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IS THERE A MORAL POINT TO REPUBLICANISM?

Jefferson's Ethics of Virtue and the Modern Notion of History

Introduction

When concentrating on tracing the so-called Machiavellian elements in early modern and modern political thinking, most historians, in both departments of history and political science, seem to be surprisingly uninterested in what can still be thought of as the most interesting question of the whole scheme: what are and what have been the usual arguments for circumventing the obvious moral deficiencies of this science of republicanism in its development into various versions of *realpolitik*.¹

Leaving aside the problem of the Lockean-derived liberal understanding of what politics is about my question is: what is the morality of the conception of the polity as something that begins, to use Hannah Arendt's language, before any fully institutionalized forms of the public sphere? In fact, even the recent discussion of the term "deliberative democracy" involves all the basic elements of the long-lasting debate over the relation between the Lockean and the so-called republican paradigm(s).² As a historian I will not seek to actually answer the question, but only to illuminate it with a historical example that concerns the longstanding coexistence of human rights thinking and slavery.

Most European intellectuals, while keen on situating recent developments in the European Union in various historical contexts, show little interest in the early history of the only superpower in the world today, the United States. Some academics from those former colonies dare claim that the American founding fathers had some crucially modern thoughts in mind when forming “a more perfect Union” in 1776–1789, and that they helped the French in articulating what it is that we, modern “republicans,” still think of such an intellectually basic issue as human rights.

There is a classic question of whether one of the most respected historical figures of the American founding, Thomas Jefferson, truly believed what he wrote in the American Declaration of Independence about the “self-evident” truths that “all men are created equal” and therefore entitled to the inalienable rights of “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” This question arises from a simple historical fact about the author himself. Jefferson was not only the central figure in the American Enlightenment, or only the third president of the United States, or only the first leader of the present American Democratic Party – but also one of the largest slaveholders in the country.³

This article will suggest that Jefferson’s characteristically eighteenth-century understanding of the grand concept of progress suffices as the historical, intellectual context for explaining his conduct of the slavery question. Whether or not one would see Jefferson’s moral dilemma as interesting in itself, there is a theoretical aspect to all this, and it has much to do with republicanism as handled by both historians and political theorists. Quentin Skinner’s, I would think, a bit hastily formulated maxim that “unless we place our duties before our rights, we must expect to find our rights themselves undermined” would leave us poor historians with exactly the same moral anomaly as the Machiavellian Prince himself.⁴ Were our rights truly known, we hardly need moral philosophy for anything. As it comes to the relation between politics and morality, one may well ask could there possibly be anything wrong in a human effort to unite Italy, if not Europe? And if not, what is the statesman’s duty in this respect?

For a historian it may still appear worthwhile to cling to the conception of “the Aristotelian polity as the paradigm of all civic humanism” as offered by J.G.A. Pocock, in *The Machiavellian Moment*

(1975) a quarter of a century ago. His approach, in fact, seems to offer a sufficient rationale for freeing historians, though hardly political theorists, from precisely the kind of anomaly Skinner's formulation would still leave us with.

The purpose of this article is to outline how civic humanism can be seen as related to modern individualism by studying Jefferson's understanding of the slavery question. Then will follow an examination of what can be understood as the fundamental paradigm of all republican thinking in relation to a whole series of paradigms in the field of political science throughout Western history, ranging from Aristotle up to the most recent visions of a new republicanism.

Thomas Jefferson's Republicanism and a Vision of Hope and Fear

Thomas Jefferson, as is well known, was not only the author of the Declaration of Independence. In his home state he played the key role in the committee to revise Virginia's civil legislation and drafted the famous statute for religious freedom. He also advocated the abolition of primogeniture and, though in vain, the extension of universal male suffrage. As the Secretary of State in George Washington's cabinet he became a bitter opponent of the Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, whose large-scale fiscal program – based on the idea of a permanent national debt – strongly favored commercial interests and manufacturing. Jefferson, who always remained skeptical about the patriotism of the financial elite of the north and of Hamilton as their spokesman, became the nation's leading advocate of extensive democratic rights and a visionary with regard to rural, agrarian America. To a large extent the first American party system, the Hamilton-minded Federalists and the Jeffersonian Republicans, resulted from the fundamental differences of opinion between these two visionaries. In 1800 the Federalists lost the battle. Jefferson was elected to be the third president of the United States and the period known as the Jeffersonian era began. Whether this so-called Revolution of 1800 should be counted historically as a triumph of modern, democratic society is quite another matter.

Historically speaking, of course, the term “republicanism” refers to a combination of Aristotelian and Polybian patterns of thinking in politics centered on the concepts of public virtue and the balance of governmental powers, the latter offering the theoretical basis for securing public virtue against political corruption. The constituents of the ideal mixed regime (the republic) were handled in terms of the Aristotelian-inspired, sociopolitical grouping of the people – living in any human association describable as the state – into the one, the few, and the many. Each of these constituents of the classical ideal of the republic was supposed to embody an aspect of civic virtue so that the polity as a whole would be held stable against the ever-present threat of corruption. In this sense early modern political science was a science of civic virtue aimed at defining the best theoretical way to secure the state against the corruption of the civic virtue of either prince, his court, or the citizenry.⁵

To summarize the intellectual framework of the American foundation in terms of this view: the origins of American republican thought can be traced back to the Aristotelian ideal of a mixed regime and to the Polybian view of cyclical history in which political corruption and the renewal of civic virtue frequently succeed each other. The early modern characteristics of American political thinking, in turn, can be seen as originating in the teachings of Machiavelli and other Renaissance political writers, while its neoclassical elements are often associated with such English republicans as James Harrington and Algernon Sidney. Finally, the immediate ideological context of the thinking of the revolutionary generation is definable not so much in terms of Lockean social contract theory as in terms of post-Lockean political thought, represented by Blackstone, Bolingbroke, and the pseudonymous Cato (Trenchard and Gordon), a group of thinkers more or less explicitly identifiable as the Country ideologists.⁶ The central question arising out of this intellectual framework was to what extent the commercial interests of the king and the Parliament, comprising “a court,” in opposition to the gentry and the people, comprising “a country,” were corrupting civic virtue and deforming the ancient, presumably mixed, British constitution. In John Adams’s words, England was like Rome in decline, “a venal city, ripe for destruction, if it can only find a purchaser.”⁷

My suggestion is that Thomas Jefferson saw the American Revolution as the renewal of the Lockean principles of government simply because the corrupt British government had violated those principles. What, in Jefferson's eyes, was truly novel and even perhaps epoch-making in the American founding was that it drew heavily on the superiority of the modern, historically self-conscious understanding of political freedom in the sense that the natural rights of man were a matter of morality only there where people themselves manifested such rights in reality. For Jefferson republicanism was about preserving, not about creating, one's rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

From a sociopolitical perspective this view stood in sharp contrast to the early modern, totally extra-historical notion of the naturalness of social hierarchies. In Jefferson's words, the republic was a "state of society in which every member of mature and sound mind has an equal right of participation, personally, in the direction of the affairs of the society."⁸ Such a "state of society" was not equivalent to the form of government, for Jefferson treated it as an ideal towards which "all governments" should be directed. He, in sum, spoke of the notion of the polity; i.e., the perspective from which political discussion is always prior to any historical social ordering of the human regime.⁹

Considering the complicated historical relationship between the notions of personal freedom and of civic humanism, it still seems useful to peruse John Pocock's fundamental thesis in *The Machiavellian Moment* according to which Renaissance republican thought marks the emergence of the first mode of historicist thought in Western intellectual history.¹⁰ Few historical studies in republican thought have been so often and so severely criticized as this one, and most often criticism has been offered without any consideration as to how Pocock's mystic "moments" relate to historicist thinking.

