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The Republican-Liberal Continuum: De-Polarizing the Historiographical Debate

Katrina Loulousis Combs

Olivet Nazarene University, kcombs2@olivet.edu

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THE REPUBLICAN-LIBERAL CONTINUUM:


DE-POLARIZING THE
HISTORIOGRAPHICAL
DEBATE

By

Katrina Loulousis Combs

APPROVED BY SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:


William Dean, Chair


David Van Heemst


Lori R. Fulton


Gary Hyde

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KATRINA LOULOUSIS COMBS, B.A.

THESIS

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THE REPUBLICAN-LIBERAL CONTINUUM:
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Katrina Loulousis Combs, M.A.

Olivet Nazarene University, 2010

Supervising Professor: William Dean

The historiography of the American Revolution and the Early National Period remains a polarized debate. Historians attribute either classical Whig republican ideology or classical liberal ideology to influencing those periods. However, republicanism and liberalism exist along a philosophical and practical continuum. Because Louis Hartz attributed American liberalism exclusively to John Locke, I first examine Locke's relationship to Algernon Sidney, observing similarities between these exemplars of liberalism and republicanism. Next I examine the confluence of Thomas Reid's commonsense moral philosophy (via John Witherspoon) and republicanism, particularly concerning views on man and moral liberty. These commonalities are further demonstrated in Thomas Jefferson's agrarianism. Arguing that philosophical interface in republicanism and liberalism has occurred since Plato and Cicero, I underscore a philosophical problem apparent even in classical thought: that individuals are inescapably embedded in community. I conclude that the "boxed-off" paradigms of republicanism and liberalism are no longer useful due to the philosophical and practical commonalities exposed.

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Introduction: An Historiographical Debate

Historical imagination – that is, how we narrate history to ourselves – is virtually as significant as historical reality. For events in historical reality shape the present, but conceptions of the historical imagination shape the future. In a considerably “young” nation such as the United States, this may be particularly true. We are still trying to define “the meaning of America.” In our attempt to grasp American, or any other, history, conceptual frameworks for historical narration are necessary. Such conceptual frameworks can be oversimplified – tending to neglect or distort – but, these frameworks are necessary so that the past is not, as William James put it, “a blooming buzzing confusion.”

Nevertheless, the conceptual bracketing of the ideologies of republicanism and liberalism in American history has not been particularly helpful. Gordon Wood asserts, “It is important to remember that the box-like categories of “republicanism” and “liberalism” are essentially the invention of us historians . . . It is a mistake to argue about the transition from republicanism to liberalism in large abstract terms, as one [framework] replacing another.”¹ In his landmark *Creation of the American Republic, 1778-1787*, first published in 1969, Wood challenged the typical historical narration of American history as one predominantly shaped by classical liberalism. In a preface to a newer edition of the book, Wood explains how he came to challenge the interpretation that liberalism was the founding force in American history:

I was dimly aware that a number of isolated studies had begun to erode the prevailing view, expressed most forcefully by Louis Hartz in *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955), that John Locke’s possessive individualism was virtually the only idea that mattered in eighteenth-century or, indeed, all American political thought. But not until I began to immerse myself in the newspapers, pamphlets, and sermons of the Revolutionary

¹ Wood, Gordon S, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina Press, 1969, 1998), xi, xiii.

era did I began to appreciate how complicated the creation of American political and constitutional culture actually was. The radical character of the republicanism that the Revolutionaries adopted in 1776, with stress on corruption, luxury, virtue, and the public good, especially struck me as being at odds with individualistic and rights-oriented liberalism that Hartz had claimed lay at the heart of American culture.²

Wood thus forged a new direction for scholarship in early American history. He was accompanied by Bernard Bailyn, whose 1967 *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* also, according to Joyce Appleby, “jettison[ed] the search for liberal roots” and instead went back to the sources (especially pamphlets, such as the ones Bailyn edited and prepared as a multi-volume tome).³ J.G.A. Pocock, too, contributed to this conversation by stressing the “Machiavellian moment” in which the founders were overcome by a fear of political corruption. Appleby summarizes the discovery of Wood, Bailyn, and Peacock as the unearthing of the significance of the ancients. “The rhetoric and references” of the eighteenth-century “led them to a conceptual universe which structured political discourse around the models of the ancient world.”⁴

Definitions

If the conceptual frameworks of republicanism and liberalism are, as Wood has asserted, unhelpful, we ought to observe various definitions of the ideologies. Liberalism, having saturated contemporary American culture, may be easier to identify. Appleby states the tenets of liberalism as such:

Human nature manifests itself universally in the quest of freedom. Political self-government emanates from individual self-control. Nature has endowed human beings with the capacity to think for themselves and act in their own belief. This rational self-interest can be depended upon as a principle of action. Free choice in matters of religion, marriage, intellectual pursuits, and electoral politics is the right of every individual. Free inquiry discloses the nature of reality, whose laws are accessible to reason . . .⁵

² Wood, v.

³ Appleby, Joyce. *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 1992, p. 21.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

The themes of these tenets are the autonomy and authority of the individual. David Koyzis, in fact, succinctly defines modern liberalism as “belief in the sovereignty of the individual.”⁶ Utilizing the term *sovereignty*, Koyzis connotes a political dimension in the term. He attributes historic liberalism to the writings of John Locke, Adam Smith, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant.⁷

On the surface, the definition of republicanism seems to directly contrast that of liberalism. The term is a compound derived from the Latin words *re publica*: the matter of the people. Mark Noll has suggested that, during the Revolutionary era, a singular definition of republicanism did not exist. Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison all arrived at different definitions. Hamilton’s definition, which appeared in *The Federalist*, was as simple as “the prohibition of titles of nobility.”⁸ Adams and Madison offered definitions emphasizing the representation and participation of citizens. Thomas Paine rounded out the definition by adding that republicanism was “government established and conducted for the interest of the public.”⁹ The following vignette illustrates the essence of republicanism: “It was obviously a most exciting day for young Thomas Shippen, a Philadelphia gentleman of social prominence, when Thomas Jefferson presented him in 1788 to the French Court at Versailles,” writes Gordon Wood in *The Creation of the American Republic*. Wood continues:

The American, something of an aristocrat in Philadelphia but hardly one at Versailles, could not help feeling his difference; and that difference understandably became the shield for his self-esteem. He was, after all, as he told his father, a republican: geographically and socially he was from another world. The magnificence and elegance both impressed and

⁶ Koyzis, David T., *Political Visions and Illusions: A Survey and Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 43.

⁷ *Ibid*, 45.

⁸ Quoted in Mark Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2002), 55.

⁹ *Ibid*, 56.

repulsed him. How many thousands of subjects, Shippen asked, were doomed to want and wretchedness by the King's wasteful efforts "to shroud his person and adorn his reign" with such luxury? He "revolted" at the King's "insufferable arrogance," and was even "more mortified at the suppleness and base complaisance of his attendants." He rejoiced that he was not a subject of such a monarchy, but the citizen of a republic - "more great because more virtuous" - where there were no hereditary distinctions, no "empty ornament and unmeaning grandeur," where only sense, merit, and integrity commanded respect.¹⁰

The essence of republicanism was that a citizen (not a subject), through reason and virtue, acted on behalf of the interest of the larger community. While young Thomas Shippen made several distinctions between monarchism and his beloved republicanism, it is important to understand that republicanism has never been a clear-cut governmental system. Republicanism is more of an idea than a specific structure, and, being an idea, it is dynamic and changing. In the context of the American Revolution, John Adams's famous remark reminds us of the ideological underpinnings of that tumultuous era: "The Revolution was effected before the war commenced," wrote Adams. "The Revolution was in the minds of the people."¹¹

De-Polarizing the Debate

While Wood, Bailyn, Peacock, and Appleby have all helped expose America's republican roots, Wood proclaims that we cannot understand republicanism and liberalism as "boxed-off" conceptual frameworks. He is right. These framework definitions have led to a standstill in the republican-liberal debate. **As Annie Mitchell put it, the debate has become "polarized."**¹² Joyce Appleby has concluded that determining the precise interface between republicanism and liberalism requires additional research.¹³ Here that task is continued. While it can be generally observed that the United States was founded in republicanism, and that liberalism emerged as a

¹⁰ Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 46-47.

¹¹ MacCullough, David, *John Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 15.

¹² Mitchell, Annie, "A Liberal Republican "Cato," *American Journal of Political Science* 48, No. 3 (2004): 588, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1519918> (accessed February 2010).

¹³ Hess, Andreas, Ed., "Republicanism," *American Social and Political Thought: A Reader* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), 97.

more “visible” ideology in the early nineteenth century, the transition was complex. Here I do not attempt to pinpoint that ideological shift, but rather provide an intellectual history helping explain *why* this shift may have been able to occur. We will examine evidence from two general time periods: the early modern period, when the path to Revolution was drawn, and the classical period of Greece and Rome, because the republican revisionists have pointed us there. We will examine how the two ideological frameworks might interface, or even be philosophically compatible or overlapping. I will seek to demonstrate that the two exist along a continuum.

This continuum refers back to an image often conjured up in discussions of political theory. This image is an arrow curved into a circle. On one end of the arrow (to the extreme right), Nazi Germany is placed. On the other end (the extreme left) is the Communist Soviet Union. The ends of the arrows are joined. While both movements were built upon vastly different theoretical foundations, in practice, the movements appeared grotesquely similar. Looking back, we easily draw comparisons between the Nazis and the Soviets. Both suppressed dissenters; both censored and controlled the media, education, arts, and literature; both utilized a secret police; and, most regrettably, both employed mass exterminations or purges of human beings.

As this image illustrates, political theories, whether Nazi versus Soviet, or liberal versus republican can overlap in actual practice despite their different theoretical groundings. This is the type of continuum I refer to when claiming Whig republicanism and classical liberalism exist along a continuum. This continuum illustration acknowledges that different elements of republicanism and liberalism can “run into” each other. It expresses commonalities in the practical sense, but, because republicanism and liberalism are *not* extreme movements of the right or the left (as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were), it also expresses commonalities in the philosophical and theoretical domains. Historians of Revolutionary America and the Early National Period have

perceived republicanism and liberalism as bracketed-off paradigms rather than fluid ideologies existing along this continuum. Therefore, representatives of each side of the debate have not fully understood the other. This has largely contributed to the polarization that has developed.

Because Louis Hartz attributed the development of American liberalism so exclusively to John Locke, I will begin to argue for this continuum with a case study of Locke and his relationship to Algernon Sidney. I will observe their similarities as exemplars of liberalism and republicanism, respectively. Then I will examine Mark Noll's treatment of the "confluence" of commonsense moral philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment, republicanism, and Calvinist theology. I will compare the views on man and moral liberty of both Locke and John Witherspoon, the latter being the representative of the commonsense moral philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment in colonial America. Through these comparisons, I will argue that the "boxed off" definitions of republicanism and liberalism are no longer useful, because some philosophical commonalities between republicanism and liberalism should become apparent. These philosophical commonalities being demonstrated, I will examine how these commonalities blur in the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, particularly in light of his agrarianism.

The second half of this work focuses on the classics of Greece and Rome as I establish a case for classical influence. But my treatment of Plato and Cicero is primarily meant to underscore a philosophical problem apparent even in classical thought: that the individual is inescapably bound to the community. I highlight this problem in the thought of both Plato and Cicero, arguing that the philosophical interface in early American republicanism and liberalism can also be observed in their philosophical forbears in the Western tradition.

The Hartzian vs. the Historical Locke

In his 1955 publication *The Liberal Tradition in America*, Louis Hartz attributed liberal ideals virtually explicitly to the work 17th-century British philosopher and activist John Locke. “There has never been a “liberal movement” or a real “liberal party” in America, Hartz wrote. “[W]e have only had the American Way of Life, a nationalist articulation of [John] Locke himself . . .”¹⁴ In fact, Hartz claimed, “[John Locke] is a massive national cliché.”¹⁵ Hartz might have known that Jefferson himself acknowledged John Locke’s significance, once writing in a personal letter, “Bacon, Locke and Newton . . . I consider them as the three greatest men that have ever lived, without any exception, and as having laid the foundations of those superstructures which have been raised in the Physical and Moral sciences.”¹⁶ Heraldizing Locke’s influence, Hartz has been taken to define “liberal” as “one who believes in individual liberty, equality, and capitalism and who regards the human market place, where a person succeeds or fails by his or her own efforts and ability, as the proper testing ground of achievement.”¹⁷

On the other side of the debate, of course, emerged historians who proclaimed a *republican* understanding of the American founding. Bailyn asserted that republicanism, not liberalism, was *the* driving ‘faith’ of the new America – a faith “where authority was distrusted and held in constant scrutiny; where the status of men flowed from their achievements and from their personal qualities, not from distinctions ascribed to them at birth; and where the used of power over the lives

¹⁴ Hartz, Louis, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, with an introduction by Tom Wicker (New York: Harcourt, 1955), 13.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 140.

¹⁶ Thomas Jefferson to John Trumball, 15 February 1789, in the *Thomas Jefferson Exhibition, Library of Congress Online*, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/18.html> (accessed October 2009).

¹⁷ Hartz, ix.

of men was jealously guarded and severely restricted.”¹⁸ The key historical figures often cited in the American republican Whig synthesis include Gordon and Trenchard, who wrote *Cato’s Letters*; Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury; and Algernon Sidney, who is most remembered for being executed for treason in 1683 in the aftermath of the English Civil War.

Curiously, Jefferson’s quote above, which praises John Locke – known to us as the father of liberalism – is juxtaposed by Jefferson’s republican Whig understanding of the law. Jefferson’s biographer Merrill Peterson wrote, “In the black letter of the law Jefferson began with Sir Edward Coke’s formidable *Institutes*, and from there, *like a good Whig*, pursued English rights and liberties back to their ancient Saxon foundations.”¹⁹ So Jefferson simultaneously esteemed John Locke – who Hartz so loudly proclaimed as the founder of liberalism – and utilized Whig traditions as a lawyer. Do we dismiss Jefferson as incoherent? We must realize that Jefferson would not have perceived liberalism as fully developed ideology in the textbook sense; that would be an anachronism. So did Jefferson perhaps view ideas with a republican bent and those with a liberal bent as philosophically compatible? If so, and if he was right, what would this mean for the “polarized debate” between the liberal tradition and the republican synthesis? These questions have driven my research to investigate a potential compatibility between John Locke and Algernon Sidney, the exemplars of liberalism and republicanism, respectively. By comparing the historical backgrounds of both Sidney and Locke, I will demonstrate some potential for compatibility between republicanism and liberalism, and ultimately, that Hartz’s interpretation of Locke is incomplete.

¹⁸Bailyn, Bernard, ed., *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776*, Vol. I (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), 202.

¹⁹ Jefferson, Thomas, *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Penguin, 1975), xiv, emphasis mine.

In Context: The Corruption of Charles I

It is crucial to begin with a historical context of the ideologies of republicanism and liberalism. While republicanism in context of the American Revolution took on a distinctly American flavor, it originated in the wake of the 17th century English Civil War and Glorious Revolution, and in the context of the European Enlightenment. Again, republicanism was basically synonymous with Whig ideology, which most basically prescribed that the most dangerous threat to liberty came from within the state, from its own leadership. Adherents of Whig thought believed power was intrinsically corrupting. Also known as Commonwealthmen, or members of the English dissenting tradition, British Whigs emerged as reactionaries against King Charles I. Algernon Sidney lived during the time of Charles I and Oliver Cromwell, on the eve of the 1688 Glorious Revolution.

