

Political Philosophy and the Republican Future: Reconsidering Cicero**Gregory Bruce Smith****Publication Date**

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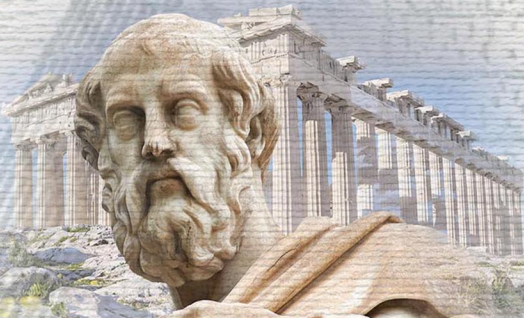
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POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE REPUBLICAN FUTURE



Reconsidering Cicero



GREGORY BRUCE SMITH

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*For my wife, Betty,
once again and forever*

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Introduction

Every age is determined by its past. It operates within a dispensation those in the present did not choose and cannot outrun. What has our dawning postmodern age bequeathed to us? For many it seems that we are moving inevitably into an irreversible era of postnationalism and a universal homogenous cosmopolitan state. But the tradition of republicanism has always assumed that republics have to be small enough that some element of participation and self-government could remain central in political life. In the thinking of the republican tradition, the larger a political entity becomes, the more despotic it becomes. Without the possibility of participation, citizens are inevitably transformed into subjects.

No matter how comfortably and softly administered a regime might be, if participation in self-government is not central to our vision of the good, does not a form of despotism become inevitable, especially on a global basis? Is that our irreversible fate? By becoming postnational cosmopolitans would we become postpolitical and postrepublican? Would we not simultaneously become posthuman?

The great modern republican Montesquieu helped republican thought find a path toward crafting republics larger than the premoderns thought possible with his notion of “confederated republics.” And he among other

modern authors helped find a basis for republicanism in commerce rather than slavery and imperial conquest, as was true of premodern republics. That thinking found its way into the U.S. Constitution. The participants at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787 built on the philosophical premises of modern republicanism, and more than a few classical and Christian ones also, and crafted an argument for a republic larger than any seen since Rome.¹

The large American “extended republic” was to be moderated by strong elements of decentralization and federalism, but as large and extended as the American republic was at the Founding, and is now, it is minuscule compared to the postnationalist state predicted and/or longed for by many. Will this leap to a new global scale of life be the final death knell of republicanism as a political possibility? What would now be required for the continuation of the republican tradition? In other words, what political, philosophical, and ethical commitments must remain central?

A second and related issue in this book is that from almost the beginnings of the republican tradition in Greece, that tradition has been intertwined with the tradition of political philosophy. This is true in various and competing ways from ancient authors like Aristotle and Cicero to modern authors like Machiavelli, Locke, Montesquieu, Smith, Hume, Madison, Hamilton, and even Rousseau. But in our time, both the republican tradition and the larger philosophical tradition have been called into question by the philosophical assaults of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and their various epigones. Those assaults cannot be ignored; they are a part of the legacy of our age.

Therefore we must also consider what would be required for the continuation of the tradition of political philosophy as something more than a nostalgic picking and choosing from among past authors attempting to declare a winner. My thesis is that these two issues, the future of republicanism and the future of political philosophy, are inextricably connected.

The question becomes, where do we start? My suggestion is that we cannot start with the famous self-grounding, self-legislating modern Ego or with its ironic descendant postfoundationalism or postmodernism with its philosophical midair tap dance that only works for cartoon characters. We must find a way to get a purchase on our present situation, a way of putting the central issues that cannot be transcended into a manageable perspective. My suggestion is that there is always only one place to start

such reflections. We always start our questioning in a particular place, at a particular time, with a particular past we did not choose but cannot dismiss—especially if we hope to have a future.

This starting place is captured by Plato's metaphor of the cave. Cicero designated the same notion as *res publica*, a shared "public space." This is also, I will argue, the inevitable foundation of political philosophy, which, when correctly understood, is proto-philosophy itself. In short, the starting point for our discussion is the present political, moral, and philosophical situation, together with how it emerged.

To that starting point must be added our responsible reflections on plausible future possibilities that are consistent with our past and present. We always stand between past and future with the need to link the two. Philosophy is set in motion by this practical necessity it shares with the republican need for maintaining a tradition of self-government. We achieve our greatest insight and clarity when we have made both the past and future more present for us than the actual, given, inert, present moment. In short, we must link past and present in an ongoing tradition.

We do this by taking responsibility for the future, by extending the essential past into that future. I would suggest that this notion is surprisingly similar to what Leo Strauss once designated as "the loyal and loving reshaping or reinterpretation of the inherited."² I would add one caveat: in doing so we must leave open the possibility of actual novelty, that something unique is always still possible. We need be neither at the end of history nor limited to an eternal return of finite past possibilities, and with it Nietzsche's repeated return to a barbaric "retranslation of man back into nature."³ And for Nietzsche that retranslation was to be preceded by "innocence and forgetting."⁴ The loss of openness to the past and the closure of the future go hand in hand, and it is a spiritually deadening region to colonize.

I have already suggested that in our time various high-level attacks on the philosophic tradition, especially as those attacks descend from Heidegger and Nietzsche, stand as an impediment that cannot be ignored.⁵ In their deconstructions of the entire tradition, Nietzsche and Heidegger would destroy not just the philosophic tradition but also the republican tradition. But in various ways, these authors open the door for us to go back and reappropriate both premodern and modern moments of our tradition in a new and revived fashion.⁶

No amount of intellectual gymnastics will ever find a way to admit the fathers of our nihilistic, deconstructive moment, Heidegger or Nietzsche, to the republican tradition. At the end of modernity, what we can do is recover the insights of the premodernity that modernity closed down, and thereby also understand our modernity more clearly. We do this with an eye to the recovery of the best of our tradition as something to be extended, and not simply to be rejected or repeated.

Despite having almost dropped out of discussions of the greats of the philosophic tradition, Marcus Tullius Cicero was once considered one of the philosophical greats throughout the Christian era and well into the modern era. And he was not only a republican theorist; he was a republican practitioner. I will argue that our late modern nihilists Nietzsche and Heidegger knew little that Cicero did not already know. Precisely on Heidegger's own central issue, temporality, I am going to argue that Heidegger knew little that wasn't already known by Cicero.

While remaining close to Cicero's own arguments and texts, what follows will also remain ever mindful of a dialogue with the two great German antagonists of the philosophic tradition of our time. In our situation, they cannot be ignored, especially given that neither was anything resembling a proponent of self-government. This confrontation is obligatory because we cannot co-opt their principles, and fall into deconstructionist self-forgetting, without simultaneously advancing despotic political and moral outcomes.

When Cicero turned to the production of what has come down to us as his philosophical corpus, his Roman Republic was already doomed. Cicero hoped that through his philosophical reflections he might still bequeath a republican possibility for untold future generations. Our republican present is troubling for a myriad of reasons, including increasing rootlessness, runaway technological autonomy, moral relativism, philosophic irrationalism, bureaucratization, self-selecting elitism, just to name a few of the ills. Our late modern republican situation is not yet as dire as what Cicero confronted, but there are enough causes for concern to turn our thoughts to the first things and fundamental questions that we must self-consciously reconsider if we are to bequeath a republican future to our posterity.

Reflections on republicanism in our time have become divorced from a relation to and discussion of the first things and the fundamental

questions that should ground all political philosophy if it is to be more than special pleading. And philosophically grounded discussion is what our public debates cry out for. Even in academic debate, it frequently seems that in our time skyscrapers are being built starting with the eighty-fifth floor—this is the only outcome predictable for postfoundationalism or postmodernism.

But we are surrounded by other intellectual currents that also foster the abstractness and technical jargon and fragmentation of knowledge that create a disconnection between academic and public debates. This frustrating and problematic gap is to the disadvantage of both. Through Cicero we can thematically access the issue of a healthier relation between philosophy and public discourse.

Perhaps an abstract and technical theoretical building without a foundation allows one to speak in shorthand to those of the same ideological inclination, but it makes both fundamental philosophical and serious public debates ultimately impossible. It is one of the causes of the incivility of contemporary debate, both public and academic. One admits in advance that there is no real foundation for persuasion. When that happens, everything devolves into power politics, and this is true of both conventional understandings of political life and in contemporary philosophical and academic debate. Everything becomes an exercise in power politics more or less subtly disguised. The deliberative element that republican government demands, with its openness and toleration, is lost.