The machiavellian "moment" is a seized "present," a relative permanence of time, acquirable by means of human, individual action and possible only within a rudimentarily linear conception of time related with the notion of politics. Being only an early modern view, it was still fully circumscribed by the notion of a closed future in two ways. Firstly, it was linked to the Polybian view of the inescapable, cyclical recurrence of different forms of government; secondly, it was linked to the central Christian notion of truly meaningful

time, namely the non-recurrent cycle of time linking the Fall and the Redemption.

Pocock's central concept, the "machievellian moment," is in his words "a name for the moment in conceptualized time in which the republic was seen as confronting its own temporal finitude." The notion of "conceptualized time" might be identified with the concept of process. In distinction from mere narrative, whether historical or fictional, which is based on a linear view of time and explains things as a sequence of occurrences, process is something that includes time as only one of its dimensions.¹¹ To take an example, the Christian meaning of the sacred time; the Fall and the Redemption may be taken as a type of process, which, due to its fundamental significance to an individual Christian, must take precedence over any secular type of occurrence, whether personal or public. This is why Pocock points out how "to a Christian it would appear that the primacy of politics was possible only on the blasphemous supposition that some *civitas saecularis* could be the *civitas Dei*."¹²

Two kinds of processes must be distinguished. Pocock formulates the distinction by noting that, "the being and not-being of a thing is not identical with the replacement of the thing by another thing: it is a closed process whereas the latter is open-ended."¹³ In terms of the early modern Christian view, the argument goes, a political event was bound to take place within the Polybian scheme of the transience of governments. It could amount to an act of replacement, but not to any truly meaningful change in terms of the only significant process, namely that of the Fall and the Redemption. All human attempts to build up a system of justice were doomed to repeat the story of the Fall.¹⁴ Even if the central Christian time conception is taken to be a linear one, it is certainly not open-ended in terms of the future, which explains its use for various eschatological notions of politics.¹⁵

In Renaissance civic humanism the novel element, therefore, was the consideration of the domain of politics as something truly significant despite its lack of eschatological meaning. In this sense the Machievellian notion of politics as a specific sphere of human action contributed to the gradual emergence of the secular Western world view that made particular events and individuals significant, in striking contrast to the medieval philosophy that found significance only in universals and in certain extra-temporal truths of theology.¹⁶ An

individual, not only his soul, was coming to be seen as something worth consideration within time.

The Aristotelian and Machiavellian elements of civic humanism should not be confused with each other, for they serve quite different functions in relation to the fundamental question about human agency in history. For Aristotle it was clear that the extension of democracy in Athens ever since Solon did not occur “according to Solon’s intention but as a result of circumstances.”¹⁷ The Machiavellian Prince is first and foremost an actor on the historical stage. He acts in a distinct sphere of human action defined as political. Therefore the ancient figures of Lycurgus and Solon could be excluded from this scheme as mere reformers.¹⁸

The tragic element of the Machiavellian figure of the prince stems from the perception of the historical particularity of man as an individual, albeit still only as a political being, no matter how universally benevolent his ends may appear. Anyone who subscribes to human historicity simultaneously submits himself to the notion of mere replacement of a thing with another thing and so on, potentially *ad infinitum*, meaning that the process he intends to contribute to is recognized as open-ended.¹⁹ In a truly open-ended process all the consequences of any particular action can never be fully known. As a political being one may become aware of both the conception of secular history as an entity in itself and of oneself as an agent within that history. Yet, within the early modern view, no statesman questions the only non-recurrent cycle of time between the Fall and Redemption as the ultimate image of all history. Regarding any effort to build up a merely human system of justice this means, in Pocock’s words, that “the politicization of virtue had arrived at the discovery of a politicized version of original sin.”²⁰

It is only what Pocock calls the “Rousseauian moment” that associates the ancient notion of man as naturally political with the notion of man as an individual within, at least, a rudimentarily open-ended view of all history – not only political history. It consists of finding the individual in a constant process of becoming alienated from the Rousseauian natural sociability of man, the latter notion being fully distinguishable from the contemporary, merely historical and by definition partly twisted, social order of modern, eighteenth-century society. Reversing this unfortunate development of Western

society – which apparently was going on despite all “the modernists” and their talk about progress – could occur only by turning back to the politics of small republics.²¹

What makes the Rousseauian scheme a “moment” is that it represents neither a mere description of the state of things, nor a utopian vision. Instead, it can be viewed as a call for the individual to conceive the fate of mankind as a process in a purely secular sense of the term. It was now secular history itself that mattered: man in history was both the subject and the agent of the process.²² This is, broadly speaking, why Rousseau’s political thought marks the emergence of the view in which the ultimate significance of the process of history became converted from Christian eschatology into a secular ideology connected with the image of the modern individual. In Pocock’s words, “since by its nature society humanized man and by the same processes distracted and alienated him again, there was no point in past, present, or future time at which this double effect had not been going on.”²³ The historical vision flowing from this view is equally ambiguous, for it consists of both hope and fear. It is this perspective which gives rise to Pocock’s assertion that

the quarrel between civic virtue and secular time has been one of the main sources of the Western awareness of human historicity; but at the same time, the continued conduct of this quarrel – largely because it is anchored in a concern for the moral stability of the human personality – has perpetuated a premodern view of history as a movement away from the norms defining that stability, and so as essentially uncreative and entropic where it does not attain to millennium or utopia.²⁴

There are certain doctrinaire aspects related to the prevailing liberal approach to the history of the American founding that tend unnecessarily to brand any pattern of sociopolitical thinking short of Lockean liberal ideology as inherently incapable of envisioning a better future. The term “ideology” has a myriad of meanings and connotations. Most often, perhaps, it is used to refer to what Bernard Yack characterizes as “grand ideologies that involve claims about the direction of human history.”²⁵ It might be illuminating to distinguish ideological thinking from idealistic one in terms of such concepts as distribution of political power and differentiation among

the members of society. Contrary to what I would call a purely “idealistic” perspective – that fully acknowledges only the presumably Lockean and definitely ahistorical, view of free society as inherently non-political and fundamentally alien to all notions of social differentiation – it is the fundamental presumption of the historicist perspective that in order to have an ideology one would first have to admit that society is always historical, and therefore, inevitably differentiated as well. Human society is inhabited, not by some standard ideal of man as equivalent to the individual, but by people, who are genuinely different precisely because they are historical, cultural, and individual, beings.²⁶

This is why the so-called Country argument used in British politics in the early eighteenth century can be called an ideology, although it was confined to being only a “vision” of “English politics.”²⁷ This is also what was at stake with the constant discussion among eighteenth-century enlightenment thinkers who viewed civil society as distinguishable from the natural law conception of the absolutely free and absolutely moral “state of nature.” Ideally, or metaphysically, or *only* theoretically speaking, all mankind had always lived (and was always to live) under the moral law of nature, while ideologically the problem was how best apply the dictates of that law to historical reality. Most often it was claimed that the best chance to discharge one’s moral duties was to cling to the notion of civil society and to the possibilities it offered in terms of human perfection.

