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Neo-republicanism: Machiavelli's solutions for Tocqueville's republic

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In this paper, I demonstrate that neo-republicanism, as found in the works of Philip Pettit, Quentin Skinner, Maurizio Viroli, Iseult Honohan, and John Maynor, is underpinned by a conception of the well-ordered republic derived from the classical republican tradition. I also argue that an alternative, modern framework of the republic and its political stability emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and is captured in the work of thinkers like Benjamin Constant and Alexis de Tocqueville. Neo-republicanism, however, collapses these distinct conceptions of political order. It does so in some cases by misinterpreting these nineteenth-century figures as representing the continuation of the classical perspective that calls for virtuous political participation to secure freedom. It does so in others by aligning with a classical framework of political order and yet not seeing its core conundrum as problematic, perhaps because of adopting assumptions associated with an optimistic perspective on social and political change. What is more, even if neither were a problem, neo-republicanism, in its appeal to a classical tradition, overlooks a relevant body of work which dealt with key republican concerns from within the context of increasingly commercial and heterogeneous societies.

Keywords: republicanism; civic virtue; political order; Alexis de Tocqueville; Philip Pettit

Introduction

Theorists arguing for a re-examination of republican themes in today's politics focus on a set of problems they see as characteristic of the liberal state, such as increasing political apathy, and find in the republican tradition a set of attractive ideals of active and virtuous citizenship that can revive public life. The picture of the republic in these accounts is intended as a critique of liberal theory and liberal democracy. While admittedly inspired by its classical predecessor, neo-republicanism is offered as a public philosophy, a set of guiding ideals and ideas, for present-day commercial, representative democracies.

Yet, the revival of republicanism in contemporary political theory has been marked by a degree of confusion. This is not related to the oft-discussed topic in the literature – the conception of freedom said to be at the heart of this political tradition – as disagreements on this matter, not just among republicans but also between proponents and opponents of republican thought, have been characterized by precision. Rather, the muddling is related to a collapsing of distinct conceptions of the republic and its stability on the part of key advocates of republican thought,

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and this influences the degree to which their thinking offers a coherent and compelling alternative to the dominant philosophy of liberalism.

In this paper, I demonstrate that prominent advocates of republican thought in contemporary political theory, namely Philip Pettit (1999), Quentin Skinner (1991, 1998, 2008), Maurizio Viroli (2002), Iseult Honohan (2002), and John Maynor (2003),[1] share an understanding of political order and its sources that is derived from classical republicanism. The classical perspective their accounts track is significantly critiqued, however, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, giving rise to a different paradigm of the republic. This new orthodoxy involves a transformed account of the demands politics can make on institutions and individuals. Neo-republicans tend to overlook this profound break, in some cases, by interpreting figures like Benjamin Constant and Alexis de Tocqueville as representing a continuation of the classical perspective, especially as it relates to the relationship between freedom, stable institutions, and civic virtue. They do so in others by their silence on a central theoretical conundrum in the republican tradition related to the establishment and maintenance of the republic, which appears to reflect their assimilation of certain assumptions associated with the modern perspective. In these two ways, contemporary proponents have created confusion as to what their conception of republicanism entails. Yet, even if these problems did not exist, neo-republicans' appeal to a classical conception of the republic and its ideal of civic virtue as a basis of political order overlooks a literature with a stronger claim of relevance to some of their key concerns – issues of faction and arbitrary rule and motivating an active citizenry – from within the context of representative institutions and market societies.

I first sketch the account of the well-ordered republic in the work of exemplars of republicanism in contemporary theory. Next, drawing on a body of literature in intellectual history, I identify four analytical dimensions along which a classical framework is departed from. This allows me to illustrate the background for the distinct diagnosis of what threatens to cause political instability in the modern theory of the republic, as reflected in the work of thinkers like Constant and Tocqueville. Then, I examine a puzzle that arises in neo-republican accounts because of their subscription to a framework of political order drawn from classical republicanism and identify tensions that arise in attempts to solve this conundrum. Finally, I briefly look at how neo-republicanism attempts to marry features of the modern liberal state with a more animated public sphere, but in reaching back to the classical tradition ignores a relevant literature that deals with such issues.

Neo-republicanism and the well-ordered republic

The revival and central commitments of republicanism in contemporary theory are shaped by the work of historians of political ideas. Hans Baron, Felix Gilbert,

[1] See also Viroli's contribution in Viroli and Bobbio (2003) and Maynor's contribution in Maynor and Laborde (2008).

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Carol Robbins, Zera Fink, Bernard Bailyn, Gordon Wood, J.G.A. Pocock, and Quentin Skinner established not only the significance of republican ideas at important intellectual and political junctures in the past, but also that republicanism is composed of various strands and tensions. Skinner and Pocock are particularly influential sources for normative political theorists. These figures, Pettit argues, 'have not only made the tradition visible to us in the past couple of decades; they have also shown how it can give us a new perspective on contemporary politics' (1999: 7).

Intellectual historians and political theorists often approach their subjects with different questions and view the projects to which they contribute in distinct ways. In some sense, normative theorists, by focusing more closely on the defining of values and their political and social implications, gloss over some of the complexities found in historiography (Springborg, 2001). As a disclaimer, the classical republican tradition that concerns me is that which is constructed in the works of contemporary normative theorists. Thus, my sketch of classical republicanism is an attempt to identify, in broad terms, what it is that the neo-republicans appeal to, knowing that the classical tradition is composed of different strands and complexities.

Republicans in contemporary theory possess a degree of diversity, especially on the interpretation of freedom, as the thinkers I focus on reflect. Part of my argument is that these thinkers are united by their subscription to a perspective of political order that accommodates these differences. Many take inspiration from Skinner's historiographical work on Roman and neo-Roman thought, and largely adhere to Pettit's notion of freedom as non-domination, in which, unlike Aristotelian strands of republicanism, civic virtue is instrumentally connected to freedom. The central historical figure in the work of Skinner, Pettit, Viroli, and Maynor is Machiavelli, and they argue that a coherent republican tradition exists from which they draw.[2] Honohan understands republican freedom differently, advocating a conception of freedom as 'political autonomy'. Although she supports the intrinsic connection between political participation and freedom, she does not follow Aristotle or Arendt in seeing freedom as presuming a fixed account of human nature or that political activity should be elevated above all others as critical to human flourishing. Despite such differences, all see the republican tradition as offering resources to critique not only a liberal conception of freedom as non-interference, but also a political system of procedural neutrality and overemphasis on rights thought to follow from it. While they may have different aims, including some who see their work as contributing to intellectual history, each of them also makes a normative case for republicanism in today's polities that engages with contemporary debates. Others might also be taken up in an analysis of republicanism in contemporary thought. Michael Sandel and Charles Taylor come to mind. I exclude their work partly for reasons of space, but

[2] Classical republicanism for them largely begins in Republican Rome, see, for example, Pettit (1999: 5, 19–20).

