

Republicanism and its Legacy

Dario Castiglione *University of Exeter, UK*



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Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, vol. 2, *The Values of Republicanism in Early Modern Europe*. *Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*, 2002.

Republicanism is the area of political thought – both its history and theory – in which academic scholarship has perhaps been most productive during the past decades. Republicanism has been the object of historical reappraisal for the past 40 years at least – a reappraisal that has taken many forms and touched upon many different periods.¹ Republicanism's impact in normative political discourse has not been less evident, even though, leaving aside the earlier and quite distinct contribution of Hanna Arendt, this can only be dated to the last 15–20 years. While republicanism's theoretical import remains difficult to assess at the present moment, it can be safely maintained that its theoretical manifestation has consistently found inspiration in the historical revival.

The reasons for republicanism's fortunes may be partly contingent. But, in historical studies, its ascendancy coincided with the rejection of the teleology of ideology-based narratives of political thought, and of their implicit economic and social determinism. Republicanism offered a repertoire of ideas and concepts that were rooted in a long tradition and that as such could be easily abstracted from the conditions of the time and thus made it to play a more active role. This tied in well with the new emphasis on the role of language as a form of action. Moreover, for the study of the early modern period, republicanism offered an alternative mode of thinking about politics and the state to that dominated by medieval and theological categories, and therefore something that could be more easily related to the process of the secularization of the modern mind.

In normative theory, as one would expect, the reasons for republicanism's fortunes were more self-conscious and direct. From a communitarian perspective, republicanism offered an example of a politics of identity based on strong political allegiances. In spite of the obvious, and by modern standards objectionable, exclusionary aspects of classical republicanism, its insistence on civic morality and patriotism were appealing features as part of the criticism of the dis-embedded individualism associated with contemporary forms of liberalism. In particular, the republican revival in American historiography found immediate echo in both American political and legal theory, suggesting a different genealogy for American democracy and constitutionalism, and offering a historically and culturally

Contact address: Dario Castiglione, University of Exeter, SHiPSS/Politics, Amory Building, Rennes Drive, Exeter, EX4 4RJ, UK.
Email: d.castiglione@ex.ac.uk

European Journal of Political Theory 4(4)

rooted alternative to the dominance of right-based legalism in the American ‘procedural republic’. But, as this first republican wave went beyond the confines of the American debate, it became both more liberal-inclined and attentive to the conceptual construction of a self-styled republican tradition, positioning itself between liberalism and communitarianism with respect to important themes such as sovereignty, citizenship and liberty. This move towards the ‘middle’ of the divide between liberals and communitarians has, however, raised the question of what is distinctive about republican theory, or for that matter of how it relates to the classical and early modern traditions of republicanism.²

In view of the large and sustained scholarly production of the last few decades, as well as of its success in raising important questions in both history and theory, this may be a good time for taking stock of the republican literature’s achievements. The publication of two rich volumes on *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*,³ which bring together part of the proceedings of a major European Science Foundation project conducted over four years on that very same theme, is a good occasion for such an assessment. Admittedly, the two volumes, edited by Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner, and comprising an impressive cast of intellectual and political historians, have a narrower focus, since they purport to study the period *after* the revival of classical republicanism in Renaissance Europe and *before* its political success in revolutionary France and America. Moreover, the volumes are exclusively concerned with the *European* republican tradition and its heritage, without claiming to engage with issues in the ‘politics of republicanism’ or to assess what uses, if any, one can make of such a heritage. Nevertheless, as a number of reviewers have already noticed, there is scope for considering them within the broader discussion of the history and theory of republicanism.⁴

This, of course, may make for some unfair readings and assessments. Although most of the reviewers agree that the essays comprising the volumes are often of outstanding scholarship, offering an unusually broad view of the diffusion of republican ideas across Europe in the period between the mid-16th century and the end of the 18th century, in different ways they question what holds the collection together: what idea of republicanism, what kind of heritage, what historical logic. Inevitably, for a collection of 30 essays from an international cast of scholars from a dozen countries and different academic traditions, it is difficult to produce a coherent synthesis. But in spite of the variety of approaches and interpretations on parade, and of the editors’ deceptively light-handed approach in their introduction, there is much in the volumes that lends itself to more wide-ranging reflections. In the following, I shall briefly suggest three such general and overlapping themes: the relationship between the history and theory of republicanism, the unity of the republican tradition, and finally republicanism’s endurance through time.

