

Civic Virtue

Frank Lovett

Any discussion of civic virtue must begin with the meaning of virtue in general. A virtue, on the standard view at least since Aristotle, is a settled disposition exhibiting type-specific excellence. Thus, for example, since the central purpose of a knife is to cut things, it is a virtue in knives to be sharp. Similarly, one might argue, since sociability is an important characteristic of human beings, it is a human virtue to be disposed to form friendships. To be a genuine virtue, of course, this disposition must be firmly settled or resilient: much as it would detract from the virtuosity of an exceptionally sharp knife if its edge dulled after a single use, so too would it detract from the virtue of a human being if he or she were only a fair-weather friend. Civic virtues are a species of human virtue – specifically, they are those settled dispositions in human beings that exhibit the excellences relevant to membership in a political community. Put another way, civic virtue is simply the character of a good citizen.

What are the qualities of good citizenship? Our answer, as Aristotle observed, is partly relative to the community in question. This is because civic virtues are connected to the problem of stability. Every political order will through various means tend to engender certain dispositions of character in the individuals living out their lives under its auspices: the issue is whether those dispositions ultimately turn out to be congruent with the political order generating them. In the long run, presumably, no political order can be stable unless it tends to engender a pattern of dispositions that largely supports, rather than undermines, its various distinctive institutions and practices. In this broad sense, every political doctrine (liberal, authoritarian, socialist, etc.) will have an interest in civic virtue, though not

always under that description. One might argue, for example, that a failure in the necessary congruence ultimately doomed soviet-style communism, and some (communitarians especially) worry that widespread liberal individualism is gradually eroding the institutional foundations of liberal societies as well. Though he did not use the expression “civic virtue,” the problem of congruence was absolutely central to the third part of Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice*. In the mainstream tradition of western political thought, however, the importance of civic virtue most strongly resonated among writers associated with what is usually called the “classical republican” political tradition.

The classical republicans were a diverse group of political writers, including among others Machiavelli and his fifteenth-century Italian predecessors; the English republicans Milton, Harrington, and Sidney; Montesquieu and Blackstone; the eighteenth-century English commonwealth men; many Americans of the founding era such as Jefferson and Madison; and some later observers such as Tocqueville. These writers were all committed to the political ideal of a *res publica*, where this was understood roughly as a community of citizens governed by a shared system of law in which no one person or group holds personal mastery over any other. In the classic expression of James Harrington, such a community would constitute an “empire of laws and not of men” (1992: 8). Perhaps because the classical republicans often found themselves living in unstable and failing, or new and untested republics, they developed a particular fascination with the problem of stability. In their writings, the expression “civic virtue” (often simply “virtue”) refers to the dispositions of character necessary specifically for the long-term maintenance and stability of what Machiavelli called a well-ordered republic (*republica bene ordinata*). The classical republicans were concerned with

finding those institutions and practices that might reliably cultivate civic virtue, so understood. Conversely, they were also concerned with avoiding those institutions and practices that would cultivate the opposite – that is, dispositions of character inimical to the long-run stability of a well-ordered republic. These they generally describe as “corruption.”

Despite the strong association between civic virtue and the classical republican tradition, the problem of stability is a perfectly general one. It is thus unfortunate in a way that the classical republicans settled on such aggressively moralistic language as “civic virtue” and “corruption,” since this gives an impression that they were committed to a strenuously heroic ideal of citizenship simply incompatible with the conditions of diverse and complex modern societies. In fact, it is presently a subject of debate just how heroic the classical republican doctrine was meant to be, as we shall see. Before considering that modern debate, however, the views of the classical republicans themselves should be examined in greater detail, since it is from the classical republican tradition (usually via Tocqueville) that nearly all contemporary discussions derive.

