the obvious merit of echoing his reception by his own contemporaries. The problem that it raised – his strange anticipation of modern reductionist views – was solved by J. G. A. Pocock in 1957 in a famous book on 'English historical thought': the first of a series of writings that form one subject of this article. As Pocock reasonably pointed out, Harrington's principal concern was not the economy, but the control of armies in a post-feudal world. Like Machiavelli, his favourite political writer, he saw the history of states as a Polybian cycle of corruption, in which free soldier-citizens (the type of admirable human beings) were threatened by reduction to dependence. 'Viewed in this light', in Pocock's words, '*Oceana* is a Machiavellian meditation upon feudalism.'[7]

This was an innovative contribution to the history of historiography, and has of course been understood as such. Not everyone has understood, however, that Pocock's later work on Harrington was moulded by the same preoccupation with the pre-history of History; *The Machiavellian moment*, the undisputed masterpiece of Pocock's scholarly maturity, approached the arrival of republicanism in the Anglo-Saxon world as 'part of the journey of Western thought from the medieval Christian to the modern historical mode'.[8] Most

[1] Hume's own italics. David Hume, *Political essays* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 28. For a survey of the literature as it appeared in 1959, see Judith Shklar, 'Ideology hunting: the case of James Harrington', *American Political Science Review* 53, (1959), pp. 662–92.

[2] J. G. A. Pocock, *The ancient constitution and the feudal law: a study of English historical thought in the seventeenth century*, a reissue with a retrospect (Cambridge, 1987), p. 331.

[3] Brian Manning, *The English people and the English revolution* (2nd edn, London, 1991), esp. pp. 326–37, collects much evidence for this perception.

[4] *The diary of Thomas Burton*, ed. J. T. Rutt (4 vols., London, 1828), III, pp. 133–4, 146–8.

[5] *A common-wealth and common-wealthsmen asserted and vindicated* (1659), pp. 3–4.

[6] Ibid., p. 8

[7] Pocock, *Ancient constitution*, p. 147.

[8] J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian moment: Florentine political thought and the Atlantic republican tradition* (Princeton, 1975), p. viii.

readers of his brilliant re-description of early modern British political thought have failed to grasp how this approach conditions his historical conclusions. As Pocock's writings underpin a whole interpretation of Anglo-American culture, this failure has important implications.

I

The Machiavellian moment's opening chapter explained its core assumption: that 'the modern historical mode' involves a liberation from the previous, sub-Platonic, prejudice that knowledge in the fullest sense must be of universals.[9] Before this liberation, there was, of course, a literary genre, invented by the Greeks, which dealt with contingent and transient human events, but none of the Greeks had found a way to integrate their histories with their philosophy.[10] Though Aristotle was concerned with change, 'the process of change which the Aristotelian intellect singled out was that by which a thing came to be and then not to be... the being and not-being of a thing is not identical with the replacement of that thing by another thing'.[11] For Aristotelian thinkers, a mere succession of events was not a worthy object of attention, unless it manifested some universal rule.[12] These instincts were much reinforced by Christianity, especially in its Augustinian version, as Christians necessarily believed the only thing worth knowing was eternal. God intervened in time, but not, one might say, through it; he saved his fallen creatures 'by a separate sequence of acts of redemptive grace, sharply distinguished from and only mysteriously related to the happenings of history in the secular sense'.[13] Armed with these formulations of the essential features of the pre-modern view, Pocock set out to study the shift towards a sense that history – the knowledge of unique events in time – had just as much claim to be knowledge as anything else.

Pocock's approach to Harrington was based on a hypothesis concerning the beginnings of this shift:

> there is a historically resonant vocabulary in which politics is presented as 'the art of the possible' and therefore contingent, 'the endless adventure of governing men', the 'ship' sailing 'a bottomless and boundless sea'; and if we think of the domain of contingency as history, 'the play of the contingent, the unexpected and the unforeseen', it will appear that a powerful stimulus to the growth of secular historiography may arise from this view of politics...[14]

Pocock distinguished here between what he called 'the philosophical tradition', which seeks to understand 'political community' as an aspect of 'the universal order', and other, more pragmatic 'modes of thought'. *The Machiavellian moment* is concerned with three such modes, ways of imagining and recommending political arrangements without abstracting from their temporal setting. One of these ways of thinking depicts political structures as time's creation through experience; a second sees them pessimistically, as victims of

[9] Ibid., pp. 4–5. [10] Ibid., p. 6. [11] Ibid., p. 5. [12] Ibid., p. 5.
[13] Ibid., p. 7. [14] Ibid., p. 8.

corruption by *fortuna*, that is by the corrosions of contingent circumstance; the third and final mode is millenarian: it treats a particular structure as God's kingdom, a kingdom actualized on earth in ordinary time. For thinkers in these modes, there is an intrinsic connection between the notion of a polity and the idea that it is made or menaced by successions of particular events.

It is of great importance that these three modes together made up an 'intellectual equipment'; together they exhausted the possibilities for thinking about politics in time. Pocock is keen to emphasize 'the poverty of the modes of historical explanation available in the political thought of late medieval man'.[15] The postulate of his approach is that political activity could only then be understood as prudence guided by experience, as virtue menaced by fortune, or as participation in an eschatological drama. In trying to express this scheme he memorably lapses from his habitually torrential prose:

> Experience, prudence, and the arcana imperii; fortune + faith = providence; providence − faith = fortune; providence + prophecy = revealed eschatology; virtue and grace. These formulae constitute the model so far established of an intellectual equipment which lacked means of explicating the succession of particulars in social and political time, so that all responses to such particular occurrences must be found somewhat between the poles of experience and grace. We proceed to test the model…[16]

James Harrington's identity as part of the tradition that pictures political history as a struggle between virtue and *fortuna* is not so much the finding as the presupposition of Pocock's elaborate research. When he maintains, for instance, that Harrington was a 'civic humanist' in the spirit of those read by Hans Baron, he does not mean, and does not try to show, that Harrington devoted hours to studying Coluccio Salutati.[17] The claim that he is making is just that Harrington in one respect (his understanding of the character of human temporal experience) can usefully be classified with civic humanists. As it would be a curious politician who did not understand himself as making decisions in time, a classification of such attitudes is also an exhaustive classification of ways of thinking about politics.

Given that Pocock's classificatory scheme makes Harrington an isolated figure, it generates an interesting problem: the proper explanation of 'the naturalization of an alien stock in ground to which it was highly exotic'.[18] The wide acceptance of this scheme owes much to a desire to find non-liberal resources in the history of Anglo-American culture: to 'show that the English-speaking political tradition has been the bearer of republican and Machia-

[15] Ibid., p. 46.

[16] Ibid., p. 48.

[17] The evidence for such a claim would be extremely thin. He famously asserted, after all, that Machiavelli was 'the only politician' who had attempted to retrieve the insights of the ancients. Giannotti figured as 'the most excellent describer of the commonwealth of Venice' – a rather different type of accolade. (*The political works of James Harrington*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge, 1977), p. 161) – but even for this purpose, Contarini was preferred (p. 458). As Pocock himself has admitted (p. 161n), Giannotti was in any case distorted in Harrington's work (see also on this Anna Strumia, *L'immaginazione repubblicana: Sparta e Israele nel dibattito filosofico-politico dell' età di Cromwell* (Florence, 1991), p. 74). Guicciardini receives a solitary mention: an extremely vague citation on a narrow historical point (p. 443n).