The History and Theory of Republicanism

I have already noted that neo-republican theory is deeply indebted to republican historiography, but I have also mentioned that the two volumes in consideration are meant as a series of ‘purely scholarly studies’, aiming to further our ‘historical understanding’ (p. 6 in both volumes), while being purposefully silent on present political and theoretical preoccupations. In so far as they engage with the republican *heritage*, they do so by treating it as something in the European past, not as a series of ideas and attitudes that Europeans may recognize as informing their own view of how they have come to live their present.⁵ There

Castiglione: Republicanism and its Legacy

is nothing wrong with this. To pretend otherwise would have mis-characterized the nature of the volumes. But the issue is worth pursuing, and indeed it emerges in between the lines of a couple of contributions (Vega and Winch). If I am correct in suggesting that part of the success of republican historiography lies in it having presented a favourable terrain for a more contextualist and historically minded approach to ideas, it is perhaps ironic that such an attempt at insulating history from theory has resulted in the reverse effect of historiography influencing theory. Ironic, but not necessarily incoherent, for contextualist historiography does not need to deny that the recovery of past political thought may have direct relevance in present debates.⁶ Nonetheless, there may be something remarkable in the way in which republican historiography seems to have touched such a sensitive chord in political theorizing. This has not gone unnoticed by historians who have contributed to the republican revival. Gordon Wood, for instance, has written of his surprise in witnessing how in the 1970s and 1980s his own and others' historical works on the new 'republican synthesis' in the historiography of the American revolutionary period 'were picked up and cited by an increasing number of scholars who had all sorts of interpretative needs and political agendas to promote'.⁷ This went beyond historical studies, engaging 'political scientists, sociologists, philosophers and legal thinkers of all sorts'. Although exporting success stories to other disciplines is not uncommon, the rapid embracing of republicanism across other fields poses the slightly awkward question of whether the emergence of the new historical synthesis was due to the same political impulses and motivations that later made it so attractive to scholars in other disciplines. The question – certainly not a new one – is whether historians are immune from their own time. Yet more troubling – particularly for a category such as 'republicanism', which denotes a *tradition* of thought, and which was *not* always self-consciously embraced by the authors whom we associate to it – is the question of how much the tradition itself is an artificial product of historiographic work, and therefore to be interpreted as a category of the *present* as well as of the *past*. Indeed, Gordon Wood is quick to point out that 'the use and abuse of republicanism over the past several decades provides an object lesson in the power of politics to influence scholarship'. In the same text, he significantly declares that the one subject of his classical work on the creation of the American republic that he

. . . probably would treat differently would be republicanism. Since republicanism has come to seem to many scholars to be a more distinct and palpable body of thought than it was in fact, perhaps it needs to be better set in its eighteenth-century context.⁸

Wood's candid admission is interesting, though in need of some qualification. The suggestion that the emergence of republican historiography was itself the product of a general climate of opinion favourable to those ideas may be true, though not particularly enlightening. More intriguing is the proposition that the process of influence between republican historiography and theory may have now come full circle. As Wood suggests, the great amount of attention given to republicanism may have resulted in making it 'a more distinct and palpable body of thought' than it really was. Thus a search for early modern republicanism and its heritage needs to be more reflexive of its own categories than it probably needed to be 20 or so years ago. This means, on the one hand, acknowledging the influence that may come from a more theorized vision of republican discourse; while, on the other, keeping in check the temptation that such influence inevitably brings with it of reading too much in the historical evidence. I shall return to the influence of theory over history in the next section. But to stay with the issue of overemphasis, this is hardly avoid-

European Journal of Political Theory 4(4)

able in a project whose intent is to discover traces of republican thoughts in our heritage. The strain in the argument is visible in a number of essays, particularly those on the republican idea of citizenship and some of those on the mixed constitution (parts II and III of volume 1, respectively). In dealing with periods and contexts dominated by monarchical ideas and practices, arguments for local autonomy and constitutional restraint of monarchical power tend to be overblown into republican positions. A similar tension between evidence and interpretation emerges in the essays devoted to the way in which the logic and syntax of the republican language was put to the test by the diffusion of commerce and the transformation of social manners and gender roles (volume 2). Indeed, many of the essays devoted to these themes are fully aware of the dangers of over-interpretation that come from a 'tunnel' vision of political discourse, which sometimes risks emphasizing coherence and continuity, where what is remarkable is instead innovation, eclecticism and cross-fertilization. The concluding essays in each of the two volumes (Worden and Winch) are particularly insistent on the way in which ideas and concepts that may be related to a republican language can also be found or adapted from other conceptions of politics, without this necessarily involving republican principles and commitments. As, in discussing the background motivations for the establishment of the republic in mid-17th-century England, Blair Worden pithily puts it, 'the explanation lies largely in the territory of events rather than ideas' (vol. 1, p. 315).