In this respect it usually made little difference whether such a scheme of progress was expressed in terms of three rather than four different stages of history.²⁸ Given the fact that Thomas Jefferson personally translated Destutt de Tracy’s *A Critical Commentary and Review of Montesquieu’s Spirit of Laws*, the book appears quite applicable as a point of departure in studying Jefferson’s thought of history. The authors vision consisted of three phases of civilization as epitomized in certain general patterns of thinking and the corresponding political modes of society:

I noticed that the human mind is progressive in the social as in all other sciences, that democracy or despotism were the first governments imagined by men, and mark the first degree of civilization that aristocracy under one or more chiefs, whatever name may be given to it, has every

where taken the place of these in artificial governments, and constitutes the second degree of civilization and that representative democracy under one or several delegates, is a new invention, which forms and constitutes the third degree of civilization. I added, that in the first state, it is ignorance which governs or force that dictates in the second, opinions are formed, and religion has the greatest power in the third, reason begins to prevail and philosophy has more influence.²⁹

This is a kind of progress theory based on Montesquieu's categorization of different governments. Most importantly, however, Destutt de Tracy is arguing that general ignorance may bring about a pure democracy just as well as pure despotism. This ambiguity results from the fundamental presumption lurking behind the author's, as well as Jefferson's, view of scientific progress, namely that representative government – which coincided with the predominance of reason – is the regime by which man may gain control over the course of his history. That the idea of natural, inalienable rights of man was a necessity for this ideological endeavor to get into control of one's history is what shall be discussed.

Jefferson's Inalienable Rights to Preserve the Freedom of Free Man

Whether or not there is a break between the Jeffersonian and Lockean views of natural rights depends on what is claimed about them. What is known, is that in the Declaration of Independence Jefferson replaced the third item on Locke's famous list of the natural rights, "property," with "the pursuit of happiness." This is how the doctrine of the natural rights of man is referred to in the famous preamble to the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government...³⁰

Even while Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration seems epistemologically more consistent than the final one, because he, in the former, spoke of "the preservation of" these rights rather than only of "rights to" or "rights of" life and liberty, there is no doubt that both the original draft and the Declaration hold that an individual cannot morally alienate such rights from oneself.³¹

Morton White's renowned account of Jefferson's rights thinking, *The Philosophy of the American Revolution* (1978), relies too heavily on the idea that the term "unalienable" makes the very notion of a right fully reciprocal with that of a duty in the spirit of Samuel Pufendorf's category of the perfect rights. This view led him to argue that, in Jefferson's view, once a given individual has a morally inalienable right to preserve his life and liberty, he must find himself under the duty to preserve them.³² Thus far, the duties and rights seem to be in balance; but in order to hold that the pursuit of happiness would be a morally inalienable right, one is compelled to argue that every free man must be, not only under some natural constraint but also under the moral obligation to pursue happiness. The traditional voluntarist argument would be, in fact, necessary to make this reading of the Declaration entirely comprehensible. Such an interpretation is totally incompatible with Jefferson's own assertion that "in strict language" man cannot owe moral duties to himself.³³

The most logical way to maintain that the rights of "the preservation" of one's life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are undeniable, and even perhaps self-evident, seems to be to conceive of these rights as rights to activities including their own ends. When Jefferson suggested corrections to the Marquis de Lafayette's draft for the French declaration of rights, he crossed out the term "property" among the inalienable rights of man, but accepted the notion of the preservation of the use of human faculties among them.³⁴ Once again in 1817 Jefferson enumerated the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and this time supplemented the list with the right to use "our faculties."³⁵

Jefferson's consistent interest in the notion of the free use of one's faculties brings his view close to the Aristotelian conception of *praxis*. Morton White brings up this explanation only in the appendix of his book, which is probably due to his unstated assumption that the use of such an argument would be tantamount to maintaining that Jefferson believed in Aristotelian elitist social views.

On the whole, ancient virtue ethics examine the objectively best way of living. Yet, regarding Garrett Ward Sheldon's formulation of the widely held understanding of all ancient ethics, namely that "classical social ethics ... imply an objective standard – revealed by God or determined collectively," it is necessary, for reasons of clarity, to note that the eudaimonistic view of morality does not in itself demand a once and for all settled view of such a standard.³⁶ As John McDowell has pointed out, the Aristotelian definition of the good for man (*eudaimonia*) as "rational activity in accordance with excellence" does not have to be interpreted as if it excludes all "competing views about what it is the business of a human being to do."³⁷ To fully grasp the historicist aspect of this view, it is useful to pay attention to John McDowell's central thesis that all choices which reveal something of the character of the agent – and which the agent always makes by the means of his moral virtue and for the sake of truly eudaimonistic ends – can be viewed as cases of "doing well here and now."³⁸

Indeed, as far as there is to be found any fixed view of man in Jefferson's moral thought, it results from the conception of the morally inalienable rights of a free man to preserve his free agency and moral responsibility, meaning that the individual is morally bound to preserve his freedom whenever such freedom has been truly achieved. In other words, freedom is meaningful only in the framework of historical time. In his often quoted letter of June 13, 1814 to Thomas Law Jefferson turned the whole issue of morality in the language of virtue ethics by noting that "nature has constituted utility to man the standard and test of virtue. Men living in different countries, under different circumstances, different habits, and regimens, may have different utilities."³⁹

Jefferson should not be dismissed as a utilitarian thinker on this account. First of all, he never suggested that a man's virtue could be defined by the number of people whose happiness he has managed to advocate. Instead, virtue always devolved from the notion of justice. Second, human capacity for virtue was inherent in every man. Third, any virtuous character trait had to comply with human sociability in order to appear as a real virtue.