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mainly because the thinkers selected are more systematic in their work on republicanism, giving significant attention to the preconditions of freedom.

The neo-republicans considered share an explanatory and normative framework of the well-ordered republic and view themselves as constructing it from the classical tradition. It entails that laws and institutions are established that are directed toward the common good; the common good is secured not only by such institutions but also critically by the civic virtue of the citizenry; and the common good and civic virtue are threatened by individualism and circumstances that encourage self-interested behaviour. This framework instructs their common concerns about trends in liberal democracies, including growing political apathy and declining civic engagement; rising individualism and the dissolution of social norms of trust and reciprocity; increasing material inequality manifested in a politics in which those with wealth dominate; rising distrust in government and interest group factionalism and egoism in the public sphere; disrespect for the rule of law; and a decline in patriotism and 'civic consciousness', involving a lack of a sense of the common good or that it should be promoted.[3]

These thinkers argue that to revive today's democracies and secure liberty, institutions must be established that constrain arbitrary and sectional use of political power and citizens must develop dispositions to pursue the common good. This combination of good laws and institutions and good citizens is integral for securing the common good in republicanism. It is so in large part because of a sense of the fragility of the republic. Among thinkers in the tradition, Skinner says, '[t]he first of their shared assumptions is that any understanding of what it means for an individual citizen to possess or lose their liberty must be embedded within an account of what it means for a civil association to be free' (1998: 23). Free states are those in which the 'will of the citizens', Skinner says, 'chooses and determines whatever ends are pursued by the community as a whole' (1993: 301). Freedom thus requires, for instance, the absence of external control, including from the rule of other states or nations. The security of a free state against foreign domination depends on the maintenance of good laws and institutions and good norms within the republic. The interrelationship of these components is crucial for republicans, and Skinner explains why: 'We are being told that, if the freedom of the commonwealth is to be upheld', citizens must be willing 'to devote their time and energy to acting for the common good'. The problem, however, is that civic virtue 'is rarely encountered as a natural quality: most people prefer to follow their own interests rather than the common good', adding, 'The main constitutional implication is that, if civic virtue is to be encouraged (and public liberty thereby upheld), there will have to be laws designed to coerce the people out of their natural but self-defeating tendency to undermine the conditions necessary for sustaining their own liberty' (1998: 32–33, n. 103).

[3] These general concerns summarize the positions of these thinkers.

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Pettit offers a sophisticated analysis of republican institutions and gives much weight to them in stabilizing the republic, but also argues that in the absence of certain norms and dispositions on the part of citizenry, the institutions he describes could not survive: 'republican laws must be supported by habits of civic virtue or good citizenship' (1999: 245). Similarly, Maynor defends a form of republicanism that 'emphasizes the need for properly constituted republican institutional arrangements and the necessity of certain robust virtues – such as citizenship and civic virtue – in the citizenry' (2003: 60).

The idea that laws and institutions alone cannot secure freedom is backed by a sense that ultimately the survival of the republic rests on the character of citizens. For republicans, Skinner says:

> A self-governing republic can only be kept in being…if its citizens cultivate that crucial quality which Cicero had described as *virtus*, which the Italian theorists later rendered as *virtù*, and which the English republicans translated as civic virtue or public-spiritedness. The term is thus used to denote the range of capacities that each one of us as a citizen most needs to possess: the capacities that enable us willingly to serve the common good, thereby to uphold the freedom of our community, and in consequence to ensure…our own individual liberty (1993: 303).

In arguing for the revival of republicanism in contemporary polities, Viroli states that the 'political wisdom that republican theorists have repeated with little variation over the centuries is that liberty can survive only if citizens possess that special passion called civic virtue' (2002: 12). As such, '[t]o protect liberty, a republic must be able to rely on the civic virtue of its citizens, that is, on their willingness and capacity to serve the common good. Civic virtue is the foundation – or the spirit, to use Montesquieu's word – of republican government' (2002: 69). Skinner too argues that individual freedom will not be secure as long as citizens fail to possess the capacities that motivate 'virtuous public service'. Precisely what worries republicans is corruption, or a failure, Skinner says, 'to recognise that our own liberty depends on committing ourselves to a life of virtue and public service' (1993: 304, 306; see also Skinner (1991)).

Civic virtue refers to a collection of traits of character that structures an individual's emotions, attitudes, and actions, specifically regarding the way he reacts to the challenges of public life. In short, it involves the capacities that motivate individuals to place the common good ahead of private or sectional interests. The ascription of virtue is a substantive claim about a person's character and dispositions. Honohan explains:

> Civic virtue is, like the classical idea of virtue from which it derives, an established disposition to act in certain ways, not a matter of acting in accordance with law or duty. It represents internalized inclination… . It involves developing and modifying perceptions of where our interests lie. …Civic virtue is a second nature, a predisposition to act voluntarily in some wider interests (2002: 159–160).

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The lesson of the interdependence of institutions and virtuous citizens is one that a number of these theorists draw straight from Machiavelli. Pettit cites Machiavelli's advice: '"Just as good morals, if they are to be maintained, have need of the laws, so the laws, if they are to be observed, have need of good morals"' (1999: 242). Maynor says that 'Machiavelli envisioned a close and intimate relationship between the laws and institutions of a republic and the citizens that comprised it': 'republican institutions and laws need virtuous citizens, just as virtuous citizens need good laws and institutions to protect and enhance their freedom' (2003: 131). This is because, as Machiavelli taught, '[w]ithout widespread civic virtue and citizenship, the laws and institutions of the republic will inevitably be driven by corruption and private interest' and liberty lost. The lesson drawn is that today's citizens must 'develop certain substantive character traits so that liberty', Maynor adds, 'can be secured' and '[t]aking a cue from the classical republican approach', the state must play an active role in this process (2003: 181).

The appeal to the interdependent nature of institutions and citizens' dispositions and norms rests on a basic political sociology in these accounts. Republicans share a core assumption that although the republic depends on cooperative behaviour, individuals incline toward selfishness and although malleable, are continuously susceptible to corruption. This informs worries about the stability of the republic and arguments about the necessity of establishing the conditions for building and maintaining civic virtue. Because of individuals' tendency toward private interest, republicans look to ground collective behaviour especially in norms and habituated dispositions of character. These bases provide a sturdy source of motivation and encourage citizens to support the practices and institutions that secure the common good even when their private interests direct them otherwise (Pettit, 1999: 242–249). The presence of good norms, Pettit argues, by requiring concern for the common good, drives 'a politics of common concern' (1999: 249). These norms are so crucial for fostering virtuous habits and encouraging the kind of political engagement, which reinforces republican laws and institutions, that without 'robust' republican norms, Maynor argues, the republican project 'is doomed to failure' (2003: 192).

Neo-republicans are adamant that securing freedom and maintaining the republic requires an interdependence of good laws and institutions and a citizenry marked by civic virtue. There are other legacies and ways of reading classical republicanism, but considering how these thinkers understand the classical tradition, this is the main framework of political order and stability derived from it.