There is another aspect to the question of how palpable and distinct is the republicanism of the period covered by this collection, relating specifically to its Europeanness. Because of the span of countries and traditions covered in this work, republicanism emerges as a tradition and a language that was widely diffused throughout Europe. This is beyond dispute. Less clear is whether, in that period, republicanism operated as a somewhat unified tradition across the European republic of letters – as natural jurisprudence probably did during the same period – or whether its vernacular aspects and preoccupations were more to the fore. The evidence from the two volumes is mixed. A number of essays illustrate the ways in which republican ideas and models were easily translated from one experience to another – from Venice to the Netherlands, from Florence to England – while others are more insistent on the stamp that local conditions and peculiarities put on them. The issue here is also whether the Europe we are dealing with is a geographical entity or a Europe of the mind. If it is the former, the heritage uncovered by these essays pertains as much to the Old World of Europe as to the New World of the Americas, since their history at the time was so closely intertwined. But if we are concerned with the latter, the issue is more complex. Indeed, the question of what is peculiarly *European* in the republican heritage may be impossible to answer on the basis of the sole evidence produced in this collection, since answering it presupposes establishing a point at which the more localized histories of political discourse and of political action come into some meaningful contact, what John Pocock has called the 'discourse of sovereignty': something capable of organizing both the understanding of the past and the conditions for political action.⁹ A historical narrative that proposes to find a shared European heritage requires also some sense of perspective and a point of ascent as well as one of descent within which to frame that narrative. The availability of such a framework is part of the reason why the 'republican synthesis' in American history has proved so compelling, and why republicanism resonates strongly in many national historiographies (France and Italy, for instance). Significantly, John Pocock's own narrative of the civic humanist variant of republicanism

Castiglione: Republicanism and its Legacy

is constructed as an *Atlantic*, rather than a European history. Indeed, the collection's own focus on the European heritage could be construed as an implicit challenge to Pocock's reconstruction – something more explicitly attempted in some of the essays. Yet the two volumes as a whole do not provide a 'republican synthesis' in early modern European history and the reasons for this may have partly to do with the questions discussed in the following two sections.

Republicanism

The main difficulty with providing a 'republican synthesis' is that of agreeing first on the meaning of republicanism.¹⁰ The authors in this collection tend to refer to it, sometimes indifferently, as either classical republicanism or civic humanism. A number of the contributors identify republicanism more specifically with the ideals and practices of *vivere libero* and *vivere civile* propounded by classical republicans (Skinner, Comparato, for instance), or with the political consciousness associated to humanist studies (Peltonen, in particular), or with republicanism's informing moral philosophy of government according to laws and reason (Scott). Other contributors point to a number of distinctions crossing the republican tradition (Worden, Geuna, and Sonenscher, for instance), while still others propose more distinctively vernacular versions of it (Velema, Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, Campos Boralevi, Conti, Pii, Oz-Salzberger, Kaposy to name a few).

As already remarked by other reviewers,¹¹ the overwhelming impression one derives from these studies is that there is no one single republicanism but many. This should not come as a surprise. Yet it is worth noticing that part of the problem for recent historiography comes from its closer embrace with political theory. On the one hand, republicanism has progressively, and retrospectively, hardened into an ideology, therefore needing something less vague than a moving spirit or a set of related themes in order for it to be seen to shape people's understanding and intentional actions. On the other hand, the more theorized and philosophically coherent understanding of republicanism that we have come to expect has favoured more sophisticated attempts at marking analytical distinctions as much in the present as in the past. The most obvious example comes from the way in which a sharper distinction between a communitarian and a liberal republicanism has recently gained currency, becoming a matter of dispute in both political theory and intellectual historiography, and in the grey area between them.¹² In political theory, this has been mainly played out as a dispute between different ideas of liberty. Should the ideal of participation associated with republican liberty be considered as an intrinsic and expressive part of it, thus underscoring a substantive idea of the good life? Or should it be construed as an instrumental protection against enslavement and domination, thus upholding a more neutralist conception of politics? In republican historiography the dispute has partly concerned the exact sources and character of post-Machiavellian republicanism. Pocock's ground-breaking work on early modern republicanism insisted on the importance of Aristotle's idea of the virtue of the citizen as being at the core of the civic humanism that triumphed in the 15th century, which was later transformed and modernized through Harrington's powerful influence, and thus transposed into the Anglo-American debate. More recently, particularly through the work of one of the editors of the present collection, the forming role of Aristotelian categories has been replaced by a neo-Roman and Ciceronian vision. At the centre of this there is the defence of liberty as non-domination,

European Journal of Political Theory 4(4)

while the virtues of the citizen are said to be ensuing from it rather than being intrinsically constitutive of it. According to this interpretation, the neo-Ciceronian philosophy of *vivero libero* is perhaps the most distinctive aspect in the transmission of republican ideals throughout the early modern period until the triumph of liberalism.¹³