King Charles' reign illustrates why Whig thought focuses on the corruption of power. In the wake of the Protestant Reformation and a series of English dynastic struggles, Charles I had fought to maintain monarchical power by refusing to call Parliament for eleven years. However, Charles was eventually forced to call Parliament to pay for the large debt he incurred through troubles with Scotland, because Parliament held the purse strings. First Parliament refused to fund the extinguishing of a Scottish rebellion, as Charles had desired. This Short Parliament met for only three weeks before Charles dissolved it. To many English subjects, Charles' general lack of cooperation with Parliament was in and of itself a perceived abuse of power.

But Charles did need Parliament; again, Parliament held the power of the purse. As Charles became more desperate, the Long Parliament ensued, meeting for an unprecedented twenty years. During these years, Charles' plan to rule as single-handedly as possible backfired. The Long Parliament set another precedent: the members of the House of Commons set forth the Grand

Remonstrance, a list of 204 Parliamentary grievances from the last decade. For “the multiplicity, sharpness and malignity of those evils under which [they had] many years suffered,” the document cautiously blamed other church and governmental leaders rather than the king himself.²⁰ However, the document was meant to be a sly attack against the king. In fact, in the document, the members of House of Commons made serious demands of the king, including demands for trustworthy king’s ministers and church reform. Avoiding such demands, Charles fled to Nottingham. The English Revolution had begun, and Oliver Cromwell’s Interregnum soon followed.

Having lived through the abuses of power of Charles I, Sidney (and all Whigs) stood adamantly opposed to the belief in the divine right of kings. Belief in the divine right of kings developed in medieval European as a replacement for Roman emperor worship, originating out of Augustine’s work *The City of God*. Rather than attributing actual divine status to the emperor or king himself, divine right theory acknowledged that the ruler was chosen and ordained by God. Especially in medieval Christendom, in which the Catholic Church held a monopoly in all life institutions, divine right theory was often cited as a scapegoat for absolutism and tyranny. In response to the claim of the divine right of kings, and its supposed begetting of liberty, Sidney wrote, “If it be liberty to live under such a government, I desire to know what is slavery.”²¹

During this period, two parties emerged: the Cavaliers and the Roundheads. Their divide between support for king and parliament lasted into the next century. By that point, the parties had developed different names: Tory and Whig. “[E]very Tory saw himself as a latter-day Cavalier

²⁰ “The Grand Remonstrance, with the Petition accompanying it,” ed. David Plant, in *British Civil Wars, Commonwealth and Protectorate, 1638-60*, Website, <http://www.british-civil-wars.co.uk/glossary/grand-remonstrance.htm> (accessed July 2010).

²¹ Sidney, Algernon, “Apology (1638),” *Classics of American Political and Constitutional Thought, Vol. 1: Origins through the Civil War*, ed. Scott J. Hammond, Kevin R. Hardwick, and Howard L. Lubert (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 37.

and every Whig a latter-day Roundhead.” In short, “‘The Whig rhetoric . . . spoke of reform, parliament and the people.’ The Tories were for ‘King, Church and Constitution.’”²²

Sidney and the Whig Rhetoric

The “Whig rhetoric” of reform, parliament, and the people relied heavily on power of the people to check leaders, by dividing and limiting power. The Whigs' origin lay in constitutional monarchism, belief in the rule of law, and opposition to absolutism. This was an issue of sovereignty. During the trial of Charles I, which occurred before the people, the king’s subjects exhibited that they were actually sovereign over their “ruler” for one of the very first times. As Peter Marshall explained, Charles I’s sanctions were, “uniquely, halted and reversed by opposition from his subjects.”²³ These subjects – now citizens – had achieved a step toward sovereignty. But Whigs such as Sidney never believed the king was ever sovereign in the first place. Sidney believed that the “divine” right was *not* divinely instilled but humanly manipulated. The following is Sidney’s description of the mess that ensued from the divine right of kings: “a vile usurper [becomes] God’s anointed and by the most execrable wickedness invest[s] himself with that divine character.”²⁴ Sidney believed no one has this divine ‘anointing’ but only ‘anoints’ himself.

It follows that Sidney believed all men were equal, born naturally free: “The creature having nothing, and being nothing but what the creator makes him, must owe all to him, and nothing to anyone from whom he has received nothing. Man therefore must be naturally free. . .

²² Ingle, Stephen, *The British Party System: An Introduction*, 4th ed., (New York: Routledge, 2008), 8.

²³ Marshall, Peter. *Reformation England, 1480-1642*. New York: Oxford, 2003, p. 194.

²⁴ Sidney, “Apology,” 36.

This liberty must therefore continue, till it be either forfeited or willingly resigned . . . [and] they are all equal, and equals can have no right over each other . . .”²⁵

Englishmen like Sidney believed they were simplifying and returning to their original Saxon liberties, which were assured through limited terms and representative governments. Accordingly, Sidney’s writings teem with a suspicious attitude toward governmental power. Near the opening of his *Apology*, spoken from the scaffold, he stated that he “live[d] in an age that maketh truth pass for treason.”²⁶

This “Whig rhetoric” of reform was the legacy that Whigs such as Algernon Sidney hoped to preserve. In fact, when Charles II was restored to the throne after the Interregnum, Sidney became involved in a plan to kill the king. For his involvement in this Rye House Plot, he was executed for treason. In his death, Sidney stood for the Whig belief in government for the government: “governments are not set up for the advantage, profit, pleasure or glory of one or a few men, but for the good of the society.”²⁷ Having died a martyr’s death in a sense, Algernon Sidney is an exemplar of Whig thought.

Filmer’s *Patriarcha*

Many of Sidney’s statements here are drawn from his *Discourses Concerning Government*. Quite significantly, Sidney wrote his *Discourses* in direct response to a book entitled *Patriarcha*, written by Sir Robert Filmer in 1680. In his *Apology*, Sidney referred to his *Discourses* as “a large treatise written long since in answer to Filmer’s book.”²⁸ As the title implies, the book

²⁵ Sidney, Algernon, *Discourses Concerning Government* (1689), in *Classics of American Political and Constitutional Thought, Vol. 1: Origins through the Civil War*, ed. Scott J. Hammond, Kevin R. Hardwick, and Howard L. Lubert (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 40.

²⁶ Sidney, *Apology*, 35.

²⁷ Sidney, *Discourses*, 38.

²⁸ Sidney, *Apology*, 35.

argued for the divine right of kings. Sidney's harsh critique of absolutism is actually more directly a critique of Filmer's book.

Perhaps surprisingly, Locke also wrote his *Two Treatises of Civil Government* directly in response to Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha*. In fact, in his preface, Locke directly states his purpose as such: "to strip Sir Robert's discourses of the flourish of doubtful expressions, and endeavour to reduce his words to direct, positive, intelligible propositions, and then compare them with one another . . . quickly find[ing] [*Patriarcha* to be] glib nonsense." Conjuring up the same imagery of slavery as Sidney did, Locke wrote: "The king, and the body of the nation, have since so thoroughly confuted [Filmer's] hypothesis, that I suppose no body hereafter will have either the confidence to appear against our common safety, and be again an advocate for slavery."²⁹ Here Locke referred to Charles I's abuses of power, those against Parliament and others listed in the 1641 Grand Remonstrance.

This shared response to Filmer's *Patriarcha* was not Sidney and Locke's only point of intersection. If we extrapolate what their shared response implies, we realize that Sidney and Locke were contemporaries, both living in the era of the English Civil War. Moreover, if we examine Locke's biography, we will see that he, like Sidney, was steeped in Whig thought.

Locke and Liberalism?

The son of Puritan parents, and having been educated at Oxford, Locke's public life coalesced when he refused to be ordained in the Church, which would have secured him a permanent teaching position at Oxford.³⁰ Instead, he switched to a career in medicine. When he

²⁹ Locke, John, *Two Treatises on Civil Government*, in *Modern Political Thought: Readings from Machiavelli to Nietzsche*. 2nd ed., ed. David Wootten, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008), 285.

³⁰ Hallowell, John H. and Jene M. Porter, *Political Philosophy: The Search for Humanity and Order* (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall Canada, 1997), 342.

performed a very successful surgery on a prominent patient named Anthony Ashley Cooper, he gained the admiration of a lifelong patron. Locke became the prominent patient's advisor, and the prominent patient soon became Lord Ashley, and henceforth the Earl of Shaftesbury.

With such a wealthy patron, Locke had an outlet to write his tracts and treatises. If Hartz's analysis of Locke is completely adequate, we would expect his famous *Two Treatises on Civil Government*, his *Essay on Toleration*, and his *Essay concerning Human Understanding* to reflect ideas of the individual in the market place, succeeding by sheer human will. However, as previously mentioned, the Earl of Shaftesbury was one of the most significant proponents of Whig thought and opponents of King Charles I. Because Shaftesbury sponsored all of Locke's writings, Locke's writings naturally manifest some Whig assumptions.

Specifically, we find three Whig assumptions in Locke's writings that also appeared in Sidney's writings: the ideas that men are born free in the state of nature, that government is for the governed, and that government should be limited. First, Locke believed so deeply in the importance of men being born free in the state of nature that he wrote a work entitled *Essays on the Law of Nature*. He wrote: "[I]t seems to me to follow just as necessarily from the nature of man that, if he is a man, he is bound to love and worship God and also to fulfill other things appropriate to the rational nature, i.e. to observe the law of nature . . ." ³¹ Sidney argued that men are born free and equal, and that God endowed them that way. Locke, too, argued for this, and clearly delineated that natural laws should imply natural rights. He qualified his assertion above about the law of nature, writing that "though this be a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of license." ³² Although Locke relegated natural rights to the private realm, this statement implies that some freedoms must be checked as not to interfere with the freedom, and natural rights, of others. The

³¹ Locke, John, *Essays on the Laws of Nature*, ed. W. Von Leyden (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 199-200.

³² Locke, *Two Treatises*, 287.

reality that such interferences will occur is Locke's rationale that government exists at all. In fact, Locke is uniquely known for his social contract theory – that government is an artificial construct made explicitly to benefit the people. People leave the state of nature and join civil society: “The only way one divests himself of his Natural Liberty, and puts on the bonds of Civil Society is by agreeing with other Men to joyn and unite into a Community, for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living amongst another, in a secure Enjoyment of their Properties, and a greater Security against any that are not of it.”³³ In another place in his *Two Treatises on Civil Government*, Locke states that the legislative power is “limited to the publick good of society.”³⁴ Here Locke further demonstrated his belief that government is created for the benefit of the people. Finally, Locke demonstrates his Whig assumption of limited government by beginning with the typical Whig bent toward suspecting corruption. In his *Second Treatise*, he wrote: “[Y]et Men being biased by their Interest, as well as ignorant for want of study of it, are not apt to allow of it as a Law binding to them Men being partial to themselves, Passion and Revenge is very apt to carry them too far . . .”³⁵ To put these interests in check, Locke advocates the three powers in government – executive, legislative, and judiciary. In these ways, Locke carries on Whig tradition and demonstrates fundamental similarities with Algernon Sidney.

Philosopher in the Street

Moreover, Locke's activities were not confined to writing. Because Lord Shaftesbury adamantly opposed Charles II's reign, Locke often became entangled in perilous situations. One commentator wrote, “. . . to say that this was an age of political turmoil understates the brutality

³³ Hallowell, 390.

³⁴ Ibid, 394.

³⁵ Ibid, 393.

and dangers of political life.”³⁶ At one point, in fact, Locke was suspected of involvement in the Rye House Plot – along with Algernon Sidney, and Locke’s mentor, the Earl of Shaftesbury – but fortunately fled to asylum in Amsterdam.

It is crucial to read Locke in light of these life experiences and in the crucible of 17th-century England. As Nicholas Wolterstorff put it, “Locke is not the philosopher in the tower rendering judgments on who knows what and how, but the philosopher in the street offering advice to his anxious combative compatriots on how to overcome the cultural crisis engulfing them.”³⁷ And more specifically, Locke is not the philosopher confined to ideas of property and capitalism; he is the well-rounded Oxford student who was classically trained, which would have spurred on Whig leanings, but also interested in rising modern thought.

Historicizing Locke

In *The Liberal Tradition*, Hartz’s definition of a “liberal” has been taken to be “one who believes in individual liberty, equality, and capitalism and who regards the human market place, where a person succeeds or fails by his or her own efforts and ability, as the proper testing ground of achievement.”³⁸ This is further defined by support of a “Lockian creed, ultimately enshrined in the Constitution,” according to Hartz himself.³⁹ But does Hartz describe the *historical* Locke, or a Locke that is blurred, caricatured, and ultimately Americanized?

If we historicize Locke – that is, if we read him in his own context – we perceive his similarities to Algernon Sidney, and certainly other proponents of Whig thought. Because historians have failed to historicize Locke, mainly interpreting him as Louis Hartz did, perhaps we

³⁶ Ibid, 344.

³⁷ Wolterstorff, Nicholas, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1996), x.

³⁸ Hartz, in an introduction by Tom Wicker, xi.

³⁹ Hartz, 9.

have failed to understand the balance or possible compatibility between republicanism and liberalism in the founding of the United States.

That Locke and Sidney were both driven to action during the English Civil War; that they both wrote in response to Filmer's *Patriarcha*; and that they were both either directly involved or suspected of involvement in the Rye House Plot seem to suggest some compatibility between the two men's views. Locke, it turns out, expressed some deep Whig conviction. Exactly how a combination of liberal and republican Whig ideas could play out practically is not exactly clear, as this has been the American experiment. What is clear, however, is that Hartz's proclamation of the American anthem *Locke et praeterea nihil*⁴⁰ – Locke and none other – he commits the mistake of bracketing off the paradigm of liberalism without making allowance for enough nuance. In short, Louis Hartz's thesis presented in *The Liberal Tradition* needs revision not just because historians of the republican synthesis have compiled credible research (which I take as evidence of a republican-liberal continuum), but also because Hartz's interpretation of Locke is incomplete. Hartz's picture of Locke as the voice of rights, property, and capitalism is a caricature that ignores particularly his belief in government for the governed, for the good of society as a whole. No wonder historians of the republican synthesis, such as Gordon Wood, found themselves examining documents that did not match with Hartz's emphases on capitalism and the "market place" of "human achievement." Even the beliefs of Locke himself exist on a republican-liberal continuum.

Although Hartz missed this complexity in Locke's work, Hartz *did* make implications in *The Liberal Tradition* that he was vaguely aware that he did not describe the historical Locke. First, Hartz wrote that "a society which begins with Locke, and thus transforms him, stays with Locke, by virtue of an absolute and irrational attachment it develops for him." He also made a

⁴⁰ Shalhope, R.E., "Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography," *William and Mary Quarterly* 29 (January 1972): 49-80.

similar statement: “We have to consider that peculiar meaning that American life gave to the words of Locke.”⁴¹ Despite these acknowledgements, Hartz presented Locke’s writings as an applied system rather than liberalism as a fluid ideology, or even as the work of a person. In other words, Locke’s actual writings and actual beliefs are not synonymous with the modern textbook description of what classical liberalism has become, and even this textbook definition should acknowledge that ideologies morph and develop through time and circumstance. This skewed presentation occurs throughout the text.

In addition, the Whig assumptions present in Locke’s thought, which are discussed here, have not been illuminated in Hartz’s work. When reading the historical Locke, it seems Locke’s budding liberal ideas need and refer back to Whig republican assumptions to avoid corruption and dysfunction due to corruption.