Cicero confronted a similar situation of an environment of abstract school philosophies. And he is the perfect author to help us see that all fundamental philosophical discourse always implies answers to fundamental questions in ethics, political science, psychology, cosmology, natural theology, and epistemology, whether those questions are openly discussed or not.⁷ Seeing this is especially important in an age of the fragmentation of knowledge where there is seemingly no integrating vision. Fundamental political philosophy, as displayed in Cicero, represented his conscious, attempted return to the architectonic phenomenologist Plato, a return to a first philosophy that must address the first things and the fundamental questions directly and thematically and in a discourse that is unified and available for public discussion.

The great advantage of approaching the question regarding the future of republicanism through Cicero is that he still presented his thought

in a holistic and architectonic fashion that was accessible to a public audience. This unity of fundamental thinking displayed in Cicero's philosophical corpus was then seen throughout the tradition of political philosophy, but with a declining openness as modern political philosophy evolved, especially as it spun off independent disciplines. Cicero was at work at a moment when political philosophy still understood itself as architectonic and as addressed at least significantly to an intelligent public audience.

The philosophical present that Cicero confronted was one of fragmentation and isolated school philosophies and sects that seemed determined to talk only to fellow members and in a language that was increasingly divorced from the language of everyday life. Our own intellectual fragmentation is well documented, and is even celebrated in some circles as a moral and political good. In what follows I am going to suggest that we need something similar to the philosophical recovery and phenomenological regrounding that Cicero attempted if we are to offer future republican possibilities. We must again address the simple and primary questions of the good for man and the best regime for pursuing the good.

There is much that is similar in our age and Cicero's age, but ours is nonetheless an unprecedented time. The rapid social and technological change we have seen in the last one hundred years will be as nothing compared to what is coming in the next one hundred years. This alone will have powerful transformative effects on political and moral life on this planet. Indeed, looking back from one hundred years in the future, readers will know many things about which we can now only speculate more or less blindly. It is this predictable rapid change that makes it imperative that we find access to the things that do not change.

I am going to argue that we late moderns find ourselves in one of history's rare transitional moments. We must try to find our bearings in that transition so that we can bequeath to those who follow a satisfying and fully human existence. Let us hope those who are our heirs can still freely read thoughtful philosophical texts in some format, whatever that may be, and openly address the fundamental issues of human existence. It must be hoped that future individuals are still free to think and choose, that they are still responsible "human" beings and citizens—not subjects of some large and distant never-before-seen global postnational state that can only be despotic, no matter how softly and comfortably it may dole out its gifts. And we must hope that we have helped forestall that most appalling and chilling of euphemisms: "the posthuman condition."

We must realize that there are forces other than technology and the social change it drives that are operating in the present and that will be transformative. At the philosophical peaks of our age we find the powerful assaults on modernity, and the Western tradition more generally, by Nietzsche and Heidegger and their various epigones, who in a variety of permutations now dominate contemporary discussion. The ramifications of the critiques of Nietzsche and Heidegger have been percolating down into our public life for decades; that discourse has more or less taken over the thinking of major portions of our intellectual elites.⁸

That modernity has philosophically reached a moment of decision, and that we cannot go back to any concrete premodern or earlier modern moments in history, is not to say that the premodern thinkers, and even the best of the moderns, the greatest of whom were precisely “untimely,” did not see and understand some fundamental things more clearly than we do. Perhaps only now do we live in a concrete world where elements of the noblest parts of premodern understanding can have true efficacy. If nothing else, it is a thought experiment worth conducting on our way to the future. It is part of how we can fruitfully stand between past and future without the nihilistic determination to simply obliterate the past and blindly wander forward in mass self-forgetting.

In what follows I do not attempt to recover an understanding of Cicero merely to reenthroned him as the one author who got it right for all times. We turn to Cicero to see a mode of thinking that can be redeployed in any given present. Yet that thinking will still have to be ours and turned loose on our unique present.

We have one significant impediment to approaching Cicero. The Cicero who is offered up for present audiences is but a vague, and boring, facsimile of the original. To be of anything but antiquarian interest to us we have to gain access to this noble author who has fallen into eclipse. It can be hoped that this effort will reinspire a sense of our responsibility to the future like the one shown by Cicero. We will need more than a little genuine remembrance of our past to do that. Tocqueville has unfortunately been proven correct when he predicted that the people of the modern world, especially as presented in that vanguard of modernity among Americans, would become among the most ahistorical peoples of all times. We are close to accomplishing the “innocence and forgetting” posited by Nietzsche’s Zarathustra as the gateway to the future.

Past concrete political, social, and moral possibilities that have been available to human beings in their pursuit of the good, the noble, and the just are closing down; the spaces for future possibilities are not being opened. The present is fraught with the danger of losing what we have that is valuable, the majority of which was gained in the era of modern republics. Our present political environment, with all its aimless but blindingly passionate selfishness and partisanship, threatens to undermine republican government in any serious sense and with it genuine individualism and personal autonomy, personal responsibility, liberty, self-government, and openness to those things that transcend the mundane, everyday world.

These, and many other goods, will not be saved in the future that is coming if we cannot recur to the first things that help us see why they are good in the first place. For example, we must remember why republican goods such as liberty and self-government are ends in themselves and not just means to wealth and our private comfort. It is necessary to remember that modern commerce itself was not seen by many of its original champions as an end in itself but as a means to republican ends.

Modernity has given us the highest form of republicanism to date. It has offered a centuries-long object for aspiration, namely, to modernize, enlighten, and liberate. But what comes next? We late moderns are left to rethink the highest objects of our aspiration and attachment and rethink the fundamental questions in the same penetrating fashion as our proto-modern predecessors. Our world is different than theirs; undoubtedly our informed choices will be different too. It is precisely their successes that made our world what it is. We now stand in the same relation to the future that they stood to our present.

Among other things, modern republicanism gave us individual rights, self-government, individual personality development, and a ground for dignity for all, private property, and a free market with rewards for individual effort rather than those based on mere birth or false claims to “merit.” Modern republicanism also supplied the environment for the progress of modern technology—and modern science in its essence is technological, not ontological. All of these things are good but not inevitably sustainable in the changed environment of the future.

But simultaneously modernity has increasingly alienated us from the fundamental human experiences of core phenomena, such as civic

dedication and social and familial attachment, to say nothing of the highest striving for excellence as an end in itself. Too infrequently do we experience the genuinely transforming virtues: a sense of the divine and the beautiful or a true encounter with honor, nobility, solidarity, shame, and awe. With this modern alienation from core phenomena of a genuinely human existence, we have fallen into a spiritual hollowness and the resultant reign of a utilitarian selfishness. Even Mandeville would have a hard time defending these things in our age as leading to public virtues. We must reclaim what is becoming a dispirited—if not increasingly non-existent—public space from which individuals withdraw to a hollow private existence. This is a witches' brew that, though at times intoxicating, can lead only to despotism.

Modern political philosophy is implicated in these questionable outcomes and in the good things modern republicanism and modern technology have wrought. Some wit once asserted that no good deed goes unpunished. Put slightly differently, eventually every good brings its correlate and unintended disadvantages trailing behind. At that point we must continually readjust, for we will never transcend the ultimate limitations of human existence. That is why history will never end, because we will never totally actualize the good, and we are beings who long for the good and have a vision of it, if only through a glass darkly.

What I will present as Cicero's return to Plato and his "phenomenological" mode of doing political philosophy can be helpful in getting us back in touch with the fundamental issues we must recall before we can make informed choices about our future. Once again, we do not approach Cicero, or any other thinker of the first rank, with the hope of specific concrete recipes for adoption. We study the greatest thinkers the way artists study their greatest predecessors, as a prelude to painting their own distinctive canvas. I hope to show that Cicero offered a distinctive transformation of what earlier philosophers offered rather than a mere watered-down, textbook restatement in Latin that culminated in a thoroughgoing Academic skepticism, as is the general consensus at present.

Cicero consciously attempted to provide a transformative lens for viewing his philosophical predecessors—especially Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. And Cicero consciously tried to soften the moral stance bequeathed to him by predecessors, including Plato, Aristotle, and Stoicism. Cicero reacted against the moral teaching of his predecessors with

its remaining pagan stress on pugnacious, self-centered, self-assertive “magnanimity.” In the process Cicero opened spaces that were occupied eventually by a nascent Christianity, which was forced to engage in efforts at moderating the magnanimous pugnacity of the German tribes within which it resided after the fall of Rome.

Christianity itself would have been a far different phenomenon than it became if not for Cicero, who in a certain irony, became the first Christian philosopher. In fact, it can be argued that Cicero remained the pre-eminent philosopher of Christianity until Aquinas — and not just through his influence on early Christian thinkers such as Ambrose and Augustine.