Although, as we shall see in a moment, this is neither the sole nor the main distinction discussed in these volumes, it may be instructive to pause briefly on the different views of republicanism that Pocock's and Skinner's historical works propose. The differences in their interpretations have become more evident since Skinner's publication of a series of articles on Machiavelli's idea of liberty, later developed into a fully fledged neo-Roman view, to which Skinner's own contribution in the present collection is yet another addition. Yet, the differences predate Skinner's more recent work, being already discernible in his *Foundations of Modern Political Thought* published a few years after the *Machiavellian Moment*.¹⁴ Such differences involve questions of chronology and historical reconstruction, besides matters of substance that go beyond the textual interpretation of Machiavelli's idea of liberty.¹⁵ As is obvious from Pocock's adoption of the label of 'civic humanism' to describe the language of the Machiavellian moment, in this he was following Hans Baron's interpretation of Florentine's political thought at the time of Machiavelli. This interpretation saw in Machiavelli's political attitude and his contemporaries' a break with medieval and early humanist political thought, one mainly based on the use of Aristotle to back up a strongly civic idea of *vita activa*.¹⁶ Skinner's own interpretation, partly based on Paul Oskar Kristeller's competing interpretation of humanism, saw instead a greater continuity between early humanist political thought and Machiavelli's own time. As part of this argument, he considered Roman political thought as the real source of inspiration for the republicanism of the humanists.¹⁷

The differences over chronology and influence stand here to highlight differences over the treatment of the relative position between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* in humanist thought. Both categories were central to Renaissance moral philosophy. The humanists agreed that the aim of a classical education was the formation of the 'universal man' (*uomo universale*), who combined a desire for action with one for reflection. The dispute between them and across time was often on the relative importance of either disposition. According to Baron, the new political climate in Florence at the turn of the century marked a shift in humanist thought from the relative supremacy of the ideal of contemplation to which the early humanists inclined, to one where the virtues of an active life were paramount. Not the progress of scholarship, but political imperatives were at the root of this change, while its long-term consequence was to free the humanist culture from the medieval remains of Petrarchism, opening the way for a new philosophy of active life: *civic* humanism, as Baron named it. Kristeller's own interpretation suggested instead that humanism's main contribution on the subject was not to have opposed the active life of citizens directly involved in political business to the aloofness of scholars and philosophers, but to have contributed to the secularization of the ideal of contemplation. According to Kristeller, republican convictions and civic commitment were contingent forms which the humanist *Weltanschauung* assumed in particular circumstances, and that the respective advantages of *vita activa* or *vita contemplativa* could therefore be indifferently argued by the humanists, who had freed contemplation from the medieval ideal of monastic and ascetic life. In Skinner's *Foundations*, Kristeller's thesis is partly vindicated by Skinner's own examination of the different trajectories that humanism took in Northern and Southern Europe, depending on the

Castiglione: Republicanism and its Legacy

political circumstances in which humanists found themselves to operate. Pocock's reconstruction of the Machiavelli moment, instead, comes closer to Baron's thesis by insisting on the epistemological character that the eulogy of active life assumed for the knowledge of things political. In this version, *vita activa* is intrinsically linked to *vivere civile* as citizens' active participation in the fortunes of the community. Both the legitimacy and the functioning of the body politics acquire meaning within the social-communicative framework of the *vivere civile*, which requires the citizens to share in the conditions (arms and property) for their active participation. It thus comes as no surprise that, despite acknowledging the importance of the Ciceronian influence and the possibility that Baron may have overstated his case over Florentine civic humanism, Pocock remains wedded to the interpretation of the 15th-century civic ideal as something deeply influenced by the Aristotelian language and vision.¹⁸

Even though no single essay in these volumes engages straightforwardly with the bifurcation in republican historiography provided by these two views, many of the latter's themes resonate throughout the collection. This is most obvious in Skinner's own reconstruction of the role that the neo-Roman conception of liberty has in the stand-off between parliament and the crown at the onset of the English civil war. Cognate views of republicanism also emerge from those studies in volume 1 that are concerned either with what it means to be a citizen or with the criticism of monarchical prerogatives as a threat to liberty. But the influence of the Pocockian paradigm is not less discernible. Indeed, his reconstruction of the enduring influence of civic humanism throughout the early modern period acts as a critical catalyst for many of the studies in this collection. On the one hand, the essays in volume 2 that discuss the way in which republicanism engaged with the new realities of 18th-century politics and society rely heavily on Pocock's reconstruction of the language of civic humanism; even though most of the same contributors tend to dilute it within a broader discursive context characterized by the presence of other traditions and vocabularies (Conti, Hampsher-Monk, Spitz, Geuna, Oz-Salzenber, Winch). On the other hand, many of the essays dealing with the 17th century take a more critical view of Pocock's own achievement. Some question a number of Pocock's interpretative gambits, such as the centrality that Harrington has in his reconstruction of the language of civic republicanism, or the fact that his narrative of republican theory bypasses the Dutch experience (Dzelzainis, Scott and Boralevi). Others criticize his failure to recognize that civic humanist and republican themes operated already in the ideological panorama of pre-civil war England (Peltonen and Skinner). The latter view makes two implicit criticisms, though they seem to be pushing into different interpretative directions.¹⁹ One criticism sees Pocock's civic humanism as too thick a category to capture the meaning of republicanism as primarily consisting in the support for republican against monarchical institutions – as we have seen, this criticism tends to undermine Pocock's view of the original Machiavellian synthesis. The other criticism instead suggests that humanism is tantamount to republicanism, so that humanist culture and politics are interrelated. This undermines the important role that Pocock gives to the reconceptualization of time in post-Machiavellian politics, making his narrative of the 'Anglization of the Republic', and how monarchical, legal, customary and theological categories were internally transformed, partly redundant.