[18] Harrington, *Works*, p. 15.

vellian, as well as constitutionalist, Lockean, and Burkean, concepts and values'.[19] Precisely because the humanist approach to history was so completely alien to the custom-ridden English, its presence in an English writer's works could function as a marker of the presence of republican ideas.

The reason that Harrington's thought was indispensable to Pocock's theories was that he seemed to 'bring about a synthesis of civic humanist thought with English political and social awareness, and of Machiavelli's theory of arms with a common law understanding of the importance of freehold property'.[20] This postulated synthesis has been an important foundation for readings of the eighteenth century that stress the republican nature of opposition thought on both sides of the North Atlantic Ocean; if Harrington was really the theorist of 'participatory virtue',[21] and landed property was best conceived as the 'material basis' of that virtue,[22] then spokesmen for the small proprietor, threatened by ministerial 'corruption', could be construed as civic humanists.[23] This article will argue that Harringtonian virtue had another character, and that the structure of his thought was altogether different from that discerned by Pocock among the Florentines. It therefore sets out the connection that Harrington saw between his central concepts of reason, virtue, interest, and law, before examining their application. One interesting conclusion is that his differences with Machiavelli had an extremely intimate relation to rejection of one radical ideal: a godly oligarchy, composed of the New Model Army along with its civilian supporters.

II

It is often asserted that English republican thought considerably post-dated the creation of a kingless English state. In a sense this is perfectly true, but in another, less demanding sense, the Commonwealth had always been equipped with a crude but quite plausible theory. The 'Act Abolishing the Kingly Office' explained it well enough:

> it is and hath been found by experience that the office of a King in this nation and Ireland, and to have the power thereof in any single person, is unnecessary, burdensome and dangerous to the liberty, safety and *public interest* of the people, and that for the most part use hath been made of the regal power and prerogative to oppress and impoverish and enslave the subject, and that usually and naturally any one person in such power *makes it his interest* to encroach upon the just freedom and liberty of the people, and to promote the setting up of their own will and power above the law.[24]

A reader of Pocock will notice the appeal to experience here; the mode of political thought, to use Pocockian terminology, is clearly in part that of custom. It is therefore not surprising that the act went on to stress that abolition

[19] Pocock, *Moment*, p. viii. [20] Ibid., p. viii. [21] Ibid., p. 397.
[22] Ibid., p. 386.
[23] Harrington, *Works*, p. 145. This point of course explains why Pocock places stress on Harrington as opposed to (say) Algernon Sidney.
[24] J. P. Kenyon, *The Stuart constitution, 1603–1688* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1986), p. 306. My italics.

of the monarchy was meant as a way for the nation 'to return to its just and ancient right of being governed by its own Representatives or National Meetings in council'.[25] This was a line of thought, accommodating drastic innovation within an understanding of the ancient constitution, which was of great importance, and to which we shall return. The core of the argument, though, seems more authentically republican, even in Pocock's terms. It is that royal power tends to corrupt, that kings 'make it their interest' to satisfy their personal desires at the expense of law and liberty and of 'the public interest of the people'.

This complex of ideas was obviously closely related to Harrington's two central definitions:

> government (to define it *de jure* or according to ancient prudence) is an art whereby a civil society of men is instituted and preserved upon the foundation of common right or interest, or (to follow Aristotle and Livy) it is the empire of laws and not of men.
>
> And government (to define it *de facto*, or according unto modern prudence) is an art whereby some man, or some few men, subject a city or a nation, and rule it according unto his or their private interest; which, because the laws in such cases are made according to the interest of a man or of some few families, may be said to be the empire of men and not of laws.[26]

A government that is legitimate (in other words a government 'of laws and not of men') is government according to the public interest. If Harrington's 'republican' ideas strengthen the theory behind the Act Abolishing the Kingly Office, it is by his insistence that policies subverting the public interest do not just involve or result in a breach of the law; they constitute the essence of illegality. What marked out proper commonwealths from other polities was that justice was their 'natural principle'.[27] Harrington had become more thoroughly republican by being more juristic.

One other new assumption strengthened the argument here, though Harrington was not to spell it out until his later, more polemical work, *The prerogative of popular government*, which was published late in 1657.[28] This was that private interest invariably dictates (not only 'usually and naturally') the behaviour of a country's governors. Though law is the production of the legislator's will, 'that will, whether of one or more or all, is not presumed to be, much less to act without a mover', and 'the mover of will is interest'.[29] In some moods he suggested this claim was philosophically based on the psychology of Thomas Hobbes (a man whose 'treatises of human nature, and of liberty and necessity ... are the greatest of new lights, and those which I have followed and shall follow'),[30] but Harrington would doubtless have upheld it anyway.[31] He

[25] Ibid., p. 306. [26] Harrington, *Works*, p. 161. [27] Ibid., p. 203.

[28] For the date of publication, see ibid., p. 82 and n. The possibility should be acknowledged that Harrington's thought developed in the intervening year. A history of his influence should certainly draw attention to the fact that the little-read *Prerogative* is more overtly Hobbesian in its psychology than *Oceana*. [29] Ibid., p. 401. See also ibid., p. 429. [30] Ibid., p. 423.

[31] One obstacle to holding that Harrington was Hobbesian through and through is that his later work. 'The mechanics of Nature' sets out a vitalistic theory (printed in *The Oceana of James*

knew a pre-Hobbesian tract by the Hispanophobic duc de Rohan, containing the completely Harringtonian idea that 'the princes command the people and the interest [sic] commands the prince'.[32] In Rohan's thought, however, analysis of politics in terms of interest was principally directed to foreign policy. Such an analysis was more subversive in thinkers who ventured to apply it to the internal structure of the state. This was the intellectual technique, unmasking the actions of monarchs in their own interest, that Harrington could learn from Boccalini (c. 1556–1613).

It was to Boccalini that he owed not just a general outlook on political affairs but something much more unmistakable: the doggedly facetious tone, in obvious imitation of the Italian's *Ragguagli di Parnasso*, that causes so much pain to modern readers.[33] In Boccalini's view, to write about 'reason of state' was always and inherently subversive of monarchical arrangements; 'princes abhor those writings, which treating of State-affairs, discover their souls, fashions, and inward intentions to the meaner sort'[34] – and this for the excellent reason that the inward intention unmasked was the pursuit of private interest. In one of his more boldly republican skits, Boccalini ironically reported that the princes on Parnassus were angered by an Aristotelian doctrine. They pointed out that

> if (as Aristotle had been bold to affirm) those princes were to be esteemed as tyrants, who intended more than their own profit than the like of their subjects, they knew not where that potentate, how good or ancient soever he were, could be found, who might not be concerned in that so universal definition.[35]

This was the situation that Harrington described as an empire of men not of laws.

The thesis of this article, in brief, is that what made it possible for Harrington to function both as theorist of virtue and as upholder of the rule of law was that both law and virtue were defined in terms of interest. Virtue was seen as action (not, interestingly, as a disposition) in favour of the common interest, and law as the constraint necessitating action of this type. As everybody was presumed to act on interest, the grand political problem was to set up such constraints that rulers were prevented from acting in their private interest, and acted for the common good instead. The problem was compounded by the fact that there is a group of natural governors placed upon earth by God, more talented than the general population, but just as liable to be corrupted. This problem

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Harrington and his other works, ed. John Toland (1700), pp. xlii–iv). Although, at the time that he wrote it, he suffered from some kind of mental illness, his fragmentary argument betrays no sign of this.

