

RENAISSANCE CIVIC  
HUMANISM

*Reappraisals and Reflections*

EDITED BY

JAMES HANKINS



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CHAPTER I

*The republican idea*

*William J. Connell*

In recent years, while the history of republicanism has become one of the most hotly contested subjects in the fields of American and English history, historians of the Italian Renaissance have been paying less and less attention to what was long a staple of our trade. The fortune of the *vita civile*, as it developed in the cities of medieval Italy and as it variously survived or perished during the Renaissance, was a central theme of most Italian histories written since the time of Sismondi. Of late, however, a number of scholars have denied the importance of the *vita civile*, and there has now developed a large body of historical writing on the Renaissance that pays little attention to it.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, the patient philological work of Nicolai Rubinstein has continued to expand our knowledge of the changing political vocabulary of Florentine thinkers and statesmen.<sup>2</sup> And Machiavelli remains as interesting as ever: although much of the best recent work on Machiavelli has focused on his rhetorical strategies rather than looking to his role in a longer republican tradition, or, in more precise ways, at the immediate historical context of *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. As an overall effort, however, few would disagree that the study of republican thought in Renaissance Italy

A first version of this essay was delivered at a round-table discussion at the Harvard Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, Villa I Tatti, in 1992. A shortened and somewhat different version appeared in the volume, *Girolamo Savonarola: Piety, Prophecy, and Politics*, ed. Donald Weinstein and Valerie R. Hotchkiss (Dallas: Bridwell Library, 1994), 95–105. Paul Kristeller, James Livingston, Thomas Mayer, Karl Morrison, and John Najemy offered helpful comments on this material.

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, the remarks of Edward Muir, "The Italian Renaissance in America," *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 1095–118; and also his "Una replica," *Quaderni storici*, no. 88 (1995): 247–51. For a similar though less radical trend in Reformation historiography, see R. Po-Chia Hsia, "The Myth of the Commune: Recent Historiography on City and Reformation in Germany," *Central European History*, 20 (1987): 203–15. The noted polemic of Philip Jones, "Economia e società nell'Italia medievale: il mito della borghesia," in his *Economia e società nell'Italia medievale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), 3–189, is much moderated in his *The Italian City-State: From Commune to Signoria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 332–650.

<sup>2</sup> Rubinstein's bibliography appears in *Florence and Italy: Renaissance Studies in Honour of Nicolai Rubinstein*, ed. Peter Denley and Caroline Elam (London: Westfield College, 1988), 515–23.

has gone little beyond the point to which it was brought in the 1970s by an extraordinary group of mostly German and American scholars.<sup>3</sup>

It was Hans Baron who with great energy opened the way for the study of republican political thought in relation to its cultural and political context in the Renaissance. Baron's death in 1988 became the occasion for a number of thoughtful essays on his contribution to Renaissance studies, although, to my mind, these have not adequately treated the impact of Baron's writings on the study of republicanism.<sup>4</sup> As the author of one of these essays noted, the discussion concerning Baron's great "thesis" – according to which the cultivation of ancient republican ideas by Florentine humanists in the early fifteenth century was the result of a lengthy military and diplomatic struggle between Florence and Milan – has tended to obscure rather than illuminate the general significance of Baron's idea.<sup>5</sup> For Baron's thesis was never strictly a claim concerning events which took place at Florence in the period

<sup>3</sup> Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955); rev. edn in one volume (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966); Rudolf von Albertini, *Das florentinische Staatsbewusstsein im Übergang von der Republik zum Prinzipat* (Berne: Francke, 1955); Felix Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in Sixteenth Century Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), with revised bibliographical essays in the 1984 Norton paperback edition; William J. Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence under the Medici (1434 to 1494)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968; revised edn, 1997); Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Gene A. Brucker, *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). For suggestive discussions of this postwar scholarship, see Anthony Molho, "American Historians and the Italian Renaissance: An Overview," *Bulletin of the Society for Renaissance Studies*, 9 (1991): 10–23; and his "The Italian Renaissance, Made in the USA," in *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past*, ed. Anthony Molho and Gordon S. Wood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 263–94. Interestingly, the most original recent contributions to the history of the *vita civile* have not been made by historians of Florence or Venice. See, for example, Quentin Skinner's attempt to demonstrate the non-Aristotelian origins of the Italian civic tradition in his "Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Artist as Political Philosopher," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 72 (1986): 1–56; and Antony Black's critical reexamination of the European legal tradition concerning guilds and corporatism in his *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Alison Brown, "Hans Baron's Renaissance," *The Historical Journal*, 29 (1990): 991–1003; John M. Najemy, review of Hans Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism*, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 45 (1992): 340–50; Riccardo Fubini, "Renaissance Historian: The Career of Hans Baron," *Journal of Modern History*, 64 (1992): 541–74; James Hankins, "The 'Baron Thesis' After Forty Years and Some Recent Studies of Leonardo Bruni," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56 (1995): 309–38. See also the essays by Ronald Witt, John M. Najemy, Craig Kallendorf, and Werner Gundersheimer in the *American Historical Review*, 101 (1996): 107–44. Among earlier tributes, the essay of Eugenio Garin, "Le prime ricerche di Hans Baron sul Quattrocento e la loro influenza fra le due guerre," in *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Hans Baron*, ed. Anthony Molho and John Tedeschi (Florence: Sansoni, 1971), lxi–lxx, is especially informative.