The modern republic and enlightened self-interest

The classical framework that unites neo-republicans was significantly critiqued in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A growing body of work in

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intellectual history views developments associated with the Scottish Enlightenment and American and French revolutions as profoundly transforming the republican inheritance, especially as thinkers accommodate republican thought to commercial society.[4] I draw on this literature on the rise of what some have called 'modern republicanism' to identify four dimensions along which a modern perspective of political order and sources of decline departs from classical republicanism: the accommodation to commerce, the assimilation of an optimistic perspective of historical change, the more limited role of institutional design and an increasingly plural conception of the self and citizen. These dimensions have counterpoints recognizable in classical republican thought and help to show that emerging from this period is a re-conceptualization of the demands of politics and the corresponding requirements on institutions and on the virtues citizens must possess for political order and freedom. These features are apparent in the thought of James Madison, Emmanuel Sieyès, Thomas Paine, Jean-Baptiste Say, and Germaine de Staël, who re-ground a theory of the republic on a series of assumptions and intellectual commitments that differ from those at the core of classical republicanism. What holds these thinkers together is not so much agreement on everything or even direct influence, but rather a shared sense of the collapsing of an older paradigm and a need to re-think and re-conceptualize the relationship between citizens, the polity, and the economy.

Because this section involves several thinkers whom scholars associate with liberal thought, one might question whether I am simply identifying liberalism. The developments examined do touch on issues related to its emergence, and key elements of the modern perspective discussed resemble a number of liberal commitments including limited political institutions dedicated to securing a set of individual rights. The perspective of political order and stability that emerges from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries seems like a good candidate for thinking about the roots of at least certain strands of liberal thought.[5] A possible criticism of my argument might claim that rather than neo-republicans overlooking the re-conceptualization of classical republicanism during this period, they simply consider it as the rise of liberalism. On this ground, my argument has no significance for theirs. Yet, their references to Madison, Paine, Constant, and Tocqueville suggest otherwise, indicating that they consider these thinkers not just

[4] Venturi (1971); Hont and Ignatieff (1983); Rahe (1994); Fontana (1994); Wootton (1994); Sonenscher (2003); Stedman Jones (2004); Hont (2005); Dunn (2006); Kalyvas and Katznelson (2006, 2008).

[5] As a sense of direction, my argument goes with the grain of the historical narrative recently offered by Kalyvas and Katznelson (2008). My account differs because my interest is less in sketching the origins of liberal thought and more in examining the ways in which a specific classical republican framework is departed from. They also do not engage with republicanism in contemporary theory, whereas my examination of a historical body of thought is to both provide a background for understanding the concerns of nineteenth-century thinkers like Tocqueville and Constant and illustrate theoretically the ways in which the classical framework crucial to neo-republicanism is significantly critiqued.

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as 'liberals', but of continuing importance to republicanism. I turn to particular nineteenth-century thinkers because they appear in neo-republicanism.

A classical republican perspective on commerce was evident in the luxury debates of the eighteenth century – the crux of which was a tension between virtue and commerce (Pocock, 1985; Berry, 1994; Hont, 2006). Those critiquing commercial society in republican terms viewed luxury as causing corruption, with commerce and the development of moveable capital its handmaiden. Commerce and luxury led to material inequalities and effeminate manners and appetites, creating forms of dependency and corrupting the mores needed to maintain military and political virtue. Commercial practices also were premised on the separation of roles the classical picture had united in the citizen. The republican ideal of unified personality – the citizen as land-owner, bearer of arms and political actor – was transgressed by the division of labour and specification of function associated with the rise of modern economies and ideologies of sociability (Pocock, 1983, 1992).

The eighteenth century saw the radical departure from the classical critique of commerce and the emergence of a form of civil humanism. The Scottish Enlightenment defended commerce, luxury, sociability, and polite manners, with Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith arguing that commercial society, for the most part, had positive moral and social consequences. It was thought to refine the passions, foster manners and progress in the arts and sciences and give rise to better living conditions (Hirschman, 1982; Hont, 2006). For these thinkers, as human relationships were conceived of in social and economic rather than political terms, so too were the virtues of concern relocated from a political to social sphere of transactions (Phillipson, 1983; Pocock, 1985: Ch. 2; Hampsher-Monk, 2002). They also believed that engagement in relationships and networks of society, though largely apart from politics, developed habits and manners that could create a moderate and stable political order (Phillipson, 1983; Hume, 1987: 274).

Building on the Scottish Enlightenment's positive picture of commercial society, those attempting to establish republics in America and France during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries adopted a different attitude toward commerce from that in classical republicanism. The importance of society was reflected in attention to how interactions in the social sphere of economics and commercial activity gave rise to virtues and manners that helped constitute a well-ordered republic. Whatmore (2000) argues that for Say, a positive relationship existed between commerce and republican *moeurs*. The manners and moral habits fostered by commercial societies did not require individuals to sacrifice their personal advantage to the common good. Rather these qualities were the product of enlightened self-interest and were consistent with and conducive to the public good. Say used his 'Olbian republic', to demonstrate how far 'a good treatise on political economy' was the 'first book of morality' as part of his argument that 'It is, for us, to live or to perish; because a republic without republican morals, cannot survive' (1999: 239).

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Similarly in America, republican manners did not necessarily imply civic virtues, but increasingly capacities associated with private spheres of commercial and civil society, family, and personal character. Isaac Kramnick argues that this shift is evident in works in which considerations of civic character emphasize the virtues of industry and frugality and the vices of luxuriousness and idleness. For some elites, he argues, their conception of their own role in politics might have been informed by classical ideas, as they considered landed property as providing the basis (independence and leisure) for fulfilment in public life through the exercise of their capacity for *logos*. But it was also the case that in their attention to the manners of ordinary citizens, '[v]irtuous republican people could, in fact, be described in noncivic, personal terms by the very same men who used the language of civic humanism', he argues. 'John Adams could see the foundation of virtuous government in men who are "sober, industrious and frugal".' Kramnick adds, 'One's duty was still to contribute to the public good, but this was best done through economic activity, which actually aimed at private gain. Self-centred economic productivity, not public citizenship, would become a badge of the virtuous man' (1988: 16, 22).