[32] Rohan, *A treatise of the interest of the princes and states of Christendom*, tr. H. H. (1640), p. 1. Rohan is almost certainly the 'French politician' referred to at Harrington, *Works*, p. 317.

[33] Parnassus is linked with Oceana at Harrington, *Works*, pp. 337–8.

[34] Boccalini, *I ragguagli di Parnasso*, tr. Henry Cary, earl of Monmouth (1657), p. 372.

[35] Ibid., p. 144.

was solved by the famous device of splitting 'the debate' from 'the result'. A senate composed of natural aristocrats would formulate proposals to promote the common good; the general populace, as represented in another House, would give a Yes/No answer to suggested legislation.[36] If backed by rotation of office and restrictions upon property in land, this would, he optimistically believed, prevent the aristocracy from using their position in self-interested ways.

It seems that Harrington himself regarded his proposed constraints as an artificial extension of Stoic natural law. He quoted both Grotius and Hooker to show that in the physical creation 'there is a common right, law of nature, or interest of the whole, which is more excellent, and so acknowledged to be by the agents themselves, than the right or interest of the parts only'.[37] The statesman therefore needed to develop 'such orders of government as, like those of God in nature, shall be able to constrain this or that creature to shake off that inclination which is more peculiar unto it, and take up that which regards the common good or interest'.[38]

The assumption that was most important here was the explicit equation of 'common right' or 'natural law' with 'common good' or 'interest of the whole'. When Harrington articulated this relationship, he normally made use of the concept of 'reason'. 'Reason', for Harrington, consisted in the process of divining interest; thus there were types of reason appropriate to types of interest:

> as first, there is private reason, which is the interest of a private man.
>
> Secondly, there is reason of state, which is the interest (or error, as was said by Solomon) of the ruler or rulers, that is to say of the prince, of the nobility, or of the people.
>
> Thirdly, there is that reason which is the interest of mankind or of the whole.[39]

This final type of reason was *recta ratio*, the ancient juristic expression for the objective right, reason expressed in human institutions. It was the set of principles dictating the only legitimate course of action:

> Mankind … must either be less just than the creature [that is, than brutes], or acknowledge also his common interest to be common right. And if reason be nothing else but interest, and the interest of mankind be the right interest, then the reason of mankind must be right reason.[40]

Within an English context, such language had a powerful resonance, as English common lawyers had come to conceive of their system as 'reason itself', or 'right reason', or as 'the perfection of reason [its realization]'. This view was the ultimate basis for the pressure they exerted to see that the republican arrangements conformed as far as possible (in having, for example, a single

[36] The system he suggests is not, of course, analogous to the image that he uses of two girls dividing a cake. A girl who cuts a cake inequitably incurs a natural punishment if she has second choice. The Harringtonian senate is running no such risk in making a self-interested proposal.

[37] Harrington, *Works*, p. 171. [38] Ibid., p. 172. [39] Ibid., p. 171.

[40] Ibid., pp. 171–2.

head of the executive) to the requirements of existing law: like 'your tailor', as Harrington put it, 'if he should desire you to fit your body unto his doublet'.[41] To claim that republican orders were based upon right reason was thus to claim they were in fact what the ancient constitution was in theory: that they were more legitimate than existing English law.

The Harringtonian view of natural law as principles securing the common interest of the universe is obviously Stoic in its general character. It is therefore unsurprising that virtue was connected with interest and law by means of an ingenious invocation of Stoic psychological ideas. For Harrington, like Hobbes, a commonwealth could always be presented as an artificial man. For both of them this image had the same convenience: it showed that forms of government were mortal, and that the obligation of allegiance should not outlast its object; royalists were entitled to obey a kingless state because the English monarchy was dead.[42] When Harrington elaborated on this simile, he chose to concentrate upon the battle of passion and reason to control the human will. The victory of reason resulted in virtuous action ('those actions of a man that are virtue')[43] and to be virtuous was to be free: 'whatever was reason in the contemplation of a man, being brought forth by his will into action, is virtue and the freedom of soul'.[44] It should be noted, once again, that to be virtuous, for Harrington, was not a disposition but an action, and that this strange philosophy was rigorously applied, especially in its analogue within the commonwealth. The empire of laws not of men was government promoting the public (not some private) interest. The rule of laws (the liberty enjoyed by commonwealths) was the product of the victory of reason: it was in fact the counterpart of virtue (which is freedom) in the personality:

> if the liberty of a man consist in the empire of his reason, the absence whereof would betray him unto the bondage of his passions; then the liberty of a commonwealth consisteth in the empire of her laws, the absence whereof would betray her unto the lusts of tyrants.[45]

The 'empire of laws' was therefore the rule of right reason, which was government directed to the common interest.

This rule of reason in the polity had two quite unrelated preconditions: the 'goods of fortune' and the 'goods of the mind'.[46] The former have given no trouble to any of his readers; they are riches, considered as the basis of military power, and therefore of what he calls 'empire'.[47] A stable commonwealth will give most of its lands to the people, and therefore guarantee that they have

[41] Ibid., p. 187. Cf. 're-imposing the yoke so lately cast off that this pack &c. may not alter the style and form of their writs' (William Sprigge, *A modest plea for an equal commonwealth* (1659), p. 7). On this theme see further Alan Cromartie, *Sir Matthew Hale: law, religion, and natural philosophy* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 58–88.

[42] Harrington, *Works*, p. 203.

[43] Ibid., p. 170.

[44] Ibid., p. 169.

[45] Ibid., p. 170.

[46] *Bona fortunae* is a common phrase for Aristotelian external goods, often employed in contrast to *bona corporis* and *animae*. See, for example, Louis Le Roy, *Aristotle's politics or discourses of government* (1598), p. 352; Aquinas, *In octo libros politicorum Aristotelis expositio*, ed. R. M. Spiazzi (Rome, 1966), p. 341.

[47] Harrington, *Works*, p. 163.

military control. The goods of the mind have received much less attention, but Harrington explains them well enough: they are 'virtues' either 'natural or acquired ... as wisdom, prudence and courage', and their possessors have 'authority';[48] authority can be defined as 'the influence of virtue' upon the government.[49] Here he was resting on what seems to have been an authentically Roman distinction:[50] he was able to quote Livy, for example, about the admirable King Evander, a monarch who governed his people 'magis auctoritate quam imperio'.[51] The causal chain thus runs from reason in the individual soul, 'brought forth into action' as virtue, to right deliberation about the common interest, enacted (the pun seems appropriate) by the commonwealth as law. These points could be expressed with an exhilarating density:

> Now government is no other than the soul of a nation or city; wherefore that which was reason in the debate of a commonwealth, being brought forth by the result, must be virtue; and for as much as the soul of a city or nation is the sovereign power, her virtue must be law. But the government whose law is virtue and whose virtue is law, is the same whose empire is authority, and whose authority is empire.[52]

To recapitulate the argument: virtue is virtuous action, the fruit of contemplation in the individual; law, when it has authority, is produced by the virtuous action that is rational debate. As soon as this chain is spelt out, one contrast with Machiavelli glares from the page. The type of humanism that was seen as most significant by Pocock and Baron was vehement in prizing an active, that is, civic way of life, over a life of useless *otium*. It was by their involvement in political affairs that Florentines were to achieve the highest form of life for human beings, and also, in the terms of Pocock's scheme, to face the slings and arrows of *fortuna*. It is thus of great importance that Harrington's picture of virtue as the precipitate of contemplation was totally un-Machiavellian, and that the singularity Pocock identified dissolves when it is properly inspected.