<sup>5</sup> Fubini, "Renaissance Historian," 542.

around 1400; it was instead a thesis about the relationship of those events to what he considered to be “modern” culture, broadly understood. This is indicated in the subtitle to the 1988 collection of Baron’s writings: *Essays on the Transition from Medieval to Modern Thought*.<sup>6</sup> In contrast with Jacob Burckhardt, whose perspective on modernity (and also the Renaissance) was far less sunny than is often acknowledged, Baron’s writings offered a thoroughly positive evaluation of what he considered the essential aspects of modern society: participatory politics, constitutional government, and security for private property.<sup>7</sup> In Baron’s view, the most important political writers of antiquity, particularly Aristotle and Cicero, had endorsed a regime founded on similar values. Baron’s great historical project became the charting of the European world’s recovery of the ideals of ancient republicanism during the Renaissance.

It was only natural that the early fifteenth-century writings of the Florentine chancellor Leonardo Bruni should have drawn Baron’s attention, since Bruni was the most important of the early humanists engaged in the diffusion of the political and moral thought of the ancient world during the century that revived classical learning.<sup>8</sup> It was natural, too, that Baron should have been drawn to Niccolò Machiavelli, whose importance in the formation of modern political thought remains undisputed (even though there is little agreement on the character of his contribution), and who – at the very least because of where and when he lived – might plausibly be claimed to have inherited the fifteenth-century republican tradition that was begun by Bruni and his contemporaries. If Bruni’s interest in ancient republicanism could be explained, and if the influence of the early humanists on Machiavelli could be established, Baron would be in a good position to describe the role played by the Florentine Renaissance in making ancient republican thought once again influential in modern Europe.

In order to draw the necessary connections between these republican thinkers, it was especially important for the success of Baron’s project that the corpus of Machiavelli be somehow cleansed, so that works indicating disagreement with the civic values of the ancients and of humanists of the early fifteenth century should not be seen as detracting

<sup>6</sup> Hans Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism: Essays on the Transition from Medieval to Modern Thought*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> On Burckhardt’s less than sanguine view of modernity, see Riccardo Fubini, “Rinascimento riscoperto? Studi recenti su Jacob Burckhardt,” *Società e storia*, 16 (1993): 583–607. Baron continually measured his writings against those of Burckhardt: see his *In Search*, II: 155–81, 190, 198, 208.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the collection *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, ed. Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins, and David Thompson (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1987).

from the republicanism at the core of his thought. It was above all Machiavelli's authorship of *The Prince* that prompted persistent doubts concerning the claim that the Florentine secretary was heir to the republicanism of the civic humanists. But in an article entitled "Machiavelli, the Republican Citizen and the Author of *The Prince*," published in the *English Historical Review* in 1961, Baron claimed to have surmounted this difficulty, for the essay turned Machiavelli's *Prince* into an isolated composition, composed well before the Florentine secretary began to write the work that represented his true republican thinking, the *Discourses on Livy*.<sup>9</sup> With Machiavelli now a true republican, it became possible to undertake the project, one in which many scholars would participate, of constructing the stages, or "crises," or "Machiavellian moments," in which the classical republican ideas revived by the Florentine humanists were transmitted to the modern world.<sup>10</sup>

Important to a general acceptance of Baron's more republican Machiavelli was a little-noticed "conversion" of Felix Gilbert to a somewhat similar view of the relation between Machiavelli and the humanists. In a 1939 essay on *The Prince* Gilbert had offered a perceptive account of Machiavelli's "refutation" of the ideas of earlier humanists, but in the postwar years he can be shown to have changed course. Already by the time of his essay on the dating of the *Discourses*, published in 1953, it is clear that Gilbert, like Baron, was reading *The Prince* as an exceptional work in Machiavelli's *oeuvre*, while he saw the *Discourses* as a more important work that emerged from a republican humanist tradition.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Hans Baron, "Machiavelli the Republican Citizen and Author of *The Prince*," in his *In Search*, II: 101–51; and his earlier "The *Principe* and the Puzzle of the Date of the *Discorsi*," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 18 (1956): 405–28.

<sup>10</sup> Compare Randolph Starn, "Historians and 'Crisis,'" *Past and Present*, 52 (1971): 3–22.

<sup>11</sup> To trace Felix Gilbert's changing views on Machiavelli's relationship to Renaissance humanism, begin with his 1939 essay, "The Humanist Concept of the Prince and *The Prince* of Machiavelli," reprinted in his *History: Choice and Commitment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 110–12, which discusses Machiavelli's "refutation" of the humanists. Note that the article suggests (e.g. at 92 and 472 n. 3) no fundamental difference between the viewpoint of *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. Then compare Gilbert's 1953 essay, "The Composition and Structure of Machiavelli's *Discorsi*," also in his *History*, 115–33, esp. 133, in which he reads the *Discourses* "as a first sign of Machiavelli's inclination to accept orthodox humanism," and therefore quite different from *The Prince*. Later, in 1977, Gilbert wrote that he had now become convinced that Machiavelli's interest in humanistic literature went back "to his early years," long before the composition of the *Discourses* when it became more pronounced (see in his *History*, 115 [at bottom]). But as doubts concerning the "classical" quality of the republicanism in the *Discourses* began to emerge in the Machiavelli literature, Gilbert stepped back somewhat from his earlier positions. In 1984 he wrote that "[c]ertainly Pocock's emphasis on Machiavelli's humanist legacy goes too far"; Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, Norton paperback edn, 321. Perhaps Fubini ("Renaissance Historian," 543) alludes to these changes of direction when he refers to Gilbert's "very pragmatic attitude" in interpreting Machiavelli.