As the republic was accommodated to commercial society, private interest became increasingly accepted and protected in politics. This move exemplified by *Federalist* No. 10, would have signalled the corruption of the polity in the classical tradition, as political order relied on widespread civic virtue and the common good declined as individuals pursued private interest. But models of government suitable for commercial societies, ensuring the rule of law and security of persons and property, had to be able to absorb the divergent interests and factions such societies encouraged. Moreover, for many thinkers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the pursuit of interest had different consequences regarding social and political change. Private interest was no longer tied to a story of decay as in classical republicanism. In arguments for early forms of capitalism, 'interests' were thought to play a positive role in constraining government and controlling individuals' passions, producing predictable patterns of behaviour and likely bringing about good political effects (Hirschman, 1977). Scottish stadial theories of history also had coupled individuals' pursuit of self-interest to a story about progressive historical change. Resting on ideas about 'spontaneous order' or unintended consequences, these theories proposed that progressive transitions and the emergence of complex institutions were fuelled without conscious intention by individuals pursuing their natural inclinations toward self-interest. These more optimistic perspectives on interest and its relationship to social and political change, buoyed by an Enlightenment confidence in human reason, contrasted starkly with a classical conception of cyclical history (de Romilly, 1991). Such arguments undermined the reasons for the purposive moulders and the role of institutional design in classical republicanism – offering a 'rejection of the original legislator myth' (Hill, 1994: 72).

This severing of the pursuit of private interest from a story of decay contributed to a dramatic change in the nature of the sociological problem in classical

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republicanism, with major consequences for institutional design. For republicans, self-interest was tied to a negative story of change, and man's natural egoism and the ease with which selfishness came to him created an intense institutional design problem that demanded extraordinary intervention by meta-actor legislators. These figures had to be capable of overcoming the self-interested biases that republicanism attributes to ordinary individuals to establish an order directed at the common good; and had to impose on people elaborate institutions and practices to allow them to escape from cycles of corruption. Insofar as political order depended, at least in part, on good mores and individuals *purposefully* aiming to promote the common good, intricate mechanisms needed to be introduced to inspire unnatural principles of motivation in human action and prevent the development of social circumstances and cultural norms that would encourage selfishness. Classical mixed constitutions could help maintain the republic by containing the threat of the domination of one class and its interests over the others, ensuring laws, not men, rule. But a lesson many republicans drew from Greek and Roman examples was that when the morals of citizens became corrupted, when citizens acted with hubris or in self-interest, peeling off into factions, institutions alone could not hold the republic together. Neo-republicanism in its emphasis on the interdependence of good institutions and citizens understands the republican tradition as conveying as much.

In the nascent language of political economy, however, the idea that individuals' pursuit of their private interests could be consistent with not only social and political order but also social and political progress meant commercial society was not similarly fragile.[6] Prominent theories of institutional design in the late eighteenth century, exemplified by the *Federalist Papers*, involved more manageable tasks as political order no longer rested on a virtuously mobilized citizenry. The concern for figures from Mandeville, Hume to Madison was to devise institutions to ensure that private interests could be channelled and controlled in such a way to produce public goods or that public interests would not be entirely undermined by private ones. Institutions were not viewed as means for imposing practices to mould character and inspire motives that did not come naturally to individuals. Moreover, in contrast to classical thinkers, especially Machiavelli and his view of *fortuna*, eighteenth-century man was thought increasingly capable of rationally experimenting with and controlling his environment. The acceptance of interest coupled with a confidence in human reason suggested that the establishment and arrangements for political association were within the grasp of ordinary mortals.

The constitutions envisioned by Madison and Sieyès offered programmes of limited government that made possible individual security, collective citizen-rule, and commerce. Sieyès has been seen, of late, as important in shaping the modern

[6] Apprehension about the decline of commercial states arose not because of the play of private interest in politics but on issues related to public debt, see Sonenscher (2007).

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conception of the republic (Sonenscher, 2003; Hont, 2005), with his representative system inspired by principles of political economy and directed at the protection of private liberty and property (Forsyth, 1987). The political structures these thinkers offered were meant to deal with inevitable consequences of commerce and markets, including inequality in wealth and divergent interests among citizens. Divergence of perspective posed a threat to stability in classical republicanism, making it difficult, if not impossible, for citizens to share a language of the common good necessary for civic virtue. Unequal property had to be dealt with by situating social classes in the framework of a mixed constitution, and instituting sumptuary and agrarian laws to limit acquisition and reduce material inequalities. Yet, for thinkers like Madison, differences in property holding were seen as arising from men's distinct capacities and the 'protection of these faculties' constituted 'the first object of government' (Madison *et al.*, 1987: 124). Furthermore, with the American Revolution, followed by Sieyès' 'What is the Third Estate?', the political order of the republic moved away from the classical model of mixed government based on social class, replaced by a conception of ultimate political authority as undivided and resting with the people or nation. Unified sovereignty removed the divisions between social classes that were part of the classical story of balance and counteraction (Manin, 1994). The modern framework gave this role to competing interest groups arising from different occupations and commercial interests, and '[t]he regulation of these various and interfering interests forms the principal task of modern legislation and involves the spirit of party and faction in the necessary and ordinary operations of government' (Madison *et al.*, 1987: 124).

The accommodation of commerce and interest signalled a change in the nature of goods achieved in common in a republican polity. Individual security became accepted as a public good that the constitutional state needed to secure.[7] One of the primary merits of an extended republic created through federalism or representation or both was its ability to reconcile collective self-rule with individual rights (Madison *et al.*, 1987: nos. 9–10). The concern to protect individuals from arbitrary political power and over-intrusion of the state into society and the market was manifested in growing attention to the details of government organization and distribution of powers, as in the works of the Federalists and Sieyès. One central fear was of a demos or majority will that was tyrannical. Even factional politics helped remedy this, with Madison suggesting that the clash of interests natural to a large federal republic was crucial for providing security for civil rights under free government (1987: 321).

Arguments for limited government were connected to an increasing sense of the importance of other spheres of individual activity that should not be subject to political domination. That politics ought no longer determine the social, economic, and private was reflected in concerns about the encroachment of

[7] This is a theme of a number of essays in Fontana (1994), especially Dunn's.

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government on these other arenas.[8] Classical republicanism too had rested on a division between the public and private – or the polis and household. But in this language of antiquity, the economic, social, cultural, and familial were subordinated to politics. This priority scheme, inculcated especially by political culture, could make unlimited demands on individuals for the sake of the republic (Herreros, 2007; Philp, 2007).

With the modern republic, one gets a theory of political stability based on a more plural conception of the world in which citizens operate. The ideal of the citizen-soldier in classical republicanism, based on unified personality, involved a conception of the self as distinctively public and political. For many thinkers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, their conception of the republic gave a much larger role for society and private life, respect for which was accompanied by a sense of the self as having multiple dimensions related to diverse spheres; as a result, politics could not make the same sort of demands on individuals as in the classical tradition. For Paine (1998) and Staël (2000), society was increasingly seen as important in meeting human needs, with threats to society coming from over-demanding governments. Staël argued: 'One must start from this great difference, in order to base the Republic in France upon a very small number of personal sacrifices' (2000: 128). It is from the context of the late eighteenth century that some have argued a natural rights doctrine is infused into the republican tradition (Kalyvas and Katznelson, 2006), and more generally, a discourse of human rights takes firm shape. These developments limited the demands the collectivity could make on citizens. Hunt (2007) argues that the culmination of various changes – legal, psychological, physical, along with cultural and artistic developments – influenced individuals' perceptions of human relationships. The emerging framework of personhood conceived of individuals as separate entities, capable of exercising moral judgement and possessing bodily inviolability, and consequently curtailed how the community could use the individual.