The criticisms of the Pocockian synthesis underscore the two conceptions of republicanism identified by Blair Worden, when he distinguishes 'constitutional' from 'civic' republicanism – one more focused on the institutional and anti-monarchical aspects of

European Journal of Political Theory 4(4)

republican forms of government, the other on the virtues required by republican politics (vol. 1, pp. 307–8). Indeed, the editors' own organization of the material in two volumes, one dealing with republican constitutionalism, the other with republican values, would seem to point in the same direction. Yet, useful as this distinction is in separating two broad strands of the republican discourse, it does not really establish two different definitions of republicanism. For one thing, Skinner's and Pocock's own versions of republicanism do not seem to divide along the institutions and values line, but on the relative thickness that they attribute to republican values. For another, readings such as Peltonen's oscillate between institutional and cultural aspects, so that, as Worden remarks, his understanding of republicanism becomes much broader and impossible to be defined with any precision. But in truth, as Marco Geuna suggests, the two levels of discourse are present in all republican thinkers. The latter are concerned with institutional matters and the 'thin' values of the 'government of the laws', particularly when they discuss how to run a republic, while show an interest in defining the 'thick' values of republican virtue when they turn to the issues of setting up and maintaining a republic (vol. 2, pp. 194–5).

As both Winch and Worden emphasize in their contributions, part of the problem in finding one or more definitions of republicanism is that there is always a gap between the artful definitions and interpretations of scholarship and the often varying and looser meanings used by the historical authors. The paradoxical result is that the more we probe into the historical meaning of republicanism, searching for more precise definitions and telling distinctions, the more we may end up discovering a cacophony of republican languages and meanings. In this way, a collection that ostensibly originated with the intent of furthering the study of republicanism as a strong historiographic paradigm seems instead to promote the impression that republicanism was indeed a lively contribution to early modern political discourses but as a weak and diffuse (and occasionally confused) paradigm.²⁰

Republicanism's Endurance

The conclusion that, in spite of the diffuse presence of republican themes and ideas throughout the early modern period, it may not be possible to establish an overarching republican synthesis, is no indictment of the research project under discussion. Indeed many of the contributors may find such a conclusion congenial to their interpretations. To show, for instance, that republican constructions of the idea of *respublica mixta* were consequential to the development of a new civil philosophy (van Gelderen and Bökdeker) may appear sufficient to demonstrate that republican ideas maintained their hold over the modern political imagination. Moreover, as remarked by the editors, the temporal boundaries of the project were set in consideration of the fact that previous and later manifestations of republicanism had already been subject to intense scrutiny. This may be construed as implying that early modern republicanism would be more difficult to identify and synthesize than that of other periods.

Such a modest characterization of the project's intents, however, risks missing the more general interpretative questions that this collection of essays undoubtedly poses. In fact, the disagreement about the nature of republicanism goes beyond its alleged temporal boundaries, reaching back to the Machiavellian period and, perhaps more crucially, posing the question of the place of republicanism in the transition towards modernity. In this respect, the exclusion of the revolutionary periods in America and France works to the detriment

Castiglione: Republicanism and its Legacy

of the project, creating an artificial and difficult to justify cutting-off point in the narrative of the passage from classical to modern republicanism. This also precludes the possibility of articulating a more precise discourse on the republican heritage, and on the way in which it has endured over the last two centuries. As Donald Winch remarks, establishing the way in which republicanism has reached into the intellectual world we inhabit may involve a detailed consideration of the republican experience in the 19th and 20th centuries, and of how republicanism interacted with 'such potent developments as liberalism, representative democracy, industrial capitalism and socialism' (vol. 2, pp. 309–10).²¹ This is something that clearly lies beyond the chronological scope of these volumes, but, as I have suggested, it also requires connecting the 18th-century republicanism explored in volume 2 with the republicanism of the revolutionary period. This may be so at least on two accounts. First, if we accept the image of early modern republicanism as a diffuse but weak paradigm, it remains to be shown how republicanism eventually turned into a political force in the course of the American and the French crises. Second, if – as most of the essays seem to show – there was a diluting and domestication of republican principles,²² thus making of it what Gordon Wood calls a 'form of life', compatible with monarchical forms of government, which it tended to transform rather than supplant,²³ how do we explain the revitalization of the republican spirit at the end of the century and its political radicalism?