Perhaps Hartz’s shortcomings can be attributed to a mono-causal view of history. He seems to have sought one answer to the larger question of his work: Why has America never experienced a successful socialist movement? Hartz actually maintained socialist sympathies and wrote *The Liberal Tradition* to address the lack of socialism in the United States. Hartz stressed the absence of feudalism in America. Never being feudal, Americans did not recognize class distinctions. “The hidden origin of socialist thought everywhere in the West is to be found in the feudal ethos,” Hartz wrote.⁴² So Hartz has circumvented a full understanding of Locke by limiting Locke not only into his American application, but also by limiting Locke to the socio-economic dimension. Similar to Charles Beard and the Progressive School before him (who only perceived the founding through an economic lens), Hartz overlooked the *ideological* origins (to invoke

⁴¹ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, in *American Social and Political Thought: A Reader*, ed. Andreas Hess (New York: NYU Press, 2003), 155, 158.

⁴² Hartz, in Hess, 155. For more analysis of Hartz’s work in light of its socialist bent, see Thomas Pangle, “The Hartz Thesis,” *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 25-27.

Bailyn) of American political thought. With such a limitation – that is, with a bent toward perceiving history as mono-causal – Hartz would never have considered that Locke’s ideas might exist on a continuum. Hartz’s interpretation of Locke amounts to what he himself called it America’s take on John Locke – a massive cliché.

The Scottish Enlightenment: Export to Colonial America

In *America’s God*, Mark Noll does not just write a theological history of Protestantism in the United States; he also offers his stance in the republicanism-liberalism debate in the historiography of revolutionary-era America. Noll’s thesis claims that American theological history can be perceived as a confluence of evangelical Protestant thought, “commonsense” moral philosophy, and *republicanism*. In this claim, Noll implies that he sits in the general camp of Wood, Bailyn, and others of the republican revision, rather than with Hartz. However, the aligning of republicanism (with its intended focus on the group at large) and commonsense moral philosophy (with its emphasis on the individual’s rationality) is a unique pairing. By focusing on the commonsense moral philosophy, an intellectual import from Scotland, Noll situates himself in a camp that focuses on the impact of the Scottish Enlightenment and republicanism, not just classical republicanism.

Just as the comparison of Locke and Sidney has exposed some possible overlap between republicanism and liberalism, Noll has introduced the possibility of more overlap. Here we investigate how American republicanism was influenced by the advent of commonsense moral philosophy in American colleges and life. Was this American republicanism different than classical republicanism proper due to its synthesis with commonsense moral philosophy, an output of the Scottish Enlightenment? Below I will argue that commonsense moral philosophy shares

some fundamental assumptions with liberalism. And because Noll has identified a “confluence” of republicanism and commonsense moral philosophy, I argue that this is evidence that republicanism and liberalism existed on a continuum in early American history.

The Puritan View of Reason

To demonstrate the oddity of this “confluence” of evangelical Protestant thought, commonsense moral philosophy, and republicanism, Noll contrasts the advent of commonsense moral philosophy with the former theological “canopy” of Puritanism. Puritanism, of course, emphasized human depravity, as evidenced by John Winthrop’s “Little Speech on Liberty.” Winthrop emphasized that all men, even magistrates, are “men subject to like passions as you are.” In addition to being subject to capricious passions, Winthrop asserted that “our nature is now corrupt.” Winthrop continued to say that humans and beasts both have a natural liberty, which, in his description, is nearly synonymous with the concept of free will. If humans follow their natural liberty, Winthrop declared, they succumb to the status of beasts. He invoked a classical Latin phrase, “*omnes sumus licentia deteriores*” – too much freedom debases us.⁴³ Clearly, the Calvinist-Puritan belief in the depravity of humanity is evident in Winthrop’s speech. The concept of depravity was a theological hinge upon which the Puritan worldview hung. Of particular importance is that Winthrop displays the Puritan-Calvinist doctrine that teaches that sin affects human noetic function, or one’s ability to reason.

Noll asserts that Puritanism, as an all-encompassing life system, began to unravel unintentionally when 18th-century pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards emphasized a personal

⁴³ Winthrop, John, “Little Speech on Liberty (1645),” in *Classics of American Political and Constitutional Thought, Vol. I: Origins through Civil War*, ed. Scott J. Hammond, Kevin R. Hardwick, and Howard L. Lubert (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007) 18-19.

covenant with God over a communal covenant with God. Edwards' good intentions to purge the church of bench-warming nonbelievers caused serious ramifications in the functioning of Puritanism. Noll writes that "the replacement of local ecclesiastical authority focusing on outward observance with personal religion concentrated on inward piety" disintegrated the Puritan life-system. "Given up was the covenant, a long-lived and explicitly biblical construct for linking together God, self, church, and society." Slowly the language of covenant faded, and with it, its association with divine right theory. Just as Locke refuted divine right theory with his emerging modern concept of natural rights, the "Puritan canopy" of the covenant became refuted by a "mixed set of modern alternatives that used social or political, but not primarily theological, categories to unify existence."⁴⁴

Contexts of the Scottish Enlightenment

One of these modern alternatives was commonsense moral philosophy, a product of the 18th-century Scottish Enlightenment. As the biographies of John Locke and Algernon Sidney have demonstrated, describing 16th-and 17th-century Europe as is an understatement. In 1517, for example, the German monk Martin Luther nailed his *95 Theses* – arguments against the existing practices of the Roman Catholic Church – to the door of the University of Wittenberg. By confronting the Catholic Church, Luther initiated the Protestant Reformation. He also challenged the institution whose influence and authority dominated not just European religious life, but political, social, and intellectual life as well. Soon the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) and other wars of religion ravaged Europe, leaving many disillusioned with religious sentiment. While Aristotelian and Thomistic approaches still prevailed in the academy, this frustrated many

⁴⁴ Noll, *America's God*, 31-32. For further discussion of Edwards and the dissolution of the Puritan "canopy," see Ch. 3, pp. 31-50.

intellectuals. Some, such as Rene Descartes, questioned this latching-on to tradition. In 1641, he wrote:

Some years ago I was struck by the large number of falsehoods that I had accepted as true in my childhood, and by the highly doubtful nature of the whole edifice that I had subsequently based on them. I realized that it was necessary . . . to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last.⁴⁵

It was in this greater European environment of questioning authority that the English Civil War occurred and in which Shaftesbury commissioned John Locke's writings.

Soon men and women in various locations across Europe were meeting in "salons" to discuss their new ideas, the new science. They corresponded to one another in a "Republic of Letters," and they published their own *Encyclopédie*, in 28 volumes.⁴⁶ The period culminated in the late 18th century: Immanuel Kant's 1781 *Critique of Pure Reason* demanded that everyone test everything for himself, and in 1789, the French Revolutionaries did test their ideas in real life, with disastrous results. Yet the name given to this movement in European history still stands: The Enlightenment.

This story, told in broad strokes, is a familiar one in Western history. Not as familiar is the offshoot of the European Enlightenment in Scotland, which hailed names such as David Hume, Adam Smith, Francis Hutcheson, and Thomas Reid. While not a movement isolated from the greater European Republic of Letters, the Scottish Enlightenment did have a unique flavor of its own, with its own unique context. Unlike most Enlightenment thinkers on the continent, or even in England, most of the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers held academic posts (sparing David Hume). With rich academic centers at Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Aberdeen, a lively intellectual exchange

⁴⁵ Descartes, Rene, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1988), 76.

⁴⁶ Edited by Frenchmen Denis Diderot and Jean d'Alembert, and published between 1651 and 1772, the *Encyclopédie* is often considered one of the pinnacle publications representing Enlightenment thought.

ensued among colleagues and their neighbors. Moreover, this intellectual exchange was propelled by the country-wide task of strengthening the universities. During this time, more faculty positions were opened in various disciplines; libraries were added; and other attempts were made to improve Scotland's universities.⁴⁷ The universities emerged "less seminary-like"⁴⁸ – that is, less reminiscent of the old medieval universities, which had mainly prepared men for the ministry. While John Locke had been frustrated with his medieval course of study at Oxford, which was steeped in Aristotelian and Scholastic thought,⁴⁹ a student at Edinburgh, for example, would have started to notice a leaning toward more contemporary ideas, such as Newtonianism.⁵⁰

This bent toward advancement was fueled by Scotland's 17th-18th-century economic and political situation. Simply put, Scotland was a poor nation. As England prospered through its colony-planting and free trade policies, Scotland's poverty was only magnified. Scotland was not exempt from the tumult across Europe. To ameliorate the nation's economic woes, Scotland formally joined the British Empire in the 1707 Act of Union, reaping the material benefits of England's free trade system. But Scotland did not just benefit economically; Scotland's status in Europe also changed dramatically.⁵¹ The Scottish academy was directly impacted.

The Scottish Enlightenment: People and Ideas

The Scottish Enlightenment was a hotbed for discussion in moral philosophy, history, social theory, economics, and more. In all areas of study, the prevailing questions sought some kind of reconciliation between traditional Scottish values and the new capitalist ethos into which

⁴⁷ Broadie, Alexander, ed., *Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 2003), 19.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Hallowell and Porter, 341.

⁵⁰ Broadie, *Cambridge Companion*, 19.

⁵¹ For further discussion of Scotland's politico-economic situation, see Roger Emerson, "The contexts of the Scottish Enlightenment," in *Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, edited by Alexander Broadie.

Scotland was thrown by the 1707 Act of Union. Gonzalo Fonseca summarizes the situation well:

Could

the acquisitive ethics of capitalism be made compatible with traditional virtues of sociability, sympathy, and justice[?] . . . Bernard de Mandeville [suggested] in his famous thesis [in *Fable of the Bees*] that “private vices” lead to substantial “public benefits,” whereas virtuous behavior does very little good at all. The Scottish philosophers wanted to show that the choice between private virtue and public good was a false one. The scandalous resolution forwarded by David Hume . . . was that moral values and judgments were social constructions anyway . . .⁵²

So Fonseca has introduced the pre-occupations of Scottish economics and moral philosophy, and the pivotal figure David Hume. For our purposes, Hume serves as a starting point in the dialogue that was the Scottish Enlightenment. Hume, an agnostic at best, threw the academy upside-down in regard to his theory of knowledge. He stated plainly: “All inferences from experience, therefore, are effects of custom, not of reasoning.”⁵³ From the beginning of his *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Hume had already proposed that “so narrow are the bounds of human understanding, that little satisfaction can be hoped for in this particular, either from the extent or security of his acquisitions.”⁵⁴ In other words, Hume believed one could hope for little certainty either from deductive or inductive (empirical) reasoning.

Hume’s conclusions, of course, were scandalous for his time and culture. After all, the academics of the Scottish Enlightenment faced an ethical question: Would Scotland’s 1707 entrance into the British Empire – and the world of free trade – infringe upon traditional morals? What was the value of these traditional morals? What ethical dilemmas might follow such a conclusion as Hume’s? Due to the social nature of the Scottish Enlightenment – with discussion

⁵² Fonseca, Gonzalo L. “The Scottish Enlightenment.” *The History of Economic Thought Website*. The New School Department of Economics. <http://homepage.newschool.edu/het/schools/scottish.htm> (accessed July 2010).

⁵³ Hume, David, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, 2nd ed., ed. Eric Steinberg (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993) 28.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

facilitated through clubs, societies, and organized debates – many met Hume with direct responses.⁵⁵

Thomas Reid: Founder of Commonsense Moral Philosophy

One response, from Glasgow professor Thomas Reid, avoided the traps Hume had so vigorously attacked in Descartes' work, while also avoiding the strict empiricism that led Hume to "little hope for certainty." Reid set out to reject both Hume's skepticism *and* the "theory of ideas," to which Descartes and Reid's other philosophical predecessors and contemporaries all adhered. These contemporaries actually included John Locke, who had written *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* to complement his political theory addressed in the previous chapter. The theory of ideas, or idealism, deems that mental ideas occur as representations in the mind.

Idealism, albeit altered through the ages, traces back to Plato's allegory of the cave, which tells of ideas in the mind being elucidated by the sun. According to an idealist model, when thinking about an object, one "sees" the object in her mind. Ultimate reality is based upon what can be known on the inside of one's mind, rather than on externals (realism).

In place of idealism, Reid proposed a type of realism rooted in his concept of common sense. For Reid, "common sense" was an exact term, not a term similar to the layman's term used today. Common sense is taken from the philosophical term *sensus communis*, which was translated into Latin from Aristotle's original inception of the term in Greek. Reid defined common sense as the following: "[T]here are principles common to [philosophers and the vulgar⁵⁶] which need no

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ *Vulgar* was a term Reid used himself to refer to the layman, i.e., not the professional or academic philosopher.

proof, and which do not admit of direct proof.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, “The operations of our mind are attended with consciousness; and this consciousness is the evidence, the only evidence, which we have or can have of their existence.”⁵⁸

In stating that both philosophers and “the vulgar” had access to “common sense,” Reid actually shared a similar view on the individual with Algernon Sidney and especially John Locke. All three leveled out human beings, attributing to them equality since birth. Peasants were born equal to kings, and the vulgar were born equal to philosophers. While Locke’s main conclusion proceeding from this premise was natural rights, Reid’s conclusion was basic equality in rational capabilities. What does this mean for the republican-liberal debate? Below I will argue that Reid’s theory, exported via John Witherspoon, and merging with republicanism, provides evidence that liberalism and republicanism exist along a continuum.

John Witherspoon and the College of New Jersey

Although the Scottish branch of the Enlightenment is less familiar than its French or German counterparts, it is “by no means solely antiquarian.”⁵⁹ In fact, there has been a renaissance in the study of the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers.⁶⁰ They have recognized that the Scottish Enlightenment is crucial for understanding early American history. In fact, the ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment, as one scholar put it, have been “Scotland’s chief export to America.”⁶¹

⁵⁷ Reid, Thomas, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, ed., Hamilton, Sir William, *The Works of Thomas Reid*, Vol. 1 (6th ed.), Edinburgh: Maclachlan and Stewart, Reprint: Bristol: Thoemnes Press, 1994, p. 230 A-B. Quoted in Broadie, Alexander. “Scottish Philosophy in the 18th Century.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2009 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Stable URL=
<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/scottish-18th/>>.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 231 B.

⁵⁹ Broadie, *Cambridge Companion*, 1.

⁶⁰ For example, see the work of George Marsden, Mark Noll, Nathan Hatch, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and William Alston.

⁶¹ Broadie, *Cambridge Companion*, p. 6.

John Witherspoon (1723-1794) was one of those chief exporters. Witherspoon held a unique triad of credentials. He descended from John Knox (the Scottish founder of Presbyterianism); he served as President and professor at what became Princeton University; and he signed the American Declaration of Independence. Thus Witherspoon serves as a unique case study in the matrix of philosophy and revolutionary politics. We will examine how Witherspoon's emphasis on commonsense moral philosophy mixed with revolutionary politics, and how this "confluence"⁶² helped pave a republican-liberal continuum.

Like Sidney and Locke, Witherspoon lived in a crucible of social controversy and change. Within the Presbyterian Church (Kirk) of Scotland, arguments evolved between a Moderate and a Popular camp. The Moderates championed the work of Francis Hutcheson (a Glasgow professor, like Reid), whom the Popular camp believed undermined biblical orthodoxy. Witherspoon identified with the popular movement, and published a satire against the Moderates entitled *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* in 1753. This satire brought him into the public limelight, and Witherspoon soon was offered a position at the College of New Jersey.

Witherspoon permanently crossed the Atlantic in 1786 to serve as a professor at the small Presbyterian college. In addition to his family and personal belongings, Witherspoon brought with him to America the commonsense moral philosophy of a Scottish philosopher who had opposed Francis Hutcheson – Thomas Reid. Witherspoon taught across the curriculum, but he considered Moral Philosophy to be his most significant. In this class, Witherspoon's students studied Thomas Reid. But Witherspoon also altered the entire college by replacing Jonathan Edwards' idealism with Reid's commonsense realism throughout the curriculum.