With the passing of the years, it has become easier to see how the great disagreement between Baron and Gilbert over the dating of *The Prince* and the *Discourses* obscured a more consequential point on which both were agreed: in urging the primacy of the *Discourses*, and by reading that work as typical of Florentine humanism, Baron and Gilbert were turning Machiavelli into a classical republican.<sup>12</sup> Thanks to their influential writing, by the late 1960s the rehabilitation of Machiavelli was probably as complete as it could ever be, with the former counselor of evil now seen as an apostle of republican virtue.

Baron, who was working at the Newberry Library in Chicago in the 1950s and 1960s, became increasingly absorbed by the intricate polemics surrounding the chronologies he had constructed for the development of the thought of Bruni and Petrarch. It was at this time that Gilbert became especially influential in encouraging the historiography of republicanism. It was not just that Gilbert, first at Bryn Mawr and then at the Institute for Advanced Study (from 1962), stood at the center of a great network of professional friends and acquaintances at American universities.<sup>13</sup> Nor was it sufficient that Gilbert had a well-acknowledged gift for making good suggestions to other scholars, such as his recommendation to William Bouwsma that he undertake the study of Paolo Sarpi that became *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*.<sup>14</sup> What made Gilbert so important was that he significantly transformed the terms of the republican discussion. Where Baron had formulated the civic humanist thesis in a rather uncomplicated way, one that now seems reminiscent of Toynbee's "challenge and response," Gilbert's goal was to study the fortunes of classical republicanism against

<sup>12</sup> Gennaro Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, 2 vols. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1980–93), I: 314–20, is most perceptive on the Baron–Gilbert controversy.

<sup>13</sup> *Felix Gilbert as Scholar and Teacher*, ed. H. Lehman, German Historical Institute, Occasional Paper no. 6 (Washington, D.C., 1992). Among the Bryn Mawr colleagues with whom Gilbert worked closely was Caroline Robbins, whose work on the "commonwealthmen" would figure prominently in English and American versions of the republican thesis. See Caroline A. Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development and Circumstances of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959).

<sup>14</sup> Personal communication. But note that Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*, xiii, states that the first suggestion was Baron's – perhaps an indication of the extent to which both scholars influenced new scholarship. Sometimes seen as a Venetian version of Baron's *Crisis* (see, e.g., Renzo Pecchioli, *Dal "mito" di Venezia all' "ideologia americana"* [Venice: Marsilio, 1983]), Bouwsma's volume should perhaps be understood instead as a test study of Trevor-Roper's thesis, advanced in a famous essay *contra* Weber and Tawney, that suggested a linkage between Erasmus religious sentiment and merchant capitalism in Europe's free republics. Compare H. R. Trevor-Roper, "Religion, the Reformation and Social Change," in *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change, and Other Essays*, third rev. edn (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), 1–45.

the background of what he called “traditional political assumptions.” Methodologically, this involved a significant raising of the stakes.

The more sophisticated approach was already evident in Gilbert’s 1949 article on “Bernardo Rucellai and the Orti Oricellari.” The ideas of individual thinkers such as Machiavelli and Guicciardini, “were not isolated phenomena,” Gilbert wrote, “for they proceeded from political and historical concepts which were the common property of a whole group of Florentine writers.” Since Gilbert further postulated that the political thought of the Renaissance was “structured in terms of schools,” one of the chief tasks of the historian was to develop an adequate taxonomy. “Ideologies” replaced “ideas” as the historian’s currency: the classical republicanism of Bernardo Rucellai and his friends was a “political ideology” they adopted as a means to power.<sup>15</sup>

There was a bravura to Gilbert’s work that it is not always easy now to recognize. In the essay on Rucellai, as in his subsequent treatments of “Florentine Political Assumptions in the Period of Savonarola and Soderini” (1957) and *Machiavelli and Guicciardini* (1965), Gilbert developed a sustained and elegant case for studying political thought through the reading of a wide range of texts by a wide range of authors. *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, arguably Gilbert’s best-known work, is often considered a disappointing exercise by readers looking for a guide to the two Florentine writers; but a close reading of major texts was not at all what Gilbert had in mind. Indeed, the book’s introduction notes with some pride how few times Machiavelli and Guicciardini are mentioned in later pages!<sup>16</sup>

Gilbert flirted quite openly with a structuralist approach.<sup>17</sup> His stated ambition – “to place the ideas of Machiavelli and Guicciardini in [the] context” of “the prevailing trends and tendencies in politics and history” – was quite clearly pointing toward the then-developing method of Quentin Skinner and the Cambridge school of historians of political thought.<sup>18</sup> By determining the “political ideology,” “system of values and concepts,” “political assumptions,” “conceptual framework,” or “prevailing mode of thinking” (all phrases used by Gilbert), evidenced

<sup>15</sup> Gilbert, “Bernardo Rucellai,” in his *History*, 217, 245.