For Harrington's own vision of personality would be compatible with scorn for active political life; the soul, 'whose life or motion is perpetual contemplation', achieves 'felicity' on earth so far as reason vanquishes the passions.[53] He probably intended to rebut the Hobbesian view that there is no felicity in life beyond the satisfaction of the passions,[54] but the effect was to suggest that happiness was Stoic *apatheia*; a Stoic virtue based on contemplation was obviously hard to reconcile with Machiavelli's *virtù*, a concept involving

[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., p. 169.
[50] For a discussion of 'auctoritas', see J. P. V. Balsdon, 'Auctoritas, dignitas, otium', *Classical Quarterly*, n.s., 10 (1960), pp. 43–50.
[51] Harrington, *Works*, p. 163.
[52] Ibid., p. 170.
[53] Ibid., p. 169.
[54] 'Continual success in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth, that is to say, continual prospering, is that men call felicity; I mean the felicity of this life. For there is no such thing as perpetual tranquillity of mind, while we live here; because life itself is but motion, and can never be without desire, nor without fear, no more than without sense.' Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge, 1991), p. 46.

the primacy of the ends of the *vita activa*. The difference between these wildly divergent philosophies was more than theoretically important, for 'Harringtonian virtue' was central to his argument for some important practical conclusions. His views about religion, the political role of the gentry, and the all-important notion of corruption put him in disagreement not just with Machiavelli's thought, but also with the purposes of English radicals. Before returning to the character of 'Harringtonian virtue', it will be helpful to explore the highly conservative uses to which it was put.

III

In Machiavelli's works, religion's necessary and proper role was simply to intensify commitment to the values of the city.[55] A set of healthy *ordini* would not outlast their maker unless the fear that he inspired was backed by fear of God.[56] It was thus a wise man's duty to encourage religious belief, especially belief in miracles, because of its effectiveness in motivating virtuous behaviour.[57] If Italy in Machiavelli's time had lost its former *virtù* this was the consequence of a religion which 'made it seem as if the earth was feminized and Heaven disarmed' (the metaphors are highly characteristic of a personal system of values more virile than humane).[58] The pagans had believed that earthly honour was the highest good,[59] but Christianity, at least as generally interpreted, preferred contemplation to action.[60]

In Harrington's writings, by contrast, man is and ought to be contemplative, and his religious impulse arises naturally from contemplation: 'to have an impulse, or to be raised upon contemplation of natural things, to the adoration or worship of God, is natural to man as he is a philosophical creature'.[61] This might suggest religion was something for sages alone; in fact, it seems, however, that every man is part philosopher, for 'every man, either unto his terror or consolation, hath some sense of religion'.[62] It follows that 'a government that is regardless of religion is not adequate nor satisfactory unto man's nature';[63] the practice of religion – and not just any religion but one of their own choice – is a good that human beings invariably seek. They will rebel against a government denying them this freedom whenever they have the military capacity to do so.[64] This does not mean, surprisingly, that there is no state church; precisely because religion is natural to man, the government must use its power in order to make correct beliefs available to every citizen. Most people have neither the time nor the technical learning to read the Bible in the original, and so a learned clergy, supported by the whole community, is

[55] *Discorsi*, II, ii. [56] Ibid., I, xi. [57] Ibid., I, xii.

[58] '… paia che si sia effeminato il mondo, e disarmato il Cielo'. *Opere di Nicolò Machiavelli*, ed. Sergio Bertelli (11 vols., Verona, 1968–82), I, p. 237.

[59] Christianity 'fa stimare meno l'onore del mondo: onde i Gentili, stimandolo assai, ed avendo posto in quello il sommo bene, erano nelle azioni loro più feroci.' Ibid., p. 236.

[60] 'La nostra religione ha glorificato più gli uomini umili e contemplativi, che gli attivi'. Ibid., p. 237. [61] Harrington, *Works*, p. 837. [62] Ibid., p. 766. [63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid., p. 844.

necessary for their religious needs.[65] Denial of this practical assistance is just as much denial of liberty of conscience as positive religious persecution.[66]

He even went so far as to assert that without some state provision, the very possibility of genuine religion is endangered:

> a commonwealth not making provision of men from time to time knowing in the original languages wherein the Scriptures were written, and versed in those antiquities whereunto they so frequently relate that the true sense of them dependeth in a great part upon that knowledge, can never be secure that she shall not lose the Scripture and by consequence her religion, which to preserve she must institute some method of this knowledge, and some use of such as have acquired it, which amounteth unto a national religion.[67]

State-sponsored intellectual life could be expected to result in the upholding of the true religion, so long as the salaried scholars were denied coercive power. Their thinking would, however, be distorted as soon as they acquired the power to persecute dissent: as soon, in Harringtonian terms, as 'interest' was potentially an influence on their thought. This was indeed the only way religion was corrupted: 'religion is not naturally subservient to any corrupt or worldly interest, for which cause, to bring it into subjection to interest, it must be coercive'.[68] If citizens were to enjoy their natural religious fulfilment, it followed there must be a state religion, but that it should be wholly powerless.[69]

This principled defence of a national church and of a hireling clergy put Harrington at odds with radical thinking on one of the great issues of the moment. In this respect, his views on the national church epitomized his broader politics. For Harrington demanded leadership, in secular as in religious matters, from the virtues of an aristocracy, virtues that were the outcome of rational contemplation.[70] A talented Few enjoyed a divine right to govern, as 'a natural aristocracy diffused by God throughout the whole body of mankind … and therefore such as the people have not only a natural but a positive obligation to make use of as their guides'.[71] This group could be relied on to give valuable advice so long as it was shielded from the temptation of personal gain. In the religious sphere, the virtuous Few were drawn from a graduate clergy, in civil affairs from the gentry.[72]

[65] Ibid., pp. 217–18, 306.

[66] 'The major part of the people, being in matters of religion enabled to be their own leaders, will in such cases therefore have a public leading; or, being debarred of their will in that particular, are debarred of their liberty of conscience.' Ibid., p. 845.

[67] Ibid., pp. 217–18.

[68] Ibid., p. 845.

[69] It should be acknowledged, however, that Harrington excepts from toleration popery, idolatry, and (more surprisingly, given the very recent readmission of the Jews) Judaism (ibid., p. 217). Even in 1659 'no religion being contrary unto or destructive of Christianity' was to be tolerated (p. 681).

[70] The secular role of the leisured is valuably stressed in Strumia, *L'immaginazione repubblicana*, p. 48.

[71] Harrington, *Works*, p. 173. See also p. 416.

[72] As Matthew Wren remarked, he 'appear[ed] very solicitous [the gentry] should still be current, and not be refused in the uses of the commonwealth' (Wren, *Monarchy asserted* (1659), p. 179).