But Cicero was more than just a prism between pagan antiquity and the Christian Middle Ages. He was already opening spaces for a greater respect for commerce and labor than we see in the Greeks and for the creation of a distinctive republican soul better suited to philosophical statesmanship and public deliberation than war and imperial conquest. These things we will encounter in detail below.

By his mode of questioning, Cicero can show us what is always possible. When political deliberation is detached from serious philosophical grounding, the result is the victory of hyperbole and noise and the consequent loss of the very ability to civilly deliberate together because we have lost touch with the underlying fundamental issues that never go away.

This process of occlusion is further exacerbated by blind faith in “progress.” If progress is inevitable, recovering philosophical understanding and moral excellence are unnecessary; they are irrelevant to the good life. And there is nothing of real import to deliberate except the administrative means to an inevitable end. We are given an excuse to cease to deliberate upon the end, overcoming thereby the need for the civil deliberation that is perhaps the central trait any republic needs. And a shared public space for that deliberation is equally essential. We must rethink the prerequisites for that kind of shared, and philosophically serious, public deliberation to exist.

By way of introduction I will offer some brief reflections in chapter 1 on the history of republicanism, a history that, after Rome, is almost entirely carried in the tradition of political philosophy until late into the modern era. I will follow that with some brief reflections in chapter 2 on the nature of political philosophy. In the central chapters of the book I

will work out the contours of Cicero's philosophical understanding. For the sake of brevity and clarity of presentation, I will do something risky, and rather than deal with his works text by text, which is ultimately required for a full understanding of his mode of writing, I will break his teaching down into constituent parts: philosophy (chapter 4); cosmology and natural philosophy (chapter 5); natural theology (chapter 6); ethics (chapter 7); oratory (chapter 8); and politics (chapter 9). I do this even though what Cicero aims at is a teaching of philosophy that, at its peak, is an integrated, architectonic, unified political philosophy, one weaving these parts into a consistent whole.

In this vein, leading into concluding remarks on the future of republicanism in my conclusion, I will offer some explicit comparisons between Cicero and Nietzsche (chapter 10). I make this seemingly iconoclastic comparison because like Cicero, Nietzsche tried to return philosophy to its architectonic status and tried to return to an integrated view in the face of the divestments, especially of modern philosophy, that spun off all manner of allegedly independent and autonomous "sciences" and forms of "scholarship." But Nietzsche divorced these reflections from republican outcomes.

I will argue that Cicero's understanding of the need to repeatedly "restore" philosophy to its unity and thereby its rightful architectonic place of leadership is more profound than Nietzsche's—which in the end remains modern, all too modern. Of the two thinkers, Cicero offers the only understanding consistent with a republican future. And yet in a surprising number of ways Cicero and Nietzsche are walking a not altogether dissimilar path. One of the softest voices with the most reserve of almost any great author and the loudest and at times most shrill of authors share more than a few similar insights, except for the ultimate and necessary political and moral insights that seem to have escaped Nietzsche as he looked at life from 30,000 feet above the ground, where one can no longer experience the sinew and ligature of everyday existence.

ONE

Reflections on the Tradition of Republicanism

ANCIENT REPUBLICANISM AND THE ORIGINS OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

The story of republicanism is old and venerable, but it has very few concrete chapters until well into the modern era. Yet the term “republic” has achieved such cachet in the contemporary world that even clearly despotic regimes, such as the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the present People’s Republic of China, and the Islamic Republic of Iran, want to co-opt the term. This fact leaves us with questions: What is a genuine republic? How is it distinctive? How is it maintained?

There are underlying, fundamental premises that determine all genuine republics. But there is also a significant distinction between ancient and modern republics that cannot be ignored. We must at least briefly consider how ancient and modern republics compare to understand what is necessary for republicanism to prosper in the future.

The word for republic comes from the Latin *res publica* (literally, “public thing/affair/matter”), which for present purposes I will translate

as “public space.” The term is closely related to the term *res populi*, which can be translated as “owned by the people.” As a first definition, a republic has a public space owned by the citizens, a space they share and from which they cannot be removed.

Before the Romans and their distinctive understanding of political life, with which we will deal in more detail in chapter 3, there is a question of whether there was such a thing as a republic. Yet everyone begins the story of republicanism with the ancient Greeks. The first notes of the republican symphony are sounded in the Greek city-states, especially Sparta and Athens, the two great competitors in the thirty-year Peloponnesian War. But it was before that internecine conflagration, during the Greek confrontation with the Persian Empire, that our republican story begins.

The Greek city-states of that time were small, usually with, at most, ten thousand citizens. After the rustic age of kingship there emerged what we now sometimes call “participatory democracies,” but it would be fairer to call them participatory aristocracies. Everyone who was a citizen had a potential voice in public affairs. Every political outcome had to be publicly negotiated. Especially in the early experience of these city-states, there were no standing political offices or written constitutions. Everything was up for grabs on the basis of fluctuating majorities. There were no rights or defenses against those majorities. To refuse, or to fail for whatever reason, to engage in public life resulted in being cast aside and ignored, thereby suffering whatever outrageous fortune one’s fellows might impose. To decline one’s public responsibilities and to be a private person was to be *idiotes*, an idiot of a certain sort.

To be a citizen required constant participation in the shared public space and its assemblies. But the prerequisite for that participation was that one first be a warrior, for these were communities that were constantly threatened by other Greek city-states, and especially the larger political entities that surrounded them, such as the Persian Empire, which repeatedly tried to conquer the Greeks. On the basis of size, wealth, and strength, the repeated confrontations between the Greeks and the Persians were mismatches. Yet the Greeks eventually won. The penalty for losing was the destruction of one’s city and its buildings, death of the men, and, at best, slavery for the women and children. Being a noncombatant was not an option.

What the Greeks valued more than anything else was their freedom. But by freedom they meant their freedom to give themselves their own

laws and not be subject to the despotically imposed laws of others. Freedom so understood required that one be both martially tough and civic-minded. The Greeks had no conception of freedom whereby individuals had rights they could assert against the state or their fellow citizens. Freedom was not something to be exercised in private or in individual pursuits. Freedom could only be exercised in the public arena. The opposite of being free men was to be ruled by a king (*basileus*), a tyrant (*tyrannos*), or a despot (*despotes*). No matter how decent those forms of rule might be in practice, such rule was seen by the republican Greeks as slavery.

It was in this fashion that the Greeks defined what was distinctive about their Greekness. Especially in opposition to the Persians to their east, the Greeks were free men. They were free men and citizens, not subjects. Here is the first manifestation of the distinction between East and West that determines the mind of Western civilization. The East was the realm of large despotisms where only one man was free. The West was the realm of citizens, freedom, and participation. The world was divided in half, Greeks (free men) and barbarians (everyone else on the planet, who were seen as slaves or subjects). The opposite of free was slave. For its maintenance, freedom so understood required cooperative public efforts and participation with others in a shared public space. But free citizens had to be warriors. One had to ensure one's freedom from others.

The Greeks pursued political freedom as an end in itself. The state was not a means to the pursuit of individual wealth or private comfort. This was true even when the victors claimed the spoils, which largely went to public expenditures. The greatest good was to be a free citizen and gain the opportunity to distinguish oneself from others by deeds and speeches in the public arena. That was the basis of Greek individuality. Some wealth was necessary to provide the leisure for war and politics. It was not an end in itself.

Hence the Greeks looked down on commerce and labor and other "illiberal" activities that destroyed the leisure for participation. Greek citizens were not wealthy by today's standards, or even by the standards of the later Roman Republic. They were absolutely impoverished in comparison to the opulence of the Persian court. The Greeks associated opulent living with slavery; this was especially true of the Spartans.

Only at a later date did superfluous wealth enter the Greek world, especially at Athens, which became an imperial empire and enslaved many of the other Greek city-states on the mainland and colonized the

islands in the Aegean Sea, forcing most to pay tribute. Even then most of the wealth generated went to public buildings (e.g., the great architecture, such as the Parthenon we still venerate), and institutions like the theater were publicly supported (recall Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides, Aristophanes), as were the Olympic Games. It is an open question whether this increased opulence led to the loss of Greek freedom. That is certainly what happened to the Roman Republic: first opulence, then despotism.

After conquest of Greece first by the Macedonians and then by the Romans, this Greek public world of participation dissolved. Both Macedonia and Rome lowered the status of the political for the Greeks to local administration of mundane things having to do with self-preservation and the preservation of the species, that is, economics. The great world of political freedom and public participation was lost as a concrete reality only *to become an ideal* to be strived for throughout Western history.