Civic Virtue and Classical Republicanism

All classical republicans subscribed to Machiavelli’s dictum that “just as for the maintenance of good customs laws are required, so if laws are to be observed, there is need of good customs.” From this interconnection of institutional order and civic culture it follows that “it is difficult, or rather impossible, either to maintain a republican form of government in states which have become corrupt or to create such a form afresh” (Machiavelli 1983: 160, 164). In support of this contention, the civic republicans nearly always followed Machiavelli in citing the pre-eminent example of Rome. How was it, they asked, that in the very same city after the Tarquins were expelled, the establishment of a well-ordered republic was

possible, whereas after Caesar was assassinated, it was not? The difference lay in the presence of civic virtue in the former case, and its absence in the latter. As the authors of *Cato’s Letters* later put it, the “Roman virtue and ... Roman liberty expired together” (Trenchard & Gordon 1995: 195). From this shared starting point, the civic republicans go on to account for the importance of civic virtue in widely varying degrees of depth and specificity. Broadly speaking, three dimensions to civic virtue were commonly discussed, each corresponding to a specific danger facing any well-ordered republic.

The first and perhaps most obvious danger facing any republic is conquest and subjugation by a foreign power. This danger was particularly acute in the highly competitive security environment faced by city-states in the ancient world and in Renaissance Italy, though it never fully receded from view among the later republicans in England and America. Size and wealth both contribute to security, of course, but as the classical republicans were fond of pointing out, history was replete with examples of small republics defeating much larger and wealthier kingdoms. The explanation seemed to be that citizens of a well-ordered republic are potentially more willing to fight for their community than mercenaries or oppressed subjects. Defense against external dangers, therefore, involved designing republican institutions and practices such that they inspire this sort of patriotic courage on the part of the citizens.

Not all dangers to the republic are external, however; no less serious is the danger of internal regime change – the overthrow of republican institutions by ambitious authoritarian elites. This was precisely the fate of the Roman Republic, and also the fate of many of the Renaissance Italian city-republics, including Florence. While intelligent constitutional design can partially reduce this danger, the ultimate safeguard must lie in a sufficient degree of political engagement on the part of the citizens themselves. Positions of authority in a republic, no less than in any other sort of regime, come with discretionary powers that

can be wielded for or against the common good. So long as a sufficient number of responsible and capable citizens remain duly informed of public affairs, supervise the holders of public office in the conduct of their duties, and offer themselves for public service when necessary, there will be little scope for the ambitious to usurp public authorities to their own end. Once political apathy becomes widespread, however, constitutional safeguards alone will not be sufficient. Indeed, as the Medici in Florence for example demonstrated, the outward form of republican institutions can easily enough be preserved as a cover for authoritarian rule. Thus Alamanno Rinuccini, in a lament typical of the classical republicans, observed that only “the arrogance of a few overbearing individuals and the apathy of the rest of the citizens” permitted the Medici to “usurp the power of all. Their impulses and ambitions decide everything, while almost no authority is left to the councils or the people” (Rinuccini 1978: 205).

Courage and a spirit of public engagement often run together and support one another, of course. On the one hand, active participation can engender a devotion to republican institutions, while on the other, courage is sometimes necessary in putting oneself forward for public service. For the classical republicans, these two virtues were jointly exemplified in the tragic figure of Cicero, whose devotion to the Roman Republic was such that he continued to defend her institutions long after it was politically safe to do so, ultimately at the cost of his life. His *De Officiis*, which adamantly insists on the duty of capable citizens to engage in the public life of their republic, was enormously popular in the early modern period: it was the first non-religious book published on a printing press (in 1465 at Mainz), and it was long a best seller.

Apart from conquest and regime change, every well-ordered republic faces a third danger as well: namely, internal disorder. In order to remain a community of citizens in which no one person or group holds personal mastery over any other, every republic must

maintain a robust rule of law. This cannot be done unless the citizens by and large respect the law, both in letter and spirit, and the shared institutions and practices of the republic generally. Correspondingly, in addition to courage and public engagement, the list of citizen virtues must be extended to include some degree of moderation and restraint in pressing private or factional claims. This need not involve the complete subordination of private interests to the common good, as some have mistakenly believed. Factionalism as such is not always a problem for the republic, provided that everyone remains willing to play by the accepted rules: indeed, differences of opinion are often conducive to healthy public debate as Milton, for example, argued in his *Areopagitica*. The danger arises when people begin to regard those rules strategically, as mere instruments for advancing their private aims. From here it is only a short step to dispensing with the rules altogether whenever they are found to hinder those aims. Left unchecked, the spread of such attitudes will undermine public confidence in the rule of law, and the republic will slide into anarchy. Things rarely go that far, of course, since disorder incidentally increases the danger of conquest or regime change, either of which would cut short the natural life of the republic anyway.