Perhaps as a reaction against some earlier scholarship which treated him as nothing but a spokesman for the gentlemen of England, Harrington's admiration for his class has recently been rather underplayed. In fact, he flatly stated that 'such ... as have gotten any fame in the civil government of a commonwealth, or by the leading of her armies, have been gentlemen'.[73] His reason was a very simple one: 'that the politics can be mastered without study, or that the people can have leisure to study, is a vain imagination'.[74] Though this might seem to justify a political role for the leisured, irrespective of hereditary status, it would appear that Harrington had something more traditional in mind. The ideal politicians were not just nature's gentlemen, but gentlemen by birth (which Harrington described as 'ancient virtue'); he wanted his readers to know that the notable Roman plebeians were really drawn from noble families, 'being of known descents and of equal virtues, save only that they were excluded from the name by the usurpation of the patricians'.[75] This was a minor reason for placing limits upon landed wealth but not on other assets. Hereditary gentlemen, debarred by the agrarian from expanding their holdings of land, would turn their energies to public life, 'an industry less greasy or more noble', in preference to going into trade.[76]

It was therefore quite predictable that Harrington was much disturbed by Machiavelli's attitude towards a leisured class. He made repeated reference to *Discorsi* I 55, where Machiavelli denounced a group he spoke about as *gentiluomini*, a class who lead a life of *otium* on the basis of the rents from their estates.[77] The mischief is compounded when such people have castles as well, but Machiavelli's principal objection, as Harrington correctly understood, was to the idleness of their existence. Venetian noblemen (whom Machiavelli thought more admirable) were *gentiluomini* in name alone, because their possessions were largely in tradable goods (a form of wealth, presumably, demanding some attention from its proprietor).[78]

In view of the anxieties expressed by 'neo-Harringtonians' about the softening effect of economic progress, it seems well worth observing, at this point, that Harrington actually favoured the growth of a commercial civilization. In this, of course, he differed from Machiavelli, who saw great merit in a state that kept its individual people poor.[79] Side-stepping an effective point by his critic Matthew Wren about the sheer discomfort of the Spartan way of life, he asked if he had ever 'opened his mouth against plum-pottage, gilded coaches, pages, lackeys, fair manor houses, good tables, rich furniture, full purses, universities,

[73] Harrington, *Works*, p. 183.
[74] Ibid., p. 257.
[75] Ibid., p. 183; see also the discussion at pp. 259–62.
[76] Ibid., p. 238.
[77] 'Per chiarire questo nome di gentiluomini quale e' sia, dico che gentiluomini sono chiamati quelli che oziosi vivono delle rendite delle loro possessioni abbondantemente, sanza avere cura alcuna o di coltivazione o di altra necessaria fatica a vivere.' Machiavelli, *Opere*, I, p. 209. See Harrington, *Works*, pp. 166, 234, 258, 261.
[78] Machiavelli, *Opere*, I, p. 211. Harrington cited this point to show a gentry could be very useful, so long as its *landed* property did not exceed the balance (Harrington, *Works*, p. 261).
[79] 'La più utile cosa che si ordini in uno vivere libero è che si mantenghino i cittadini poveri' (Machiavelli, *Opere*, I, p. 393).

good benefices, scarlet robes, square caps, rich jewels, or said anything that would not multiply all this?'[80]

The banishment of usury by Moses, and of coinage itself by Lycurgus, were disagreeable necessities in countries where trade was unknown, and where the stock of land available was small and much divided; 'but in a country where merchandise is exercised, [usury] is so far from being destructive that it is necessary, else that which might be of profit to the commonwealth would rust unprofitably in private purses'.[81] It would have been consistent with these highly capitalistic principles to welcome the emergence of the leisured *rentier*. It was, at all events, the merit of a nobleman of the traditional type that he combined his property (a significant stake in the country) with leisure to devote to public service:[82]

> Your mechanics, till they have first feathered their nests – like the fowls of the air, whose whole employment is to seek their food – are so busied in their private concernments that they have neither leisure to study the public, nor are safely to be trusted with it, *quia egestas haud facile habetur sine damno*, because a man is not faithfully embarked in this kind of ship if he have no share in the freight. But if his share be such as to give him leisure, by his private advantage, to reflect upon that of the public, what other name is there for this sort of men, being *à leur aise*, but (as Machiavel you see calls them) nobility?[83]

Harrington's attitude to virtue and corruption was thus the opposite of Machiavelli's. A central Machiavellian belief was that necessity engenders virtue, but Christianity had introduced 'uno ambizioso ozio'.[84] The cultured diplomat and amateur playwright went out of his way to acknowledge that early republican Rome was an uncivilized community of virtually indigent peasants, impelled to their tremendous feats by superstition,[85] poverty,[86] and fear of being slaughtered or enslaved.[87] A city that was founded, as a great city must be, upon a fertile site, would need to establish some rigorous laws to institutionalize necessity, and counteract the tendency of these advantages to breed corruption.[88] For Harrington, by contrast, prosperity and leisure, so far from being a threat, were the natural foundation of the virtue of the Few. This difference explains what might be thought a very puzzling intellectual failure. As Harrington freely confessed, he did not really understand the Machiavellian concept of corruption:

> a people (saith Machiavel) that is corrupt is not capable of a commonwealth; but in showing what a corrupt people is, he hath either involved himself or me, nor can I otherwise come out of the labyrinth than by saying that, the balance altering, a people, a people, as to the foregoing government, must of necessity be corrupt; but corruption in this sense signifieth no more than that the corruption of one government (as in natural bodies) is the generation of another.[89]

[80] Harrington, *Works*, p. 466. [81] Ibid., p. 407. [82] Ibid., p. 261.
[83] Ibid., p. 259. [84] Machiavelli, *Opere*, I, p. 94. [85] *Discorsi*, I, xi–xiv.
[86] Ibid., III, xxvi. [87] Machiavelli, *Opere*, II, p. 78.
[88] '…quanto a quell'ozio che le arrecasse il sito, si debbe ordinare che a quelle necessità le leggi la constringhino, che il sito non la constrignesse'. Ibid., I, p. 97.
[89] Harrington, *Works*, p. 202. For another use of corruption in this sense, see ibid., p. 162.

This sense of corruption as relative to types of government was clearly quite inadequate as an account of Machiavelli's thought. As even Harrington could recognize, the symptoms of corruption the Florentine deplored (adultery, luxury, ambition) would be condemned by any moralist.[90] In order to escape this difficulty, he tried to read Machiavelli as arguing that morals were determined by the prevailing balance of dominion:

> whereas I am not ignorant that the corruption which he meaneth is in manners, this also is from the balance. For the balance, swaying from monarchical into popular, abateth the luxury of the nobility and, enriching the people, bringeth the government from a more private unto a more public interest, which, coming nearer, as hath been shown, unto justice and right reason, the people upon a like alteration is so far from such corruption of manners as should render them incapable of a commonwealth, that of necessity they must thereby contract such reformation of manners as will bear no other kind of government.[91]

This passage is obscure, perhaps because its author was uncertain of his meaning; it seems to say, however, that the manners which support a commonwealth depend upon the 'balance', that is upon a proper distribution of property in land. The trouble surely springs from a tension between a Spartan/Machiavellian conception of corruption, which treats all forms of wealth as dangerous, and Harrington's own narrower obsession with the sources of political dependence. As readers will have noticed, 'luxury' was a danger in the nobility (this possibly supplies another reason for limiting the size of their estates), but there was no objection to 'enriching' of the populace in general. His talk of the danger of luxury was anyway extremely inconsistent; in other moods he promised his aristocracy not only generous salaries, but limitless possessions in conquered provinces.[92] His central point must be his usual one: that people who are properly informed will always lay claim to their freedom whenever they have the military capacity to do so.[93]