In the classical Greek world the two activities that were honored were war and political participation. Thus labor and commerce were not honored because they offered no leisure to pursue martial and political excellence. Because women could not participate in war, they could not participate in politics. Thus a distinction was made between the *polis*, “city, political life,” and the *oikos*, “household.” The *polis* was the arena of men; the *oikos* was the arena of women.

Initially the *oikos* included primarily the function of reproduction and child-rearing alone, but as time passed the administration of the economic things moved into the arena of the *oikos* and hence into the purview of women.¹ Our word “economics” comes from combining the Greek words *oikos* and *nomos* (law). Economics is the law of the household, which provides the economic necessities for the *polis*.

They were not political beings, but women were not slaves either. The leisure needed for political participation was supported primarily on the basis of real slavery. At its peak, the Athenian *polis* probably had 20,000 male citizens. Added to that, by a factor of roughly three or four, were free women and children, and then another 400,000 slaves and “metics,” or resident aliens needed for commerce and trade. Freedom and inequality were seen as perfectly consistent in the Greek understanding. The idea of the universal equality of human beings as individuals entered the West from a different direction—the Christian belief that we are all the equal creatures of a universal Creator/God.

Because of the sheer necessity posed by external threat, the Greek *polis* strove for unity and solidarity. The necessary unity needed for survival required a common religion, common opinions, common tastes, and even enforced common dress and patterns of consumption. Ostentatious public displays of wealth were forbidden and opposed by sumptuary laws. A Greek wandering about with the equivalent of a Rolex could be banished from the *polis*, thereby losing any chance for political freedom.

One differentiated oneself from others not by conspicuous displays of consumption, but by great and memorable deeds and speeches. The Greeks were great lovers of public speaking and rhetoric. Before the arrival of philosophy, the teachers of oratory and rhetoric (Sophists, or “wise men”) were admired and respected because of the central political importance of what they taught. At a later date the same veneration became true by extension for poets and playwrights and eventually philosophers. This was a civilization of public speech in a way we can now hardly imagine.

Such a civilization was the prerequisite for the birth of philosophy. And thus Aristotle could codify the Greek understanding when he defined man as both the “political animal” (*zoon politikon*) and the “animal with speech” (*logos*). But these were not initially two separate things. They became separate things for Aristotle and thereafter. With Aristotle we get the doctrinal separation of theory and practice, politics and philosophy. This was a fateful move.² The true and pure *logos* increasingly became separated from the public space of the *polis*.

Politics for the prephilosophic Greeks was primarily speech and public decision-making about war, justice, and the rites of public religion, and not the interest-group politics we now know, which is primarily based on competing economic interests. In fact, the Greeks abhorred the notion of what we call interest groups, or what James Madison would call “factions.” Politics for them was categorically not the competition of different interests, as in economic interests.

Contrary to Marx, politics so understood could not be reduced to a mere epiphenomenon of economics. This is why the Greeks always saw commerce as corrupting; it always created competing interests, instead of the needed solidarity. If the marketplace was allowed into the public space, it would always bring with it the corrupting influence of competing interests, destroying the necessary solidarity needed for war and public deliberation. To put it mildly, Greek republics were homogeneous.

This helps explain the Greek, and until very recently the overall republican, preference for farming over commerce — not to mention that farmers cannot remove their assets from the nation. Farming does not foster anywhere near as many factions as does commerce. And it does not produce superfluous wealth, luxury, and opulence that can destroy participatory equality.

With the Greeks emerged a picture that retained vitality right down to the so called Anti-Federalists during the time of the American Founding. A permutation of this vision is given manifestation in the thinking and writing of Thomas Jefferson, despite the also evident Lockean language of the Declaration of Independence. In that understanding, the best republican citizen is a relatively equal and participating citizen farmer who is part of an armed militia. This understanding is codified in the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution with its “free state” language.

The alternative vision of a commercial republic with representation rather than actual participation was the one fostered by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and the Federalists, who ultimately won the day with their new constitution. Yet to this day, shadows of the older republican understanding remain. Notions of citizenship, participation, patriotism, and solidarity never go away. Even a commercial republic will not work without them.

The possibility of leisure as the basis of political participation is what the Greeks saw as distinctive about man. And the point of political participation was to pursue honor and recognition and thereby define oneself for oneself. Hence the political was necessarily linked with notions of excellence (*arête*). It is only excellence that truly calls attention to oneself in a genuine fashion and brings a desired personal honor and the immortal remembrance of one’s deeds.

One needed to display courage and fortitude in war. One needed to display eloquence and intellect in public discussion. And at all costs one had to display honor, for victories without it would gain no lasting acclaim. Victories won by deceit and chicanery were no victories at all in this mind-set. Even the “wily” Odysseus had his code of honor, albeit a more intellectual version than that displayed by the frequently pouting and more atavistic Achilles.

Therefore one of the primary functions of the state was education in virtue and excellence; the *polis* then provided a stage for that virtue to be

exercised. Again, all of this presupposed leisure gained through wealth generated outside the polis, which was reduced to merely the prerequisite for that excellence and participation. Wealth was a means, not an end in itself.

One of the best ways to retain the necessary republican leisure was to show indifference to wealth and opulence. That is an ever-repeated core aristocratic mentality, if we understand the relation between aristocracy (from *aristoi*, “the best”) and virtue (*arête*). It manifests itself across time and across civilizations and shows itself to be an eternal longing of humanity—freedom through indifference to necessity together with personhood developed through manifest and necessarily public displays of excellence with honor.

Yet that pursuit of excellence, and eschewing the pursuit of wealth, was very demanding, hierarchical, and only capable of unequal manifestation. And this is something modern thinkers came to rebel against. They saw it as unfair.³ The modern authors also found the warrior pugnacity that flowed over into ongoing bellicosity distasteful and wasteful. These concerns led in the direction of modern political philosophy and modern commercial republics, which tried, and still try, to substitute a new softer, “bourgeois” set of attitudes better adapted to commerce than war. Commerce could thereby be substituted for imperial conquest and slavery as the basis of necessary wealth.

But that softening was already under way in the moral teachings of Aristotle and especially Cicero, both of whom tried to substitute the picture of a citizen-gentleman for the prior manifestation of a citizen-warrior. Even in Locke’s discussions of education we still see a manifestation of a republican *bourgeois gentilhomme*. But that new gentleman was no longer primarily a citizen in the older sense. Participation was increasingly deflected into the far more individualistic pursuit of commerce in an arena outside the political—that arena came to be called civil society. “*Civil society*” is not identical to a republican “*public space*,” an equivalence far too many of our contemporary authors are inclined to make. They are perhaps mutually supportive, and even mutually necessary, but they are not identical.

Eventually the Greek love of leisure embellished with intellect and the pursuit of distinction found a new object: philosophy. At first, philosophy seemed to lead away from the public space of the polis and into the private—it seemed to occupy the realm of the *idiotes*. It also appeared to

undermine religion and solidarity. Hence the Greeks initially viewed philosophy with suspicion and skepticism. But the great political philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, in different ways, turned philosophy toward public political and moral reflection, and this eventually gained for philosophy a purchase in the Greek world. Cicero did the same thing at Rome. The same attempt to win public recognition for genuine philosophy needs to be accomplished again in our time.⁴

When the independence of the *polis* was eventually lost, the Hellenistic world withdrew into a greater concern for philosophy and showed less and less concern for political participation. The same retreat from the *res publica* was occurring at the time of Cicero's Rome. In our post-Hegelian and post-Nietzschean world, it has become a commonplace to attribute this withdrawal to the rise of Christianity, but it was already long prefigured in the ancient pagan world. Christianity arose in an environment where this withdrawal was already far advanced.

I will return to the Roman manifestation of republicanism and so will not pause to do so here other than to say that the Roman Republic, like its Greek predecessors, again emerges out of an antipathy to monarchy and despotism. There was a similar longing for freedom to make one's own laws. There was a need for solidarity and shared opinions. There was also an antipathy to opulence, preference for agriculture, and attachment to an ethic based on the martial spirit. Participation reemerged as central, albeit eventually filtered through a representative body, the Roman Senate. In time a popular assembly was joined to the aristocratic Senate. Representation replaced the older all-inclusive participatory public assembly. Participation in the direct sense became the preserve of but a few of the citizens.