In articulating the importance of civic virtue, it is noteworthy that the authors discussed draw almost exclusively on classical sources rather than Christian ones. While the Christian tradition certainly contained resources for an account of civic virtue (in Aquinas’s discussion of the virtue of justice, for instance), the classical republicans were generally true to their Renaissance humanistic roots in eschewing such material. Indeed, some went even further. Machiavelli suggested that, at least as historically interpreted, Christianity might be inimical to maintaining a well-ordered republic. “Our religion has glorified humble and contemplative men, rather than men of action,” he writes. “It has assigned as man’s highest good humility,” and where it demands strength, “what it asks for is strength to suffer

rather than strength to do bold things” (Machiavelli 1983: 278).

Despite a broad consensus on the three main dimensions of civic virtue, the classical republicans vociferously disagreed on how civic virtue might best be encouraged and efficaciously employed. The fundamental issue, recall, is one of congruence – of settling on a configuration of institutions and practices that will tend to engender the desired dispositions (courage, public engagement, and respect for the law), while also being consistent with one another and with the overarching aim of constituting a genuine empire of law. Broadly speaking, three strategies for securing such congruence are available: first, one might select institutions that *inspire* virtue; second, one might design institutions to *economize* on the stock of virtue readily available; third and finally, one might attempt to *inculcate* virtue (through education, religion, public mythology, etc.) so as to bridge any gap left by the former two methods. Among the many debates concerning optimal institutional design, four are especially worthy of note.

The first of these concerned the important issue of political inclusiveness. Roughly speaking, the classical republicans distinguished between democratic republics on the one hand, with a broad citizenship base and power-sharing among the various social classes, and aristocratic republics on the other, with a narrow citizenship base and power concentrated in the hands of a relatively small elite. Athens, Rome, and Florence were often cited as examples of the former, Sparta and Venice as examples of the latter. Initially, the impressive durability of Sparta and Venice inclined observers such as Francesco Guicciardini to favor the aristocratic option. Machiavelli emphatically rejected this line, however, arguing that the only way to inspire the courage and public engagement required to support republican institutions was to incorporate all social classes into a broad-based democratic republic. As Algernon Sidney later said, “men can no otherwise be engaged to take care of the public, than by having ... a part in it” (Sidney

1996: 196). While Marchamont Nedham and James Harrington generally agreed with Machiavelli, other English republicans such as Henry Vane and John Milton did not, fearing that their country at any rate was not ready for a commonwealth government. In this they were no doubt correct, though it is doubtful that an aristocratic republic of those committed to the “good old cause” would have fared much better. Eventually, of course, it was the democratic view that won out in the tradition. When it comes to nurturing civic-minded dispositions, there is simply no substitute for involving people in the political process, and any lingering doubts on this score were effectively erased through Tocqueville’s portrait of the broadly inclusive and effective American democracy.

A second debate concerned the appropriate place of commerce in a well-ordered republic. The concern expressed by many classical republicans was that commerce would spread luxury throughout society, and that luxury would promote political apathy and sap martial courage as private material pursuits draw citizens away from an interest in public affairs. Here the opening chapter of Sallust’s *Bellum Catilinae* was widely influential. According to his diagnosis, so long as virtue and republican government went together, Rome flourished – vanquishing great kingdoms and empires, bringing the entire ancient world under her dominion. Alas, this very success later brought luxury in its train, and public virtue steadily decayed until eventually the republic failed. Fearful of this prospect, some classical republicans followed Machiavelli in believing that “well-ordered republics have to keep the public rich but their citizens poor” (1983: 201); this was the view of many English republicans such as Nedham and Sidney, and to some extent it survived later in the agrarian idealism of Thomas Jefferson. From the beginning, however, there was also a contrary view. The Florentine republican Leonardo Bruni, for example, believed that commercial wealth was perfectly compatible with civic virtue, and indeed beneficial to the health of a republic,

insofar as it provides a basis for generosity and liberality. Among eighteenth-century republicans such as the authors of *Cato's Letters* and Montesquieu this latter view came increasingly to predominate over the former. Provided that it not lead to excessive inequality (see below), responsible commercial activity could improve manners, spread useful knowledge, and strengthen republics without necessarily weakening civic virtue. This line of reasoning reaches its apotheosis in Alexander Hamilton's vision of a muscular commercial republic in the *Federalist Papers*, no. 11.