To his nephew, Peter Carr, Jefferson once sent a list of reading material for religious studies with the advice that the young man should not feel despair even if he would end up thinking that "there is no

god,” because he would find “incitements to virtue in comfort and pleasantness you feel in it’s exercise.”⁴⁰ Virtue, in Jefferson’s eyes, was a matter of habitual exercise of desirable behavior in the most classical sense of the term: moral virtues were always acquired first as mere habits. “Politeness is artificial good humor,” wrote Jefferson, “it covers the natural want of it, and ends by rendering habitual a substitute nearly equivalent to the real virtue.”⁴¹ Politeness, of course, would equal the real virtue after the person in question had acquired it as a personal, permanent disposition of mind. Morality was a sheer matter of learning and practicing virtue. Thence, it was best to “be very select in the society you attach yourself to,” as Jefferson wrote to his grandson, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, strongly advising him to “avoid taverns, smoakers, and idlers and dissipated persons generally.”⁴²

Political and personal virtues were strictly linked together. When explicating his preference for the agrarian America over contemporary European social models, Jefferson famously asserted that “the mobs of the great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body.” This conclusion followed from the inherent distinction between the Jeffersonian image of the socio-economically autonomous yeoman and “the manufacturing man.” Men in manufacture and trade were dependent for their subsistence “on the casualties and caprice of customers.” It was this “dependance” that suffocated “the germ of virtue,” while they were only “the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigour.” Finally, a “degeneracy” in these manners was what Jefferson called “a canker which soon eats to the heart of ... the laws and constitution” of the republic.⁴³

Most essentially the menace of the corruption of virtue could not be eradicated by clinging to any particular form of government. Nor could the American Revolution make any drastic change in this respect. Such a threat simply concerned all human virtues in all history. The central concept of all republicanism, civic virtue, referred to the human capacity for self-government in the sense that some good was seen to inhere in the idea of self-government itself. Corruption was what happened to people in terms of their *political freedom*, due to the absence of virtue.

As Pocock formulates this position in relation to the Revolution, “there was no remedy which Americans could seek short of

rinnovazione and *ridurre ai principii*; a return to the fundamental principles ... of the constitution of the commonwealth itself.”⁴⁴ Considering the Revolution in terms of the renewal of civic virtue meant considering it in terms of the cyclical, Polybian notion of political history, meaning that it was conceivable as a return from a corrupted regime to an uncorrupted one. In this sense it made little difference what specific kind of mixed or unmixed regime one was dealing with, since what was known was that whether mixed or not, the British regime had failed to hold corruption at bay.

In Jefferson’s view, corruption in manners was always a hindrance toward more civilized modes of sociability and common understanding of the dictates of natural law. In its extreme form, when even the natural duties became neglected, moral depravation was a threat to the very existence of a society. Jefferson remained constantly worried about the apparent lack of virtue among his fellow citizens. This was the case even with the revolutionary elite of the slaveholders, whose moral instincts suddenly ceased to function whenever their property in slaves was at stake: “What a stupendous ... machine is man,” lamented Jefferson, when noting how an individual could “inflict on his fellow men a bondage, one hour of which is fraught with more misery than ages of that which he rose in rebellion to oppose.”⁴⁵ By taking a closer look at how Jefferson described the moral depravation in the courts of Europe the picture becomes even clearer:

The practice of Kings marrying only in the families of Kings, has been that of Europe for centuries. Now, take any race of animals, confine them in idleness and inaction, whether in a sty, a stable, or a state-room, pamper them with high diet, gratify all their sexual appetites, immerse them in sensualities, nourish their passions, let everything bend before them, and banish whatever might lead them to think, and in a few generations they become all body and no mind ... Louis the XVI. was a fool, The Queen of Portugal, A Braganza, was an idiot by nature. And so was the King of Denmark ... Gustavus of Sweden, and Joseph of Austria were really crazy, George of England, you know, was in a straight waistcoat... In this state Bonaparte found Europe; and it was this state of its rulers which lost it with scarce a struggle.⁴⁶

No wonder, the classical language of republicanism made perfect sense to Jefferson, who, even as a stern believer in the moral progress

of all mankind as a whole, wrote: “God bless ... all our rulers, and give them the wisdom ... to fortify us against the degeneracy of one government, and the concentration of all its powers in the hands of the one, the few, the well-born or the many.”⁴⁷

Jefferson’s Letter to Edward Coles

To clarify how central the notions of moral training and the constant exercise of the human faculties were for Jefferson’s thought regarding the slavery problem, it is necessary to examine in some detail his astonishingly harsh views on the “deteriorated state” of the black man in the letter he wrote to Edward Coles in 1814. Edward Coles was a former secretary of President James Madison and one of the most ardent opponents of slavery among the Virginian slaveholding elite. In the letter in question Jefferson not only denied his support for Coles’s plan of emancipating his slaves and migrating with them to Illinois, but also held that it would be unpatriotic on Coles’s part to leave his home state, Virginia.⁴⁸ What makes his stunningly harsh assessment of the slaves particularly interesting here is that it was, once again, articulated in terms of human virtues (excellences) and moral training in both practice and in theory:

The love of justice and the love of country plead equally the cause of these people, and it is a moral reproach to us that they should have pleaded it so long in vain, and should have produced not a single effort, nay I fear not much serious willingness to relieve them & ourselves from our present condition of moral and political reprobation ... For men probably of any color, but of this we know, brought from their infancy without necessity for thought and forecast, are by their habits rendered as incapable as children of taking care of themselves, and are extinguished promptly wherever industry is necessary for raising young. In the mean time they are pest in society by their idleness, and the depredations to which this leads them ... Their amalgamation with the other color produces a degradation to which no lover of his country, no lover of excellence in the human character can innocently consent.⁴⁹

The most obnoxious feature of the argumentation here consists of Jefferson’s comment on how “no lover of excellence in human char-

acter” can hope for the amalgamation of the black man with white society. The blueprint seems to be that the degraded condition of the African-American is in itself a deficiency of “the excellence in the human character,” and that the black man suffers from this deficiency simply because of being a black man. Such a notion suggests that moral virtue, in the case of the black race, is perhaps not simply an inherent moral quality susceptible of individual exercise and development, although Jefferson elsewhere handles it as derivable from the concept of the moral sense common to all of us.

What Jefferson probably meant to say when resorting to such an argument, however, was that slavery was the cause of such a thorough moral degradation among its victims. Rearing a child in slavery was analogous to bringing up a child in freedom. It was only that bringing up a slave was meant to deprive that individual of the very possibility of virtue – namely, by keeping that person in the state of an innocent child and therefore incapable of moral reflection.

In Jefferson’s memorandum on Condorcet’s treatment of the slavery issue, the notion of the slave as someone deprived of the very use of human faculties to pursue happiness was stated in the following terms: “In fact the slave is despoiled not only of all property moveable and immoveable but of the faculties of acquiring it, of property in his time, in his strength, of whatever nature had endowed him with to preserve his life or to satisfy his wants. To this wrong is added that of taking from the slave the right to dispose of his person.”⁵⁰ In other words, it was the exercise of virtuous dispositions that truly made man an individual and that was what the slave was not allowed to attain.