One way would be to revert to Worden's economical explanation of the English republican experience of the previous century, suggesting that 'events' forced the pace of intellectual change. And although there may be some truth in it, this time the explanation seems less appropriate, for by many accounts the main elements for a modern and more secularized understanding of politics were now in place. In the changed circumstances of late 18th-century politics, it is more difficult to argue that ideas and modes of political consciousness were, so to speak, lagging behind reality. A more likely explanation lies perhaps in the way in which modern and classical forms of republicanism were redefining themselves throughout the century, while grappling with concepts and categories that other languages and traditions were making central to the understanding of modern politics. It may be that, as Keith Baker has suggested in the case of the Terror, republican radicalism was the product of the explosive way in which modern and classical forms combined in the midst of political crises.²⁴ *Mutatis mutandis*, the conclusion reached by Gordon Wood in his examination of how republicanism became a radical ideology during the American crisis is not very different. Perhaps surprisingly – considering his reassessment of republicanism as a pervasive and less ideological form of life – the view he embraces in his more recent *The American Revolution* is that republicanism 'meant more than simply eliminating a king and establishing an elective system of government. It added a moral and idealistic dimension to the political separation from England.'²⁵ Republicanism thus became the ideology of the American Revolution, challenging all the 'assumptions and practices of monarchy', demanding definite moral virtues from the citizens, and in the process establishing a more egalitarian and solidaristic social order.

Gordon Wood's view of the radicalism of 18th-century republicanism within the American context may be a good place for rounding-off our argument on republican historiography and republican theory. From a historical perspective, the varieties of republicanism populating the early modern period make it extremely difficult to arrive at a republican synthesis embracing the European context. If there is a more unitary republican legacy in European political thought, this may need to be located in the complex

European Journal of Political Theory 4(4)

interplay between modern- and ancient-inspired forms of republicanism. Such interplay was crucial for the way in which republicanism came to terms with the realities of 18th-century politics and societies and with the categories of competing languages and traditions. The role that republican constitutional ideas and republican values played both in establishing the modern sciences of government and in providing answers to the political crises of the last quarter of the century needs to be explained by looking closely at the sometimes divergent processes of domestication and radicalization. More subtle and flexible distinctions are also needed for the period between the mid-18th and mid-19th century, to understand how republican language and preoccupations came to intermingle with democratic, liberal and eventually socialist and patriotic perspectives.²⁶

From a more substantive perspective, the radicalization of republicanism in the heat of the revolutionary crises offers a series of insights on what contributed to the enduring legacy of both its constitutional and civic variants throughout most of the 19th century, and, arguably, to its more recent revival in political theory. Many have maintained that republican visions of the civic culture, of liberty and of patriotism, have contributed to its continuity, but have put less emphasis on two other related aspects of the republican heritage that have perhaps been even more instrumental to its endurance. On the one hand, modern republican defences of liberty have been more insistent on equality, both in its formal and in its more substantive aspects, than classical republicanism was. This is a point brought out by Wood in his analysis of the American experience, but that cannot escape an analysis of the republicanism(s) of the French Revolution, and of the way in which the latter has contributed to shape – albeit controversially – Europe’s own self-understanding. On the other hand, modern republicanism has been deeply political, in a way that combines both the cultural and the institutional aspects of civicness – the encouragement of virtue and its mechanization. This is a point perceptively captured by Iain Hampsher-Monk in his analysis of how the republican language was moulded in the passage from virtue to politeness. But in the end, as he says,

. . . the ultimate logic of the argument . . . would be to diffuse politics not only from the court to the forum but from thence into every corner of social and domestic life, a condition . . . which every republican must dread, as the euthanasia, not only of government but possibly even of politics itself.

The irreducible political nature of republicanism has made it more receptive to both the demands of democratic sovereignty and discourses of empowerment in modern societies, projecting a positive vision of politics as the way of reconciling the natural differences traversing the social body. Admittedly, political equality (versus equal liberty), and the nature of the political (versus the emphasis on the ‘neutral’ mechanisms of the law and the market) are the two areas where contemporary republican theory (at least in its more liberal variant) can hope to distinguish itself more sharply from modern liberalism. This, of course, is a story yet to be written.