The issue of commerce and luxury is sometimes confused with another debate in the tradition concerning inequality. Independent of a community's overall degree of wealth and commercial activity, most classical republicans recognized a connection between equality and civic virtue on the one hand, inequality and corruption on the other. Whereas luxury undermines public-spiritedness by inducing apathy, inequality undermines respect for the law by inducing factionalism. Citizens will only respect the laws, institutions, and practices of their republic insofar as they can plausibly view themselves as participants in a fair system of cooperation for mutual benefit. Excessive inequality can render this difficult to do. On the one hand, the wealthy and powerful may come to regard themselves as so secure in their position that they can disregard the accepted rules; on the other hand, the poor and weak may come to regard the accepted rules as so unfair that they would welcome change at any cost. Summing up this worry, the authors of *Cato's Letters* observe that "the first seeds of anarchy ... are produced from hence, that some are ungovernably rich, and many more are miserably poor; that is, some are masters of all means of oppression, and others want all means of self-defense" (Trenchard & Gordon 1995: 44). With each faction pressing its interests through any means at its disposal, it will not be long before confidence in the rule of law begins to erode. Thus nearly all the classical republicans from Machiavelli to Montesquieu were agreed that some measure of citizen

equality must constitute the basis for any well-ordered republic.

The dispute concerned what, if anything, should be done about the danger of excessive inequality, and especially, whether it was a good idea to introduce policies of redistribution with the explicit aim of holding that inequality within bounds. Cicero famously believed the cure worse than the disease, explicitly blaming the advocacy of so-called "agrarian laws" by the Gracchi brothers for initiating the decline of the Roman Republic into disorder. While Machiavelli recognized that Cicero's analysis was naive, and that the underlying inequality itself was the real problem, he was pessimistic about its ever being addressed: "to restore equality it is necessary to take steps which are by no means normal," he feared, "and this few people either know how to do or are ready to do" (Machiavelli 1983: 160). It was thus left to James Harrington to bite this particular bullet and embrace the redistributive measures necessary to set republics on a sound footing. For this he was roundly attacked by his immediate contemporaries – John Milton and Henry Vane among others – but later republicans such as Henry Neville, the authors of *Cato's Letters*, and Montesquieu more or less came around to his view: a suitable balance between perfect equality and extreme inequality had to be maintained one way or another if a well-ordered republic was to survive. The difficulty was to reconcile the deeply controversial measures securing this balance with the need to prevent excessive factionalism. It was in the hopes of cutting this Gordian knot that Madison famously suggested, in the *Federalist Papers*, no. 10, that a large republic might diffuse the problem by multiplying, and thus fragmenting, political factions.

This brings us to a fourth area of dispute among the classical republicans – namely, the issue of size. Is the ideal well-ordered republic great or small in extent? Considered strictly from the point of view of encouraging civic virtue, it seemed obvious to some that small republics must hold the advantage. The

reasoning behind this view was most explicitly put forward by Montesquieu, who observed that in a small republic the public good is more obvious and better understood, and opportunities for abuse comparatively scarce. In an extended republic, by contrast, the public good is harder to see and the invigilation of public authorities more challenging; in the face of these disincentives, courage and the spirit of public engagement will tend to slacken. Montesquieu recognized, of course, that small republics were more vulnerable to conquest, and so he also recommended that they band together in defensive confederations. American anti-federalist writers such as the author of the *Letters of Brutus* followed this line of argument in their objections to the proposed federal constitution.

Not all the classical republicans agreed, however. Machiavelli, for one, believed it necessary to restrict the territory only of aristocratic republics, which he did not favor in any case. On his analysis, supported with the example of the great extended Roman Republic, corruption had its roots in inequality rather than size. The later English republicans, to the extent that they bothered to consider the issue, tended to agree with Machiavelli. Madison and Hamilton were likewise not concerned that great size would detract from civic virtue in the fledgling American republic: good governance, they believed, would generate the necessary ties of sentiment. Conveniently, this meant that Madison's proposed solution to the problem of faction might be congruent with the institutional requirements of a well-ordered republic.