Jefferson’s suspicions about Edward Coles’s implicit advocacy of an immediate slave emancipation against public opinion can be seen as deeply connected with the idea of a man acting as the liberator of another human being when the other had been deprived of his inalienable rights as an individual. Given the view that the slave had been deprived of his free will, making a man a moral being was at issue here. There was a remarkable difference between viewing the Revolution as the act of retaining one’s inalienable rights and as that of embarking on the mission of liberating other human beings. Regarding the end the method was of crucial importance, as Jefferson made clear to the young Coles:

As to the method by which this difficult work is to be effected, if permitted to be done by ourselves, I have seen no proposition so expedient on the whole, as that as emancipation of those born after a given day, and of their education and expatriation after a given age. This would give time for gradual extinction of that species of labour & substitution of another, and lessen the severity of the shock which an operation so fundamental cannot fail to produce.⁵¹

This emancipation program offered to Coles in 1814 was something Jefferson had advocated for thirty years. In the only book Jefferson ever published, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), he had proposed that black children should be allowed to stay with their parents only “to a certain age, then be brought up, at the public expense, to tillage, arts or sciences, according to their geniusses, till the females should be eighteen, and the males twenty-one years of age, when they should be colonized to such place as the circumstances of the time should render most proper, sending them out with arms, implements of houshold and of the handicraft arts, feeds, pairs of the useful domestic animals, &c.”⁵²

Jefferson, in other words, thought that slaves were not proper educators, or tutors, for the first black generation destined for freedom. He did not intend to free adult slaves, but suggested freeing black children who had been educated for freedom by white society. Nor does he ever seem to have suggested that the educators would inquire whether their “students of freedom” would choose to stay among the oppressors of their parents or leave them for good when allowed to do that. This was really a modernization program à la Rousseau: people had to be forced to accept their freedom. Jefferson’s program was not suggested as the most humane way of bringing about general emancipation, but as the only method for ensuring the emancipation without risking a large-scale slave rebellion, and most importantly, a civil war in his home republic. This is how Jefferson expressed his concern about the role of the emancipator to Edward Coles in 1814:

This enterprise ... shall have all my prayers, & these are the only weapons of an old man. But in the mean time are you right in abandoning this property, and your country with it? I think not ... I hope then, my dear sir, you will reconcile yourself to your country and its unfortunate

condition; that you will not lessen its stock of sound disposition by withdrawing your portion of the mass. That, on the contrary you will come forward in the public councils, become the missionary of this doctrine truly christian; insinuate & inculcate it softly but steadily, through the medium of writing and conversation; associate your labors, and when the phalanx is formed, bring on and press the proposition perseveringly until its accomplishment. It is an encouraging observation that no good measure was ever proposed, which, if duly pursued, failed to prevail in the end.⁵³

Jefferson simply asked Edward Coles to stay in Virginia because of Coles's "sound disposition." Virginia, in Jefferson's eyes, was in need of men like himself and his most trusted friend, James Madison – slaveholders who sought to get rid of the distinct "nation in chains," as historian Peter Onuf has described the status of all African-Americans in Jefferson's eyes.⁵⁴ Jefferson warned Coles of too much sensibility, which would only serve to weaken the antislavery cause in Virginia and deepen the conflict between the free and the slave states on the national level.

The use of the term "innocently" in Jefferson's statement according to which "no lover of excellence in the human character can innocently consent" to the idea of amalgamating ex-slaves into American society is particularly interesting. His use of the term "innocently" in such a context suggests that Coles erred if he regarded private manumission to be an innocent act. Benevolent motives did not make Coles an innocent benefactor of mankind, but rather a fool who seriously confused the ends with the means. No conception of an innocent adult was involved in Jefferson's moral outlook, for people without full moral responsibility were not what he said he loved in his countrymen. This is how he compared himself as an American founding father with the founders of the Colombian republic: "We both consider the people as our children, and love them with parental affection. But you love them as infants whom you are afraid to trust without nurses; and I as adults whom I freely leave to self-government."⁵⁵

Finally, it is worth remarking that when this latter part of the Coles letter is considered in the context of the alleged deficiency in virtue among the slave population, it appears that when speaking of "their amalgamation with the other color" Jefferson did not necessarily re-

fer to genetic racial mixing. Coles's plan of settling his slaves as tenants among free, white farmers in Illinois did not entail racial mixing, while it certainly would have led to creating a class of free blacks in white society, at least temporarily.⁵⁶

This is not to argue that Jefferson could not have been equally worried about the possibility that any such plan would end with "miscegenation." Jefferson's abhorrence towards racial mixture, as he indicated in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, had led him to take a stand according to which "a lover of natural history" must be allowed to "excuse an effort to keep those in the department of man as distinct as nature has formed them."⁵⁷ He appears to be asking Coles to consider the threat that his plan might – in the long run – serve to advance an unnatural process in terms of Jefferson's stunningly premodern view of natural history. Breaking with the known principle of prudence that "ignorance is preferable to error" could on no account be deemed a matter of simple, pure benevolence. In Jefferson's eyes, the emancipation of slaves was a political issue just as much as it was a moral one. Virtue always devolved from morality, but it was identifiable with its utility.

To conclude: on Jefferson's position regarding slavery, three main points are worth keeping in mind. First, even while Jefferson was a genuine racist, his distaste for any permanent mixture of races in the United States, in fact, emanated from the fear of civil conflict in the federal republic in the case that former slaves would be allowed to remain in the country and form a racially distinct lower class of American society. Second, during his political career, both as a legislator in Virginia and as the President of the United States he hardly ever aimed at weakening the legal, institutional basis of slavery itself, but seems rather to have thought that without its being strictly regulated it would remain impossible to abolish such an efficient economic arrangement of labor by a commonly made, purely political, decision. Third, regardless of what he thought of racial issues as such – for he was not certain what to think of them – it was his lifelong precondition for the general abolition of slavery that free Americans must get rid of not only the institution, but also the slave population itself.

The ultimate rationale for Jefferson's position, in sum, was his constant concern about the possibility that the slavery question, if not

solved in a methodologically right way, would inevitably lead either to a racial or a civil war in the American republic itself. In this sense, he was a predecessor of Abraham Lincoln, who faced exactly the situation Jefferson for the whole of his life had feared.

History and the Republican Paradigm(s)

It is time to return to the central ideological problem of the Jeffersonian progressive view of history, namely how to gain control over that history in a given polity. The prevailing interpretation of the historical meaning of the American founding rests heavily on the view that the adoption of the Constitution marks the fundamental replacement of early modern notions of a mixed constitution by a modern, constitutionally mixed, notion of government. In other words, political science was finally abstracted from the notion of sociopolitical elites, and, consequently, from the classical notion of politics as based on the balance between the Aristotelian concepts of the one, the few, and the many.⁵⁸ Next it will be discussed how this view can be connected with a certain, historicist, notion of the civic humanist paradigm.

Contrary to what is usually thought, the very idea that American political thought detached itself from the classical republicanism is not historically antagonistic to what can be taken to be the paradigm of civic humanism. In so far as such a “paradigm” is supposed to concern republican language, it does not represent an ideology or an “ism,” in itself. Even when considered as a kind of theoretical presumption of what republican language is about, Pocock’s characterization of civic humanist thought – as it pertains to historical study – is supposed to function only as a method for historical study of political discussion. From a historian’s point of view it is quite possible to reserve the paradigm, in Pocock’s works, “to denote to its employment as an interpretative matrix.”⁵⁹

What makes the republican language “true” in a historical sense, is simply that its usage by various historical political thinkers has been documented.⁶⁰ One should distinguish between the republican language and the paradigms of political science, whether classical,

neoclassical, or modern, as well as distinguish between them and the particular theories occurring within such different scientific paradigms in the Kuhnian situation of “normal science.” Most importantly, however, it is necessary not to confuse the use of a language with the particular political ideas of a given thinker deploying such a language.⁶¹

To illustrate the meaning of the latter point, it suffices to turn to Bernard Bailyn, who, after a careful categorization of different kinds of pamphlets issued during the American Revolution, notes that “some pamphlets were political events in themselves to which other pamphleteers responded.”⁶² This is, of course, how political discourse functions. Such “political events in themselves” may be understood as acts of speech in the sense that any of them may in itself create a new intertextual context for the one who takes the trouble to respond. Situating such a reciprocal event of discourse in a historical context, in turn, involves determining some extra-textual political reality in which the writers acted, while it may also involve determining a historical language context in which the discourse itself appears meaningful.⁶³ Fundamentally, each and every such an act may be considered separately in terms of its historical context, meaning that historical interpretation in itself is always about determining the so-called “proper” political or historical context.