<sup>16</sup> Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini* (1965; 1984), 3.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, 28–9. He need not have been influenced directly by Thomas Kuhn, as Pocock would later be. Compare Quentin Skinner’s 1969 essay, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, ed. James Tully (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 292–93, nn. 17–18.

<sup>18</sup> Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini* (1965; 1984), 3; Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding,” esp. 56–67. See also John H. Geerken, “Structuralist Explanation in History,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 17 (1979), 309–18.

across a broad spectrum of texts, the historian was afforded a way of integrating the study of the theoretical, political, and social systems of past societies.<sup>19</sup> An old disciplinary barrier that stood between intellectual history and the world of socio-political power was in the process of being pulled down.

At the same time, Gilbert managed to inject a significant dose of class analysis into his interpretation of the Florentine ideological struggles of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Here, his difference with Baron is quite revealing. Baron, in accordance with an older liberal historiography, had made quite clear his belief that early modern capitalism and republicanism were closely connected and mutually supportive historical phenomena. In several essays devoted to the theme of “civic wealth,” Baron claimed that humanist arguments to the effect that private wealth contributed to public prosperity and that some forms of “avarice” could be defended (if not entirely endorsed), were an important concomitant to the development of an ethic favorable to the *vita activa* and to participatory government.<sup>20</sup> Although Baron made clear his debts to Werner Sombart and Amintore Fanfani, he was the first writer to connect a specifically republican ideology with the rise of a new positive attitude toward wealth.<sup>21</sup>

Gilbert, however, saw the relationship between wealth and republican ideals somewhat differently. It is clear from his writings that he was especially drawn to the calls to sacrifice, so common in republican literature, that appeared during times of necessity or crisis.<sup>22</sup> Gilbert’s republicanism was an ideology that sought to redistribute existing resources for the common good, while Baron’s republicanism was postulated upon exuberant economic growth. Interestingly, as Gilbert interpreted it, a republican ideology could easily become an instrument

<sup>19</sup> Compare Clifford Geertz’s 1964 essay, “Ideology as a Cultural System,” in his *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 193–233.

<sup>20</sup> See especially Baron, *In Search*, I: 158–288 (chaps. 7–10).

<sup>21</sup> Werner Sombart, *Der Bourgeois. Zur Geistesgeschichte des modernen Wirtschaftsmenschen* (Munich: Duncker and Humblot, 1913); Amintore Fanfani, *Le origini dello spirito capitalistico in Italia* (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 1933); and cf. Baron, *In Search*, I, 261. It is possible that Baron’s argument concerning wealth and the *vita civile* may have influenced Trevor-Roper’s attack on Weber, discussed at note 14 above. It is curious that in the essays published in *In Search*, Baron makes no mention of Lester K. Little’s *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), nor of Little’s preliminary essays.

<sup>22</sup> This was the larger significance of Gilbert’s detailed 1973 essay, “Venice in the Crisis of the League of Cambrai,” republished in his *History*, 269–91. Baron, too, was attracted to the “concepts of ‘devotion and sacrifice’” he found in Machiavelli’s thought (see John Najemy, “Baron’s Machiavelli and Renaissance Republicanism,” *American Historical Review*, 101 [1996]: 127), but where Baron was clear on the importance of private wealth for communal well-being, Gilbert was silent.

adopted and manipulated by both parties in a particular episode of class struggle – by the Florentine *popolo*, to be sure, but also by an upper class of *grandi* or *ottimati*. In cities of longstanding civic traditions, such as Florence and Venice, republican exhortations were powerful political weapons that could be used not just to democratize a republican regime but also to undermine it.

The fact that Gilbert's version of republicanism, unlike Baron's, was indifferent to private property would become an important factor in the development by American historians of a "republican paradigm," as we shall see. To understand the American historical profession's attraction to the republican tradition in the 1960s, it will be useful to consider the extent to which the republican idea that emerged from Renaissance historiography offered an exciting alternative to what was more or less a situation of gridlock in the field of American intellectual history. At that time, largely as a result of the work of Charles Beard and Louis Hartz, historians of both the left-leaning and the liberal schools were largely in agreement in interpreting the English and American regimes as embodiments of Lockean self-interest.<sup>23</sup> Historians on the left thought that John Locke's political ideas should be seen as the offspring of nascent bourgeois capitalism; historians on the right thought Locke's ideas instead represented a reasonable response to a plurisecular history of institutional conflict. From both perspectives, it seemed, future historians would be condemned to a dismally unvarying diet of Locke.<sup>24</sup>

For two Americanists, Bernard Bailyn and his student Gordon Wood, developments that were then taking place in Renaissance history arrived as emancipatory tidings. Encouraged in part by Gilbert's example, these Americanists discovered in the history of ideology a way to address simultaneously the concerns of intellectual and social historians.<sup>25</sup> Both Bailyn and Wood noted the predominance of classical republicanism in the pamphlet literature and political treatises of the revolutionary and postrevolutionary periods. Bailyn, in his study of

<sup>23</sup> Charles A. Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1913); Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955).