Modern Debates concerning Civic Virtue

Despite many differences of opinion as to the practical institutional implications, the classical republicans were by and large agreed on both the meaning of civic virtue and on its central importance in securing the long-run stability of a well-ordered republic. Surprisingly, the same cannot be said about those interested in civic virtue and the classical republican

tradition today. Among modern political theorists, there are disputes not only as to practical institutional questions, but also more fundamentally as to the nature and significance of civic virtue itself.

Perhaps the simplest way to explain this modern debate is to return to the definition of civic virtue given at the start of this entry. If a virtue in general can be understood as a settled disposition exhibiting type-specific excellence, then civic virtue in particular can be understood as those human dispositions specifically exhibiting the excellences of citizenship in a well-ordered republic. Presumably, it is good for citizens to have these civic-minded dispositions, but what sort of good is it? Broadly speaking, some things are good primarily for instrumental reasons, whereas other things are good intrinsically – for their own sake, so to speak. It follows that there are two possible views with respect to the good of civic virtue. On one view, while the community at large certainly benefits from the virtues of its members, civic virtue is most importantly an intrinsic good for the person exhibiting it, in the sense that possessing civic virtue is itself a part of what it means for that person to live a fully flourishing human life. On another contrasting view, civic virtue is (at least for most people) primarily an instrumental good, in the sense that its main benefit is simply to contribute to the stability of a well-ordered republic; it is assumed, of course, that people benefit from living under a well-ordered republic, but the civic virtues as such are merely a means to that end.

One especially influential group of modern scholars, usually referred to as the “civic humanists,” argue that civic virtue should be understood in the first way, as an intrinsic human good. So understood, civic humanism is essentially a variety of perfectionism – in other words, it is a political theory according to which certain specific forms of human life are regarded as objectively more excellent than others. Political institutions and social practices should thus be designed so as to promote or honor those particular forms of human

excellence. Prominent civic humanists such as Hannah Arendt, J. G. A. Pocock, Gordon Wood, and Paul Rahe have argued that something like this view of civic virtue can be discovered in the classical republican tradition; Michael Sandel has suggested that it also represents a central (though momentarily suppressed) aspect of the American political culture. Their claims essentially involve attributing to the republican tradition an Aristotelian conception of the good. Aristotle held that what was good for human beings was to exhibit their distinctive capacity to act according to reason, and that this could only be done through the active practice of virtuous conduct. Thus, to have those virtues exhibiting human excellence (together with the material means necessary to employ them) itself constituted a flourishing human life. Aristotle further held that among the virtues relevantly exhibiting human excellence was the specific capacity to rule well and be ruled in turn among a community of political equals. This particular capacity, according to the civic humanists, is none other than the civic virtue discussed in the classical republican tradition. To possess this virtue is itself part of what it means to live a flourishing human life, and this is precisely why the classical republicans advocated a republican form of government: only in a republic is it even possible for citizens to exhibit their civic virtue, and thus lead flourishing lives. From this point of view, we must understand the political liberty or freedom enjoyed in a republic – which the classical republicans extolled obsessively – as the exercise of civic virtue through political participation.

As a contemporary political doctrine, civic humanism has been criticized primarily on two grounds. First, it is commonly pointed out that the heroic vision of active participation and muscular civic virtue is simply impractical in complex modern societies, where people are pulled in diverse directions by many wants and cares. Furthermore, the scale of modern politics is such that it is simply infeasible for any significant number of individuals to have more than a token role in the joint government

of their community, and thereby (apparently) to lead fully flourishing lives. Second, apart from the infeasibility of the civic humanist ideal, it is also criticized as unattractive and elitist. As with any perfectionist political doctrine, it would seem that civic humanism holds out one sort of human life as best for all – namely, the life exhibiting civic virtue through active political participation. Why should this be, however? Are there not many different reasonable accounts of the good, and thus many different ways in which human beings can lead flourishing lives? Designing society so as to cater to one particular – and controversial – conception of what it means to live a good life seems elitist.