The four dimensions discussed illustrate how far in the attitude toward commerce, perspective on historical change, the less extreme role for institutional design and changing conception of the self and citizen, a modern framework broke from elements recognizable in classical republicanism. The older perspective emphasized the corrupting nature of commerce, a pessimistic view of historical change, institutions dedicated to the building and maintaining of civic virtue and citizens who possessed the traits of character and capacities that motivated a particular kind of engagement in politics integral to the stability of the republic – and which required intervention by great legislators.

The political analysis of Constant and Tocqueville inherits these critiques of classical republicanism, reflected in their anxieties about the threats posed to

[8] This is not to claim that other spheres exercised domination over the political, but to remark on the rise of the social and its more complicated relationship to the political. On these features of Tocqueville's thought, in particular, see Welch (2004).

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liberty. From their work emerges a set of concerns about the relationship between political participation and freedom. For both, without some degree of political activity, the state could become increasingly despotic, and a key anxiety was how to motivate political participation in commercial societies and increasingly individualistic cultures. While political participation was critical for securing private liberties and preventing government encroachment, both worried that the continued practice of such liberties might actually reduce the motivation for political participation (Philp, 2000).

Their sense of the threats to freedom stemmed from an assessment of how individuals' political behaviour and motivations were influenced by their social and political conditions, including how commercial societies with representative political institutions could give rise to forces that might undermine political participation and, in consequence, liberty. Constant's concern about the fragility of freedom was informed by his sensitivity to the attractions of private and commercial life. While 'moderns', Constant explained, valued individual liberties that were private or negative in character, these liberties could only be safeguarded through political engagement. This did not call for resurrecting the conception of political liberty held by the 'ancients', in which liberty involved a deep commitment to political activity and willingness to subordinate private interests and independence to the common good. In the modern commercial world, he argued, freedom involved individual rights and private freedoms (and the security and independence that accompanied them). The critical innovation allowing for modern liberty was representative government, 'a proxy given to a certain number of men by the mass of the people who wish their interests to be defended and who nevertheless do not have the time to defend them themselves'. Still, he argued, citizens 'must exercise an active and constant surveillance over their representatives'. Yet, the delegation involved with representative institutions and sheer size of modern territorial states created a lack of intimacy with politics on the part of commercial peoples compared with the public-oriented ancients in small city-states. The concern was a less intense political experience on the part of most individuals in large states, coupled with the private distractions of modern life, could decrease the motivation to engage in political activity. Accordingly, the main threat to modern liberty was political disengagement: 'absorbed in the enjoyment of our private independence, and in the pursuit of our particular interests', men might 'surrender' or neglect their political freedom, the guarantee of their individual liberty (1988: 326).

Tocqueville similarly linked civic engagement and security of liberty, and hence, the problem of political apathy was a serious one. Democratic society inclined toward 'individualism', disposing 'each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of those like him and to withdraw to one side with his family and friends, so that after having thus created a little society for his own use, he willingly abandons society at large to itself' (2000: 482). The corollary of the tendency of citizens to turn in on themselves was the increasing power and reach of the state, or what

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Tocqueville called 'administrative despotism'. Social atomization endangered liberty because, on the one hand, it encouraged individuals to cede ever-growing areas of responsibility to the state; on the other, it depressed their engagement in public and social life through which they built habits of cooperation and capacities to resist political abuse. 'What it is important to combat is therefore much less anarchy or despotism than the apathy that can create the one or the other almost indifferently' (2000: 704).

Neo-republicans echo these concerns about the link between political activity and security of liberty, especially the anxiety about motivating political participation within commercial and individualistic societies. Many view these nineteenth-century thinkers as representing a continuation of the classical framework, or as making arguments about the kind of political activity needed to secure freedom that aligns with the neo-republican perspective. Viroli interprets Tocqueville's thoughts on political culture and decentralized institutions as an account of the basis for inspiring virtuous political activity among citizens (2002: 101–102). For Pettit, Constant overlooked republican freedom and contributed to the dichotomy of negative and positive freedom Pettit wants to contest. But Pettit also sees Tocqueville as possibly fitting within the republican tradition, and in his discussion of the social norms needed to motivate concern for the common good, he implies that Tocquevillian ideas about norms of social trust are part of an account of motivating virtuous political behaviour which republican stability requires (1999: 19, 262). Honohan argues that Tocqueville 'sought to promote active participation and civic virtue against the political passivity which [he] saw as a drawback of modern democratic and commercial societies'. Because his 'theory is less specifically political than earlier republican ideas', she says, given he attends less to centralized and coercive politics and more to voluntary social associations than past republicans, '[i]n consequence it can be invoked by theorists of an independent civil society as well as by republican advocates of political freedom' (2002: 114, 116). Honohan, with Jeremy Jennings, argues:

> The [republican] tradition was distinguished by a concern for the character, or civic virtue, of citizens…understood as a disposition to behave in ways that support the common good of the political community. While the broader concept of virtue and the promotion of morality through politics become suspect in the nineteenth century, this did not imply a change of focus to institutions and laws exclusively, and away from individual character.

Following this statement, Tocqueville, Mill, and Constant are referenced implying that these figures' concern about individual character was one about civic virtue (2005: 217–218).

Maynor interprets Constant as essentially articulating a key tenet of neo-Roman republicanism – that civic virtue is necessary to secure a form of liberty that is private in character. He largely adopts Pettit's critique of Berlin's distinction between positive and negative liberty and argues that what should be sought is

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their combination, for which he says Constant argued (2003: 15). Maynor cites Constant for support: '"far from renouncing either of the two sorts of freedom which I have described to you, it is necessary [...] to combine the two together"'. But what he interprets Constant as saying is not just political liberty but also virtuous citizenship is needed for protecting private freedom: 'The virtues and values associated with the liberty of the ancients played an important role [according to Constant] in shaping the character of citizens exercising their "modern liberty"' (2003: 30–31).

Not all neo-republicans view these nineteenth-century thinkers as subscribing to their set of concerns about the basis of political order, or when they do, do so uniformly. Nor are these earlier thinkers central to the way neo-republicanism conceives of itself. Machiavelli and Montesquieu, and other less canonical figures in the intellectual history of republican thought, and even twentieth-century thinkers like Arendt are more important to the self-understanding of contemporary theorists and of the tradition from which they draw. But from within their accounts that argue that virtuous political activity and a concern for the common good must be re-inspired, many neo-republicans refer to nineteenth-century thinkers. This indicates that they at least do not view these thinkers as affected by the critique of classical republicanism[9] and creates confusion because the nature of political participation required by Constant and Tocqueville for the stability of political institutions and security of liberty is different from that in neo-republicanism. Rather than representing a continuation of the classical conception of the well-ordered republic, Constant and Tocqueville actually represent the culmination of a critique of it.