The nub of Harrington's misunderstanding was seen in the way that he treated his mentor's use of the word *ordini*. Good *ordini* and *leggi*, in Machiavelli's view, both presupposed and moulded good *costumi*: a city's more or less explicit constitutional-cultural arrangements depend upon and help to reproduce the level of public spirit by which they are sustained.[94] A set of *ordini* designed for a virtuous population would thus be ineffective if not harmful when faced with a citizen body which had become corrupt in its *costumi*.[95] An increase in corruption (that is, in the desire for selfish gain) could not be dealt with simply by new *leggi*, rules, previously unnecessary, against ambition or adultery; if the corruption were to be reversed, it would require new *ordini* as well, adapted to the moral state to which the people had degenerated.[96] There was thus an important distinction between *ordini* (the package of constitutional-cultural arrangements a given situation seemed to need) and *leggi* (ad hoc rules, designed for moral damage limitation). The former must be sensitive to the

[90] Machiavelli, *Opere*, I, p. 144. [91] Harrington, *Works*, p. 202. [92] Ibid., p. 471.
[93] This view is clearest from the *System of politics*, ch. I (Harrington, *Works*, pp. 834–5).
[94] Machiavelli, *Opere*, I, p. 143. [95] Ibid., pp. 144–5. [96] Ibid.

existing level of corruption, and where they are successful (which is rare) they must to some extent remake the moral nature of the citizens, restoring them to the unselfishness of ancient Romans and the modern Germans. Thus *ordini* when taken as a whole are capable of being more radically transformative than individual *leggi*; to use the central Harringtorian concept, it is in fact political and cultural arrangements that give (or ought to give) us 'interests', and not the other way round.[97] The aims of Machiavelli's contemporaries or ours would probably be better realized in Nero's Rome than in the elder Cato's, but it is precisely those aims which constitute a person as corrupt.[98]

Though Harrington also distinguished between orders and mere laws, his attitudes were really entirely different. The orders that he speaks of are fairly similar to Machiavelli's; they are the nation's fundamental laws, while 'laws' (the natural province of the lawyers) are lesser regulations, including those improving the nation's moral state; a writer praising the Athenian laws is said to 'speak of those laws which regarded manners, not of those orders which concerned the administration of the commonwealth'.[99] This was, no doubt, a defensible view of Machiavelli's distinction; what was totally unMachiavellian was his complete indifference to the need to vary the orders in accordance with the level of corruption. Where Machiavellian *ordini* set out to make people unselfish, the Harringtonian 'orders' presupposed their ordinary selfish motivation, and used it as the motor of the collective good. Even the Harringtonian faith that laws could promise a long-term improvement in general standards of behaviour seems rather at odds with the tenor of his thought.[100] It is interesting, for instance, that unlike most radicals, he thought that public office should be rewarded with high salaries.[101]

The reason Harrington could not or would not understand the Machiavellian concept of corruption was probably its obvious potential for justifying rule by puritans. *Oceana* is normally read as a last-ditch attempt to stave off a Cromwellian or Stuart monarchy, but its main polemical thrust is anti-oligarchic. So far from admiring the Rump, he chose to classify it with history's most notorious collective tyrannies, the Thirty Tyrants and the decemvirs.[102] His verdict on its record was a stern one, only a little mitigated by allowance for its victories in war:

[97] This point owes much to J. C. Davis, 'Pocock's Harrington: grace, nature and art in the classical republicanism of James Harrington', *Historical Journal*, 24 (1981), pp. 683–97, and idem, *Utopia and the ideal society: a study of English Utopian writing, 1516–1700* (Cambridge, 1987), especially his helpful classification of possible ideal societies.

[98] We are told the ancient Roman way of life 'faceva manco desiderabili le ricchezze' (Machiavelli, *Opere*, I, p. 393).

[99] Harrington, *Works*, p. 299. It is true that he is capable of saying 'give us good orders, and they will make us good men' (p. 205), but this over-compresses the process.

[100] References to the possibilities of education are mostly to be found in *Oceana*; they play no part at all in *A system of politics*. This may be further evidence that he became more Hobbesian over his short career.

[101] Harrington, *Works*, pp. 293–4. Contrast Nedham, *The excellency of a free state* (1656), p. 26; John Streater, *A glympse of that jewel, judicial, just, preserving libertie* (1653), sig. A2+1v.

[102] Harrington, *Works*, pp. 205–6.

a council without a balance[103] is not a commonwealth, but an oligarchy; and every oligarchy, except she be put to the defence of her wickedness or power against some outward danger, is factious. Wherefore, the errors of the people being from their government (which maxim in the politics, bearing a sufficient testimony unto itself, is also proved by Machiavel), if the people of Oceana have been factious the cause is apparent.[104]

The remedy was to be sought from 'that most victorious captain and incomparable patriot Olphaus Megaletor [Oliver Cromwell]', who was to play the role of legislator.

The appropriate contrast here must surely be with Marchamont Nedham's evolving defence of the Rump, the more so because Harrington and Nedham had many superficial points in common.[105] In Nedham's semi-official *The case of the commonwealth of England* (1650), he typified the writers on the Engagement in seeing the government's title to power as based on the outcome of war, and thus, if anything, on providence. He saw the situation as that which obsessed Machiavelli: a new republic threatened by the corruption of its populace. He knew, and had no trouble understanding, the Machiavellian dictum that a corrupted people cannot be made lastingly free,[106] but he did not look forward to an English Romulus. Instead, he put his faith in the army as a whole, along with its civilian supporters, a group who gave the commonwealth 'a party of its own throughout the nation, men of valour and virtue, free from those corruptions of excess and riot, and sensible of liberty'.[107] This virtuous minority would have to rule by force until their less admirable neighbours had been re-educated.[108]

Mercurius Politicus, his propaganda sheet, fed extracts of his pamphlet to the public into the spring of 1652. As this material ran out, however, he started to run leaders with a rather different tone, and with rather different enemies in mind. These leaders, when he published them in 1656 (as *The excellency of a free state, or the right constitution of a commonwealth*) were given an introduction which bravely attacked the suggestion that Cromwell should govern the nation by military power.[109] Instead of stressing that all governments were founded upon victory in war, these pieces took the view that only governments elected by the people could be legitimate. 'In all well-ordered governments', he wrote, '[the legislative power] hath ever been lodged in a succession of the supreme councils … of a nation'.[110] This was only the first of a number of doctrines that they shared with *Oceana*. Like Harrington, he took from Machiavelli the notion that the people's grasp of their own interests ('they know the shoe where it wrings') was the best guarantee of liberty; like Harrington, again, he wanted

[103] It is unclear if 'balance' is being used in Harrington's technical sense.

[104] Harrington, *Works*, p. 206.

[105] The difference between Harrington and Nedham is rightly stressed in Jonathan Scott, 'The rapture of motion: James Harrington's republicanism', in Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Political discourse in early modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1993).

[106] Nedham, *The case of the commonwealth of England*, ed. P. A. Knachel (Charlottesville, 1969), p. 111.

[107] Ibid., p. 114.

[108] Ibid. (citing *Discorsi*, I, xvii).

[109] Nedham, *The excellency*, sig. A2v.

[110] Ibid., p. 212.

the people 'continually trained up in the exercise of arms, and the militia lodged only in the people's hands'.[111] But though he modified his work in order to defend against a Caesar, he was consistent in his view that the greatest political problem was keeping the supreme authority in those who 'have appeared most eminent and active in the establishment and love of freedom'.[112] Virtue considered as a disposition was seen as a title to power.