Regardless of the merits of civic humanism as a contemporary political doctrine, there is the separate issue of whether it offers the most plausible interpretation of the classical republican tradition. Many modern scholars take the view that it does not: civic virtue should be understood in the second way noted above, as an instrumental good whose main benefit is to contribute to the long-run stability of a well-ordered republic. Numerous considerations weigh in support of this reading of the historical tradition, but perhaps the most significant is the overwhelming preference among the classical republicans for citing Roman (rather than Greek) authors and referring to examples from Roman (rather than Greek) history. Consider Machiavelli, for example, a figure absolutely central to the classical republican tradition on all accounts. His major treatment of republican theory is represented by the *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy*, which, obviously, abounds in Roman examples. In all of Machiavelli's writings, there is no more than a single (exceedingly obscure) reference to Aristotle, which, together with the absence of any meaningful thought or expression clearly attributable to Aristotle's influence, suggests that Machiavelli may never have bothered to read him. Nor is the picture much improved if we turn to another figure central to the tradition, James Harrington. His major work

Oceana contains a dozen or so references to Aristotle to be sure, but the majority of these are merely casual inclusions of his name – always together with either Livy, Cicero, or Machiavelli – on a list of persons who take a vaguely republican view of things in contrast with Thomas Hobbes. The handful of substantive references to Aristotle indicate that Harrington had certainly read the *Politics*, but for the most part they draw on the practical aspects of that work in order to further bolster his contention that well-ordered republics must restrain excessive inequality. At no point in Harrington's writings is there any suggestion that he was aware of, much less sympathetic with, an Aristotelian conception of human flourishing as consisting in active political participation. Nor is there much evidence for such a view lurking in any of the other classical republican writers, which is hardly surprising: for most of the early modern period, Aristotelian ethics remained firmly in the grips of a scholastic philosophical tradition anathema to the classical republicans and many others (such as Hobbes) besides.

There is, however, a downside to abandoning the civic humanist interpretation. If the fascination with civic virtue in the classical republican tradition is read as a straightforward pragmatic concern with the long-run stability of a well-ordered republic, then it becomes far less clear how that tradition is distinct in any meaningful way from the mainstream liberal tradition that ultimately supplanted it. Liberal societies, no less than republican ones, must generate the dispositions necessary for their long-run maintenance, and thus will have an interest in promoting citizen virtue. Provided these “liberal virtues” are regarded strictly in the modest instrumental sense, and not as part of a controversial conception of human flourishing obtainable only by an elite, there seems to be no conflict between the republican and the liberal traditions.

Some modern political theorists working in the liberal tradition, such as Stephen Macedo, William Galston, and Richard Dagger have

adopted precisely this view. To the extent that republicanism is associated with a concern for citizen virtue, these writers can be described as “republican liberals,” though only Dagger has embraced that designation. Republican liberals argue that the commitment to protecting individual rights and maintaining strict neutrality among controversial conceptions of the good in mainstream liberal doctrine has sometimes led to a disregard for the social foundations of a liberal society. In order to counteract this tendency, they emphasize the point that in order to achieve long-run stability, the institutions and practices of liberal societies must generate liberal virtues among their members. These usually include in some form the virtues familiar from the classical republican tradition (courage, public engagement, and respect for the law), but also some others, such as a disposition to respect the rights of other citizens, a generally tolerant attitude towards diverse values and beliefs, a commitment to fair play, and an appreciation of personal autonomy and individuality.

There is a third group of modern scholars, however, who, while rejecting civic humanism, nevertheless see important differences between republicanism and liberalism: prominent among these “civic republicans,” as they are often called, are Quentin Skinner, Philip Pettit, and Maurizio Viroli. The civic republicans agree with liberals that civic virtue should be understood primarily as an instrumental good, but they reject the view of both liberals and civic humanists that a concern for civic virtue alone is what (if anything) distinguishes classical republicanism from other traditions. Instead, the civic republicans point to the central role of political liberty or freedom as an ideal among the classical republican authors.