⁶² Noll's term in *America's God*.

What's more, as Witherspoon's influence at the College increased, so did the influence of the College in colonial America. Even more than Harvard and Yale, the College of New Jersey drew a national crowd, with students not just from New Jersey and other mid-Atlantic states, but also from New England and the South.⁶³ Considering the wide range of the college's influence, and the fact that all students were required to take Moral Philosophy, Witherspoon's influence was quite hefty. Two of his students, actually, were James Madison and Aaron Burr. For all the influence Witherspoon incurred (in religion, education, and politics), Noll considers Witherspoon's curriculum changes to be the "crowning accomplishment of Witherspoon's meteoric descent upon America."⁶⁴

Despite his influence via the College, Witherspoon is better remembered as a political orator than a philosophy professor. He served in the Continental Congress; remained a Congressman from 1776-1782; helped draft the Articles of Confederation; and, again, his name had been painted in ink on the Declaration of Independence. Below some of his rhetoric is analyzed to demonstrate the confluence of commonsense moral philosophy and revolutionary politics, particularly the republicanism it espouses.

In short, a movement which began in reaction to the 1707 Act of Union between Scotland and England had taken roots on American soil via John Witherspoon's influence at what became Princeton University. I have juxtaposed John Locke and the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment to highlight their common "enlightened" tendencies. Next I will compare the epistemological commitments and the polemic for moral liberty of Locke and Witherspoon. Again, Locke has been chosen as a representative of traditional liberal thought (according to Hartz), and Witherspoon has been chosen as a voice of republicanism in America (according to Noll). By first

⁶³ Noll, Mark, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822*, Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1989, Reprint Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2004) 17.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 34.

comparing their theories of knowledge more in depth, and then comparing their views on moral liberty, I will draw more comparison than contrast. These comparisons will further suggest that republican and liberalism exist along a continuum, rather than as boxed-off paradigms.

Locke and Commonsense Moral Philosophy: Comparisons

John Locke and David Hume have been compared and contrasted endlessly. Both were British empiricists. Yet their political theories are likened to “oil and water.”⁶⁵ No matter where they actually stand in comparison, the fact should be noted that Locke and Hume are the two usually put side by side. Very rarely do scholars evaluate Locke in comparison to thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment. However, such a comparison will be very useful to demonstrate the republican-liberal continuum. For, as previously asserted, what Locke’s natural rights did to the divine right of kings, Witherspoon’s commonsense moral philosophy did to the Puritan hierarchy intrinsic to their covenant theology. This section extrapolates this comparison further, beginning at the basic level of Locke and Witherspoon’s epistemological assumptions.

Perhaps Locke is not often compared to the commonsense school for two reasons. First, the commonsense school is not very well-known. Although Hume is a pivotal figure in modern philosophy, names like Thomas Reid (and other members of the commonsense school such as James Beattie, George Campbell, and Dugald Stewart) appear nowhere in the canon. Again, this does not imply that studying Reid and the others is merely an antiquarian undertaking. On the contrary, Witherspoon’s adoption of commonsense principles at the College of New Jersey, and his influence on the founders and the colonial culture, is rather imperative for understanding the founding of the United States.

⁶⁵ Wootten, David, ed. “John Locke, David Hume, and the Right to Revolution.” In *Modern Political Thought: Readings from Machiavelli to Nietzsche*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008), 283.

Furthermore, as Nicholas Wolterstorff points out, the current canon of the history of modern philosophy relies heavily on Hegel's philosophy of history, which was interpreted history as a dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.⁶⁶ Into this paradigm, Hegel inserted the continental rationalism of Descartes, the British empiricism of Locke and Hume, and their synthesis in Kant and Hegel himself.⁶⁷ The commonsense moral philosophers did not make the headlines.

Nor did they fit neatly into one of Hegel's paradigms. Relying on Hegel's tutelage in the history of philosophy constrains us to strict paradigms of rationalism and empiricism. Just as the boxed-off definitions of republicanism and liberalism have not served the historiography of early America, the stringent paradigms of rationalism and empiricism exclude the work of the commonsense moral philosophers such as Reid. (It is slightly poignant because Reid purposely distinguished himself from rationalism and empiricism to achieve a unique approach.) This is the second reason why the commonsense moral philosophers are not well known nor often compared with Locke. Yet this comparison is crucial for observing the republican-liberal continuum.

The *Volkgeist* of Enlightenment

Despite this critique of Hegel's philosophy of history, it is important to give Hegel credit where due. Wolterstorff points out that Hegel was the first to identify *modern* philosophy as a distinct movement. "Its Spirit, its *Geist*, was different," Wolterstorff assesses, invoking Hegelian language.⁶⁸ What was the *Geist* of modern philosophy? In December 1783, a German newspaper, the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, published an article asking the more general question "*What is*

⁶⁶ Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, 228.

⁶⁷ Wolterstorff, Nicholas, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 2001), x.

⁶⁸ Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, 228.

enlightenment?” One response from Immanuel Kant became the standard: “*Sapere aude!* [Dare to know!] Have the courage to use your own reason! – that is the motto of enlightenment.”⁶⁹ As Locke and the Scottish philosophers demonstrate, the major theme of Enlightenment was the use of one’s own reason. Locke, believing men were born in the state of nature, said men must rely upon empirical evidence; Hume took this a step further; and Reid revised them both by stating that all men could rely upon the foundation of their own common sense.

Elaborating upon Kant’s definition of Enlightenment, Alexander Broadie has concluded that “enlightened thinking is not to be identified by its content so much as by its form.”⁷⁰ This general form, or manner, of enlightened thinking does not rely upon authority or tradition but in thinking for oneself, or using one’s own reason. Thus Hegel perceived the *Geist* of modern philosophy as “all externality or authority [being] . . . superseded.”⁷¹

In the most general terms of the spirit of the age, the age of enlightenment and the dawn of modernity, then, John Locke and the commonsense moral philosophers, specifically Reid, share much. Despite disagreement over exact epistemological processes, both leveled out humanity by providing each man with the authority to carve out his own beliefs. Their epistemic principles both allow the common man to attain knowledge, and they both emphasize man’s active power to become. Reid, for instance, wrote that his theory of commonsense “puts the philosopher and the peasant upon a level, and neither of them can give any other reason for believing his senses than that he finds it impossible for him to do otherwise.”⁷² This is a crucial feature of much

⁶⁹ Kant, Immanuel, *What is Enlightenment?*, *The Internet Modern History Sourcebook*. <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/kant-what.html>> (accessed 15 February 2009).

⁷⁰ Broadie, Alexander, ed. *Scottish Enlightenment: An Anthology* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 1997), 4.

⁷¹ Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952), 286, quoted in Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*.

⁷² Reid, Thomas. *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (in part). In Baird, Forrest E. and Walter Kaufmann, Eds. *Modern Philosophy*, 4th ed. In *Philosophic Classics*, Volume III. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2003), 490.

Enlightenment thought, and visible in both Locke and Reid. It is also a crucial feature of American revolutionary thought.

Locke's Polemic for Moral Liberty

As the earlier comparison of John Locke to Algernon Sidney expressed, it is crucial to read Locke's thought in his historical context. It is also vital to read each of Locke's work in context of Locke's work as a whole. In discussion of the American Revolution, Locke is most cited for his concepts of "life," "liberty," and "property." These concepts, formulated in his *Second Treatise on Government*, were borrowed and adapted by Thomas Jefferson in 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 inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness . . ." ⁷³ In retrospect, it seems very fitting, with little need of explanation, that colonists no longer desiring to be subjects of the British Empire would cite such rights. Yet, as stated previously, Joyce Appleby has reminded us that liberalism has saturated contemporary American culture. We are accustomed to such rights language. We forget that these Lockean ideas had very specific meanings that were radical for the 17th and 18th centuries.

Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* provides the groundwork for comprehending Locke's rejection of divine right and monarchism in his *First Treatise* and the direct proposals in his *Second Treatise*. ⁷⁴ The *Essay*, a work in the theory of knowledge, or epistemology, was central to the development of the British empirical tradition. The *Essay* features many jargon words which seem loosely synonymous, such as *impression*, *sensation*, and *idea*. It is

⁷³ Jefferson, Thomas. *The Declaration of Independence*. In *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, Edited by Merrill D. Peterson. New York: Penguin, 1975, p. 235.

⁷⁴ The *First Treatise* is primarily a response to Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha*, discussed in the Ch. 1 of this thesis, "The Hartzian vs. the Historical Locke."

easy to become lost in the sea of gobbledygook and fail to recognize its purpose as an ancillary work to the *Two Treatises on Civil Government*. But in the *Essay*, one of Locke's main purposes was to demonstrate that humans are born without innate ideas. It is from this proposition that the expression *tabula rasa* became famous.⁷⁵ Locke made this argument very early in the *Essay*, right in the Introduction:

It is an established Opinion amongst some Men, That there are in the Understanding certain *innate Principles*; some primary Notions . . . Characters, as it were stamped upon the Mind of Man, which the Soul received in its very first Being; and brings into the World with it.⁷⁶

Clearly the concept of innate principles is not one Locke agreed with, although the concept was “established” among many before him. Locke ascertains that the belief in innate principles stemmed from an argument drawn from “universal consent”:

This Argument, drawn from *Universal Consent*, has this Misfortune in it, That if it were true in matter of Fact, that there were certain Truths, wherein all Mankind agreed, it would not prove them innate . . . But, which is worse . . . there are none which all Mankind give an Universal Assent.

So Locke declared that the argument of universal consent was a null point; there *was* no universal consent, especially in 17th century Europe, inundated in politico-religious warfare. Locke believed that if there was no universal consent, there could be no innate ideas. Without innate ideas, man must have conceived of the idea of government himself. Divine right theory would be demolished, and, consequently, men may choose their own government. Men were agents, not mere wantons; thus, they possess a moral liberty. Locke wrote: “[W]hen anyone well considers it, I think he will

⁷⁵ Taken at face value, the term *tabula rasa* can be misleading, because Locke did not entirely give up the idea of common sense (though not in a manner which totally ascribes to Reid). An example of Locke's idea of common sense would be taking for granted that one is actually speaking to another person. Knowledge, for Locke, is at a different – heartier – level than a mere idea. More specifically, Locke did not even write in his *Essay* against innate *knowledge*: he proposed that innate *principles* did not exist (Nidditch, 48). Such is the nature of Locke's jargon. Nevertheless, he purposefully chose a complex vocabulary to distinguish between different modes of thought and belief.

⁷⁶ Locke, John, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 1975), 48.

as plainly perceive, that Liberty, which is but a power, belongs only to Agents . . .”⁷⁷ John

Hallowell further explains:

Here we see a crucial link between Locke’s epistemology and his political philosophy: a new quality or property is owned by, belongs to, or is located in, the active power that caused the new quality to come into existence. The great rights mentioned in the Second Treatise – such as life, liberty, health, and estates – can be explained through the application of the idea of active power: “This at least I think evident, That we find in our selves a *Power* to begin or forbear, continue or end several actions of our minds, and motions of our Bodies, barely by a thought or preference of the mind ordering, or as it were commanding the doing or not doing such or such a particular action.”⁷⁸

Thus Locke built some epistemological foundations which assign humanity moral liberty and the ability to “become.” An archetype of Broady’s definition of enlightened thought, which is to be characterized by a form which undermines tradition, Locke leveled out each member of humanity by providing each with the authority to carve out his or her own beliefs. Although Book IV of the *Essay* warns of man’s responsibility to regulate his beliefs,⁷⁹ the work of Locke – like much Enlightenment thought – possesses an air of optimism and progress. Man’s status is elevated – again, from subject to citizen.

Viewing Locke’s political theory through the lens of his epistemology also certainly illuminates his intentions in the *Two Treatises*. But for our purposes, understanding Locke’s epistemology bridges a gap between the Hartzian interpretation and the republican synthesis, because Locke the empiricist did not entirely give up the notion of common sense. In fact, while Locke is classified as an empiricist, this classification can become a caricaturization of the bulwark of the *tabula rasa*, the blank slate containing no innate ideas. Samuel Enoch Stumpf asserted that neither Locke nor George Berkeley (another empiricist) “took his own account of the [empirical] origin of ideas seriously enough to rest his theory of knowledge wholly upon it. *They still had*

⁷⁷ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, quoted in Hallowell, *Political Philosophy*, 357.

⁷⁸ Hallowell, 356-357.

⁷⁹ Wolterstorff argues that this is the “center of gravity” of Locke’s *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. See the Preface of *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (xiv).

recourse to the “common-sense” beliefs of people, which they were not willing to give up entirely.”⁸⁰ Wolterstorff, moreover, argues well that the concept of the *tabula rasa* was not the central argument of the empiricists (or at least Locke’s). The central argument of Wolterstorff’s book *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* is reflected in the title: the real focus, Wolterstorff argues, is that we must regulate our epistemic commitments, or beliefs.

An important implication is made. If Wolterstorff’s analysis warrants merit, then something within man does exist besides a *tabula rasa* – his ability to assess or regulate the contents of the blank slate. This is precisely what Stumpf refers to in claiming Locke never fully gave up the concept of “common-sense.” In sum, the epistemologies of both Locke and Reid differ, but Locke’s “recourse to the common-sense beliefs of people” actually forges Locke and Witherspoon (Reid’s disciple) in a very similar camp. It is also a feature that exemplifies well the *Geist* of Enlightenment as discussed above. For this feature is what allows enlightened thinking to reject authority and be dependent upon one’s own reason. It is precisely this feature which, as Reid put it, levels philosopher and peasant alike. It is upon this bedrock of common sense that both Locke and Witherspoon paint their moral-political visions, which, when compared, demonstrate that the tenets of republicanism and liberalism exist along a continuum.

Witherspoon, Commonsense Moral, and a Moral-Political Vision

In the comparison with Algernon Sidney, John Locke exhibited a propensity toward an elevated view of man, even though this seems contradictory to typical Whig suspicions of power. Locke wrote in his *Second Treatise*: “[Y]et Men being biased by their Interest, as well as ignorant for want of study of it, are not apt to allow of it as a Law binding to them . . . Men being partial to

⁸⁰ Stumpf, Samuel Enoch and James Fieser, *Socrates to Sartre and Beyond: A History of Philosophy*, 7th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2003), 268.

themselves, Passion and Revenge is very apt to carry them too far . . .”⁸¹ However, in Locke’s view, men are also able to elevate themselves from the state of nature. Man is able to develop society for his enjoyment, elevating his status: “[O]ne divests himself of his Natural Liberty, and puts on the bonds of Civil Society is by agreeing with other Men to joyn and unite into a Community, for their comfortable, safe, and peacable living amongst another, in a secure Enjoyment of their Properties . . .”⁸² This statement concerns the development of government as a means for greater security. Simultaneously, Locke has indicated his belief that humans are rational beings who can create and become something greater than what the state of nature reveals. Again, he wrote: “[I]t seems to me to follow just as necessarily from the nature of man that, if he is a man, he is bound to love and worship God and also to fulfill other things appropriate to the rational nature, i.e. to observe the law of nature . . .”⁸³ His words reflect the optimism in man’s abilities to progress which is so characteristic of Enlightenment thought.

Like Locke, John Witherspoon viewed epistemology as the groundwork for a moral-political vision. An analysis of Witherspoon must take into consideration “the complex allegiances of his life – as Calvinist preacher, Scottish philosopher, Whig patriot, eager scientist, and eloquent gentleman.”⁸⁴ We begin by looking at Witherspoon as the Calvinist preacher. “I am none of those who either deny or conceal the depravity of human nature, till it is purified by the light of truth, and renewed by the Spirit of the living God,” Witherspoon announced in Congress in 1776, clearly stating his assent to a Calvinist doctrine. But Witherspoon did not consider man’s depravity as something that withheld him from good-doing and achieving greatness. He continued,

Yet I apprehend there is no force in that reasoning [the reasoning that man’s depravity fully constrains him] at all. Shall we establish nothing good, because we know it cannot be

⁸¹ Hallowell, 393.