Nedham entirely typified the English republican writers in facing the unpleasant truth that most of the nation would rather have the Stuart monarchy, along with some version or other (prelatical or presbyterian) of its intolerant church.[113] Nedham's own principles were or became extremely democratic (he even put in a good word for the Athenians),[114] but he was driven to support an oligarchy of the virtuous; if Harrington was to avoid a similar conclusion, he had to face up to the problem described in the title of one of his pamphlets, *A discourse upon this saying: the spirit of a nation is not to be trusted with liberty; lest it introduce monarchy, or invade the liberty of conscience* (1659).

His answer was a strange one, exploiting the peculiarities of his determinist psychology. He did not attempt to deny that popular opinion would favour a return to monarchy, and even to religious persecution; the beauty of the orders that he favoured was that this did not matter, and would not matter even if the nation's representative assemblies were totally made up of royalists.[115] His principle that human wills are moved by interest was linked with an extraordinary faith that human beings can be brought to understand their interests correctly. A proper debating procedure would guarantee that monarchy could never be brought in

> For the senate can never come to propose anything unto the people, without first agreeing upon debate what it is that they will propose; nor is it possible that such a debate should be brought unto any end, but by reasons thereunto conducing. Now, it must not only be impossible to find reasons for the restitution of the monarchy, but the reasons why monarchy ought not to be restored must be obvious, not only in regard that it is quite contrary to the interest of the nation and of these assemblies, but to the interest, ten to one, of every particular man in either of these assemblies.[116]

Even if it should happen that the senate, 'the wisdom of the nation', advanced such a proposal, the representative, 'the interest of the nation' would surely veto it. The populace at large would have six weeks for pondering and

[111] Ibid., p. 173.

[112] Ibid., p. 191; see also the concluding warning against 'malignants' and 'Laodiceans' (p. 244).

[113] This feeling only intensified over the decade, as the dates of its best-known expressions strongly suggest: Henry Vane, *A healing question* (1656); William Sprigge, *A modest plea for an equal commonwealth* (1659); Henry Stubbe, *An essay in defence of the good old cause* (1659); John Milton, *The ready and easy way to establish a free commonwealth* (1660). From a slightly different perspective, see Richard Baxter's gloomy views, expressed in his attack on Harrington, about the likely outcome of a democratic vote. Baxter, *A holy commonwealth, or political aphorisms* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 143.

[114] Nedham, *Excellency*, p. 2.

[115] The clearest explanation of this point is Harrington, *Works*, p. 825.

[116] Ibid., p. 798.

discussing its impact on their several interests.[117] Although they were not to be trusted to formulate the question that they answered, the sum of their perceptions, as registered by ballot 'upon mature debate', quite simply *was* the common interest. A people 'under good orders' were 'the sharpest sighted of any government whatsoever'[118] because this type of ballot was really a technique for gathering and summing information.

A Harringtonian society would have a striking range of liberal freedoms, along with opportunities for the display of virtue in public political life. All Harringtonian citizens could worship as they wished, work as they wished, and even invest as they wished (except in land). All those (except the lawyers and the clergy) with incomes of £100 p.a. were eligible for sitting in the senate where they could 'show the eminence of their parts'.[119] The rest, except for servants, enjoyed a part in the elaborate drills enacting the perfection of the system. But though one can concede to Pocock's theories that the militarized ritual of the ballots is wholly Machiavellian in spirit, the view of personality on which the republic was based could not have been more different. The point is probably best made by the notorious image of the cats

> set in such frames, so tied and so ordered, that the poor creatures could make no motion to get loose, but the same caused one to turn the spit, another to baste the meat, a third to skim the pot and a fourth to make green sauce. If the frame of your commonwealth be not such as causeth everyone to perform his certain function as necessarily as this did the cat to make green sauce it is not right.[120]

This rigidly deterministic vision explains the Harringtonian insistence that virtue is activity and not a disposition. If virtue is the quality of playing one's appointed civic role, the cats can be said to show virtue appropriate to their stations in moving, as they have to, in such a way the kitchen's work is done. The Harringtonian citizen shows virtue, virtue as action not as disposition, in acting as determined by his private interests. The English populace might be corrupt, in Nedham's or in Machiavelli's sense, but this would not prevent them, even the royalists, from acting to promote the common good. One obvious advantage of this view, from Harrington's caste-bound perspective, was that a high proportion of the gentry, excluded by their former loyalties, could thus be readmitted to their place in public life.

[117] Ibid., pp. 799–800. Most readers miss Harrington's contrast at this point between 'debate in those that are of the representative' (which is legitimate) and 'debate in the representative' (which is not).

[118] Ibid., p. 798.

[119] Epimonus de Garrula's complaint that the Venetian ballot excludes any chance 'to know and be known, show his parts and improve them' (ibid., p. 242) has been discussed by Pocock in Phillipson and Skinner, *Political discourse*, p. 405) as a valid criticism of Harrington's utopian mechanization of English politics. This possibly concedes too much. Epimonus himself would probably not be granted the chance 'to show his parts and improve them', but this could reasonably be thought a merit of the Harringtonian system.

[120] Harrington, *Works*, p. 744. Quoted with some horror by Davis, 'Pocock's Harrington', p. 696; Scott, 'Rapture of motion', pp. 159–60.

IV

From a practical political perspective, the relevance of Harringtonian virtue was that it helped to license a gentry-dominated polity. On a more theoretical level, Harrington's disagreement with the activist republican tradition was based upon a deep misapprehension about the relation of polity to personality. To Aristotle, personality was largely constituted by habitual patterns of behaviour; he associated *ēthos* (character) with the unconnected *ethos* meaning custom.[121] As virtues were habitual dispositions, created by repeated virtuous acts, a city with good *nomoi* would manufacture decent citizens.[122] A properly habituated person, what was more, would have an interest in behaving well, as good behaviour would be pleasant to him; it was an interest in behaving badly that constituted someone as corrupt.[123] These points were all connected with what was for Harrington the alien part of Aristotle's thought: its highly teleological conception of what human beings are. Because Aristotle believed that man is by nature a creature that lives in a Greek city state, his concept of the virtuous (the proper disposition for a man) was largely generated by his concept of the *polis*. Thus ethics (the study of character) was a political science;[124] virtue and politics were interdependent. Both in the *Politics*, and in the related discussion of friendship in the *Ethics*, he was extremely careful to rule out any suggestion that political arrangements are instrumental to some other aims. It is in fact political arrangements that give (or ought to give) us interests, and not the other way round.