At present I simply note that increasingly the republican tradition came to be carried forward by the tradition of political philosophy—first by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, then by Cicero, it was kept alive during the Christian Middle Ages, which saved the philosophic tradition, and then was saved again in a transformed manifestation by modern political philosophy. Eventually, it was the tradition of political philosophy founded in Greece, and kept alive at Rome by Cicero, kept alive once again by the Church's saving of the philosophic tradition, and finally modern political philosophy, that became the carrier of the republican legacy, and finally the basis of modern republicanism, which reopened the concrete republican story after more than a millennium of eclipse.

MODERN REPUBLICANISM: THE TURN TO COMMERCE,
INDIVIDUALISM, AND PRIVATE SPACES

Modern republicanism has its origins in the history of modern political philosophy as it strives to come to self-consciously transform the world.⁵ As was true at the origins in Greece and Rome, the tradition of republicanism and the tradition of political philosophy are again linked.

From the premoderns we gain a core of republican instincts. In antidespotism and the desire for the political freedom to make one's own laws, we see a stress on citizen participation, a need for moral and intellectual solidarity, and the importance of virtue and excellence. There were no individual rights that could be asserted against the solidarity of the political whole and no valued arenas of privacy to which one could safely withdraw. From the moderns we add notions of natural rights, individualism, equality (borrowed from scripture and Christian thought, if not the monarchical practice, of the Christian Middle Ages), and transformed notions of representation. The instinct for self-government and opposition to despotism remains central. I will assert now that in the future republicanism will have to construct a new synthesis of these ancient and modern elements. But the elements of antidespotism, participation, striving for human excellence, and self-government must remain central.

But modernity itself is very complicated in its origins. It represents the coming together of a variety of different forces: philosophical, religious, political, scientific, and ethical. This complicates our story. I will shortly focus on the more straightforwardly modern republican element of the moral "lowering of the sights." But first, we need to consider a few broader observations.⁶

After the fall of Rome, the new monarchy and despotism that became dominant in Europe brought with it a new martial paganism. But that new paganism was far less informed by poetry, the theater, and philosophy, and hence was far less informed by elevated notions of excellence. The new European paganism was far more barbaric, bloodthirsty, and hedonistic than its Greek or Roman republican predecessors. The taming of this new barbaric warlike age fell to Christianity.

By the end of the Middle Ages, that taming had gained success, and simultaneously the philosophic tradition, against all odds, had been preserved. Even our dedicated contemporary secularists and atheists must

acknowledge this debt to Christianity. This is especially true of modern egalitarians, because the principle of equality entered the West through Christianity. Again, it is worth emphasizing that only through the auspices of Christianity did the philosophic tradition survive.⁷ For all those who have fallen far too easily under the sway of Nietzsche's shrill hyperbole against Christianity, these debts must be remembered.

But several paradoxical things had occurred between the fall of Rome and the origins of modernity. First there came about an increasing interpenetration of throne and altar, a merging of the Church and the newly consolidating sovereign monarchical states. This ultimately destroyed the secular supremacy of ancient republicanism and of that found in prior European paganism. Second, through Thomas Aquinas there was an increasing interpenetration of Christianity and Aristotelian philosophy⁸—this represented a significant philosophical transformation of Christianity. It also led to the intensification of "Scholasticism." And then by way of reaction, it led to the Protestant Reformation, which among other things opposed the intrusion of Aristotle into Christianity.⁹

A conscious attempt arose to oppose these results of the loss of secular supremacy and the philosophical transformation of Christianity. The longing for the retrieval of secular supremacy and a philosophical/theological reformation came to be interwoven with the desire to recover republicanism. All of these converging vectors inform the origins of the new republicanism.

To complicate matters further, a new science arose that could actively conquer and master nature rather than passively contemplate it. And a longing for a comparable new political science arose that could be equally active in reestablishing the secular supremacy of the ancient world. And finally a new Reformation vision of Christianity arose that attempted to free itself from the influence of Aristotle and what it saw as the elitist, and unrepblican, hegemony of priests. From all of these elements was formed a dawning modernity that was an attempt *both* to go back in recovery ("renaissance") *and* to go forward into a brave new world. In its origins, modernity saw itself consciously as existing between past and future.¹⁰

Ancient republics were small, homogeneous, and particularistic, illiberal, pugnacious, imperialistic, almost constantly at war, with minimal popular sovereignty in the broader sense, built on slavery, rarely had the rule of law in any significant sense, were intemperately prone to prosecutions of fellow citizens and ostracism or death penalties, had no civil

liberties, no privacy, fostered vanity but also demanded sumptuary laws, were rife with envy and resentment given full public access to the political stage, with overweening pride legitimized and ruling the day. One could go on. From this spectacle any serious reader should be appropriately weaned from any easygoing *polis* envy.

Modern republicanism desired a return to the secular political supremacy enjoyed by the ancients, but it also attempted to soften and transform the pugnacity of prior ancient republics and create far larger regimes more immune from the constant threat of invasion and war. That ultimately required that the participatory element of republicanism be to some degree deflected into representation, a concept already bequeathed by the Roman Republic.

Enter Machiavelli. Machiavelli wanted to found a radically new republic, this time without the need for civil theology (or natural theology), religion, or even poetry as a support for solidarity. Machiavelli, the great open spokesman for duplicity and pugnacity, led the moderns toward building a more commodious and pacific world, and that led modernity increasingly toward a redirection of life away from war and toward commerce. Contrary to some presentations of his corpus, the opening moves of commercial republicanism are already to be seen in Machiavelli.¹¹ This is especially true of the opening moral moves.

But we cannot forget the place of the new modern science and the modern technology that have always been seen as linked with the new republicanism. This too is an important part of the story of modern republicanism. As Francis Bacon openly shows, and Descartes more indirectly, modern republicanism was seen as the regime best suited to the growth of modern science and technology. On that level, and also on the economic, modern republicanism was increasingly seen as a means and no longer as an end in itself.

Not surprisingly, given the origins, we have arrived at a point where many assume that technical solutions to the problems endemic to the human condition, whether technological, pharmaceutical, therapeutic, or bureaucratic, can replace republicanism and its needed public space and at times messy citizen participation. That is an irony lurking at the very core of modern republicanism from the beginning. Within modern republicanism are the seeds for the eventual destruction of republicanism.

What was envisioned by most proto-modern authors was an eventual withering away of the political. Republicanism on the other hand has

always required self-government in some form and hence political participation in some fashion and also a public stage for one's deeds. The abolition of the political that lurks especially in the scientific and technological aspect of the modern project has antirepublican implications.

If it is perceived that the human situation can be dealt with technically rather than politically, it can be thought that there is no reason to put up with the annoyance of participation, competition, love of honor, the public pursuit of excellence, political freedom, and self-government. The political will be seen as a messy irrelevancy that gets in the way of higher goods, such as tranquility and the abolition of anxiety and, more generally, comfortable self-preservation as the central components of the highest human good.¹²

But leaving aside modern science and technology for a moment, what was always intended by the new modern political science and its new republicanism was a softening of the imperial pugnacity of the ancient pagan republican vision and the pugnacity that eventually grew up in monarchical Europe with its own version of bloodletting. The attempt to transcend this pugnacity led to a modern either/or of war and pugnacity versus commerce and civility. With this increasingly came an ancients versus moderns either/or choice.¹³

One thing is clear: modern republicanism was from the beginning, and in all of its variations, built on the famous moral "lowering of the sights." To avoid the moral severity of both ancient republics and the Christian Middle Ages, modern republicanism tried to build on the low but firm basis that we share with animals, or the still low but nonetheless distinctively human *consciousness* of fear of death (Hobbes), or when that still bracing approach was softened, the predictable life of pursuing comfort and pleasure insulated from conscious fear of death.¹⁴

There is no doubt that modernity was partially launched as a rebellion against what it saw as clerical supremacy and a dominant philosophical Scholasticism. But the same rebellion occurred within Christianity itself, and it led to the weaving together of Reformation Christianity and modern republicanism in ways that cannot be dismissed.¹⁵ Here is where Cicero is exceptionally important because he was both a republican and the philosophical light in that pivotal period of early Christianity between the irrationalist Christianity of Tertullian and the rationalist Christianity of Augustine.¹⁶

Let us assume that much of modern political philosophy aimed at an eventual withering away if not elimination of religion. And let us also assume that at least the scientific and technological parts of modernity aimed at the withering away of the political. At least Machiavelli still built on distinctly political phenomena, the “ambition” of the few to be “new princes,” the fear of the many, and perhaps an element of patriotism. But as modernity evolved, the Machiavellian “ambition” that remained as a vague republican facsimile of the pagan pursuit of immortal fame through public excellence was directed toward various forms of increasingly nonpolitical vanity and watered-down nonpublic versions of “recognition” in fairly short order. And in some variants, commerce itself was depicted as an attempt to redirect the pursuit of recognition into entirely nonpolitical economic activity.