Notes

1. The most important contributions comprise the following. Hans Baron’s study of Florentine civic humanism at the turn of the 15th century: H. Baron (1966) *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 2nd edn. Princeton: Princeton University Press. For the rediscovery of the influence of ‘Commonwealthmen’ and ‘Country’ opposition’s ideas in

Castiglione: Republicanism and its Legacy

- early 18th-century English political history, C. Robbins (1959) *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.). Franco Venturi's analysis of the role of contemporary republican ideals and models in the Enlightenment politics of reform: (1971) *Utopia and Reform in the Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. The transformation of the historiography of the American revolution with Locke's idealized liberalism replaced by a more complex series of republican sources: B. Bailyn (1967) *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press. G.S. Wood (1969) *The Creation of the American Republic: 1776–1787*, 2nd edn 1998. Chapel Hill, NC, and London: University of North Carolina Press. John Pocock's Machiavellian moment as the key aspects of a republican understanding of politics and historical time that deeply influenced the formation and transformation of English and early American political discourse: (1975) *The Machiavellian Moment*, 2nd edn. 2003. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Finally, and more recently, the emergence of a neo-Roman tradition that firmly, though somewhat unobtrusively, operated in different periods of political history by upholding a distinctively republican idea of liberty: Q. Skinner (2002) *Visions of Politics*, vol. 2, *Renaissance Virtues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. The more communitarian reading of republicanism is evident in M. Sandel (1996) *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press. Charles Taylor and Alisdair MacIntyre have also developed communitarian visions closely related to the republican tradition, but less dependent on it. A communitarian interpretation, but with more democratic overtones, has been used (though not necessarily shared) by B. Barber (1984) *Strong Democracy. Participatory Politics for a New Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press. R.A. Dahl (1989) *Democracy and its Critics*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. R.P. Putnam (1993), *Making Democracy Work*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. For the use of a republican approach in legal theory, cf. the work of Cass Sustein and Frank Michelman, amongst their many articles: C. Sunstein (1988) 'Beyond the Republican Revival', *Yale Law Journal* 97(8): 1539–90, and F. Michelmas (1988) 'Law's Republic', *Yale Law Journal* 97(8): 1493–1537. The work that has most promoted a 'liberal' version of republicanism is P. Pettit (1997) *Republicanism: A Theory of Liberty and Government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. The works on republicanism as a political theory, or on the relationships between it and its history, published in the last few years are too many to be mentioned here. Of some interest, because of its broader influence, Jürgen Habermas's own interpretation of how republicanism and liberalism interact in the relationship between law and democracy, in J. Habermas (1996, original edn in German 1992) *Between Facts and Norms*. Cambridge: Polity Press. For a discussion of this contribution within the general context of the republican literature, cf. L. Baccelli (2003) *Critica del repubblicanesimo*. Rome and Bari: Editori Laterza. S. Ferrara and M. Rosati (eds) (2000) 'Forum: Repubblicanesimo e liberalismo a confronto', special issue of *Filosofia e Questioni Pubbliche* 5(1).
 3. Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (eds) (2002) *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, , vol. 1, *Republicanism and Constitutionalism in Early Modern Europe*, vol. 2, *The Values of Republicanism in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 4. Although it may seem unusual for a review article, I make reference to other reviews of the same work. In the circumstances, they provide a useful test of the state of the debate on republicanism, which is the real object of this review. See B. Fontana (2003) 'In the Gardens of the Republic', *The Times Literary Supplement* (11 July); P. Zagorin (2003) 'Republicanism', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 11(4): 701–14; M. Albertone, Review in *Rivista Storica Italiana* (2003), 95(2): 800–7; and J. Moore, Review Note in *Political Studies Review* (2003), 2(1): 56–7.

European Journal of Political Theory 4(4)