⁸² Ibid, 390.

⁸³ Locke, *Essays on the Laws of Nature*, 199-200.

⁸⁴ Noll, *Princeton*, 29.

eternal? Shall we live without government because every constitution has its old age, and its period? . . . Far from it, Sir: it only requires the more watchful attention, to settle government upon the best principles and in the wisest manner . . .⁸⁵

Thomas P. Miller observes that Witherspoon drew upon “traditional Calvinist assumptions about individual conscience.”⁸⁶

The Calvinist Conundrum of the Individual

Miller refers to an element of individualism in Calvinism at which Max Weber’s *Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* hints. While Weber’s famous thesis argues that hard-working Calvinists propelled the capitalistic acquisition of wealth, and even though Calvin himself would never have advocated such “worldliness,” Weber did hit on the head the internal conundrum of Calvinism. The conundrum is this: although the individual is totally depraved according to Calvinist doctrine, the Christian doctrine of sanctification allows that humans are capable of greatness through God’s grace. Although God’s power, rather than human power, is emphasized in the doctrine of sanctification, it is the human on earth who exhibits virtue, achievement, greatness, and other noble qualities. Witherspoon wrote, “I do expect, Mr. President, a progress, as in every other human art, so in the order and perfection of human society, greater than we have yet seen; and why should we be wanting to ourselves in urging it forward? It is certain, I think, that human science and religion have kept company together, and greatly assisted each other’s progress in the world.”⁸⁷

This doctrine of sanctification is not often given fair share in the literature, causing Witherspoon’s Calvinist sentiments to seem completely antithetical to his assent to commonsense

⁸⁵ Witherspoon, John, “Speech in Congress (July 30, 1776),” in *Classics of American Political and Constitutional Thought, Vol. I: Origins through Civil War*, ed. Scott J. Hammond, Kevin R. Hardwick, and Howard L. Lubert (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 307.

⁸⁶ Miller, Thomas P., “John Witherspoon (1723-1794),” in *Eighteenth Century British and American Rhetorics and Rhetoricians: Critical Studies and Sources*, ed. Michael G. Moran, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994) 270.

⁸⁷ Witherspoon, John, “The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men (1776),” in *Classics of American Political and Constitutional Thought, Vol. I: Origins through Civil War*, ed. Scott J. Hammond, Kevin R. Hardwick, and Howard L. Lubert (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 312.

moral philosophy (due to its emphasis on the individual's capabilities). But they are not. The human ability to reason, and more specifically to have clarity in moral reasoning, would not contradict traditional Calvinist teaching if one involves the doctrine of sanctification.

Views on Authority

However, Witherspoon did make one serious adjustment to Calvinist doctrine in his views as a Scottish philosopher and eager scientist: he believed that all men, whether religious or not, could become virtuous. Thus his beliefs aligned more with enlightenment thought than Puritan theology of reasoning ability marred by sin. He spoke with optimism of a belief in progress so indicative of Enlightenment thought:

I do not say that intellectual and moral qualities are in the same proportion in particular persons; but they have a great and friendly influence upon one another, in societies and larger bodies. There have been great improvements, not only in human knowledge, but in human nature; the progress of which can be easily traced in history.⁸⁸

Like Locke, Witherspoon regarded virtue as a moral science rather than an infusion of divine grace (as Edwards, and Calvin and Augustine before him did). Noll judges, "In practice, Witherspoon began theoretical inquiry with Descartes' denial of inherited authority."⁸⁹

Locke shared this Cartesian view of authority. Just as Locke's view of authority (or lack thereof) taught that each man was a *tabula rasa* in the state of nature, and therefore equal, so Witherspoon's Cartesian view of authority led him to conclude that all men were equal. Witherspoon reasoned that equality before God meant they could dissent before institutional authorities on matter of personal conscience. Thus he emerged as an eager patriot who served in Congress for many years. So, both Locke and Witherspoon show a high regard for human agency and moral liberty, which is evident not just in their epistemological assumptions, but by their involvement in politics.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Noll, *Princeton*, 45.

Republican Virtue and the Individual

Witherspoon's full-scale belief system becomes apparent in his political convictions: [H]e is the best friend to American liberty, who is most sincere and active in promoting true and undefiled religion, and who sets himself with the greatest firmness to bear down profanity and immorality in every kind. Whoever is an avowed enemy of God, I scruple not to call him an enemy of his country.⁹⁰

This quote exemplifies well the classical republican concept that the moral temperature of the republic hinges upon the virtue of the individual. This concept permeates the work of Noll, Wood, and other scholars of the republican revision in the historiography of the American Revolutionary era. "Americans consistently urged virtue as the basis of a successful republic," Noll explains succinctly.⁹¹

Noll recognizes that the emerging American republicanism of the Revolutionary era and Early National Period was a breed of its own. He cites "personal conversion," "the godly discipline of families," and the "flourishing of voluntary societies" as typical means by which Americans believed virtue should be displayed.⁹² The disinterested citizen of classical (that is, Roman) republicanism, serving in politics to deter tyranny, provides a very different picture of virtue. To begin, the American republican vision of virtue (which, according to Noll became intertwined with American Protestantism) emphasized "personal conversion." Such an emphasis would never have developed in pre-Enlightenment thought. Moreover, it could only flourish in a culture that was embracing values of liberalism. The strict dichotomy of republicanism and liberalism begins to break down. Daniel Walker Howe has stated, "Liberalism, far from being a threatening rival to republicanism, became in fact its welcome ally in the task of making free government work."⁹³ John Murrin supports this further: "[W]e cannot even begin to make sense of

⁹⁰ Witherspoon, "Dominion of Providence," 312.

⁹¹ Noll, *America's God*, 215.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 210.

⁹³ Quoted in Noll, *America's God*, 211.

the content of public life unless we see the two [republicanism and liberalism] as a continuing dichotomy.”⁹⁴

But just as Calvinist thought bears an internal paradox, as discussed above, so does this classical republican concept. How could a philosopher of the Scottish Enlightenment, which placed so much emphasis on man’s own reasoning abilities and the rejected institutional authority, ascribe to this classical republicanism, with its emphasis on the group? It seems that the classical republican ideology cannot escape the fact that an individual is inextricably bound within some form of community. It is from this paradox that we will view the intersection of republicanism and liberalism.

Jefferson’s Agrarian Vision

Jefferson is an appropriate case study in American republicanism and liberalism because Jefferson was active during the Revolutionary period, even authoring the Declaration of Independence, but also his presidency (1801-1809) highlighted the Early National Period (1783-1824). Scholars, even those of the republican synthesis, cite the Early National Period as the period when liberalism, rather than republicanism, became more pervasive in American thought and policy. A dual reason for this case study is Louis Hartz’s allusion to Jefferson’s view of land:

In America one not only found a society sufficiently fluid to give a touch of meaning to the individualist norms of Locke, but one also found letter-perfect replicas of the very images he used. There was a frontier that was a veritable state of nature. There were agreements, such as the Mayflower Compact, that were veritable social contracts. There were new communities springing up *in vacuis locis*, clear evidence that men were using their Lockian right of emigration, which Jefferson soberly appealed to as ‘universal’ in his defense of colonial land claims in 1774. A purist could argue, of course, that even these phenomena were not enough to make reality out of the presocial men that liberalism dreamed of in theory. But surely they came as close to doing so as anything in history has ever seen . . .

⁹⁴ Quoted in Noll, *America’s God*, 211.

‘Thus, in the beginning,’ Locke once wrote, ‘all the world was America [citing the Locke’s *Second Treatise on Civil Government*]. . . .’⁹⁵

Conjuring up themes from Turner’s thesis a generation before him, here Hartz has suggested that the vast expanse of American land to be settled and tilled is a direct evidence of liberalism. While Hartz has creatively perceived that North America seems to uniquely fit Locke’s picture of the state of nature and his theory of private property, Hartz does not acknowledge the significance of land in the classical-republican paradigm. Again, republicanism and liberalism are ideas; they are dynamic, flexible, and changing. Here I explore how Thomas Jefferson’s ideas regarding political economy mainly reflect classical republican ideals, but also that, in some ways, republican ideas were compatible with liberal ideas. I will specifically look at the classical roots of republicanism, compare these to Jefferson’s agrarian dream, and then investigate the compatibility of his dream with Enlightenment-era liberalism,

Cincinnatus and Agrarian Virtue

Historian Clinton Rossiter once asserted, Cato’s Letters “was the most popular, quotable, esteemed source of political ideas in the colonial period,” even over John Locke’s *Two Treatises on Civil Government*.⁹⁶ Cato Letter 38, one of the more well-known letters, addresses man’s ability to judge governmental systems. The letter heralds the qualities of “honesty, diligence, and plain sense” as the virtues that make a good citizen, and luxury and excessiveness as the vices that cause societal decay:

Honesty, diligence, and plain sense, are the only talents necessary for the executing of this trust; and the public good is its only end: As to refinements and finesses, they are often only the false appearances of wisdom and parts, and oftener tricks to hide guilt and emptiness . . . starved politicians, who live from hand to mouth, from day to day, and

⁹⁵ Hartz, in Hess, 158-159.

⁹⁶ Cato Institute. “About Cato’s Letters.” <<http://www.cato.org/pubs/letters/catolett.html>>.

following the little views of ambition, avarice, revenge, and the like personal passions . . . make a private market of the publick, and deceive it, in order to sell it.⁹⁷

Then, in describing the life of Roman hero Cincinnatus, the authors link the described virtues to an occupation: farming.

Cincinnatus was taken from the plough to save and defend the Roman state; an office which he executed honestly and successfully, without the grimace and gains of a statesman. Nor did he afterwards continue obstinately at the head of affairs, to form a party, raise a fortune, and settle himself in power: As he came into it with universal consent, he resigned it with universal applause. . . . Honest Cincinnatus was but a farmer . . .⁹⁸

Wood confirms these links between virtue and an agrarian lifestyle, and between vice and a luxurious lifestyle: “Frugality, industry, temperance, simplicity – the rustic traits of the sturdy yeoman – were the stuff that made a society strong. . . . the obsessive term was luxury, not mere wealth but that “dull animal enjoyment” which life “minds stupefied”.”⁹⁹ From where did this connection between virtue and vocation derive? The answer lie in the fact that 18th century moral philosophers could not conceive of economics as an amoral realm.¹⁰⁰ In fact, they believed economic decisions to be very indicative of moral behavior. Quite specifically, they saw the mercantilist system of the British to be immoral. The American Revolutionaries largely reacted against attempts of British Parliament to tax the colonists in an effort to pay for the French and Indian War. The Stamp Act, the Townshend Acts, and the Intolerable Acts are all examples of mercantilist maneuvers which Britian utilized to raise money. Their mercantilist system often employed the use of tariffs and other subsidies to make sure more profit derived from exports than imports. Now, the European world had been becoming more and more industrialized and

⁹⁷ Trenchard, John and Thomas Gordon, *Cato's Letters*. “Letter 38.” In Hammond, Scott J., Kevin R. Hardwick, and Howard L. Lubert, Eds. *Classics of American Political and Constitutional Thought, Vol. 1: Origins through the Civil War* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 88.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Wood, *Creation of American Republic*, p. 52.

¹⁰⁰ McCoy, Drew, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 7.

commercialized since the 15th century – the age of exploration. Drew McCoy points out that, by the 18th century, debates on the "civilizing versus the corrupting tendencies of commercial development, the definition and character of 'luxury,' and above all, the question of whether some kind of fundamental decay was curiously inherent in social progress."¹⁰¹ (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for example, popularized the image of the “noble savage.”) The Revolutionaries – particularly Thomas Jefferson – believed that, in contrast to the mercantilist world of commerce, the agrarian life was free of such debilitating effects.

Jefferson’s Agrarian Dream

Thomas Jefferson was never a strict ideologue, but rather a learner, a continual explorer of ideas. Nevertheless, Jefferson did subscribe to a specific agrarian dream for the America he envisioned. It is in this agrarian vision that we will come to see how the tenets of republicanism and the tenets of liberalism come face-to-face.

Jefferson’s agrarian vision was rooted in a long lineage of such pastoralism. Socrates, Aristotle, and Horace have all been noted for their admiration of the farming and shepherding life. Vergil, too, wrote about the peaceful life of the pastoral Arcadians, who lived on the Peloponnese of Greece. The classical symbols of simplicity and peace stood in stark contrast to the industry and urbanization Europeans were experiencing at the time of the American Revolution.¹⁰²

By the time Jefferson enunciated his agrarian vision for America, most notably in Query 19 of his 1782 *Notes on the State of Virginia*, the patriot-statesman had already fought tirelessly for the cause of the new nation. As a young lawyer, he had sat at the House of Burgesses, seen the

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 17.

¹⁰² Jefferson’s vision for the yeoman farming lifestyle hit the political scene with controversy, of course. By the time of the early national period, the Federalists, led by Alexander Hamilton (“Tully,” as noted above) favored strong central government and commercial and industrial expansion. The Jeffersonian Republicans, in contrast, pushed for the primacy of local government and this “pastoral” economy of small, independent farmers.

House dissolved, and become a member of the Second Continental Congress in 1775. It was during this appointment that Jefferson wrote his most famous document, the pivotal Declaration of Independence. Then, back in Virginia, he sought to improve the Virginian constitution, but without success. However, Jefferson eventually did get the draft of his *Statute of Religious Freedom* enacted in 1786. Through this achievement, Jefferson helped usher in an essential part of America's unique heritage – the separation of church and state. Having earned a reputation of distinction in politics, Jefferson was elected governor of Virginia in 1779. But, with the War for Independence raging in the colonies, Jefferson's home state of Virginia eventually got a taste of the battlefield. Cornwallis, accompanied by traitor Benedict Arnold, marched into Virginia in 1781. Throughout the ordeal, Jefferson not only fled his home estate, Monticello, but also suffered heavy criticism. Disillusioned and exhausted, Jefferson planned to leave politics permanently.