The general shared premise of proto-modernity was that there was no need to deliver men from the tyranny of their subrational drives and passions. There was also no need to create an internal harmony of those passions and drives. This lined up well with the redirection of life into commercial activity and the pursuit of wealth as an end in itself. It became legitimate in fact to heighten some of the passions for the sake of increasing market activity.¹⁷ Hence the pursuit of the passions had to be freed from moral opprobrium. Even the obvious disturbances of the soul that proceed from the cacophony of the passions were themselves seen as useful. The need for leisure, the pursuit of excellence, and the internal self-control traditionally needed for republican participation in self-government withdrew from the republican equation.

The austere virtues of either the ancient pagans or the Christians were to be driven out as almost vices. It was hoped that in the place of the virtues of the austere premoderns would eventuate a more easygoing, self-preoccupied, and “humane” individual. The new virtue was “humanity”; cruelty became the greatest vice. That view of “humanity” was, however, at odds with the still remaining cruel lust for mastery of the new science, which remained a form of pagan ambition if not the will to power to dominate all of being. Within modernity, this technological lust for mastery in fact eventually became the most powerful remaining acceptable form of ambition. But it was apolitical and amoral.

The eventual unrepublican convergence of a transformed easygoing humanity and ambitious technological mastery was always lurking in

modernity. The danger was always that political science would eventually circle back to co-opt its own version of the domination lurking in the new natural science—for example, in bureaucratic domination and various forms of despotism masquerading as “democratic.” Either way, the implications were nonrepublican. Modern technological science has always been the potential enemy of republicanism lurking within.¹⁸ The modern moral lowering of the sights plays into that technological danger.

In the modern view, reason ceased to be a unique form of erotic passion for knowledge and longing for immortality, as it was for the Greeks, or for salvation and a return to the Godhead, as with the Platonically informed Christians. Reason became merely the scout for the other drives, the lower, bodily passions we share with the animals. Reason was in the service of the body, and it was the body that formed the basis for the new individualism, that which one could not share with others because they could not share their bodies, which had their own needs. Hence the pursuit of individualism could be divorced from excellent deeds and a public space to display them. One could retreat entirely into a private world to be an individual.

All sense of hierarchy among human activities and aspirations was lost. There was even an attack on the notion that there was a hierarchy among the senses (sight was no higher than taste or touch—for Hobbes sight was a form of touch), a hierarchy among the needs (love of the truth versus love of food), or a hierarchy among the longings (immortal fame or salvation was no higher than the objects of hunger or lust).

From all of this would come at first a cautious but eventually an increasingly unlimited hedonism. That commitment to hedonism, it was hoped, would foster a further weakening of both martial and religious severity and austerity. Men would become lukewarm in their religious and political attachments, or in some versions drop them altogether. They would become too hedonistic to fight for either country or personal honor and glory or to care about their personal salvation. This would open the door to a cascading pursuit of commerce in the service of a hedonism, which would still further weaken political and religious attachments. *Tranquility and comfort were the highest goods.* Again, unfortunately, these goods can be achieved despotically, technologically, and even pharmaceutically.¹⁹ At that point there would be no need for republicanism and its demanding public space. The freedom for self-government, to say nothing of personal self-government, would no longer be needed.

In the modern vision, we would become gentle, amiable, and cosmopolitan rather than committed, particularistic, pugnacious, pious, virtuous, patriotic, and so on. With docile, hedonistic “subjects” and expanding commerce providing the needed wealth, there would be no limits on the technological domination of nature. Again, this new mastery and despotism was always part of the modern story. In that version of the story, modern republicanism was just a transitional means to the full development of technological mastery.

Granted, the proto-modern optimism about the omnipotence of technology has, thankfully, begun to wane because of its attendant dangers. But if Heidegger, among others, is correct, it has gained too much momentum simply to be stopped. The new danger is that individuals made gentle and hedonistic by modern commercial republicanism will no longer give up their technological pleasures to reassume the demanding requirements of a more political, ethical, and spiritual existence—they will inevitably become what Nietzsche called “last men.” But as we will develop in our discussion of Cicero, without the political, and a distinct public space for its manifestation, there can be no republicanism in any serious sense.

One can trace the modern juggernaut of commercial republicanism, faith in science and technology, lukewarm and declining religious attachment, and transformation of citizens into humane subjects to a certain reading of the American Founding.²⁰ But in the American experience there always remained expectations of Christian virtue, especially humility (a humility modern technology lacks), and an ancient public-spiritedness together with gentlemanly canons of honor. It is just that these virtues were not directly fostered. Those virtues had to enter from “without.” What is least fostered fades most quickly. In that regard, modern republicanism has been all too successful in eliminating the external supports that it needs to prosper.

There is still another part of the story. Modern political philosophy is neither as simple nor as linear as some depict it. The same can be said for the entire Western tradition. Modern political philosophy represents an ongoing discussion, dialogue, and dialectic with internecine squabbles and open rebellions from beginning to end. For example, Rousseau tried at modernity’s midpoint to reinsert classical republican elements. He remained a modern, but was totally dissatisfied with commercial republicanism and the public, technological disseminations of modern science.

Rousseau attempted to invent a different, while still modern, republicanism (more closed, smaller, particularist, and homogeneous, as with the “General Will”²¹) from that of the various competing forms of commercial republicanism of everyone from Locke to Montesquieu, Smith, Hume, and Hamilton.

This is but one element of a deep-seated self-dissatisfaction that drives modern thought. This ongoing internal modern self-dissatisfaction leads to distinctive moments within modernity itself. But in the end—Rousseau and perhaps Nietzsche to the contrary—there seems to be a powerful convergence on the pursuit of an apolitical outcome.²² And with that turn to the apolitical comes the increasingly open specter of a never-before-seen global, bureaucratic, atheistic, technological despotism. This must become the new *bête noire* of republicanism.

Despite the dangers lurking in the modern philosophical project, we must not forget the great yield of modern republicanism. The pugnacity of ancient republicanism has been softened. The economic and educational ground for what can potentially be expanded citizenship has been significant and parallels the abolition of slavery as a legitimate basis for generating necessary wealth. Modern technology and commerce have at least potentially increased the possible education and leisure for larger numbers to participate in self-government. The dignity and rights of individuals against evanescent and tyrannical majorities has been established, and elites have been at least theoretically delegitimized. And equality of opportunity beyond spurious claims of merit based on birth and mere tradition has taken hold. The only issue is this: Can the best of modern republicanism be maintained into the future, or are we destined to a new age of elitism and despotism, this time fueled by global technology and bureaucracy, and by various forms of fundamentalism and irrationalism, perhaps in the postscriptural religious form longed for by Nietzsche and Heidegger?

ON THE ROAD TO IRONIC REPUBLICANISM

This leaves us to remark briefly on a contemporary body of literature that presents itself as republican. In the afterword to the 2003 edition of his *Machiavellian Moment* (1975), J. G. A. Pocock confides that his “research

strategy” was to “empty our minds of Locke and his ‘importance.’”²³ Pocock then attempts to construct a republican “tradition” in the remaining space where there is no Locke. Locke, and modern commercial republicanism more generally, simply disappears. Also gone in Pocock is the place for religion. Ancient republics relied on civil religion, Ciceronian republicanism longed for a support in a rational religion (natural theology), and modern republicanism was intimately wound around the Protestant Reformation in ways that Pocock, and the rest of the “ironic republican” literature, ignores or dismisses. The association with Reformation Christianity is especially prominent in the American republican tradition. With the ironic republicans we are a long way from the sentiments of the American republican George Washington in his Farewell Address:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. . . . Let it simply be asked: Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion.²⁴

Pocock was joined in the effort to find a republicanism that was really neither ancient nor modern by any traditional understandings by Quentin Skinner and Philip Pettit.²⁵ What this triumvirate attempts to do is set up an opposition between their alleged republican tradition and modern commercial republicanism without in any serious sense returning to any elements of classical republicanism and its love of virtue and immortality or to openness to Christianity, or to modern love of rights and individualism. In the process, what remains in their republicanism is neither the hatred of monarchy and despotism nor the desire to avoid the rule of a few self-selecting elites, but instead an anachronistic veneration of a “country” party, that is, a nonbaronial aristocracy.²⁶

To support their argument, each invents a “tradition.” These authors move across time and place and consider various texts, both ancient and

modern, taking at most small shards and trying to synthesize them. The gaze of these ironic republicans is very selective. Once pasted together their longed for elements are then designated as a “tradition.” But it is a tradition that has little in common with any actual philosophical tradition or the traditions of any particular regime, especially the American regime. The appeal to “tradition” rests on self-conscious choices made by what can only be a modern, self-legislating theoretical self—which from the beginning has been the enemy of all tradition. The scissors-and-paste efforts of these ironic republicans represent the operation of a modern Cartesian self-legislating Ego, and with Pettit it eventuates in an altogether modern bureaucratic state with global, cosmopolitan longings.