Because neo-republicans require civic virtue on the part of the citizenry as a component of their formula to achieve republican ideals, they not only call for increased political participation to revive public life, but also demand a particular set of motives behind participation. As Maynor argues, what 'republicans must take from Machiavelli's account is that motivations matter' (2003: 133). Citizens must engage in public life with the desire to pursue the common good and prioritize its claims for the right reasons and with the right passions, doing so because of their civic dispositions. While Constant and Tocqueville worried about the political effects of social degeneracy and individualism, arguing that engagement in public affairs was necessary to secure freedom, in both cases their arguments about the nature of participation required for political stability are clearly distinct from those in neo-republicanism. Neither Constant's nor Tocqueville's account of political activity entailed civic virtue. They thought that given the conditions of modern societies, the majority of citizens could not be motivated to engage in politics by considerations of the common good, rather appeals needed to be made to their self-interest.

[9] For Skinner and Pettit, republican freedom declines especially with the rise of utilitarianism in the early nineteenth century, but this story, while itself controversial (Ghosh, 2008), also appears not to affect how some neo-republicans read certain nineteenth-century thinkers.

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Constant thought it crucial that citizens use their political freedom to defend their individual freedom. But the motivations behind political activity were not those of civic virtue, and this is evident in his analogy between the motives to control one's financial advisors and one's political representatives: just as 'rich men' would watch their financial 'stewards…lest they should prove negligent, corruptible, or incapable', one should monitor his political stewards, as well (1988: 326). This requires the capacity and motivation to defend one's interests; in other words, the inspiration to engage stems from a desire to protect one's private interest.

This contrast between virtuous and self-interested motives is especially evident in Tocqueville's account of the nature of political activity. Tocqueville took for granted that, under the conditions of modern democracy, private interest was the motive force for most individual action and engagement in public and social life. The 'doctrine of self-interest well understood', practiced by Americans, he said, involves the notion that the motivation of individuals is self-interest, and cooperation occurs because through association with others, they begin to see that it is part of their personal interest to do the sorts of things that secure wider goods. As an individual learns that to achieve the ends he wants he must cooperate with others, he also learns that his 'particular interest is to do good'. This 'enlightened love of themselves', Tocqueville argued, 'does not produce great devotion; but it suggests little sacrifices each day; by itself it cannot make a man virtuous; but it forms a multitude of citizens who are regulated, temperate, moderate…' (2000: 501–502).

Tocqueville, like Constant and Say, thought ordinary citizens ought to act on their 'enlightened interests' in political and social life rather than on unenlightened or narrow selfishness.[10] But this does not entail civic virtue as Tocqueville recognized, because of the motives of such actions and because the idea of enlightened interests involves prioritizing a set of private interests, although these can be shaped through public and social action. Tocqueville's description of the motives of individual cooperation do not demand a strong sense of collective commonality associated with the politics of the common good. He gives more emphasis to an idea of common interest, in which the private interests of individuals happen to come together or coincide.[11] The main issue the example of America raised, he argued, was 'to what extent can the two principles of individual well-being and the general good in fact be merged' (2002: 51). He viewed their common ground in the idea of enlightened self-interest. Illustrating the

[10] Constant's concerns about political apathy capture this idea. While it might be in one's interest to consume oneself with commercial gain, it is in one's enlightened interest to spend some energy monitoring his political representatives, because that is the guarantee of his other private interests. See also Say's (1999) use of this term.

[11] On this concept, see Barry (1965). The idea is that people who have a common interest have interests that overlap or coincide when each consults his private interest.

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motivations behind the pursuit of the common interest, Tocqueville explained, 'In America, the man of the people has conceived a lofty idea of political rights because he has political rights; *so that his own are not violated, he does not attack those of others*'. In this way, his personal interest unites with the common interest (2000: 228, emphasis added).[12]

Tocqueville also continuously brings his ideas of patriotism and cooperating for the common interest back to individual private interest, or at least his notion of enlightened self-interest. Patriotic citizens prioritize the general interests of the community and defend their individual and civil liberties. For Tocqueville, they do so not because they are virtuous, but because they realize it is in their self-interest. The 'enlightened' patriotism of the republic is 'more rational…less generous, less ardent', but 'more lasting', than other kinds, he said, adding, 'it develops with the aide of laws, it grows with the exercise of rights, and in the end it intermingles in a way with personal interest'. Decentralized political arrangements help engage and shape an individual's private interests and unite them with the interests of others in the community – or in other words, with the general interest. As each participates in his small 'sphere, tak[ing] an active part in the government of society', an individual, Tocqueville argues:

> Understands the influence that general prosperity exerts on his happiness…he is accustomed to regarding this prosperity as his own work. He therefore sees in the public fortune his own, and he works for the good of the state not only out of duty or out of pride, but I would almost dare say out of cupidity (2000: 225–226).

Part of the confusion surrounding the reading of Tocqueville and Constant by some neo-republicans is that they underestimate the importance of the distinction between civic virtue and enlightened self-interest. Neo-republicans argue, often in opposition to critics, that civic virtue does not require self-sacrifice (Pettit, 1999: 257–260; Honohan, 2002: Ch. 5; Viroli, 2002: Ch. 5). They are in some ways correct. Civic education is partly about the education of citizens' interests; the fostering of civic virtue describes the process whereby individuals come to have a set of interests in the common good. Therefore, even as those interests in the common good must be presumptively prioritized in political action, an individual does not sacrifice herself to the common good because she has a set of interests in it or she identifies with it. A polity which demands civic virtue *does* require, however, that she subordinate her private interests to the interests she has in the common good; and neo-republicans consistently make this claim.

Tocqueville correctly understood that this was what the republican ideal of civic virtue involved and distinguished the demands of the modern republic from it. In a notebook entry on his travels in North America, 'Contrast of Ancient Republics as Virtuous vs. the United States as Based on Enlightened Self-Interest', Tocqueville

[12] See also Tocqueville's (2000: 227–228) similar explanation regarding property rights.

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argued that the ‘principle of the republic of antiquity *was to sacrifice private interest to the general good*. In that sense, one could say that they were virtuous’. He then added, the ‘principle of [the US republic] seems to be *to make private interests harmonize with the general interest*. A sort of refined and intelligent selfishness seems to be the pivot on which the whole machine turns’. He concluded, ‘This society can pass as enlightened, but not as virtuous’ (2002: 51, emphasis added).