<sup>24</sup> John P. Diggins, *The Lost Soul of American Politics: Virtue, Self-Interest, and the Foundations of Liberalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 18–47, is especially insightful.

<sup>25</sup> Gilbert's Bancroft Prize-winning *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961) guaranteed him, as a Europeanist, an unusual degree of attention from American historians.

the pamphlet literature surrounding the Stamp Tax Act, published as the *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* in 1967, encountered a powerful rhetoric of communal liberty and the right of resistance rather than expressions of Lockean individualism.<sup>26</sup> Although he thought classical republicanism was ultimately unimportant in the Revolution,<sup>27</sup> and he rejected the term “civic humanist,”<sup>28</sup> Bailyn’s discovery of a communitarian ideology in the American colonies provided Gordon Wood with the conceptual starting-point for a thorough-going reinterpretation of the Revolution as a phenomenon that had little to do with Lockean self-interest. In Wood’s *Creation of the American Republic*, published in 1969, the Revolution was not about the protection of colonial tax exemptions but rather about brotherhood, self-sacrifice, and the defense of the community. Only with the drafting of the constitution, that elaborate mechanism for balancing and defusing the conflict of particular interests, did the forces of Lockean reaction take over.<sup>29</sup> What was so particularly suggestive in Wood’s model was that the communitarian and republican ideals of the revolutionary period might be said to offer an alternative and prior standard for the measurement and correction of the republic’s institutional arrangements – or even for disobeying them.<sup>30</sup> Published at a time when American society was becoming increasingly disenchanted with its institutions, Wood’s book immediately found a receptive audience. The impact of Wood’s conceptual model was such that by the early 1970s it was possible for Robert Shalhope to conclude that there was an emerging “republican synthesis” in American historiography.<sup>31</sup>

Charting the lineage of this American republicanism – legitimating it by situating it within an ancient European and Western tradition – was the ambitious task that was taken up by J. G. A. Pocock. Pocock’s *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* drew connections with a whole series of republicanism,

<sup>26</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967; enlarged edn, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *Faces of Revolution: Personalities and Themes in the Struggle for American Independence* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 225–78.

<sup>28</sup> See his preface to the 1992 enlarged edition of *Ideological Origins*.

<sup>29</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969).

<sup>30</sup> See also Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1992).

<sup>31</sup> Robert E. Shalhope, “Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 29 (1972): 49–80. See also his “Republicanism and Early American Historiography,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 39 (1982): 334–56.

stretching from the *politeia* of Aristotle, to the Florence of Bruni and Machiavelli, to Venice, England, and the American Republic.<sup>32</sup> In elaborating the stages of a great republican *translatio virtutis*, Pocock did not seek to determine specific connections by looking for evidence that certain books were read or cited by certain people in certain times and places;<sup>33</sup> he tried instead to survey an array of important texts, most of them by well-known writers, in order to demonstrate that there were structural continuities in republican language that could be found to have endured through the centuries. One of the casualties along the way was the previously omnipresent Locke, whose incipient liberalism Pocock and others were busily writing out of the eighteenth century.<sup>34</sup> By the time of the American Revolution, the language of classical republicanism, anchored in Aristotle and Machiavelli, was so dominant that, according to Pocock, it excluded other possibilities. “Not all Americans were schooled in this tradition, but there was (it would appear) no alternative tradition in which to be schooled.”<sup>35</sup> Where Gordon Wood had seen republicanism’s influence coming to an end with the framing of the constitution, Pocock saw it as an enduring presence in the American psyche. It explained typical American attitudes toward the frontier, toward corruption, and toward time itself – since a notable quality of republican ideology, according to Pocock, was a tendency toward millenarianism.

One of the most interesting and indicative of the many transformations Pocock effected in Baron’s original concept appears in his discussions of wealth and the market. Here Pocock followed Gilbert, by asserting that “virtue” and property stood in fundamental opposition to one another. Where Baron thought that republicanism was properly protective and nurturing of property, Pocock asserted that the republic should be ever on guard to combat the corrupting effects of private

<sup>32</sup> On Pocock’s volume, see J. H. Hexter, “Republic, Virtue, Liberty, and the Political Universe of J. G. A. Pocock,” in his *On Historians* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 255–303; and Cesare Vasoli, “The Machiavellian Moment: A Grand Ideological Synthesis,” *Journal of Modern History*, 49 (1977): 661–70. Note Pocock’s two vigorous defenses of his work: “The Machiavellian Moment Revisited,” *Journal of Modern History*, 53 (1981): 49–72; and “Between Gog and Magog: The Republican Thesis and the *Ideologia Americana*,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 48 (1987): 325–46.

<sup>33</sup> As Vasoli (“The Machiavellian Moment,” 662), suggests he should have done.

<sup>34</sup> John Dunn, “The Politics of Locke in England and America in the Eighteenth Century,” in *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. John W. Yolton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 45–80; J. G. A. Pocock, “The Myth of John Locke and the Obsession with Liberalism,” in *John Locke: Papers Read at a Clark Library Seminar, 10 December 1977*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock and Richard Ashcraft (Los Angeles, 1980), 3–24.