5. This point is raised by Biancamaria Fontana in her review cited at 4, where she criticizes these volumes for providing a 'memorial garden', rather than a living image, of republicanism's heritage. As the editors say in their introduction, some of the contemporary themes were discussed in another volume partly connected to the same project: C. McKinnon and I. Hampsher-Monk (eds) (2000) *The Demands of Citizenship*. London and New York: Continuum. It is, however, true that an enquiry on the sense in which the European republican heritage may still be active would offer an interesting perspective (though not necessarily a convincing one) on either the supposed common European identity or the values on which to foreground a European constitutional culture.
6. I have discussed the intricate relationship between contextualist interpretation and political relevance, and the epistemological and hermeneutic problems involved by this relationship, in D. Castiglione (1993) 'Historical Arguments in Political Theory', *Political Theory Newsletter* 5(2): 89–109.
7. Wood (n. 1), 'Preface to the 1998 Edition', p. vi. Cf. also Pocock (n. 1), afterwords to the 2d edn, and his (2004) 'Cittadini, clienti e creditori: la repubblica come critica del mutamento storico', in M. Viroli (ed.) *Libertà politica e virtù civile*, pp. 133–47. Turin: Edizioni della Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli. On the political relevance of historiographic reconstruction, an interesting case is the revival of liberalism in France, which presents some interesting parallels and telling contrasts with the case of republican historiography. Cf. J. Jennings, "'Le Retour des Émigrés'? The Study of the History of Political Ideas in Contemporary France', in D. Castiglione and I. Hampsher-Monk (eds) (2001) *The History of Political Thought in National Context*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
8. Wood (n. 1), pp. vi–vii.
9. Cf. J.G.A. Pocock (1993) 'A Discourse of Sovereignty: Observations on the Work in Progress', in N. Phillipson and Q. Skinner (eds) (1993) *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
10. Disagreement on the meaning of 'republicanism' may also depend on some confusion surrounding the meaning of 'republic' (in its vernacular variants) at different historical junctures. This is a topic interestingly developed by David Wootton in a paper on "'De vera republica": The Disciples of Baron and the Counter-Example of Venturi', presented at conference on Franco Venturi's vision of Republicanism, Naples, Sept. 2004. Regrettably, I only become aware of Wootton's piece and the other yet unpublished papers presented at the conference after I had completed this review.
11. Cf. Zagorin's (n. 4). But similar impressions are discernible in all other reviews, in particular Manuela Albertone's.
12. An often quoted place for this distinction is J. Rawls (1993) *Political Liberalism*, pp. 205–6. New York: Columbia University Press But Rawls was not the first to draw such a distinction, which was previously used, among others, by R. Bellamy (1992) *Liberalism and Modern Society: An Historical Argument*, Cambridge: Polity Press. M. Viroli (1992) *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics 1250–1600*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
13. With different emphasis, this is to be found in both Skinner and Viroli. See in particular Q. Skinner (1998) *Liberty before Liberalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. M. Viroli (1999) *Repubblicanesimo*. Rome and Bari: Editori Laterza.
14. Q. Skinner (1978) *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
15. This is recognized in the paper on 'Foundations and Moments', which John Pocock gave to Cambridge Conference on 'Rethinking the Foundations: Quentin Skinner and the History of Political Thought after Twenty-Five Years', 10–12 April 2003.

Castiglione: Republicanism and its Legacy

16. Cf. Baron (n. 1).
17. Cf. P.O. Kristeller (1965) *Renaissance Thought II: Papers on Humanism and the Arts*. New York: Columbia University Press.
18. Pocock (n. 7), p. 136.
19. Cf. Blair Worden's contribution, but also his 'Le idee repubblicane e la rivoluzione inglese', in Viroli (n. 7), pp. 109–32, 118–19 in particular.
20. The impression that this collection raises as many problems in the historiography of republicanism as it answers is shared by Jim Moore (n. 4). As he says, 'perhaps (one reflects upon it with some trepidation) another round of conferences may be in order'. Indeed, the Sisyphean condition often applies to academic endeavours.
21. The volume edited by Viroli (n. 7), which reproduces the results of another international project, financed by the Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, and whose contributors partly overlap with those of the present work, covers a larger historical span, and part of its overt intention is to provide such a missing link. However, the main focus seems to be almost exclusively on the republican idea of patriotism, while the volume as a whole is much less than its parts and appears rather haphazard in its organization.
22. Dilution and domestication had different facets: republican language and concepts became increasingly intertwined with other traditions (Bödeker, Geuna, Oz-Salzberger and Winch); republican discourse tried to accommodate discourses of manners and civility (Hampsher-Monk, and Spitz); aristocratic and exclusionary elements of classical republicanism were often defended against the transformations that commerce and the erosion of social hierarchies were promoting in politics (Conti, Fauré and Larrère); finally, its constitutional principles were progressively domesticated and made more compatible with monarchical government (Armitage, Zurbuchen, Kent Wright, Pii and Sonenscher).
23. Wood (n. 1), p. viii.
24. K.M. Baker, 'Le trasformazioni del repubblicanesimo classico nella Francia del Settecento', in Viroli (n. 7), pp. 149–75, p. 175 in particular.
25. G.S. Wood (2003) *The American Revolution*, p. 91. New York: Modern Library.
26. Examples of recent attempts to introduce a number of distinctions within the republican discourse and to put it into relation with other currents of thoughts, comprise J. Israel (2003) 'The Intellectual Origins of Modern Democratic Republicanism', *European Journal of Political Theory* 3(1): 7–36; R. Whatmore (2003) 'Democrats and Republicans in Restoration France', *European Journal of Political Theory* 3(1): 37–51; E.F. Biagini, 'Virtù e Vittoranesimo: i valori repubblicani del liberalismo inglese, 1860–1890', in Viroli (n. 7), pp. 177–98; and D. Castiglione (2000) "'That Noble Disquiet": Meanings of Liberty in the Discourse of the North', in S. Collini, R. Whatmore, and B. Young (eds) *Essays in British Intellectual History 1750–1950*, vol. 1, , pp. 48–69. *Economy, Politics and Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