Tocqueville did worry about individualism and social atomism, moving him to suggest that political stability depends on a degree of education of interests. But such education differs in form and character from classical republicanism. Individuals are motivated by private interest and through *voluntary* forms of engagement in social organizations and local political associations education occurs, as their horizon of self-interest is enlarged and they develop a willingness to defend (through cooperation) their own rights and liberty. Not only then does the nature of engagement as stemming from self-interested motives differ significantly from the kind of motivations required by civic virtue in neo-republicanism, but so too does the manner of education he supports. The cultivation of civic virtue in republicanism is about the proactive and protracted education of citizens’ interests by the state and political culture. To inspire and sustain individuals’ commitment to the common good, their interests must be shaped so that they identify reflexively with it (Maynor, 2003: 72–76), including placing the common good ahead of their private interests because they have been educated to prefer it in some cases to their own good. Some neo-republicans (Maynor, 2003: 97; Honohan and Jennings, 2005: 217–218), in support of their interpretation that Constant argued that the state should cultivate civic virtue, cite his statement:

> Institutions must achieve the moral education of the citizens. By respecting their individual rights, securing their independence, refraining from troubling their work, they must nevertheless consecrate their influence over public affairs, call them to contribute by their votes to the exercise of power, grant them a right of control and supervision by expressing their opinions; and, by forming them through practice for these elevated functions, give them both the desire and the right to discharge these.

What Constant says here is that institutions must educate citizens to understand they possess the right to exercise political power and supervise its exercise on their behalf. By instructing them in this principle and allowing them to exercise this right, institutions help individuals develop the capacity and desire to discharge the right. None of this says institutions must foster citizens who place the common good ahead of private interest (and this is given additional force by recalling his thoughts on the private motives for political activity).

Neo-republicans in viewing a link between political activity and security of liberty share the anxiety about motivating political involvement within commercial societies articulated by Constant and Tocqueville. Yet, these earlier figures

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did not adopt the ideal of a political order that rested on widespread civic virtue. Granted, Tocqueville did not think that private interest exhausted all sources of motivations. But both also thought liberty could be secure in light of the reality that most citizens did not possess civic virtue, as they did not see their anxieties about the security of liberty and viability of political institutions as requiring classical solutions. In contrast to requiring the motives and traits of character in neo-republicanism, which Tocqueville suggests had served as an unstable and onerous foundation for republics in the past, his 'moral doctrine' of self-interest well understood is best suited for the era of commercial democracy, for as it is 'accommodating to the weaknesses of men, it obtains a great empire with ease' (2000: 502).

Neo-republicanism and the legislator problem

In the first section, I argued that neo-republicans are united in seeing a tight interconnection between good laws and institutions and good norms and citizens as necessary for the achievement of the common good: good laws and institutions encourage certain norms and cultivate virtuous citizens; these norms and dispositions to place the common good ahead of private interest, in turn, prevent backsliding with regard to those laws and institutions. This tight interrelationship exists in republicanism because certain preconditions are needed for fostering and motivating civic virtue. Neo-republicans largely follow Aristotle's understanding of how individuals develop the virtues; civic virtue refers to traits of character and capacities gained through the performance of certain practices, namely those of citizenship and collective self-government. The ethos of the republic imbues citizens with the right character, as they engage in activities and are exposed to norms that build the virtues, which then motivate them to behave in ways conducive to the achievement of the common good and the stability of the republic.

It is just this interconnection among conditions necessary for civic virtue that creates a conundrum in classical republicanism: good norms depend on good laws and institutions, but to have good laws and institutions, one needs good norms. This problem drove thinkers from Aristotle, Machiavelli, Montesquieu to Rousseau to appeal to the legislator figure for the founding of republican rule. Ordinary individuals could not bootstrap themselves into the republic, because to expect them to be capable of doing so would be to assume that they possess a certain character prior to the institutions that give them that character.[13] It takes more than sound arguments to move individuals into the kind of stable patterns of behaviour on which virtuous republics depend, for if the right practices do not exist, then the virtues of either intellect or moral character will not be properly developed.

[13] Rousseau argued: 'For a young people to be able to relish sound principles of political theory and follow the fundamental rules of statecraft, the effect would have to become the cause; the social spirit, which should be created by these institutions, would have to preside over their very foundation; and men would have to be before law what they should become by means of law' (1993: 216).

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Neo-republicans face this same problem. Yet, while making similar demands central to this older perspective, such that citizens' political engagement must be inspired by a certain set of motives which stem from their civic dispositions, they do not invoke the figure of agency it requires – the *deus ex machina* – to establish the preconditions for virtuous citizenship. The issue of the transition from vicious to virtuous cycles and the maintenance of the virtuous one against decay is a central preoccupation for classical republicans. A crucial question for a range of republican writers, including Machiavelli, as Skinner says, was how a self-governing republic 'can in practice be established and kept in existence' (1993: 303). Although adhering to a classical framework, including its assumptions about human nature, theory of virtue and entire approach to politics (especially the integral relationship between institutions and virtue that informs its political sociology), neo-republicans do not come to the same conclusion on how to break into and sustain virtuous cycles. Their accounts are puzzlingly silent on the key form of agency pertaining to the founding of the republic or re-founding, if in decline.

Because contemporary accounts rely on a series of assumptions and commitments in common with the classical tradition, they have difficulty explaining the establishment and re-establishment of republican rule. The republicanism of contemporary thinkers is classical in structure, as it assumes decay: individuals are naturally selfish, foiling transitions to cooperative politics aimed at the common good, and are continuously susceptible to corruption because they incline toward self-interest; and given the conception of the virtues – that they are embedded in practices – individuals cannot reason themselves into a republic. In consequence, neo-republicans lack the resources for a story of progressive and piecemeal development and are thereby stuck with the good laws-good citizens conundrum. This problem haunts Pettit's statement:

> The importance of having civil norms that mesh with political laws has been recognized from the earliest days in the republican tradition. Machiavelli is quite clear…there is no hope of enforcing a republic of laws in a society that is not already characterized by *buoni costumi*: by good customs or morals (1999: 242).

Pettit does not solve the problem, for the question of how good mores are established in the first place remains.

To surmount this problem without the legislator or form of agency this figure represents, neo-republicanism would require a set of assumptions associated with a more optimistic perspective about human behaviour and its relationship to political change, something like that associated with the modern framework. Yet that would sit in tension with neo-republicans' pessimism about decline and anxieties about self-interest, reflected in the pervasive concern about building and re-building civic virtue, an angst inherited from the classical tradition. As 'Machiavelli repeatedly emphasises', Skinner says, citizens 'tend to be "corrupt", a term of art the republican theorists habitually use to denote our natural tendency

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to ignore the claims of our community as soon as they seem to conflict with the pursuit of our own immediate advantage' (1993: 304).

This difficulty of founding and re-founding affects neo-republicans because they rely on a framework that does not allow for some of the main features that gave eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thinkers confidence about the rise and stability of the modern republic – including the positive role of private interest in social and political change and its acceptance in the politics of commercial societies, which in turn mitigated the intensity of the institutional design problem and demands on character and removed the necessary role of the legislator. According to the republican critique, part of what is wrong with liberalism is precisely that it allows, if not encourages, the pursuit of private interest in politics.