<sup>35</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 507.

wealth. Pocock so emphasized the subordination of private wealth to the good of the commonwealth that for many American historians today the rhetoric of “civic humanism” has come to stand for a kind of communitarianism, if not socialism, offering a response even to that hoary question, “Why is there no socialism in the United States?” For if – so the argument goes – for various historical and structural reasons (such as the absence of feudalism) America remains impervious to European socialism, its republicanism is a historically grounded political tradition which, like socialism, also prizes the sacrifice of private interests for the good of the community.

Certainly this communitarian reading of republicanism was one of the most important reasons for the diffusion of the Pocock model among American historians, who have used it to produce influential interpretations of the Jacksonian period and of early labor movements. Lately the republican model has been extended even to treatments of Wilsonian diplomacy, Jane Addams at Hull House, and the CP-USA during the Popular Front period. We should perhaps leave it to our Americanist colleagues to decide whether it makes sense for their graduate students – who have certainly never heard of Hans Baron – to spend time tracing throwaway references to the Pisistratidae or the Gracchi in the soap-box oratory of the nineteenth century.<sup>36</sup> But the fact that they are doing so stands as almost eerie testimony to the impact a group of Florentine historians has had on contemporary historical research.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, back in Florence, historians for the most part have been content to address their own moment in the republican tradition in its more narrow aspects, steering clear of many of its more important historical and methodological ramifications. In particular, the controversy over the “validity” of Baron’s thesis that classical republican values were rediscovered during the war with Milan has resulted in what Riccardo Fubini has called the “misdirection” of historical research.<sup>38</sup>

To begin with, the critics of Baron among the Florentinists have not done nearly so much damage to the Baron thesis as has often been

<sup>36</sup> Compare the skepticism toward classical allusions evident in the portrayal of the labor organizer Slackbridge in Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, ed. Kate Flint (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), 141 ff.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers, “Republicanism: The Career of a Concept,” *Journal of American History*, 79 (1992): 11–38, offers a highly critical discussion of the republican thesis as a Kuhnian-style paradigm. As an essay about fashions in scholarship this is terrific; but the historical problems associated with the republican idea – the reasons for its survival, transmission, and transformation – cannot be dismissed so easily. Baron, Gilbert, Pocock, and the other historians of republicanism, were engaged in something more serious than propagating paradigms.

<sup>38</sup> Fubini, “Renaissance Historian,” 542.

claimed.<sup>39</sup> Virtually all scholars now object to Baron's use of such terms as "democracy" and "democratic values" to describe the Florentine regime of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. As we know from a good many studies, the government for which Leonardo Bruni worked was oligarchical.<sup>40</sup> But it bears keeping in mind that oligarchies are still republics, and there is still something distinctly different about the rule of a self-governing, self-legitimizing oligarchy as compared with the rule of a monarch or a tyrant.

Criticisms to the effect that the Florentine republic was imperialist in its foreign policy, rather than defensive as Baron claimed, have been made since the 1960s. Baron was wrong here, too; but history has known other republics that were aggressor states.

A great deal of attention has been paid the Florentine chancellors, whose rhetoric of republicanism, it is alleged, was insincere, a concomitant of their professional lives.<sup>41</sup> But even if it was true that some of the most important early Florentine humanists were not sincere republicans, there remains a problem of audience, since the Florentine oligarchs who *hired* the chancellors had quite clearly developed a taste for the humanist rhetoric of classical republicanism in roughly the years Baron designated.<sup>42</sup>

In the 1960s and 1970s it was established by Charles Davis, Nicolai Rubinstein, and Quentin Skinner, among others, that major aspects of the kind of republican civic consciousness that Baron thought originated in the Florentine crisis of 1400–1402 were already present in Italy during the communal period.<sup>43</sup> But even such a drastic revision of republican-

<sup>39</sup> For a good survey of the *fortuna critica* of the Baron thesis, see Albert Rabil, Jr., "The Significance of 'Civic Humanism' in the Interpretation of the Italian Renaissance," in *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms and Legacy*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), I: 141–74.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Herde, "Politische Verhaltensweisen der Florentiner Oligarchie, 1382–1402," in *Geschichte und Verfassungsgefüge. Frankfurter Festgabe für Walter Schlesinger*, ed. Klaus Zernack (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1973), 161–249.

<sup>41</sup> Jerrold Seigel, "'Civic Humanism' or Ciceronian Rhetoric? The Culture of Petrarch and Bruni," *Past and Present*, 34 (1966), 3–48; Peter Herde, "Politik und Rhetorik in Florenz am Vorabend der Renaissance," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 50 (1965): 141–220. See also Robert Black, "The Political Thought of the Florentine Chancellors," *Historical Journal*, 29 (1986): 991–1003.

<sup>42</sup> This is the argument of Ronald G. Witt, *Coluccio Salutati and his Public Letters* (Geneva: Droz, 1976), 73–88. See also Gene Brucker, *Civic World*, 300–2. For an excellent discussion of one of the ways in which professional rhetoricians responded to new social and institutional developments, see Witt, "Civic Humanism and the Rebirth of the Ciceronian Oration," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 51 (1990): 167–84.