This period of disillusionment, however, was crucial for defining Jefferson's agrarian vision. Because he planned to permanently retire from the political scene, Jefferson spent a great deal of time and energy taking care of his estate, Monticello. Jefferson had come to Monticello in 1772 with his new wife, Martha Wayles Skelton Jefferson. However, his revolutionary fervor had caused him to largely ignore the estate. In this period, he took proper care of the estate, explored more of his native Virginia, and more thoroughly developed his vision of the yeoman farmer – the sturdy, hardworking, independent farmer that tilled his own soil – the harbinger image of the idea of the “American dream.”¹⁰³

¹⁰³ It is also possible to suggest that this period in Jefferson's life was crucial for all of American history and for American self-understanding, if the “Frontier Thesis” of Frederick Jackson Turner is accurate. Turner argued that the frontier and cultivation were part-and-parcel of American history. In his agrarian vision, Jefferson seems to lay some of the groundwork for this frontier-focus and feelings of “Manifest Destiny.” Take, for instance, this quote from Jefferson's *First Inaugural Address* (in Hammond, et al, p. 688): “A rising nation, spread over a wide and fruitful land, traversing all the seas with the rich productions of their industry, engaged in commerce with nations who feel power and forget right, advancing rapidly to destinies beyond the reach of mortal eye – when I contemplate these transcendent objects, and see the honor, the

Jefferson's agrarian vision is most clearly enunciated in his document entitled *Notes on the State of Virginia*. This 1782 *magnum opus* of sorts includes a plethora of information, from notes on the Virginian landscape, suggestions of specific penalties for specific crimes, prescriptions of curriculum in public education (a radical idea in his time), issues regarding the institution of slavery, and, of course, many allusions to the heritage of classical Greece and Rome. But most well-known is Query 19, in which Jefferson extolled the yeoman farmer:

In Europe the lands are either cultivated, or locked up against the cultivator. Manufacture must therefore be resorted to of necessity not of choice, to support the surplus of their people. But we have an immensity of land courting the industry of the husbandman. . . . Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phaenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example.¹⁰⁴

So vital to understanding Jefferson's enthusiasm for the agrarian life is to discern the roots of classicism evident above. Jefferson specifically lauds "[t]hose who labour in the earth" here because he believes they are the most virtuous. Critical to the idea of republicanism, both in classical Roman and the emerging American forms, was this concept of personal virtue. From the classical period, recall the figure Cincinnatus, who was celebrated for his disinterested devotion to the Republic. This was paramount for classical virtue. Moreover, the virtue of the individual was counted on to maintain the virtue of the republic as a whole. Mark Noll explains:

The central republican conviction was belief in the reciprocity of personal morality and social well-being. Changes over time did take place [in the early American republic] in what personal morality and a healthy society meant, but underneath those changes endured a remarkably fixed alliance between a language of liberty and a language of virtue.

happiness, and the hopes of this beloved country committed to the issue and the auspices of this day, I shrink from the contemplation, and humble myself before the magnitude of the undertaking."

¹⁰⁴ Jefferson, Thomas, "Notes on the State of Virginia (1782)," ed. Hammond, Scott J., Kevin R. Hardwick, and Howard L. Lubert, *Classics of American Political and Constitutional Thought, Vol. 1: Origins through the Civil War* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 355.

Virtue,¹⁰⁵ originally defined as disinterested public service transcending the passions, promoted freedom and social well-being; vice, marked especially by luxury, self-seeking, idleness, and frivolity, promoted tyranny and social decay.¹⁰⁶

Commerce and Free Trade

Here we diverge for a moment because a note must be said about Jefferson's view on commerce and free trade. Because Jefferson is often caricaturized in relation to the image of the yeoman farmer, some of the details of his vision are overlooked. But, while epitomizing the agrarian-based economy, Jefferson did not want to restrain Americans from trading with foreign countries. In his *Summary View of the Rights of British America*, for instance, he wrote a complaint against British imperialism: "That the exercise of a free trade with all parts of the world, possessed by the American colonists as of natural right, and which no law of their own had taken away or abridge, was next the object of unjust incroachment."¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, addressing the problem of Indian lands diminishing in a letter to Benjamin Hawkins, in 1803, Jefferson asserted that the Indians had exhausted the resources for hunting to sustain themselves, and that they need to turn to "agriculture" and "household manufacture," which he himself would "aid and encourage liberally."¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, Jefferson continued, eventually the population increase would make land scarce, and people with land would have to sell their surplus goods from the land they worked to those who did not have large shares of land. This is commerce, in other words, and Jefferson did not discourage it. "This commerce, then, will be for the good of both," he wrote, "and those who are friends to both ought to encourage it."¹⁰⁹ In his First Inaugural Address, Jefferson summed up

¹⁰⁵ In the previous paragraph, Noll traces the word virtue to Machiavelli, *virtú*, which was then adopted by the promoters of the English Commonwealth (meaning, quite literally, "common well-being").

¹⁰⁶ Noll, *America's God*, 2002.

¹⁰⁷ Jefferson, Thomas, "A Summary View of the Rights of British America." Ed. Hammond, Scott J., Kevin R. Hardwick, and Howard L. Lubert, Eds. *Classics of American Political and Constitutional Thought, Vol. 1: Origins through the Civil War* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 250.

¹⁰⁸ Jefferson, Thomas, "Letter to Benjamin Hawkins (February 18, 1803)." Ed. Hammond, Scott J., Kevin R. Hardwick, and Howard L. Lubert, Eds. *Classics of American Political and Constitutional Thought, Vol. 1: Origins through the Civil War* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 611.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

his view, stating that he believed in the “encouragement of agriculture, and of commerce as its handmaid.”¹¹⁰ In other words, agriculture was paramount, and commerce, though secondary, helped circulate the goods of the land.

Freedom from Servility

Again, Jefferson’s agrarian vision advocated the small, independent “yeoman” farmer; and Jefferson submitted to the reality that some commerce would be necessary. Yet the crux of Jefferson’s agrarian vision was that it would make the individual free from the servility of mercantilism and from strong centralized government (with its accompanying economic control). So, in addition to breeding virtue among the citizens, there was a motive for independence in the matrix of Jefferson’s agrarian vision. This is where republican and liberal ideals start to blur. As Noll put it above, the ever-changing, dynamic idea of republicanism “endured a remarkably fixed alliance between a language of liberty and a language of virtue. Virtue, originally defined as disinterested public service transcending the passions, promoted freedom and social well-being . . .” Of the issues Noll’s quote addresses, the concepts of “virtue” and “social well-being” (or the common good, the common*wealth*) are often associated with the ideology of republicanism. But “liberty” and “freedom” are often associated as buzzwords of liberal thought. Yet Noll’s interpretation –which Jefferson’s writings support – implies a compatibility, or confluence, of republican and liberal thought. He even suggests that there is a “continuum” in republican thought, from classical to liberal.¹¹¹ Here, in a 1799 letter to Elbridge Gerry, Jefferson, writing from Monticello, Jefferson summarized his own views succinctly, sounding very liberal:

I am for free commerce with all nations; political connections with none; & little or no diplomatic establishment. And I am not for linking ourselves by new treaties with the

¹¹⁰ Jefferson, Thomas, “First Inaugural Address (March 4, 1801).” In Hammond, Scott J., Kevin R. Hardwick, and Howard L. Lubert, Eds. *Classics of American Political and Constitutional Thought, Vol. 1: Origins through the Civil War*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007, p. 689.

¹¹¹ Noll, *America’s God*, 12.

quarrels of Europe; entering that field of slaughter to preserve their balance, or joining in the confederacy of kings to war against the principles of liberty. I am for freedom of religion, & against all maneuvers to bring about a legal ascendancy of one sect over another . . .¹¹²

How do these convictions of Jefferson not contradict his republican values? Noll concludes for us:

“The liberalism of Thomas Jefferson and the Democratic-Republicans was, for example, an ideological compound: it did feature heightened attention to personal rights, economic opportunities, and individual liberty, but it neither reduced concern for the public effects of virtue nor abandoned the perceived bond between liberty and communal well-being.”¹¹³

The Founders and the Classics

The account of Jefferson’s agrarian dream above contains various allusions to the classical era. An association between the classics of Greece and particularly Rome and the founding of the United States has long been recognized. We cannot ignore that early Americans “chose classical names for their villages and hamlets; they adopted such pen names as “Brutus” and “Cassius . . . their statues depicted American statesmen and soldiers dressed in antique costumes . . . Classical revival architecture dictated the appearance of their public buildings.”¹¹⁴ But these examples are merely superficial influences. Recognizing only such elements gives credence to Bailyn’s conclusion that the classics were ““illustrative, not determinative, of thought.”” Bailyn had agreed with Clinton

¹¹² Jefferson, Thomas, “Letter to Elbridge Gerry (January 26, 1799),” ed. Hammond, Scott J., Kevin R. Hardwick, and Howard L. Lubert, Eds. *Classics of American Political and Constitutional Thought, Vol. 1: Origins through the Civil War* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 673.

¹¹³ Noll, *America’s God*, 211.

¹¹⁴ Miles, Edwin, “The Young American Nation and the Classical World,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35 (April-June 1974) 262.

Rossiter that the influence of the founders was only “window dressing.”¹¹⁵ But Wood, Appleby, and especially Carl Richard argue for a much more substantial influence.

“Window-dressing” Allusions?

As Joyce Appleby noted, discovering other ideological influences other than liberalism in early American history led “to a conceptual universe which structured political discourse around the models of the ancient world.”¹¹⁶ Jefferson’s autobiography in fact opens with reference to his classical education:

He [Jefferson’s father] placed me at the English school at 5 years of age and at the Latin at 9. where I continued until his death [in 1757]. My teacher Mr. Douglas a clergyman from Scotland was but a superficial Latinist, less instructed in Greek, but with the rudiments of these languages he taught me French, and on the death of my father I went to the revd Mr. Maury a correct classical scholar, with whom I continued two years, and then went to Wm. and Mary college, to wit in the spring of 1760, where I continued 2 years.¹¹⁷

Thus Jefferson had at least two years of strong Latin study, which likely included the reading of Ovid and Horace, two Roman poets, but more importantly, Cicero and Plutarch, two authors who focused more on political themes.

But drawing attention to the Greek and Latin classical education of the founders of the United States has proven controversial. The early 20th century Progressive historians – such as Baird and Parrington, who focused on class conflict – would have reacted by asserting that the founders, having elite classical education, were just aristocrats seeking the power of the purse. But Wood, Appleby, Bailyn, Pocock, and even Louis Hartz, from who they dissented, argued for an

¹¹⁵ Richard, Carl J., *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 1994), 2.

¹¹⁶ Appleby, *Historical Imagination*, 21.

¹¹⁷ Jefferson, Thomas. *Autobiography*. In *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*. (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984), 4. Original punctuation and spellings kept.

American homogeneity; they are known as *consensus* historians. They emphasize that classicism permeated colonial America.¹¹⁸

It is easy to detect this classicism. A man named James Chalmers, for example, wrote a pamphlet in response to Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and used the pseudonym *Candidus* – a Latin word meaning “clearness” – an appropriate author's name for a pamphlet entitled *Plain Truth*.¹¹⁹ John Adams and his wife Abigail, moreover, often corresponded using as nicknames the names Lysander and Diana, names made famous by Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, which was set in ancient Athens. In other letters, Abigail even began to adopt the name “Portia,”¹²⁰ the devoted wife of the Roman statesman Brutus. This name is especially fitting since Brutus led the conspiracy against Julius Caesar, whose power increased to the point of tyranny in ancient Rome. Furthermore, the famous *Cato Letters* bear the name of a Roman who also famously opposed Julius Caesar, heralding republican principles instead. Other examples abound. Again invoking Julius Caesar's assassin, Robert Yates wrote the *Brutus Essays* in 1787-88. Alexander Hamilton wrote a tract under the pen-name *Pacificus* (June 29, 1793), and James Madison responded anonymously under the name *Helvidius* (August 24, 1793).¹²¹ Hamilton invoked the Latin word for peace, while Madison responded with the name of one of Brutus's sympathizers, Helvidius, a Stoic philosopher and staunch republican. Perhaps most provocatively, Hamilton

¹¹⁸ Wood and Appleby make a case for a culture of classicism, rather than directly focusing on the classical education of the founders and its impact on them. They specifically focus on the Revolutionary and Constitutional eras, marking the early national period as the period in which classical republicanism began to merge and even be overtaken by liberalism. (Bailyn, as noted above in the preceding paragraph, considered the classics' influence insignificant, while J.G.A. Pocock, and Drew McCoy, author of *The Elusive Republic*, assess that classical republicanism extended into the early national period.) However, in contrast to all of these historians, Carl J. Richard makes an impressive case that they have all underestimated the *direct*, rather than *indirect*, influence of the classical models upon the founders. See his book-length study, *The Founders and the Classics* (Harvard, 1994) and Meyer Reinhold's *Classica Americana* (1984).

¹¹⁹ Hammond, Scott J., Kevin R. Hardwick, and Howard L. Lubert, ed. *Classics of American Political and Constitutional Thought, Vol. 1: Origins through the Civil War* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 281-288.

¹²⁰ MacCullough, 26.

¹²¹ For full copies of these letters, see Hammond, et al.

wrote other letters under the pseudonym Tully – the nickname for Marcus Tullius Cicero, the hero of political heroes from the classical world. Making an allusion to Cicero’s *Catilinian Conspiracies* – in which Cicero condemns the traitor Catiline in the Senate – Hamilton closes one of his Tully letters with the harsh words, “To the plausible but hollow harangues of such conspirators, ye cannot fail to reply, How long, ye Catilines, will you abuse our patience?”¹²² But are these allusions to these classical heroes mere “window dressing,”¹²³ as Bailyn has suggested?¹²⁴

Formative Influence

Gordon Wood does not believe so, and the depth of symbolism suggested by the authors’ chosen pen names and other classical allusions does not suggest so either. Wood articulates, “Such classicism was not only a scholarly ornament of educated Americans; it helped shape their values and their ideals of behavior.”¹²⁵ Wood, in fact, traces classical influence upon modern political thought to its founder, Machiavelli. However, Wood believes that most Americans saw classical antiquity as a “refracted image”¹²⁶ – that is, passed down to them through generations, and interpreted through the men of the Renaissance. These Americans turned to the classics not mainly for specific instructions for setting up a government, but to learn what caused decline and decadence in a culture. In this way, Rome was to serve as both a negative and positive example: its republican era was a positive example, and its decline into *imperium* was to be noted as what *not* to let happen to America. Wood explains:

¹²² Hamilton, Alexander, “Tully, No. 3 (August 28, 1794),” ed. Hammond, Scott J., Kevin R. Hardwick, and Howard L. Lubert. *Classics of American Political and Constitutional Thought, Vol. 1: Origins through the Civil War* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 647.

¹²³ Quoted in Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1994) 2.

¹²⁴ Julius Caesar and the conspiracy of Catiline will be discussed further below, in the chapter entitled “Cicero: Patriot and Cosmopolitan.”

¹²⁵ Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 49.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 50.

Writing at a time when the greatest days of the Republic were crumbling or already gone, pessimistic Romans – Cicero, Sallust, Tacitus, Plutarch – contrasted the growing corruption and disorder they saw about them with an imagined earlier republican world of ordered simplicity and Acadian virtue, and sought continually to explain the transformation. It was as if these Latin writers in their literature of critical lamentation and republican nostalgia had spoken directly to the revolutionary concerns of the 18th century.¹²⁷

Such “critical lamentation” and “republican nostalgia” was seen best in Whig ideology, as expressed in documents such as *An Old Whig, No. 5* and the *Cato Letters*.

Carl Richard’s 1994 work, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment*, was the first full-length book addressing the topic of the founders’ classical reading. Richard acknowledges many influences upon the fledgling United States, from the Scientific Revolution to the Great Awakenings. But he argues for that the classics of Greece and Rome gave a more formative influence than is generally accredited to them. He has elaborately researched the founders’ private reading of the classics (which was propelled by the educational standards of their period), concluding that not only did the classics provide models, heroes, and inspiration, but also acknowledging that classical ideas were mediated to the founders through Whig political philosophy.

If we return to antiquity, we will see that a certain compatibility, or tension, between republican and liberal thought actually has been evident from the era of Plato and Cicero.

Plato and the Polis

In *The Machiavellian Moment*, J.G.A. Pocock discusses Plato in context of a discussion of the primacy of the rule of law or the rule of convention. Without asserting it, Pocock has identified the crucial element of Plato’s thought to point us to the earliest strains of liberalism within

¹²⁷ Wood, p. 51.

republicanism. In the crux of the philosophical battle between *physis* (loosely, law) and *nomos* (loosely, convention), themes of the individual – that is, early strains of liberalism – emerge. First, Plato’s republic was birthed out of the injustice committed toward one man (Socrates). Second, and more importantly, knowledge and virtue are considered individualized as evidenced in his allegory of the cave in the *Republic*.