Pocock’s *The Machiavellian Moment* provides a history of an Aristotelian-inspired language of republicanism more or less closely describable by the civic humanist paradigm.⁶⁴ The paradigm has very little to do with what is usually referred to as political Aristotelianism, because it allows us to subscribe to the notion that irreversible changes take place in history. The author’s formulation of what the conception of polity is about is offered in terms of “a society” that in the eyes of classical republican thinkers was

organized in such a manner that any theoretically conceivable group had opportunity to contribute to decisions in the way for which it was best fitted, while any individual citizen might contribute many times over, both as a member of any specialized group, for which his attainments might qualify him and as a member of the non-elite demos, the citizen body as a whole.⁶⁵

The formulation, indeed, sounds broad, but its strength lies in the fact that it enables the historian to consider different political theories ranging from the classical period up to the early modern as well as the modern usages of political concepts within a single scheme. Most importantly, this formulation is not morally charged in any other sense than that “any theoretically conceivable group” *can* “contribute” to society in some theoretically conceivable way. There is no inherent reason even to consider such a contribution as equivalent to duty. The paradigm, then, is neither a political nor a moral theory in itself. It provides us with no theory of even the best way to theorize about the relation between people and their government, except in the suggestion that the theoretician should have something positive to say about how people are supposed to promote their own good in terms of any association describable as political.

Lance Banning’s formulation of the paradigm is essentially similar to the one offered here, although he speaks of it only as either a classical or an early modern paradigm. The reason for this is that his definition involves the notion that each “individual attains his highest good” when “contributing his virtue to decisions.” Such a notion about one’s “highest good” does not inevitably belong to the paradigm when used for an historical analysis of a given polity. An individual’s “highest good” may well lay elsewhere even while a given political society sees his political action as a true contribution to the common decision making process.⁶⁶

It is of definite importance to distinguish between the theoretical efforts to formulate a republican political theory and the historical use of the Aristotelian polity as “the paradigm of all civic humanism.”⁶⁷ The latter term refers simply to the historian’s paradigm within which to compare different historical theories within different political paradigms.

To illuminate the distinction it is useful to discuss briefly Quentin Skinner’s exceptional essay “The republican ideal of political liberty” (1990). What makes this essay exceptional is that it is an exercise in political science rather than in history even though written by a historian. Skinner, indeed, argues that the republican tradition can be turned into “a vision of politics.” His vision aims at resolving nothing less than “a false dichotomy” which he identifies with Alasdair MacIntyre’s insistence that there is a moral opposition “between lib-

eral individualism in some version or other and the Aristotelian tradition in some version or other.”⁶⁸ In delineating the origins of this “false dichotomy” Skinner begins by reminding us of various formulations of negative and positive liberties put forward by such authorities on the liberal tradition as Jeremy Bentham, Isaiah Berlin, and Donald Dworkin. Then he contradicts the liberal tradition with what he calls “the exercise theory of liberty” embraced by such more or less Aristotelian-inspired theorists as Hannah Arendt, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Charles Taylor.⁶⁹ I doubt whether the dichotomy is as false as Skinner presumes.

Tracing the anti-Aristotelian elements in Machiavellian republicanism, Skinner works out a broad republican thesis of politics, and asserts that “the Aristotelian and Thomist assumption that a healthy public life must be founded on a conception of *eudaimonia* is by no means the only alternative tradition available to us if we wish to recapture a vision of politics based not merely on procedures but on common meanings and purposes.”⁷⁰ Skinner offers us “the traditions of Machiavellian republicanism as a third force” within which the “exercise theory of liberty” can be taken as compatible with modern rights theories. Even so, “the republican vision of politics” cannot tell “us how to construct a genuine democracy,” because – as Skinner says – this is “for us to work out.” All this, at least, seems fully compatible with the conception of *eudaimonia*. Nor is the Aristotelian notion of numerous, if not infinite, possibilities for organizing a workable regime in any sense antagonistic to Skinner’s adherence to human agency in time. A genuine democracy is, indeed, a good idea.

What makes Skinner’s argument problematic is his implicit suggestion that one can derive reliable normative proposition from the republican vision of politics itself, in the form of a warning “that unless we place our duties before our rights, we must expect to find our rights themselves undermined.”⁷¹ Speaking of duties as something to be preferred to something else means simply that one has no moral predicament to solve. Skinner, in other words, does not inform us what is the constitutive good from which such a “duty,” or an imperative, or rationale as his notion of “placing our duties before our rights” is derivable. Nor is it clear whether such a good is supposed to be found as residing in the vision of republicanism.

The assertion that the republican tradition, or any other political view, in itself, may inform us of the necessity of seeing political awareness as a *duty* is vulnerable from the perspective of moral philosophy. It is like claiming that there is no real distinction between deontic and aretaic notions of morality. The strength of the historicist analysis of civic humanism is that no such claim is necessary, because republican thought can be viewed as consisting in the notion of virtues exercising powers; as Pocock states: "We know that the Aristotelian polity, the ultimate paradigm of all civic humanism, was simultaneously a distribution of political functions and powers and a partnership between many kinds of virtue."⁷² Some good (or some human value) is simply presumed to exist among the people before a theorist may begin his work.

When regarded as an "interpretative matrix," the republican paradigm aims at disproving neither the deontic nor the aretaic views of morality; nor does it refute their respective historical notions of how morality relates to politics, if at all. What the paradigm refutes is merely taking paradigmatically ahistorical notions of morality and politics as the method of historical analysis of these concepts. As Alasdair MacIntyre phrases the question about the connections of history and morality: "There was the-morality-of-fourth-century-Athens, there were the-moralities-of-thirteenth-century-Western-Europe, there are numerous such moralities, but where ever was or is *moral-ity* as such?"⁷³

To return to the theme of the modern character of the American founding, one may conclude that speaking about constitutionalism by using classical terminology of virtue and corruption did not have to mean that no ideology was involved.⁷⁴ Neither Jefferson nor his adversaries lived under the spell of the Polybian notion of history. While Jefferson strongly believed in the general moral refinement of mankind, his fundamental concern was to preserve a confessedly historical, and admittedly morally deficient, human system of justice, the American republic. Nor did he ever think that the hypothetical failure of that experiment should be considered the final proof of a human incapacity for progress. It was the possibility of losing his political experiment in a war about slavery that most concerned him. It is good to bear in mind, however, that Jefferson was

an exceptional slaveholder due to his claim that there *was* a slavery question. One of the most “innovative” statements regarding this dilemma is undoubtedly the one put forward in Gerald Gunderson’s *A New Economic History of America* (1976). He pinpoints the economic motives of the slaveholders in going to war in 1861 by noting that it was only the later “historians who failed to recognize that war was not necessarily always a poor course of action.”⁷⁵