Roughly speaking, freedom might be understood as either an exercise concept – something people enjoy through the performance of certain distinctive sorts of activities; or as an opportunity concept – something people enjoy whenever certain distinctive sorts of obstacles are absent from their lives. The civic humanists argue that the classical republican tradition

reflects an exercise conception of freedom, according to which one enjoys freedom through active political participation; indeed they must argue something like this in order to square the obvious importance of political liberty in that tradition with an Aristotelian conception of human flourishing. Civic republicans reject the latter attribution, however, freeing them to read the classical republican commitment to political liberty in a very different light. On their view, the ideal of political liberty in the tradition is best read as an opportunity concept, according to which one enjoys freedom to the extent that one is not subject to arbitrary rule or domination. This sort of freedom can be enjoyed only in a well-ordered republic – that is, in a community of citizens governed by a shared system of law in which no one person or group holds arbitrary power over any other. According to the civic republicans, it is a commitment to this ideal of liberty as nondomination that distinguishes republicans from liberals, who are rather generally committed to an ideal of individual rights. (It also distinguishes republicans from communitarians like Sandel, who are primarily interested in republicanism insofar as it happens to represent the shared values of a particular historical community.)

These, in broad outline, have been the main theoretical debates among those modern scholars interested in the idea of civic virtue and its history. Distinct from these are another important set of debates concerning the civics education policy of modern democratic societies. Ironically, of the three main strategies for securing a congruence between institutions and practices on the one hand, and dispositions of character on the other, the classical republicans overall had the least to say about inculcation. Perhaps this is because sophisticated systems of formal public education were simply not available until comparatively recently. Whatever the reason, however, current debate is almost exclusively focused on education – what its aims ought to be, which methods are best, whether it has any limits, and so forth. It is also worth noting that the

program of civic education now has serious critics, for example those who worry that it might render citizens too attached to their particular communities and thus insufficiently cosmopolitan. These interesting debates are unfortunately beyond the scope of this entry.

SEE ALSO: Aristotle (384–322 BCE); Cicero, Marcus Tullius (106–43 BCE); Citizen/Citizenship; Harrington, James (1611–77); Machiavelli, Niccolò (1469–1527); Madison, James (1751–1836); Montesquieu, Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de (1689–1757); Pocock, J. G. A. (1924–); Republicanism; Republican Political Thought; Republics; Skinner, Quentin (1940–); Tocqueville, Alexis de (1805–59)

References

- Harrington, J. (1992) *The Commonwealth of Oceana and A System of Politics*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Machiavelli, N. (1983) *The Discourses*, trans. L. J. Walker. New York: Penguin Books.
- Rinuccini, A. (1978) “Liberty.” In R. N. Watkins (Ed.), *Humanism and Liberty: Writings on Freedom from Fifteenth-Century Florence*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Sidney, A. (1996) *Discourses concerning Government*, ed. T. G. West. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund.
- Trenchard, J. and Gordon, T. (1995) *Cato’s Letters, or, Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, and Other Important Subjects*, ed. R. Hamowy, 2 vols. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund.

Further Reading

- Arendt, H. (1958) *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Arendt, H. (1993) “What Is Freedom?” In H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Brennan, G. and Hamlin, A. (1995) “Economizing on Virtue,” *Constitutional Political Economy*, 6, 35–60.
- Burt, S. (1990) “The Good Citizen’s Psyche: On the Psychology of Civic Virtue,” *Polity*, 23 (1), 23–38.
- Cicero. (1991) *On Duties*. ed. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Dagger, R. (1997) *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Galston, W. A. (1991) *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hamilton, A., Madison, J., and Jay, J. (2003) *The Federalist, with Letters of "Brutus,"* ed. T. Ball. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Macedo, S. (1990) *Liberal Virtues: Citizenship, Virtue, and Community in Liberal Constitutionalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Montesquieu, C.-L. (1949) *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. T. Nugent. New York: Hafner.
- Pettit, P. (1997) *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pocock, J. G. A. (1975) *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rahe, P. A. (1992) *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Rawls, J. (1971) *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sallust. (1963) *The Jugurthine War and the Conspiracy of Catiline*, trans. S. A. Hanford. New York: Penguin Books.
- Sandel, M. J. (1996) *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of Public Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sinopoli, R. C. (1987) "Liberalism, Republicanism, and the Constitution," *Polity*, 19 (3), 331–52.
- Skinner, Q. (1991) "The Paradoxes of Political Liberty." In D. Miller (Ed.), *Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Skinner, Q. (1998) *Liberty before Liberalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tocqueville, A. de (1969) *Democracy in America*, trans. G. Lawrence. New York: HarperCollins.
- Viroli, M. (2002) *Republicanism*, trans. A. Shugar. New York: Hill & Wang.
- Wood, G. S. (1969) *The Creation of the American Republic: 1776–1787*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.