<sup>43</sup> Charles T. Davis, *Dante's Italy and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984); Nicolai Rubinstein, "Florentina Libertas," *Rinascimento*, n.s., 26 (1976): 3–26; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) I: 3–65. For a recent appraisal see J. H. Mundy, "In Praise of Italy: The Italian City-Republics," *Speculum*, 64 (1989): 815–34.

ism's early chronology did not touch the larger project – we might call it a “republicanist” project – concerning the continuity of republican political language through Machiavelli and beyond. This, indeed, was the goal of Skinner's two-volume study on *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*.

Florentine historians, after years of the sometimes quite bitter polemics precipitated by Baron's writings, have taught us a great deal more about Renaissance Florence; but with respect to the larger republican thesis they have done little more than change the chronology. Indeed, the more imposing challenges to the republican thesis have come in other fields, namely American history, the study of classical antiquity, and in the studies on Machiavelli of a number of political theorists and literary scholars.

In the field of American history, John Locke has quite correctly returned to center stage, as such scholars as Joyce Appleby, John Diggins, and Paul Rahe reconstruct the intellectual and cultural world of the Founding Fathers.<sup>44</sup> What becomes clear from this recent work is the extent to which the generation of Madison, Hamilton, and Jefferson embraced liberal ideals that can only be called “Lockean,” while furthermore adopting an often critical approach to the republicanism of the ancient world. Although there were differences between them, the Founders of the United States made clear again and again that they hoped to replace classical factions with modern interests, classical virtue with modern industry, classical direct democracy with diluted modern representation. As a result of these studies we can now see the extent to which the most important English and American republican theorists of the early modern period believed that a great historical divide separated them from the republics of classical antiquity.

And, indeed, there may really have been such a divide. As the work of ancient historians increasingly reminds us, the world of ancient politics was radically different from our own. Fierce civic religions, chattel slavery, the exclusion of foreigners, the domestic enslavement of women, and the subordination of private wealth to the *res publica*, institutions that the modern republic deems inimical or can tolerate only with difficulty, were necessary to the perpetuation of the primacy of politics in classical republican regimes.<sup>45</sup> The idea that the coming of

<sup>44</sup> See Joyce O. Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York: New York University Press, 1984); Diggins, *Lost Soul*; Paul A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

<sup>45</sup> Paul A. Rahe, “The Primacy of Politics in Classical Greece,” *American Historical Review*, 89 (1984): 265–93; Christian Meier, *The Greek Discovery of Politics*, trans. David McLintock (Cambridge,

modernity has drastically changed the kinds of moral philosophy now possible has been emphasized by a number of writers, most notably Alasdair MacIntyre, who offers a model that is explicitly historical and which therefore deserves to be tested by intellectual and social historians who have been slow to take up his challenge.<sup>46</sup>

If the relationship of the Founding Fathers to antiquity was more problematic than we have thought, so too was their relationship to the Italian medieval republics, which they studied with a view to modern concerns – interests, industry, and representation – rather than for shining instances of civic virtue. If any of the early American statesmen took the time to read Leonardo Bruni, it is extremely unlikely they arrived at assessments similar to Hans Baron's.<sup>47</sup> The Americans were impressed by Machiavelli, but not because they thought he was a classical republican, or because they wished to imitate the faulty Florentine institutions they read about in his *Florentine Histories* – a work that John Adams characterized as a “humorous entertainment,” while transporting great sections of it into his *Defence of the Constitutions*.<sup>48</sup> Instead, Adams, Madison, and Jefferson were attracted to the Machiavelli whom they thought had opened a way for creating a new kind of republic that would be more successful than any of the regimes of classical antiquity.

And it is precisely in the area of Machiavelli studies that challenges to

Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); Pierre Vidal-Naquet and Nicole Loraux, “La formation de l'Athènes bourgeoise,” in Vidal-Naquet, *La Démocratie grecque vue d'ailleurs. Essais d'historiographie ancienne et moderne* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990), 161–209. See also the valuable collection of essays, *City-States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy*, ed. Anthony Molho, Kurt Raaffaub, and Julia Emlen (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991). The point was not fully grasped by M. I. Finley, *Politics in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), notwithstanding the contribution in this direction of many of his earlier writings.

<sup>46</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, second edn (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). For some recent attempts in this direction, see F. Edward Cranz, “A Common Pattern in Petrarch, Nicholas of Cusa, and Martin Luther,” in *Humanity and Divinity in Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. John W. O'Malley, Thomas M. Izbicki, and Gerald Christianson (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 53–70; and Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). See also James Hankins, “Humanism and the Origins of Modern Political Thought,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 137.

<sup>47</sup> John Adams owned a copy, now in the Boston Public Library, of the 1610 Strasbourg edition of Bruni's *Historiae Florentinorum*, but he did not rely on it for his major work of political theory and history, *A Defence of the Constitutions*; Alfred Iacuzzi, *John Adams Scholar* (New York: Scholar Press, 1952), 95–6, 279 n. 5.