History, of course, teaches us nothing, nor does a historical account of Jefferson’s moral predicament. In relation to that problem we live in the post-bellum era. Yet, with our own moral predicaments – whether they concern animal rights, ethnic tensions in many member states of the European Union, or the continuously widening gap of living standards between our internet-freedom in the West and the reality of the underpaid (child) labor in the Third World – we might well live in an antebellum era. Perhaps practicing virtue simply means constant and conscious sensitivity to such obvious moral issues. As modern individuals we, of course, live in history ourselves and one may always ask whether there is a better reason for hope than for fear. This said, it remains only to state that even when interested in such “dramatic” academic ideas as finding politics in the language itself, we, in our own uses of language, no matter which Union we are discussing, hopefully never end up being only academic animals.

Notes

- 1 It is worth noting here that this article will not handle the problem to what extent eighteenth-century thinkers applied moral and political concepts to women. Only for practical reasons, I will therefore use the term “individual” as referring primarily to men, as I would guess did Hannah Arendt when stating that, “No man can be sovereign because not one man, but men, inhabit the earth.” Arendt 1958, 1998, 234; I want to express my gratitude to Roger Clarke, Pasi Ihalainen, Allan Megill, and Peter Onuf, for their comments about the manuscript.
- 2 This is how James Bohman and William Rehg characterize deliberative democracy in discussing Jon Elster’s essay on the concept: “Elster’s essay brings out two key elements in the deliberative conception of democracy: that political deliberation requires citizens to go beyond private self-

interest of the “market” and orient themselves to public interests of the “forum”; and that deliberation from this civic standpoint is defensible only if it improves political decision making, especially with regard to achieving common ends. Both points invite further questions. Exactly how, for example, should one conceive the civic standpoint and public good? The classical civic-republican view stemming from Plato and Aristotle conceived the common good substantively, in terms of shared traditions, values, conceptions of virtue, and so forth. The quality of deliberation requires insight into, and the retrieval of, these traditions and values.” Bohman & Rehg 1997, xiv.

3 This view has very little to do with the much discussed Thomas Jefferson-Sally Hemings relationship. The historical and historiographical aspects of that issue are best handled by Annette Gordon-Reed. See Gordon-Reed 1997, *passim*.; For particularly valid views on Jefferson’s thinking in general, see, for example, Matthews 1984, *passim*. and Onuf 2000, *passim*.; On the relationship between republicanism and Jefferson’s Republican Party, see Banning 1978.; For a balanced view of Jefferson scholarship generally, see Onuf 1993.

4 Quotation, Skinner 1990, 1993, 308-309.

5 See on “the science of civic virtue,” Pocock 1975, 484; cf. Pocock 1988, 57.

6 Bailyn 1967, 1971, *passim*.

7 Bailyn 1967, 1971, 136.

8 Quotations, TJ to Samuel Kercheval, July 12, 1816. Ford 12:7; TJ to Isaac H. Tiffany April 4, 1819. *Jefferson. His Political Writings*. (ed. by Dumbauldt) 1955, 55.

9 Quotations, Lienesch 1993, 1994, 330.

10 Pocock 1975, 3, 551.

11 See Pocock 1975, 5.

12 Pocock 1975, 552.

13 Pocock 1975, 5.

14 Pocock 1975, 77-78.

15 See Falk, 1988, 379.

16 Pocock 1975, 3-47, esp., 5.

17 Aristotle, *Politics* 1273b27-1274a11, 160-161.

18 See Pocock 1975, 168.

19 See Pocock 1975, 5.

20 Pocock 1975, 167.

21 Shklar 1969, 1987, *passim*. This is how Judith Shklar sums up what one may regard as modern ideological thinking in Rousseau: “Even when Rousseau wrote about a policy or an institution that he recommended, it was always a matter of attacking the existing system. Not equality, but

the destruction of inequality matters, all the more so since the psychological predisposition to inequality is a manifest part of the experience of association.” Ibid., 170.

22 When considered in terms of a process the end result of all history might well appear as the end of man with all his potentials actualized. About all the qualifications of such an end, however, an individual may remain equally certain or uncertain as to the significance of the sacred time. And only by clinging to the notion of not being able to foresee such an end may one see any point in finding a relative permanence in the cyclical recurrence of human life as consisting in innumerable human beings coming to be and ceasing to be. The very notion of human action may therefore appear relevant only in the present tense that simultaneously acknowledges the relevance of irreducible changes in our experience of the continuity of time. Cf. Arendt 1958, 1998, *passim*. esp., 96-99, 232-234.

23 Pocock 1975, 504.

24 Pocock 1975, 551; The process, by definition, involves its own fulfillment. One may see Christianity as contributing to Western political thought only when politics came to be seen as the means for fulfilling some extra-political, namely eschatological, hopes; for some radical groups, such as the Fifth Monarchy Men, the English Revolution appeared as the moment for turning England into a godly nation ready for the end of time. What makes their millennialism historically interesting is that some *secular political action* was deemed significant in itself even while it still acquired its significance from certain eschatological views on the part of the historical actors themselves. In a similar manner, the Machiavellian figure of the prince – as a political innovator – could be seen as an integral part of the process that basically consists in fulfilling the function of a *polis*, such as Italy in becoming a moral and political entity of its own kind. The Machiavellian innovator – whether Moses, Romulus, or a prince – is truly a lawgiver and cannot break any moral codes, for he is generating a process, not acting a given process. See Pocock 1975, *passim*. esp., 35, 157, 345.

25 Yack 1993, 240.

26 To take an example of the fundamental differences of perspective between the historicist and more traditional approaches to political history: Joyce Appleby’s fundamental disagreement with the republican school of scholars stems from her different notion of what is *ideological* thinking. By claiming that even according to the republican view, “ideologically the society is undifferentiated,” she, in fact, defines *ideological thinking* as identical with thinking of *only the ideal* of a free society. No wonder that, in her view, the problem with classical republicanism is that some people “may benefit

more than others from the distribution of authority built into the society's conceptual language, but the distribution nonetheless presents itself as a given embedded in the minds of all." (Appleby 1986, 29.); The central civic humanist concern with the distribution of political power may well be connected with Hannah Arendt's conception of the notion of power itself. Power, according to her view, is not determinable as an opposite of any indefinable, not to say absolute, notion of human liberty, or personal freedom. Instead, it is something to be found within such forms of discussion and common action that primarily take place in the public sphere. The public sphere is distinguishable from the concept of personal freedom, not because of its inherent connection with power, but because of the necessity to keep public discussion in guard so that the common decision-making processes would always respect the genuinely modern notion of privacy belonging to each of us – alone. This is not at all to claim that there are no power claims involved in the private sphere of human life, but only to cling to the basic, actually liberal, belief in the notion that the individual is capable of deciding in what kind of power games one is willing to participate – as an individual. Power is the very subject matter of all significant discussion. In order to keep it so, Arendt remains very suspicious about all efforts to breach the line between the public and the private. Power is, therefore, not the opposite of freedom, but the opposite of violence. Not power, but only violence threatens the continuity of discussion. (Arendt 1958, 1998, *passim.*, see esp., 201-203.)