Where Pocock sees in Aristotle and Machiavelli the antecedents to his “civic humanism,” which is the republican gateway to England and America, Skinner says the following:

I have sought to emphasise the remarkable extent to which the vocabulary of Renaissance moral and political thought was derived from Roman stoic sources. . . . I do not think it has been fully appreciated how pervasively the political theorists of Renaissance Italy, and of early modern Europe in general, were also influenced by stoic values and beliefs. Nor do I think it has been fully recognized how far an understanding of this fact tends, amongst other things, to alter our picture of Machiavelli’s relationship with his predecessors, and in consequence our sense of his aims and intentions as a political theorist.²⁷

Skinner gives more republican importance to Rome, its practice, and its authors. As to actual Romans, Skinner discusses Cicero in passing here and there but usually in the same breath as the decidedly Stoic Cato. Further, it is never clear just what Skinner means by “Stoicism.” But no matter how he understands Stoicism, if Skinner is insinuating that Cicero was a Stoic, he is clearly wrong. Be that as it may for the moment, Skinner seems to give pride of place in his republican tradition, especially as it operates in England, to the Roman historian Sallust (rather than Cicero) and, to a lesser extent, especially as it operates among the Florentines, to Livy. Skinner’s alleged Stoic link with Renaissance republicanism partly explains why his republican tradition is designated “neo-Roman.”

In one respect, Pettit's *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* represents an extension of the Cambridge School's version of ironic republicanism. In another respect, he strikes off in a unique direction. At most, he co-opts a few elements of the prior Cambridge narrative. Instead of the nostalgic longings of Pocock and Skinner for what can only be a small, aristocratic, inegalitarian, secular, largely agrarian, homogeneous, noncommercial, civic-minded, nonurban, militia-enriched, antireligion, and aristocratically participatory republicanism, we get the victory of what can only be a large, urban, demilitarized, bureaucratic, administrative, "postnationalist" state undoubtedly ruled by "new class" intellectuals who promise to give their subjects a life where they have no perception of domination lurking anywhere. But the *bête noire* remains the same: Locke, natural rights, and modern commercial republicanism.

The primary end of political life is now posited by Pettit as a distinctive kind of freedom, and it is not the freedom to make one's own laws or to assert rights against majorities or the modern state. Nor is it a freedom that preferences participation, as with actual ancient republics or *virtù* or personality development as stressed by Pocock; other ends ignored are virtue in any traditional sense, salvation of the soul, the pursuit of wealth, knowledge, glory or immortal fame, individual autonomy in a Kantian sense, and so on. In short, missing seem to be the ends that actual human beings have historically pursued. Freedom is now conceptualized in the abstract, nonphenomenological sense as "nondomination."²⁸

Pettit's view of freedom is defined initially as what it is not. It is absolutely not the Lockean, liberal notion of freedom now categorized as mere "noninterference."²⁹ It is also not freedom understood as "autonomy" in the Kantian sense. On this level, Pettit is ruling out the Kantian and Continental understanding of freedom as leading to a form of "metaphysical freedom" as the perfection of our fundamental humanity where we find freedom in willing (universal) rules for ourselves and thereby become autonomous individuals.³⁰

Pettit does make the counterintuitive empirical claim that a state ordered to produce primarily nondomination will also facilitate Kantian, metaphysical autonomy, but not as its primary end. Freedom as nondomination, as the highest end of action, takes precedence over autonomy, wealth, personal responsibility, and independence, virtue in the classical or Christian senses, the salvation of the soul, personal glory, national glory,

personality development, civic *virtù*, the longing to be left alone in noninterfered privacy, and every other conceivable concrete or theoretical end.

Pettit openly announces that his is a “consequentialist” position. The implication of Pettit’s consequentialism is that the state positively must engage actively to produce the intended consequence of eliminating *perceived* domination.³¹ The state must in fact act in advance of an actual grievance being lodged or perceived.

The fact that no domination is actually being exercised in the present or predictable in the near future, or any future moment, is irrelevant. The issue is whether it is possible that such domination could be felt at some moment. The real problem is a psychological problem. So every possible future manifestation of any form of *perception* of domination must be cleared away in advance so that there is no possibility of anyone ever feeling its existence.

The standard here is possible perception by someone at some time. And it is clear that the contemporary modern bureaucratic state is never the principal dominating actor to be feared; no, rather, to be feared are nonstate actors against whom the state must proceed preemptively for the sake of the anxiety-free existence of everyone, freed at last from any possible thought of domination. The highest good is to lead a tranquil, anxiety-free existence.

The state that Pettit is discussing is designated as not only a republic but as an (allegedly) democratic republic. But Pettit will not accept that the basis of democracy is found in consent or the participatory equality of Pocock and Skinner, or in “populism,” which is summarily dismissed. In Pettit’s argument, the place of consent is taken instead by possible “contestability” after the fact. Not only is the “positive” freedom of participation, which is a part of past republicanism, something Pettit will not accept, or the “negative” freedom of modern liberal republicanism—which is something that is “ominous”—but populism in any form must be strangled before the fact. It is asserted that populism will always lead to domination. Hence privacy, consent, and participation must have their wings radically clipped lest the public be inclined to populist, democratic flights of dominating fancy. Only somewhere outside populism and the noninterference view of defending natural rights is there allegedly freedom as nondomination.

These commitments, we are told, and the “language of freedom” as nondomination shape a long tradition.³² It is alleged to be an “older”

republican tradition than that of which Locke is the exemplar. For Pettit this tradition supposedly consists of Cicero, Machiavelli, Harrington, and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America, England, and France and their respective revolutions. Notable by its addition is the entirely antitraditionalist, idea-driven French Revolution, which aimed at a radical break with everything *ancien*, that is, any actual, concrete traditions.

Pettit specifically appeals to Pocock and Skinner to ground his alleged republican tradition. But both Pocock and Skinner show that it is the freedom of citizens to make their own particularistic laws that is the primary concern for their republicans—or, to a lesser extent as time passes, freedom from the Church. Unlike Skinner and Pocock, Pettit's longed-for state is not by any means supposed to be heavy on any participation ("participation is not a bedrock value"). And although Pettit's state will be large, it will have a minimal foreign policy and probably only the most minimal armed forces. For Pettit, freedom does not demand much in the way of defense against other states, as past republics did. This is due to a series of cosmopolitan, postnationalist assumptions that he works in along the way.

Pettit's state is conceptualized as a trustee. The state must be trusted to dispense freedom as nondomination and create for individuals what is called a "nonarbitrary" life. Almost nothing is held back as an inviolable private realm for individuals free from any interference by this trustee state. Nor can acts of participation or consent by citizens be allowed to negate the actions on their behalf by their trustees, who take the place of Pocock's and Skinner's traditional aristocratic "few." Pettit gives us government for the people—but not of or by the people. All of the great yields of modern republicanism are jettisoned without any attempt to retrieve the moral excellence, political participation, and antipathy to despotism that characterized classical republicanism.³³

Eventually, having based his argument on the existence of an alleged tradition, Pettit explicitly reveals that the historical and traditionalist parts of the argument are mere window dressing: "The historical aspect of the book is secondary. If historians of ideas find [Pettit's tradition] misleading, then they should regard the more substantive historical suggestions as simplifications that are justified only by the colour that they give to my philosophical claims."³⁴

We must constantly keep in mind that the "philosophical" claims are never specifically grounded other than on an appeal to a tradition, which is eventually cast aside. Pettit is at least straightforward—his "axioms

need not represent a unique base of justification, as in a foundationalist scheme, but they do claim to be a good starting-point for organizing institutions.”³⁵

In different places, Pettit announces that he is a “postfoundationalist,” a quasi-“traditionalist,” and a “consequentialist.” But he appears unwilling to accept what really follows from his postfoundationalism. What follows is that there are no foundations for our arguments. If there is no basis or foundation for our arguments in tradition, nature, history, or God, then everything rests on the groundless will. This is the self-grounding Cartesian will that finds its *reductio ad absurdum* in Nietzsche’s doctrine of the groundless “will to power.”