Socrates on Trial

Plato was first prompted to thinking about individualized knowledge and virtue as assessing his famous Forms in the wake of the trial of Socrates. As his mentor and teacher, Socrates gained Plato’s admiration for his moral superiority. Plato’s respect was so deep that he made Socrates the “mouthpiece” for his own thought in his dialogues on ethics. Despite Plato’s admiration, Socrates provoked the Athenian people as their “gadfly” concerned with lofty principles, and not with the realities of public life. When tried in 399 B.C.E. for impiety and the corruption of Athens’ youth, however, Socrates insisted that his confrontational questioning brought moral reform in service to God.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, Socrates was found guilty by the Five Hundred, the democratic body reinstated after the Peloponnesian War. After a period of imprisonment (recorded in Plato’s *Crito*), Socrates died a near-martyr by drinking poison hemlock.

Xenophon’s account of the trial affirms Socrates’ virtue despite his alleged guilt: “And so, in contemplating the man’s wisdom and nobility of character, I find it beyond my power to forget

¹²⁸ It must be noted that classical concepts of God differ from Judeo-Christian concepts of God. Most classical notions of God do not resemble later theological explanations of God, but are sometimes rather vague. Plato, however, did define God as the Demiurge, which created the rational parts of the soul. He desired to see Greece move away from belief in the Homeric gods. Aristotle wrote of an Unmoved Mover, which he considered the final cause (which should be distinguished from a creator in the theological sense). Cicero, as a Stoic, emphasized Providence and the immortality of the soul, although, in contrast to Plato, he thought popular religion was beneficial for maintaining communal life. Despite these differences from the Judeo-Christian tradition, and among each other, these classical philosophers all believed in transcendent God which was somehow engaged in the cosmic order.

him or, in remembering him, to refrain from praising him.”¹²⁹ The biographer Laertius affirmed Socrates’ virtue as well, but also the injustice of the trial: “So he died; but the Athenians immediately repented of their action, so that they closed all the palaestrae and gymnasia; and they banished his accusers . . . but they honored Socrates with a brazen statue, which they erected in the place where the sacred vessels are kept.”¹³⁰ In short, the Athenians recognized their wrongdoing.

The Athenian Illness: *Nomos*

So, Plato set out to interpret what went wrong with this public affair. He identified the problem with Socrates’ trial as the standard of justice deriving from the current men in power -- the democratic body of the Five Hundred. He perceived that the trial heralded the men in power as “the measure of all things,” as the Pre-Socratic philosopher Protagoras (490-420 B.C.) wrote.¹³¹ The human, then, determines all standards, including justice. Protagoras’ words embody what Plato diagnosed not only as the main fault in Socrates’ trial, but also in the *polis* at large. The current men in power virtually invented the current standard for justice.

This unstable, human-based ethical ideal Plato experienced during Socrates’ trial illuminates the dominant view of the *cosmos* known as naturalism. Twentieth-century scholar Terence Irwin identifies this appeal to human convention with the Greek term *nomos*. In addition to the beliefs of Protagoras, Irwin links naturalism with the thought of Democritus. Democritus, for example, maintained no moral motive for justice. Rather, justice benefits the weak and restrains the strong. However, it is not grounded in an unchanging ethic of an unchanging god; it is

¹²⁹ Xenophon, *Apology of Socrates*. <<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/trials/socrates/xenophonapology.html>>.

¹³⁰ Laertius, Diogenes, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. C.D. Yonge (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853) <http://classicpersuasion.org/pw/diogenes/>, II.

¹³¹ Protagoras, *Excerpts*. In *Readings in Classical Political Thought*, edited by Peter J. Steinberger. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 20.

based on man and on pragmatic utility. This characterized the early Greek naturalism Plato came to despise as he witnessed Socrates' trial.

In the *Republic*, the student Glaucon (actually Plato's brother) observes an inevitable fate for the just man living amidst a culture of *nomos*:

“[I]t shouldn't be difficult to complete the account of the kind of life that awaits each of them [the just and the unjust]. . . They say that a just person in such circumstances will be whipped, stretched on a rack, chained, blinded with fire, and, at the end, when he has suffered every kind of evil, he'll be impaled, and will realize then that one shouldn't want to be just but to be believed to be just. . . [In contrast, a] really unjust person . . . rules the city because of his reputation for justice; he marries into any family he wishes . . . he has contracts and partnerships with anyone he wants; and besides benefiting himself in all these ways, he profits because he has scruples about doing injustice.”¹³²

In the crucible of his disillusionment, Plato, “praising philosophy . . . was compelled to declare it alone enabled one to discern what is right in the polis, as well as in the life of the individual.”¹³³

The Cure for *Nomos*: *Physis* and *Aletheia*

In contrast to the *nomos* of democracy, Plato advocated *physis*, or nature, as the source of justice. *Physis* is grounded in universals and is akin to absolute truth. His experience with the injustice committed in the polis by the Five Hundred prompted him to provide an elaborate description of his ontology, which is composed of the famous Forms.

In the *Republic*, Plato portrays Glaucon and their other brother Adeimantus begging Socrates to explain justice *in itself* – not as a social construct (*nomos*). In Book V, Plato explains that philosophers, who embrace truth, or *aletheia*, perceive the just itself, the beautiful itself, and all the *Forms*. In Book VII of the *Republic*, Plato builds another famous epistemological metaphor

¹³² Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), 37, 361e-362b.

¹³³ Voegelin, Eric, *Order and History, Vol. 3: Plato and Aristotle* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 4-5.

known as the Allegory of the Cave. In this allegory, Plato describes that all men are chained in a cave. In the cave, there is a fire, and the men pass their time by watching shadows made by the blaze move across the stone of the cave. Their limited knowledge of reality is based on these mere shadows, because they “keep their heads motionless throughout life.” “[T]ruth is nothing other than the shadows.” Then, one man is unchained, is forced to stand up, and turns to see light behind him. Because he is so used to the shadows cast by the fire, he thinks the light behind him and the objects it illuminates are distortions of reality. Eventually he draws closer to the cave’s opening, and, “dazzled” as his eyes adjust to the light, he realizes the shadows cast by the first were the actual distortions of reality.¹³⁴

The light the freed prisoner experienced elucidates the Agathon, which for Plato is the good itself. The Agathon embodies goodness, which is beyond and more complete than justice and other virtues which fall under this category. The philosopher fixes his gaze upon the good itself, the Agathon, and uses it as a “paradigm for the right ordering (*kosmen*) of the polis, the citizens, and [him]self for the rest of [his] life.”¹³⁵ Plato’s *Seventh Letter* contrasts the philosopher with the blind, covetous man: “The covetous man, impoverished as he is in the soul . . . is blind and cannot see in those acts of plunder which are accompanied by impiety what heinous guilt is attached to each wrongful deed” – just as the Five Hundred were blind to their ill treatment of Socrates.

In perhaps a bittersweet tone, Plato concludes his Allegory of the Cave by connecting reason and ethics. The freed prisoner, embracing the Good itself, and fixing his gaze upon the Agathon, finds no more satisfaction with life in the cave. Nevertheless, he is scoffed at for leaving and for thinking he has found a more satisfying existence. He can no longer recognize the fire’s

¹³⁴ Plato, 415.

¹³⁵ Voegelin, *Order and History*, 112.

cast shadows, and he is mocked for this. The most pious freed prisoner will try to unfetter others in the cave; but they will not understand.

American Connections

How does Plato's Allegory of the Cave display any strains of pre-liberal thought? Certainly the anti-Democritus, anti-naturalism element of Plato's thought should not be interpreted as anti-individual. Rather, it is anti-*nomos* in the full sense of the Greek word, which denotes any law established by custom or usage. Plato wants to protect the individual from custom and convention – the “herd,” or mob rule. It is precisely in this way that Plato's thought makes way for the virtuous individual. The virtuous individual escapes “herd mentality” by ascending to the Forms. Knowing the Forms, Plato believed, required that the person would live out the Forms, exemplifying virtue.

Plato's emphases on reason, virtue (and reason being equated with virtue), and warnings against political corruption sound suspiciously similar to the major tenets of Whig political philosophy. This is not a coincidence. Rather, the Whigs borrowed from the classical tradition, of which Plato was the father. Plato broke from the Pre-Socratic philosophers before him and set classical philosophy on the path to address virtue and true justice (anti-political corruption). Consider how the classical philosophical agenda Plato set emerges in Whig thought in the following excerpts from *An Old Whig, No. 5* (1787):

[Y]et the fate of the unhappy old woman called *Corbmaker*, who was beaten . . . and at last killed in our streets, in obedience to the commandment which requires “that we shall not suffer a witch to live” . . . should be an example to warn us how little we ought to trust the unrestrained discretion of human nature. The more I reflect upon the history of mankind,

the more I am disposed to think that it is our duty to secure the essential rights of the people . . . ¹³⁶

Whig thought typically suspected those in power, stressed the tolerance of ideas (especially evident in the requirement of a disestablished church), desired limited government , and stressed personal liberties. The excerpts above not only reflect this agenda, but they also reflect some of the ideas Plato acquired after the unjust trial of Socrates. The fate of the “witch” can be compared to the fate of Socrates, and the distrust of human nature can be compared to Plato’s distrust of the “herd.”

Most significantly, Plato’s pointing to natural (versus conventional) law predisposes Platonic thought to mesh with liberalism. Plato could not disconnect his emphasis on the virtuous citizen with his leaning toward natural law. Yet the development of a virtuous citizenry was more of a focus within republicanism, and natural law was more of a focus within liberalism. The fact that Plato merged these two emphases demonstrates that the concepts within republicanism and liberalism are not always contradictory, but sometimes complementary.

Cicero: Patriot and Cosmopolitan

While Plato’s writings stress the individual in a manner significant enough to suggest that strains of liberalism were evident even in early republicanism, Cicero’s writings do so to an even greater extent. Although the “germ” of natural law theory – an artifact of liberalism – is evident in Plato, it was Cicero and his fellow Stoics who placed natural law theory at the center of their thought. In addition to the role of natural law theory, we will analyze Cicero’s work to discover how he places the individual within a community – holding both as vital entities. In this way, we

¹³⁶ *An Old Whig, No. 5 (1787)*, ed. Hammond, et. al, *Classics of American Political and Constitutional Thought*, Vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 533.

will see how certain elements of liberalism and republicanism present an internal conundrum, pointing back to the persisting historiographical debate.

Marcus Tullius Cicero, having been trained in Platonism, Aristotelianism, Epicureanism, and Stoicism, exposed various themes seen previously in Greek philosophy. He believed that the best life was one lived according to nature, and that honor far outweighed material possessions. But Cicero was most deeply influenced by Stoicism. His works, which are very practical in nature, contrast those of Plato's in the sense that Plato was primarily a philosopher, but Cicero was primarily a statesman. In the Roman Republic, statesman sought to progress through a series of increasingly significant political positions called the *cursus honorum*. Cicero successfully ascended the ladder to the noteworthy position of consul with considerable quickness. "Ambition led me to seek official advancement," he admitted in letter to his lifelong friend and confidante Atticus.¹³⁷ So his works must be read bearing Cicero's political career in mind. Most importantly, Cicero's works feature three concepts which relate to our problem regarding the debate between American republicanism and liberalism. These three concepts are mixed government, natural law, and dual citizenship in the *patria* and the *cosmos*.

Cicero's Vision for Recovering the Republic

If Plato's defining moment was the fateful trial of Socrates, Cicero's defining moments were the chaos of Roman civil war and Julius Caesar's dictatorship. In the last days of the Roman Republic, Julius Caesar led campaigns into Gaul, Hispania, Greece, and northern Africa. After his conquests, Caesar's legendary crossing of the Rubicon marked the beginning of his *coup d'état*. Marching triumphantly back on Rome, Julius Caesar managed to secure power. Rome shifted

¹³⁷ Cicero, Marcus Tullius, *The Letters of Cicero*, trans. Evelyn S. Shuckburgh (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1899-1900, reprinted on *Fordham University Internet Ancient History Sourcebook*, ed. Paul Halsall, 1998) <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/cicero-letters.html>, Letter IV.

from Republic to Empire. Of course, Caesar was assassinated on the Ides of March in 44 B.C.E. by a group of senators led by Marcus Junius Brutus. After the assassination, Cicero made his feelings toward Caesar very clear in a letter to Brutus: “[W]hat a heavy cloud I declared to be hanging over the Republic. A great pest had been removed by your means, a great blot on the Roman people wiped out . . .”¹³⁸ In his political career, Cicero advocated a return to the early Republic and its virtues. He hoped that Caesar’s assassination would hasten the Republic’s rebirth, but Cicero was wrong. Rome had gradually been experiencing social, economic, and political decline long before Caesar became dictator; recovery would have required much more than Caesar’s elimination.

But Cicero was a visionary of sorts and recorded his thoughts on how Rome should return a republic in *De re publica* (the *Republic*). In this work, Cicero laces his political theory of a mixed government with narrations supposedly coming from Scipio Africanus, who played a major role in the defeat of Hannibal in the Punic Wars. Scipio thus played a role in establishing the predominance of the Roman Republic with certainty. Cicero seems to have chosen Scipio as a sort of foil for Julius Caesar, who brought the Republic to an end rather than secure it. Eric Voegelin also has suggested that Scipio was to Cicero what Socrates was to Plato.¹³⁹ At the close of *The Republic*, Cicero portrays the King of Carthage giving Scipio advice in a dream. The advice Scipio receives embodies the classical republican concepts of virtue and the goal of the commonwealth as the good of the people. The king tells Scipio:

Africanus, you must show to your country the light of your courage, your character, and your wisdom. . . . Scipio, cultivate justice and loyalty, which is a noble spirit when shown

¹³⁸ Cicero, *Letters*, Letter XXXVI.

¹³⁹ Voegelin, Eric, *History of Political Ideas, Vol. I: Hellenism, Rome, and Early Christianity*, Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Vol. 19, ed. Athanasios Moulakis (Columbia, MO: U. of Missouri Press, 1997), p. 132.

towards parents and kindred, but noblest when shown toward country. Such a life is the way to heaven . . . Train [the soul] in the noblest ways! Now the noblest concerns of the soul have to do with the security of your country . . .¹⁴⁰

Like a good Stoic, Cicero writes with much reference to the idea of virtue and disinterestedness (acting in behalf of the republic's interest rather than one's own interest).

A Mixed Regime

In addition to this concern for the commonwealth, Cicero's *Republic* features the earliest mixed government theory – more than a millennium before Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*.

Cicero wrote:

[M]onarchy is, in my judgment, far the best of the three simple types of states. But even monarchy will be excelled by the kind of state that is formed by an equal balancing and blending of the three unmixed types. For I hold it desirable, first, that there should be a dominant and royal element in the commonwealth; second, that some powers should be granted and assigned to the influence of the aristocracy; and third, that certain matters should be reserved to the people for decision and judgment. Such a government insures at once an element of equality, without which the people can hardly be free, and an element of strength.¹⁴¹

The mixed government theory protects individuals, as well as the longevity of the regime, from abuses of power. So, while Cicero's mixed government supported the common good, as early American republicanism stressed, it also sought to protect the people, foreshadowing the protection of individuals in modern liberalism.

Natural Law

Yet the Stoic ideals of self-sacrifice and patriotism take precedent over this individualism. What, then, suggests a confluence of republicanism and liberalism as evidenced in Cicero's work?

¹⁴⁰ Cicero, Marcus Tullius. *The Republic*. In *Readings in Classical Political Thought*, ed. Peter J. Steinberger. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 456-460.

¹⁴¹ Cicero, *Republic*, 452.