27 Bailyn 1967, 1971, 35.

28 Such favorite authorities of Jefferson as Lord Kames, Montesquieu, Thomas Reid and Destutt de Tracy often supplanted the four-stage view of history based on hunting, pastoralism, agriculture and commerce by the three-stage view simply by connecting hunting with pastoralism.

29 Tracy 1811, 148-149. (The ellipses in the original.)

30 Papers 1:429.

31 White 1978, *passim.*, esp. 196, 199, 202.

32 White 1978, 166-167.

33 TJ to Thomas Law, June 13, 1814. Papers. Second Series 1983, 356.

34 Wills 1978, 230.

35 TJ to John Manners, June 12, 1817. Ford 12: 66.

36 Sheldon 1991, 15.

37 McDowell 1998, 13.

38 McDowell 1998, 26.

39 TJ to Thomas Law, June 13, 1814. Papers. Second Series, 1983, 358.

40 TJ to Peter Carr, Aug. 10, 1787. Papers 12:16-17.

41 TJ to Thomas Jefferson Randolph, Nov. 24, 1808. *TJW*, 1195.

42 TJ to Thomas Jefferson Randolph, Nov. 24, 1808. *TJW*, 1196-1197.

- 43 *Notes* (1787), Query XIX. *TJW*, 290-291; See also TJ to Jean Baptiste Say, Feb. 1, 1804. *Ibid.*, 1144.
- 44 Pocock 1975, 508.
- 45 TJ to Jean Nicolas Dêmeunier, June 26, 1786, *TJW*, 592.
- 46 TJ to John Langdon, March 5, 1810. *TJW*, 1221-1222.
- 47 TJ to Joseph C. Cabell, Feb. 2, 1816. *TJW*, 1381.
- 48 Edward Coles requested Jefferson's blessing for his plan only after getting a cold response from James Madison. McCoy 1989, 1996, 312.
- 49 TJ to Edward Coles, Aug. 25, 1814. *TJW*, 1344-1345.
- 50 TJ's *Notes* from Concorcet on Slavery, Jan. 1789. *Papers* 14:496.
- 51 TJ to Edward Coles, Aug. 25, 1814. *TJW*, 1345.
- 52 *Notes* (1787), Query XIV. *TJW*, 264.
- 53 TJ to Edward Coles, Aug. 25, 1814. *TJW*, 1344-1346.
- 54 Onuf 2000, *passim*.
- 55 TJ to P.S. Dupont de Nemour, April 24, 1816. *Ford* 11: 522.
- 56 It is uncertain whether Coles's private colony of freed men was aimed at colonizing his freedmen "back" to Africa. He later, in vain, tried to persuade them to remove to Africa. See McCoy 1989, 1996, 316-318.
- 57 *Notes*, (1787) Query XIV. *TJW*, 270.
- 58 Behind this thesis, put forward by Gordon Reed, lies the standard notion of modern, constitutionally established, equality of opportunity, which Wood probably shares with most of the advocates of the Lockean interpretation of the Founding. (See Wood, 1969, *passim*., esp. 604.) The fundamental premises of this view are present in Rawlsian philosophical liberalism as well. According to John Rawls, "a well-ordered democratic society" has "no final ends or aims," nor can the modern individual become judged in accordance with "their role in gaining those ends." Rawls 1993, 41.
- 59 Pocock 1983, 236.
- 60 Pocock 1987, 1990, 26. Pocock brings up the notion of language as a "language context" – such as the classical republican language – which the historian may not invent, but only find in history.
- 61 This is, of course, not to claim that the language context itself remains intact when used in these various "speech acts," Pocock 1987, 1990, 31, 34.
- 62 Bailyn 1967, 1971, 7.
- 63 Pocock's use of the term "language" may well appear problematic, but the essential point is that not any single language or any single political context should be offered as the only possible context for any given text. See Pocock 1987, 1990. *passim*.; Quentin Skinner offered the classic formulation of this approach in 1969, see the reprint in Skinner 1969, 1988.

- 64 This is why Pocock may use such formulations as, “the civic humanist ideal is applied as a paradigm in the interpretation of social thought in the eighteenth century.” Pocock 1983, 236. (Tyrannical forms of such arrangements are excluded, since they are corrupt prior to the analysis.)
- 65 Pocock 1975, 71.
- 66 See for this insightful summary of Pocock’s overall view, Banning 1988, passim., esp. 201.
- 67 Pocock 1975, 478.
- 68 Skinner 1990, 1993, 293.
- 69 Skinner 1990, 1993, 308; Regarding the latter position, MacIntyre is ready to assert that “there ought not to be two histories, one of political and moral action and one of political and moral theorizing ... Every action is the bearer and expression of more or less theory-laden beliefs and concepts; every piece of theorizing and every expression of belief is a political and moral action.” MacIntyre, 1981, 1985, 61.
- 70 Skinner 1990, 1993, 308; Skinner is certainly correct in claiming that the champions of classical republicanism were not Aristotelians in any strict teleological sense, because they never argued that “we are moral beings with certain determinate purposes.” (Ibid., 306.) This, however, is not what, for example, MacIntyre’s reading of the Aristotelian ethics is about, since it is based on the fundamentally modern (and in this sense anti-Aristotelian) notion that we, indeed, do not know man’s purpose. MacIntyre certainly does not take Aristotle to be a historicist thinker. (See MacIntyre 1981, 1985, 277.) The suggestion is, rather, that in order to make an intelligible moral argument we are supposed to find some moral purposes for ourselves instead of adopting mere strategies aiming at political or economic success, regardless of whether the strategy was republicanism, socialism, or something else. On MacIntyre’s views on the relations of the Aristotelian ethics and modern identity, see MacIntyre 1981, 1985, 154, 216-217.
- 71 Skinner 1990, 1993, 308-309.
- 72 Pocock 1975, 478-479. What Pocock refers to with the latter notion is “a partnership of different social virtues within a *politeia* or *res publica*.” (Ibid., 479.).
- 73 MacIntyre 1981, 1985, 266.
- 74 In Pocock’s words, “as we now see it, modern and effective government had transplanted to America the dread of modernity itself, of which the threat to virtue by corruption was the contemporary ideological expression.” (Pocock 1975, 509.); And as he once lamented: “It is the historicity – if historicism is too strong a word – of the American debate that I, as the author of *The Machiavellian Moment*, have been trying to establish; and I have been astonished by the determination of some of

my colleagues to treat me if I were seeking to entrap American culture in its past. All I have claimed is that American culture was sophisticated enough to know that it had a history and that it shared its problems with other cultures.” (Pocock 1988, 66.)

75 Gunderson 1976, 266.

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