It is not necessary to postulate in Machiavelli's thought a teleological biology in order to see that his *ordini* are very much like Aristotle's *nomoi*. They are, that is to say, conceived as forming personalities; they give human beings their aims. Just as the *nomoi* nurtured by the Aristotelian *polis* are partly constitutive of the moral dispositions of its people, so *ordini* (in contrast to mere *leggi*) are partly constitutive of personality. The art of politics, for Machiavelli, is the art of fostering *virtù*; no single set of rules can hope to master every situation (the Romans were often defeated), but they possessed the moral qualities for coping with *fortuna* (they always won the war).[125]

To Harrington, by contrast, the dispositions of the citizens have only secondary significance; virtue is simply action that promotes the common good, and even the most hopelessly corrupt (the royalists) can be induced to act in such a way. Pocock insists that civic humanists were faithful to their Aristotelian roots in seeing human virtue as intimately connected with man's Aristotelian *telos*:

> civic action carried out by *virtus* – the quality of being a man (*vir*) – seized upon the unshaped circumstance thrown up by fortune and shaped it, shaped Fortune herself, into the completed form of what human life should be: citizenship and the city it was

[121] Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, ed. and trans. H. Rackham (Harvard, 1934), p. 70 (bk II, ch. i).
[122] Ibid., p. 72 (II, i). [123] Ibid., p. 40 (I, viii). [124] Ibid., p. 4 (I, ii).
[125] A point explicitly made in *The art of war* (Machiavelli, *Opere*, II, p. 30).

lived in. *Virtus* might be thought of as the formative principle that shaped the end, or as the very end itself.[126]

Thus 'civic action' was itself a good, and this 'good of citizenship – of ruling and being ruled – consisted in a relationship between one's own virtue and that of another'.[127] In Harrington's own mind, of course, the 'very end' of human life was really solitary contemplation, one of whose *consequences* was activity promoting common good. In practice, few if any of his readers were interested in his Stoicism, and Harringtonian virtue was therefore likely to be understood as action *instrumental* to that good. There was no sense, however, in which Harringtonian virtue was seen as an end in itself. If later readers of his works came to regard the autonomy of Harringtonian men in something of an Aristotelian light, they must have taken their interpretation from some quite different source.

Although it is beyond this article's scope to speak about later developments in British political thought, a reinterpretation of Harrington's ideas has obvious and far-reaching implications for understanding of the eighteenth century. In brief, this view of Harrington makes it impossible that he imported civic humanism; if there was such a channel, it must be found elsewhere. This fact casts doubt upon the synthesis 'of civic humanist thought with English political and social awareness',[128] for it was Harrington's intense concern with the control of landed property that gave the Pocockian model its plausibility; he cannot simply be replaced with Milton or Algernon Sidney. It is, of course, quite indisputable that eighteenth-century Atlantic culture was very much preoccupied with manners, and that the many critics of commerce and politeness could fear that these advances were actually the agents of corruption. It is also undoubtedly true that there existed eighteenth-century thinkers who took their notion of an active virtue direct from Machiavelli (and no doubt read their Harrington somewhat in Pocock's spirit).[129] What seems to be more dubious, however, is Pocock's view that the corruption feared not just by Country writers and rebel colonists but even by the implausible figure of Hume was civic humanist in character.[130]

The purpose of this article has not been to deny the presence in Anglophone culture of Florentine ideas, although it makes them more peripheral than Pocock and his followers have claimed; the failure of the *Moment* is not in demonstrating their existence so much as showing their centrality. But their centrality or otherwise is crucially important to our appreciation of the eighteenth century; and the manner of his failure has a moral for anybody who

[126] Pocock, *Moment*, p. 41. [127] Ibid., p. 74. [128] Ibid., p. viii.

[129] The works of Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun and later of John Brown seem fairly unambiguous examples. For a brief account of Fletcher see Pocock himself, esp. *Moment*, pp. 429–32; on Brown, see Peter N. Miller, *Defining the common good: empire religion and philosophy in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 105–14.

[130] J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, langauge and time: essays on political thought and history* (London: 1972), p. 97: 'if any doctrine could drive the mind of Hume into prophetic despair, it is evident that we have to take its effects very seriously'. On Hume's surprising 'jeremiad tone' about corruption threatened by the Debt see Pocock, *Moment*, pp. 493–7.

makes use of the metaphor of 'languages of thought'. Pocock's own work suggests there is a spectrum of such 'languages' between *mentalités* (which are unchosen, and may completely constitute the selves in which they can be found exemplified) and minor linguistic conventions (which with a conscious effort can always be dropped or amended by an agent).[131] When we are told that Bolingbroke 'elected to conduct' his campaign against Walpole in language that derives from Harrington, the latter definition seems more appropriate;[132] when we are told that Hume was driven near despair by humanism, we are obviously closer to the former. In Pocock's presentation of Bolingbroke's decision, we have a plausible account of purposeful behaviour;[133] the plausibility of the description of Hume's concern with the burden of National Debt depends upon discerning the presence in his writings of a persistent intellectual structure. In Florence, in the fifteenth century, this structure was made more or less explicit; thereafter Pocock's argument relies upon detecting it throughout a lengthy process of transmission. If the chain of transmission is broken, because a rather different kind of structure is discovered in one of the links, then everything that follows becomes historically dubious.

The most unshakable presuppositions are those that have never been stated in propositional form, or that have sunk below a level that requires explicit comment; it is therefore entirely imaginable that certain eighteenth-century modes of discourse had an underlying grammar of which their users were quite unaware. Pocock was quite entitled to postulate a grammar of this kind, and use a work about political thought to test his theories. What cannot be denied is that his argument is very fragile: open to refutation by experts about every period that is discussed by an ambitious book. What is still more alarming is that the crucial words which tend to mark the presence of republican ideas – virtue, corruption, fortune – are rich in connotation, and that the most sophisticated writers made use of their everyday meanings; though Bolingbroke may have made use of the 'language' of the civic humanists, he was an English speaker all the time. Corruption can be bribery, virtue a Christian quality, fortune no more than luck. It is, in principle, quite difficult (and often it will be impossible) to show that the relevant structure is found in any particular paragraph of seventeenth- or eighteenth-century prose. Pocock's adventurous 'model' of the pre-history of History is a brilliant imaginative effort, but it is not surprising that the experiment is unsuccessful.

The reason for making these points is that historians of ideas who speak of 'languages' are generally using the method of *The Machiavellian moment*. There do exist some languages with strict and discoverable rules, most notably the

[131] For Pocock's near-structuralist side, see esp. the exchange with John Gunnell in *Annals of Scholarship*, 1 (1981). About the ambiguity of 'languages of thought', see Pocock's own helpful remarks in *Virtue, commerce and history: essays on political thought and history, chiefly in the eighteenth century* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 4–8.

[132] Pocock, *Moment*, p. 478.

[133] Which is why the same decision was the subject of a piece by Quentin Skinner, who thinks that the historian must always read his texts as being, inter alia, purposeful actions (I do not share this view). See Skinner, 'The principles and practice of opposition: the case of Bolingbroke versus Walpole', in *Historical perspectives: essays in honour of J. H. Plumb* (London, 1974), pp. 93–128.

ones employed by lawyers. But most, as Pocock would concede, are simply postulates, which stand or fall by making sense of actual linguistic behaviour.[134] One reason for popularizing this general approach has been to try to undermine 'law-centred' history of political thought, allowing much looser traditions to function as explanatory tools.[135] The need for a corrective was genuine enough, but there has been a danger of forgetting that invocation of such languages is necessarily beset by two opposing dangers. If the languages in question are offered as classifications of the ways that people write, they have no diachronic explanatory use; if they are offered to suggest that discourse was constrained, perhaps over hundreds of years, by the availability of some particular conceptual structures (and non-availability of others), then they must pass some very stringent tests. One merit of the *Moment's* noble failure is that it dramatizes this disagreeable truth.

[134] The test of their existence is 'the number and diversity of performances [the historian] can narrate.' Pocock, *Virtue*, p. 10.

[135] Pocock's phrase in ibid., p. 46. He goes on to remark that this project 'is largely equivalent to writing it as the history of liberalism'.