The normative and explanatory framework of the republic that emerged from the period surrounding the American and French revolutions adopts an understanding of the relationship between individual behaviour and institutions that both allows for the omission of the legislator and is part of a distinctive understanding of political order that did not involve classical demands on institutions and citizens. It might be that what neo-republicans *actually* demand of citizens and institutions is less than their rhetoric suggests. If so, then it is not clear what it is about their republican credentials, especially if an optimistic or progressive view of social and political change is also adopted, that distinguishes them from many liberals, the central targets of their critique,[14] who also hold that democratic institutions require a certain level of political participation for stability.[15] In consequence, as Patten (1996) argues, republican theory, especially that which offers an instrumental account of political participation, does not appear to provide a distinct alternative to liberalism.

That said, the arguments of contemporary republicans do seem to advocate a robust account of virtuous citizen engagement for today's democracies. It is this feature of neo-republicanism, of course, that has attracted criticism from other angles (Goodin, 2003). In response to critics, proponents argue that their concepts of virtue and the common good have moved away from classical features, such as military virtue, and have been updated to reflect basic changes such as universal citizenship. They also reconfigure the common good so that it can be compatible with moral pluralism (Pettit, 1999: Ch. 5; Maynor, 2003: Ch. 5; Honohan, 2002: Ch. 5).

Despite these adaptations, the problems I have identified remain. Neo-republicans continue to subscribe to the idea that the achievement of republican ideals requires

[14] To present republicanism as both a distinct and compelling alternative to liberalism is an intention shared by many of its proponents, see for instance, Honohan and Jennings (2005: 3, 214).

[15] I lack the space to address whether deliberative collective will formation has a claim of affinity with classical republicanism, since not all republicans – even in contemporary theory – advocate a deliberative position (and it does not particularly help to distinguish them from liberals, as many support deliberative politics). But even for those republicans who could be thought of as seeing deliberation a useful mechanism, it could not act as the basis for establishment of political order, rather it is a mechanism within an order founded by other forces. I thank an anonymous referee for raising this issue.

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not only good laws and institutions, but also individuals who possess a certain civic character. Inextricably linked with concepts of civic virtue and the common good, and what these works still emphasize, is the requirement that a citizen's engagement in politics is inspired by a set of motives and dispositions – involving the right reasons and passions – to pursue the common good. This constitutes the 'demanding nature', Maynor says, of 'republican citizenship and civic virtue' (2003: 172).

Motivating citizens in commercial societies

Even if setting aside the problems raised, a lingering issue for neo-republicanism is that it does not engage with a literature associated with the modern republic that would seem to have a better claim to the attention of contemporary theorists than that related to the militarized republics of the classical world. The origins and much of the history of republican thought are pre-modern and in the classical tradition it was axiomatic that republics be small and in many cases anti-commercial and culturally homogenous. Most proponents of republican thought in contemporary theory do not call for the return to ancient military virtues or to the institutions, involving the removal of basic individual protections, which could craft a morally homogenous citizenry. Rather, as Maynor and Laborde say, 'most contemporary republicans take seriously what we may call the circumstances of liberal modernity – moral individualism, ethical pluralism, and an instrumental view of political life – and seek to adapt old republican insights to them' (2008: 1). They also accept a number of features associated with modern liberal states, including representation, constitutionalism, widened suffrage, markets, private property, (Dagger, 2006; Pettit, 2006) and standing armies, all set in large territorial states.

It seems neo-republicans rather than wanting to return to a classical republic intend to improve the institutions thinkers argued for in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, offering a critique of the errant course or excesses of the outcomes of that system, namely rampant individualism and capitalism, and an argument for the re-animation of the public sphere. But in their appeal to the classical tradition and its language of citizenship, they overlook a body of literature in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that addressed precisely how to marry many of these features of the modern state which neo-republicans accept with long-standing republican concerns to protect politics from the risks of factionalism, arbitrary rule, and tyranny, including what it might take to motivate individuals to engage in political activity to protect their own freedom.

Conclusion

The accounts of proponents of republicanism in contemporary theory are united by a classical framework of the interrelated conditions necessary for achieving a well-ordered republic, a central tenet of which is widespread civic virtue. An alternative species of the republic emerges at the end of the eighteenth and

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beginning of the nineteenth century that departs in a number of ways from the ideal of the virtuous republic in the classical tradition. During this period, thinkers constructed a political system of collective self-government that accommodated commercial society, was informed by a more positive picture of historical change, assigned a different role to institutional design and assumed a more plural conception of the self and citizen. Together such transformations gave rise to a framework of the republic that did not rest on the causal chain that required figures like the classical legislator. These developments are captured in the thought of Constant and Tocqueville, structuring their anxieties about democratic and commercial republics and their sense that while engagement and a vibrant political culture are central to securing liberty, the absence of widespread civic virtue does not threaten freedom and solutions requiring laws and institutions directed at rebuilding virtuous citizens need not be invoked.

My claim that neo-republicanism remains wedded to the classical tradition is somewhat uncontroversial, for in some respects contemporary thinkers intend it to remain that way. But as they turn to the resources of the republican tradition, drawing on an extraordinary range of references in their understanding of republican thought, they have muddied the issue about what it means to endorse republicanism for today's polities. Distinct pictures of the republic have been blurred, as thinkers like Constant and Tocqueville are seen as offering arguments aligned with or helpful for reviving a theory of the republic derived from the work of thinkers like Machiavelli. Also, by relying on assumptions and commitments about the stability of the republic more in common with classical republican authors, the absence of the legislator raises questions about the theoretical coherence of neo-republicanism on issues of transition and stability. Insofar as contemporary theorists do not deal with the issues raised, their accounts contain certain confusions and tend toward the exhortatory. The extent to which they can move past these problems, however, by appealing to features that form part of a modern framework – decreased demands on the nature of political behaviour and a more optimistic theory of political change and acceptance of interest in politics – they contradict their key tenets of civic virtue and political stability and also contribute to the sense that their arguments are relatively indistinguishable from liberals they want to critique.

These issues raise questions about how far neo-republicanism is compelling as a public philosophy for today's representative, commercial republics. This is not to say the theory of the republic that accommodates society and commerce does not have its own problems, including how far political equality can co-exist with capitalist markets or whether the political activity needed to secure liberty can be motivated amid commercial societies and representative political institutions. But when neo-republicans consider certain nineteenth-century thinkers' writings about motivating political activity within representative institutions and large commercial societies, they often misconstrue these earlier figures' thoughts of political participation to look more like classical demands. And because as Honohan

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says, '[w]e do not now live in republican communities' (2002: 289), it is important to know how we could get there and whether the solution in the republican tradition is something we want to accept. Finally, by invoking a classical language of civic virtue and appealing to a conception of political order at the heart of this older tradition, neo-republicanism overlooks a body of work which in important ways has a stronger claim to their attention and of relevance to political problems in advanced capitalist societies than the ideal of citizenship and framework of political order associated with the republics of the ancient world.

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