<sup>48</sup> John Adams, *A Defence of the Constitutions of the Government of the United States of America*, 2 vols. (1787–88; rpt. New York: Da Capo, 1971), II: 114. In fact, Machiavelli's *Prince* and Guicciardini's *History of Italy* arrived with the Pilgrims at Plymouth Plantation, where William Bradford kept them in his library. See Thomas Goddard Wright, *Literary Culture in Early New England, 1620–1730* (1920), 27; and Giorgio Spini, *Autobiografia della giovane America. La storiografia americana dai Padri Pellegrini all'Indipendenza* (Turin: Einaudi, 1968), 17.

the thesis of a continuous republican tradition or “language” are now taking hold. Although Pocock, Skinner, and other English-language scholars accept Baron’s late dating of the *Discourses*, thirty-three years after the publication of Baron’s revisionist article European authorities hold fast to the view that *The Prince* was composed during an interruption in Machiavelli’s work on the *Discourses*.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, it has become more common now for writers to seek similarities of outlook in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, or to read the *Discourses* in the light of *The Prince*, as in the work of Mark Hulliung, Hanna Pitkin, and Victoria Kahn.<sup>50</sup> Albert Hirschmann’s *Passions and the Interests*, written at the same time as Pocock’s *Machiavellian Moment*, reveals a somewhat different Machiavelli, one who anticipates the ideas of early capitalist theorists, rather than a Machiavelli who recapitulates the classical doctrine of the suppression of the appetites.<sup>51</sup> In these studies we find a serious effort to restore to our reading of Machiavelli his forceful *critique* of classical political thought, as evidenced in his espousal of very different ideas concerning imperialism, faction, class, and the moral appetites. Thus the important ways in which Machiavelli’s republicanism differed from that of Aristotle or Cicero are becoming once again visible.<sup>52</sup> One can hardly

<sup>49</sup> For endorsements of Baron’s chronology, see Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 185–86; Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 50; John M. Najemy, *Between Friends: Discourses of Power in the Machiavelli–Vettori Letters of 1513–1515* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 335–6; and David Wootton’s introduction to his translation of Machiavelli’s *Prince* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994). For the more widely accepted view that the *Discourses* existed in some preliminary form before the writing of *The Prince*, see John H. Geerken, “Machiavelli Studies Since 1969,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 37 (1976): 357; Bernard Guillemain, *Machiavel. L’anthropologie politique* (Geneva: Droz, 1977), 151–7; Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, I: 314–20; Paul Larivaille, *La pensée politique de Machiavel. Les Discours sur la première Décade di Tite-Live* (Nancy: Presses universitaires de Nancy, 1982); and Francesco Bausi, *I “Discorsi” di Niccolò Machiavelli: genesi e struttura* (Florence: Sansoni, 1985).

<sup>50</sup> Mark Hulliung, *Citizen Machiavelli* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984); and Victoria Kahn, “Virtù and the Example of Agathocles in Machiavelli’s *Prince*,” *Representations*, 13 (1986): 63–83; Kahn, “Reduction and the Praise of Disunion in Machiavelli’s *Discourses*,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 18 (1988): 1–19. See now Kahn’s *Machiavellian Rhetoric: From the Counter-Reformation to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>51</sup> Albert O. Hirschmann, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 13, 33, but see also 41.

<sup>52</sup> In an attempt to rescue most of the thesis of republican continuity – all save Aristotle and Greece, which he is willing to let go – Quentin Skinner has recently posited a third, intermediary strain of republicanism, lying between the ancient republicanism of Aristotle, on the one hand, and the liberal, modern republicanism of Locke, on the other. But whether this republicanism based in law is of a kind substantially different from modern republicanism is open to question. See Quentin Skinner, “The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty,” in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 293–309 and the essay by Paul Rahe in this volume.

approach the writings of Machiavelli now without wondering whether the continuities in republican vocabulary registered by Pocock might not have obscured radical differences of meaning.<sup>53</sup>

What we are witnessing in a sometimes tentative and disharmonious manner in the various fields of scholarship I have discussed is a more careful historicization of the republican tradition than we have had so far. To understand better the changes that took place, one of the places to which we shall have to return is Florence – but with a new set of questions that regard not so much the imitation and rebirth of the culture of the ancient world, as the relationship of medieval and early modern culture to the culture of modernity. This is not a new agenda – in fact it was Burckhardt's – but perhaps at the end of the twentieth century we are in a better historical position to assess the advantages and disadvantages of modern culture. If republicanism is still one of the important cords that links us to the ancient world, it is clear that the composition of its threads has changed dramatically over time. Rather than distancing ourselves from the history of republicanism and the *vita civile*, what is needed instead is to focus critical attention on the demonstrable changes that took place in the republican idea – and to undertake the substantial and important task of constructing historical explanations for those changes.

<sup>53</sup> Machiavelli's meaning certainly was not intentionally concealed, as Leo Strauss (*Thoughts on Machiavelli* [Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1958]) and some of his followers would have it. What is needed is much patient philological and historical work to reveal Machiavelli's new meanings, which appear, of course, alongside older ones. Such an effort is evident, above all, in the lifework of Gennaro Sasso (see especially his *Machiavelli e gli antichi e altri saggi*, 4 vols. [Naples and Milan: Ricciardi, 1987–97]); while Najemy's recent *Between Friends* offers another excellent model for combining the historical and the philological in studying Machiavelli.