For example, if there is no support for our arguments in unchanging human nature, as a true postfoundationalist must accept, it is hard to see how one presumes to make predictions regarding how one’s acts will play out in future consequences. One cannot be a consequentialist and postfoundationalist simultaneously. And if there are no discoverable foundations for our arguments, the most consistent move is to accept the trial and error of actual traditions. But Pettit’s argument is precisely intended as the basis for attacking actual traditions, like the reigning tradition of Lockean republicanism, to say nothing of the classical republican and Christian traditions.

Pettit is indicative at most of a very soft and inconsistent postfoundationalism that does not try to go any deeper than that “we”—a small group of like-minded intellectuals?—happen to already like the position in question and cannot philosophically ground it in any actual phenomena or fundamental and unchanging elements of human existence that repeat themselves. But this produces a discourse only for a self-selecting few that is primarily conducted outside anything that deserves to be called a *res publica* and in a language that is usually foreign to everyday speech, as in the variety of Pettit’s neologisms from “contestability” to “density.”

If pushed on why Pettit groundlessly wills his particular *summum bonum*, there is only one answer: “we” like it, or, using his terms, it is “attractive” and “plausible,” but that can only mean plausible to “us.” There is no attempt to prove that the “we” in question are everyday citizens of a republic that already exists and has its own concrete tradition, a tradition that is under assault in this discourse. At least Pocock and Skinner have some idea of what is implied in the idea of traditionalism.

That an assault on actual traditions is under way is clear. Freedom understood exclusively as nondomination requires “radical changes” in social life.³⁶ What we have operating here is but one of many modern constructivist forms of reason trying to operate in the vacuum caused by the collapse of tradition and also the postfoundationalist collapse of faith in reason, namely, in the age of postmodernism. Except in the artificial homogeneity of a few spaces in the academy, postfoundationalist principles can lead to nothing but a cacophony of voices talking simultaneously, but not to each other.³⁷

Freedom as understood by Pettit is perfectly consistent with both massive statist intrusions into privacy and an enforced Epicurean withdrawal from participation in the *res publica* for the majority of citizens, who in effect become subjects. No existence pursued entirely outside the *res publica* of the *res populi*—an existence that replaces public spaces with private and invisible venues of elitist and bureaucratic control—can by definition be called “republican” except by an act of theft.³⁸ This is nothing but an inconsistent postfoundationalist longing for the radical Enlightenment, rationalist longing for the abolition of the political.

We eventually see that what is being offered as the highest good for those who are not the elite trustees, who conduct the state in the name of its subjects, is a form of tranquility of mind that does not have to anxiously attend to its own freedom through active political participation, even as the nature of this nonanxious perception will itself also be determined by the state. It was this tranquility of mind that both Stoicism and Epicureanism aimed at in Cicero’s time as the greatest good.³⁹ Cicero opposed both schools, and especially on this subject.

Pettit’s republicanism implies a “conversational” and “deliberative” state.⁴⁰ But what is left to deliberate about when the highest end is already fixed in advance and in principle removed from discussion? And who is it that is intended to do the deliberating once the state manufactures an antiseptic and nonanxious situation of nondomination where populism is dismissed as evil? Actual “community” and “tradition” come out of free, spontaneous, and unprogrammed interchanges in a free public space. Such interactions are what keep a public space (*res publica*) open. If deliberation and conversation are truly ends in themselves, they must trump many things, even the tranquility of mind of nondomination.

Pettit’s position circles back to incorporate into his republicanism a good old modern and Continental cosmopolitanism of the variety of

Kant, Hegel, and Marx. To foster his synthesis of elements of modern cosmopolitanism and modern statism, Pettit asserts that the liberal pluralist solution of “reciprocal power” is not the solution to nondomination domestically, and he asserts that the same premise that aims at balance of power politics internationally is to be avoided.

Having built up his domestic bureaucratic state to monolithic levels, he tries to emasculate that same state internationally. He wants to support off-loading international affairs onto what could only eventuate in a super United Nations. Hence individual nations are encouraged by Pettit to maintain a limited military for use only as a last resort. We have come a long way from seeing a republicanism of the sort whereby individual states maintain their own freedom to make their own laws, to the exclusion of outsiders, and maintain them through strong, armed, self-reliant citizen militias.

We even get the issue of freedom turned against First Amendment freedoms, such as free speech and free association. We get the argument that the news media is too conservatively biased in favor of big business and that the *res publica* is being eroded by the creeping libertarianism of free speech. The public space is allegedly being “closed down” by both business elites and populist majorities trying to exercise free speech in public.⁴¹ For Pettit, the active use of the public space is destroying not only the public good but the public space itself. The solution is to deny access to the *res publica* by the *res populi*, and that outcome is then ironically designated republican.

Checks and balances are redefined as meaning “complicated government.”⁴² “Democratic accountability” is divorced from consent or majority rule (populism, as in citizen participation, is bad) and instead shuffled off under the rubric of “contestability.” Popular consent itself is redefined as “owning the public decisions” (i.e., after the fact). “Owning public decisions” becomes the entirety of the issue of accountability—and, like freedom, accountability is psychologized into “can I accept or own an outcome?” By this means there need not be any actual concrete acts of consent; in fact, crucial matters need not be put to the public prior to acting on them at all.

The “bargain-based” and pluralist interest-group model of reaching accommodation is replaced by the new understanding where we will get a “debate-based model.” But the term “debate-based” goes through

transformative definitions, which lead from “debate-based model” to “deliberative model” to “dialogical model.”⁴³ We have the disquieting sense that all the terms are being redefined from everyday meanings until what we will come out with will be entirely different than actual everyday expectations. This is what happens when debate is withdrawn from an actual public space owned by the people and puts aside everyday public speech—and that, I will argue, is central to any actual republican tradition.

In a similar vein, we are even told that we should move to a legislative situation where we have mandated seats for different groups. This comes under the rubric “mandated inclusiveness.” But this language sounds like “mandated exclusion” from the *res publica*. One need only ask the question, who does the mandating? We now have “deliberation” and “conversation” and “contestation” in an environment where Pettit is honest in saying that some “political voices have been gagged.”⁴⁴ It is explicitly the *outcomes* that are now defined as republican, not the *processes* of self-government or protections for the privacy of citizens, who have been transformed into subjects who need have no virtues whatsoever. “Republican forms” rest on the “sorts of outcomes that such [civic activities] must deliver.”⁴⁵ It is no longer clear why we need the messy unhygienic intrusion of citizens at all. We can completely transcend the political.

And what is the popular recourse when sovereignty lies not in electoral accountability or actual participation? Pettit places it in the “right of resistance.”⁴⁶ But who gets to resist and how? It is doubtful that this is some odd defense of the Second Amendment and its “free state” language. Who, in concrete, actual reality, will be able to resist Pettit’s massive, monolithic, elitist state?

From Pettit we should learn why in constructing a future form of republicanism that we must save the great yields of modern republicanism, including its defenses of rights and individualism, while defending against slippage toward amoral and apolitical hedonistic outcomes. Modern human beings must again become moral and political beings capable of self-government, both nationally and personally.

In his only reference to human nature, Pettit asserts that men are corruptible but not corrupt, perfectible if not perfect.⁴⁷ But what counts as unchanging human nature and its unchanging perfection for a postfoundationalist? On the subject of corruption and perfection, Pettit tells us that we in the contemporary world have institutions—Lockean—which

force men to be knaves. Using Pettit's terms, with a clever use of "sanctions" (selective taxes and punishments), "filters" (propaganda), and "screens" (screening out the participation of unacceptable understandings and individuals) we can avoid this knavery. We can put politics in the service of the re-creation of man. In the technological age, that is a frightening and intrinsically despotic prospect.

For Pettit, even if we cannot quite re-create man and human nature from scratch, we can forcibly de-Lockeanize man, to say nothing of depoliticize him. But none of this implies a return to classical republican education in human excellence as a means to self-government and personal government. We get limitations on modern republican freedom without any return to classical republican excellence and participation. We get the worst of all possible worlds—no excellence and no individual liberty. We get tranquility of mind at the price of being transformed into well-maintained, tranquilized pets.

Any real political competition and deliberation by excellent and self-controlled citizens within the *res publica* would undermine the pre-figured outcomes that are alone allowed by Pettit to be called republican. Actual political interactions would assuredly undermine tranquility of mind, as would any true Socratic questioning. Pettit's "republic," which he tells us should substantially eschew punishment, would undoubtedly not kill Socrates, but he would be sedated or sent for "counseling" at a republican "retraining" camp. He would certainly be "screened" out of the discussion as assiduously as Locke.