Natural law theory uniquely sits in the direct genealogy of American liberalism. Cicero's *Republic* succinctly claimed a theory of natural law: "There will be one law, eternal and unchangeable, binding at all times upon all peoples; and there will be, as it were, one common master and ruler of men, namely God, who is the author of this law, its interpreter, and its sponsor. The man who will not obey it . . . den[ies] the true nature of a man."¹⁴² His theory of natural law is further elaborated in *De legibus (The Laws)*, which connected natural law to man's ability to reason. That is, the mind was predisposed to natural law but had to utilize reason to fully ascertain it. Other Stoics, most notably Seneca, in his *Epistles*, echoed this belief.

Carl Richard has extensively researched the connection between the natural law theory of Cicero (and other Stoics) and the American founders. Richard traces natural law theory through Paul and the early Christians, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Machiavelli, and to English jurors such as Coke. A new emphasis on natural law and thus natural rights evolved in modern republics. Richard cites the French Huguenots as the first to use the phrase "life, liberty, and property."¹⁴³ As noted above, John Locke laced his *Two Treatises on Government* with the language of natural law, emphasizing man's ability to reason, as did Montesquieu in *Spirit of the Laws*. As the genealogy of natural law theory continued, founders such as John Adams, Samuel Adams, and Thomas Jefferson entered the natural law family tree. Their works teem with references. James W. Skillen affirms the connection, specifically citing the Declaration and Independence and the federal Constitution as documents which were partly shaped by the renewed Stoic concept of universal higher law "inherent in, or immediately available to, every rational creature."¹⁴⁴ Virtuous men followed this higher law; non-virtuous men ignored it. Cicero's famous passage in *De re publica* claims that

¹⁴² Ibid, 455.

¹⁴³ Richard, 174.

¹⁴⁴ Skillen, James W., *With or Against the World?: America's Role among the Nations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 68.

There is in fact a true law – namely, right reason – which is in accordance with nature, applies to all men, and is unchangeable and eternal Its commands and prohibitions influence good men, but are without effect upon the bad But there will be one law, eternal and unchangeable, binding at all times upon all peoples; and there will be, as it were, one common master and ruler of men, namely God, who is the author of this law, its interpreter, and its sponsor.¹⁴⁵

Cicero’s invocation of God¹⁴⁶ demonstrates the heavy emphasis he and other Stoics placed on the universal higher law. In fact, Martha Nussbaum explains that the Stoic man’s “first allegiance” was due to the greater moral community created by the fact that all men had access to this natural law.¹⁴⁷

The conspiracy of Catiline during Cicero’s consulate illustrates well the significance of natural law and the greater moral community. During Cicero’s consulate, Catiline, a bankrupt aristocrat, led a conspiracy to overthrow the Roman government. Cicero and the Senators learned of the plot, and a type of martial law was declared due to the state of emergency. In the Roman historian Sallust’s account, Catiline is depicted as an enemy of public law and morality. Sallust first juxtaposed Catiline with the virtue and adherence to law in “natural behavior” during the early Republic:

Therefore they [the Romans of the early Republic] cultivated good character at home and on military campaign; union of hearts was at its highest point, greed at its lowest. Among them, *Rights* and *the Good* were *no stronger in legal codes than they were in natural behavior*. . . .

Sallust then gave an account of the evolving corruption in Rome as the focus of the Republic shifted to imperial campaigns. Natural law and respect for the Good were diminishing. Sallust portrayed Catiline at home in such debauchery, leading to his conspiracy:

For greed undid good faith, integrity, and other virtuous behaviors all those whom disgrace, poverty, or criminality drove on — these were Catiline's closest associates and

¹⁴⁵ Quoted in Skillen, 32.

¹⁴⁶ See footnote 129.

¹⁴⁷ Nussbaum, Martha, “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” *Boston Review* (1994) <http://www.soci.niu.edu/~phildept/Kapitan/nussbaum1.htm>, 3.

intimate friends. . . . Relying on these friends and companions, Catiline contrived a plan to overthrow the government . . .

When Catiline audaciously attended a next meeting of the Senators, Cicero publicly admonished him:

When, O Catiline, do you mean to cease abusing our patience? How long is that madness of yours still to mock us? . . . Do not the nightly guards placed on the Palatine Hill—do not the watches posted throughout the city—does not the alarm of the people, and the union of all good men—does not the precaution taken of assembling the senate in this most defensible place—do not the looks and countenances of this venerable body here present, have any effect upon you?¹⁴⁸

Addressing Catiline's moral breach, Cicero invokes the "guards," "the people" of Rome, and "the union of all men" to shame Catiline and possibly convince him of his own guilt. Rather than appeal to the written law, Cicero appeals to the natural law found within "all good men."

Equally noteworthy is Cicero's lasting uneasiness about the instatement of martial law during the conspiracy. Under this martial law, Catiline and his fellow conspirators had been executed without trial. Although martial law legitimately replaced the regular Roman law, Cicero feared that he would be pursued for violating such a Roman principle. For just as two concepts of law existed in the Greek vocabulary (*nomos* versus *physis* or *aletheia*), two variants existed in the Latin vocabulary as well: *lex* and *jus*. *Lex* was the written code of law, while *jus* was right order, which was constituted by nature.¹⁴⁹ Another helpful Greek term for understanding its Latin corollary *jus* is *logos*. The word *logos* denotes an idea of God and right reason, but also has connotations of uttered speech and written word, like law written on tablets. Ideally, in Platonic thought, the *nomos* should reflect the *logos*. In Cicero's thought, the *lex* should reflect *jus*. Many people must have perceived the executions as an infringement of the higher law, *jus*. Hence in the Stoic conception of natural law, and in the illustration of the Catilinian conspiracy, we observe an

¹⁴⁸ Cicero, "M. Tullius Cicero, Against Catiline," *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, emphases mine.

¹⁴⁹ Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 137.

internal tension between the individual and the community: each man supposedly had rational access to the higher law, but the greater public helped define it. As Eric Voegelin points out, we observe an “assumption of the generic equality of men as a consequence of their equal participation in the divine *logos*.”¹⁵⁰ So here the classical conundrum of individualism and community continues: the individual man gains his rationality by being a member of humanity at large. How did the Stoics account for such themes of individualism and community without confusion?

Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism

Stoics followed the lead of the Greek Cynic philosopher Diogenes, who coined the phrase, “I am a citizen of the world.”¹⁵¹ Stoics suggest that our human relationships should be viewed as concentric circles. The first circle is drawn around the self; then a larger circle is drawn around one’s family. Circles follow for extended family, neighbors, city, country, to humanity itself.¹⁵² Good Stoics, then, are simultaneously called to be patriots of their homeland, and citizens of the world, the *cosmopolis*. They must be both patriotic and cosmopolitan men. As the Republic expanded through conquest, and shifted to an Empire, Cicero equated the idea of the world with the idea of Rome itself. This understanding of the ordering of the world stems from the Stoic’s recognition of “a single, teleologically organized, cosmic order.” For example, as Terence Irwin puts it, “Rivers flow downwards rather than upwards, apples rather than bullets grow on apple trees; present events are determined by past events.”¹⁵³ Stoics taught that a force inherent in the world, *pneuma* (Greek, breath or spirit) held together this order, in a manner similar to Christian providence. This brings us back to the Stoic doctrine of human rationality and ability to ascertain *jus*, or natural law. For the Stoic cosmopolitan man had the advantage of gaining perspective on

¹⁵⁰ Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, p. 134. Voegelin cites Cicero’s *Laws* I.7.

¹⁵¹ Nussbaum, 2-3.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁵³ Irwin, Terence, *Classical Thought, A History of Western Philosophy* 1 (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 1989).

issues of justice and the good. In this way, Cicero's Stoic thought illustrates the inextricable link between the individual and the community.¹⁵⁴

Conclusion: The Continuum of Republicanism and Liberalism

In his book-length study of the founders and their classicism, Carl Richard points to the paradigmatic problem of republicanism versus liberalism. He argues that relying upon the neatly-boxed conceptual frameworks underestimates the human tendency for inconsistency and the human ability to synthesize various ideas.¹⁵⁵ Joyce Appleby has concurred, stating that historians are at a disadvantage to "confront" the American Revolution because they cannot be "embedded in the revolutionary legacy," which is a "set" of assumptions.¹⁵⁶ Richard further claims that conceptualizing a strict dichotomy between republicanism and liberalism "undervalues the complexity of the relationship between the two intellectual constructs." His judgment actually points to similarities between the two. He argues:

Although classical republicanism and liberalism are two distinct constructs, the former ideology provided the latter's intellectual foundation. The Stoic theory of natural law and the optimistic view of human nature from which it derived gave birth to the modern doctrines of natural rights and social progress which undergird liberalism. . . . Furthermore,

¹⁵⁴ Although I argue that classical individualism is a pre-liberal strain, it should be acknowledged that ancient and modern individualism have significant differences. There have been obvious developments in human rights (rights being Lockean language); for example, today in modern democratic nations, the status of most people has been raised compared to the status of the Spartan helot, the Roman plebeian, or any ancient woman. In the more philosophic sense, too, though, the ancients often expressed confidence in a transcendent, *external* law (as in classical republicanism). In contrast, Locke's notion of society as an artificial construct (social contract theory) implies a natural realm relegated to the private realm. Natural law is more internal than external for Locke. See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1989), particularly Ch. 6, "Plato's Self-Mastery" and Ch. 9, "Locke's Punctual Self." See also Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, Volumes I and II (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957).

¹⁵⁵ Richard, 6.

¹⁵⁶ Appleby, Joyce, "Liberalism and the American Revolution," *New England Quarterly* (March 1976), emphasis mine.

the classical pastoral tradition was partially responsible for the growth of that laissez-faire economics which so distinguished liberalism from classical republicanism.¹⁵⁷

David Koyzis agrees that the earliest strains of liberalism are evident in the ancients, who did focus on the individual life. This is not a retrospective judgment call. Thomas Paine actually included in his definition of republicanism, cited above, that the republican interest of the public was individual as well as collective.¹⁵⁸ So, not only do the roots of republicanism derive further back than Machiavelli or the Renaissance, but the classical roots also demonstrate a compatibility or confluence, not conflict, with the tenets of liberalism. Specifically, “pre-liberal” strains in the classical republican tradition can be seen in the works of Plato and Cicero.

Classical republicanism and American republicanism both hinge upon the concept of a virtuous individual. In America especially, where the church was disestablished, these virtuous individuals would be counted upon to make the nation moral, and, it was believed, strong as a nation-state in turn. Yet here is the internal conundrum of the republicanism-liberalism debate: the strength of the *republic* (i.e., the group) depends upon the moral temperature of the *individuals*. Combining this conundrum with Noll’s assertion that commonsense moral philosophy synthesized with republicanism, it makes sense that liberalism proper could appear on the American scene during the Early National Period without seeming too alien. This internal conundrum has made room for the importance of individuals since the days of Cicero.

In his discussion of the loose definitions of republicanism, Noll concludes that “[e]arly American republicanism was a fluid construct because patriots were heirs to several overlapping political traditions.” This is an extremely important point. But, just as Carl Richard suggests that Bailyn underestimated the influence of classical Greece and Rome upon the founders (by affirming

¹⁵⁷ Richard, 5.

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Noll, *America’s God*, 56.

only the influence of Whig philosophy, but failing to emphasize Whig roots in the classics), Noll, too, underestimates this influence. He writes that the “several overlapping political traditions” being with the “civic humanism of Machiavelli and the Renaissance city-states of northern Italy.”¹⁵⁹ But he does not reach back further, ignoring the essential fact that Machiavelli’s civic humanism was rooted in the political philosophy of Greece and Rome.

David Koyzis asserts this classical ancestry of liberalism, stating that Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all had much to say about the polis, but also about the individual in the polis.

If liberalism is a fairly recent phenomenon, its roots are nevertheless ancient . . . Plato’s Socrates sought to make the case for a standard of human action above and beyond the expectations of the city. Aristotle sought to locate this standard in the nature of the virtuous person himself. Both conceived of the possibility that individual human beings might have direct access to norms for human virtue apart from the conventional standards of the polis. Yet both saw the individual firmly embedded in the life of the polis.¹⁶⁰

For believing that the individual had the ability to assess norms for human virtue, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle really can be identified as the first precursors to liberalism. Pre-Socratic philosophers are distinct from these three for believing that “truth” was conventional, local, pragmatic, and thus determined by man. The Greek term for their understanding of truth is *nomos*, convention. Exemplars of this pre-Socratic tradition are Protagoras and the Sophists. Protagoras, for example, is famous for stating that “man is the measure of all things.”¹⁶¹ The Sophists – the archenemies of Plato – used the art of speech to persuade in their own interest, because they did not believe in fixed truth. In contrast to *nomos*, the Greek word *physis* indicates this unchanging, fixed truth, which is fixed in physical nature. Plato’s writings, for the first time in the western tradition, suggest that man can access the norms for virtue. This is strangely – or not so strangely – akin to

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 56.

¹⁶⁰ Koyzis, 48.

¹⁶¹ Protagoras, *Readings in Classical Political Thought*, ed. Peter J. Steinberger (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000) 20.

Enlightenment thought, in which man is capable of thinking for himself. Whig thought extended the ability of thinking for oneself into taking responsibility for oneself. As *Cato Letter 38* states,

What is the publick, but the collective body of private men, as every private man is a member of the publick? And as the whole ought to be concerned for the preservation of every private individual, it is the duty of every individual to be concerned for the whole, in which himself is included.¹⁶²

Thus we come full circle in demonstrating why republican and liberal elements have interface or philosophical commonalities, having examined evidence from the early modern period Europe, the United States, and back to classical Greece and Rome.

Again, we observed similarities between John Locke and Algernon Sidney, the exemplars of liberalism and republicanism, respectively. We investigated Mark Noll's treatment of the "confluence" of commonsense moral philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment, republicanism, and Calvinist theology, and compared the views on man and moral liberty in both Locke and John Witherspoon, the latter being the representative of the commonsense moral philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment in colonial America. Through these comparisons, I argued that the strict, "boxed-off" paradigms of republicanism and liberalism are very limiting, because some philosophical commonalities between republicanism and liberalism became apparent. Such commonality was demonstrated in Thomas Jefferson's agrarianism.

In the section on classical Greece and Rome, I established a case for classical influence. More importantly, I underscored a philosophical problem apparent in Plato and Cicero: the individual is inescapably bound to the community. I have argued that the philosophical interface in early American republicanism and liberalism can also be observed in their philosophical forbears in the Western tradition.

¹⁶² Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato's Letters*, "Letter 38," 89.

Thus my conclusion remains that strict definitions of republicanism and liberalism are limiting, because the two exist along a continuum. This continuum refers to the circular continuum image which is commonly drawn to illustrate how Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union had many practical similarities despite their theoretical beginnings at extreme right and left. Not only should republicanism and liberalism be situated close to one another on this circle, but more importantly, the continuum exemplifies how ideologies with different starting points can share many practical and even theoretical commonalities. That republicanism and liberalism exist along such a continuum has contributed to the polarization in the historiographical debate among historians (such as Louis Hartz, Gordon Wood, and Joyce Appleby) of Revolutionary America and the Early National Period, who still debate over the republican or liberal roots of this nation. If this continuum is recognized, a deeper understanding of the founding and its meaning can be achieved.

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VITA

Katrina Loulousis Combs was raised in Mokena, Illinois. She graduated from Lincoln-Way Community High School, New Lenox, Illinois, in 2001, and subsequently earned her B.A. with a double major History and Philosophy at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, in 2005. She then taught Latin at Naperville Christian Academy, Naperville, Illinois, for several years. In 2008, she entered the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies at Olivet Nazarene University to complete her M.A. in Philosophy of History. Katrina is married to Christopher Combs, and they have one son, Jacob.