

Spinoza and Harrington: An Exercise in Comparison

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In this lecture I shall offer a comparison between two assemblages of texts which figure in the history of political theory. The two were written by authors who can be identified as inhabiting distinct political systems and non-identical religious cultures; there is no evidence that they were aware of one another, and certainly they were not participating directly in any common debate. But they lived not far apart in time or space; they drew upon shared texts as diverse as the Bible and Machiavelli; they may be viewed as connected by some of the tissues binding western Christian culture in the later seventeenth century, and among these tissues figure certain concepts and procedures used in the construction of political and theologico-political theory. We are entitled, therefore, to ask how and why they made divergent uses of shared cultural resources. We may wish also to ask whether they, and the political and religious cultures to which they belonged, shared common, practical and theoretical problems, and whether these in turn arose from a shared history, political or social, cultural or material, in the common experience of what it is now fashionable to term 'Europe'. Pressures upon historians, on the one hand to treat 'Europe' as a given, on the other to connect the theoretical with the material life, are now so strong that they may be called hegemonic, and all hegemonies ought as a matter of course to be challenged. I shall confine myself to saying that the tracing of such connections must be subject to the rules of evidence and interpretation; when they can be found it is of greatest value to find them, but when they do not emerge we have not necessarily failed in the historian's endeavour. Our mission is to find what we are capable of finding, and to enlarge our capacities as we are capable of enlarging them.

Professor Kossmann has done much — and the same may be said of other participants in this conference — to make the vocabulary and theory of politics in the Dutch Republic known to scholars who work in the language I am myself employing; and I am about to juxtapose — let me not numb you with reiteration of the word 'compare' — political treatises written by an author resident in London and Westminster with others written by one resident in Amsterdam and The Hague. Now it could have happened — as perhaps it did with John Selden and Hugo Grotius — that authors resident at these points shared in a medium of communication and in the languages transmitted along it; that they were writing to or about one another and engaging in a common discourse. But this does not seem to have been the case with James Harrington and Baruch (or Benedict) de Spinoza. Though they died in the same year (1677) I do not think they knew of each other, and

though it can be said that they dealt with comparable problems, it can be said, and I shall show, that they conceptualised and stated their problems in such sharply different terms as to raise the question of what we mean when we say that their problems were comparable, and whether we are saying anything that either author, or any contemporary reader of both texts (had there been one), could have recognised. If we are not, we may still be doing something meaningful, but the question must next arise of what that something is and with what intellectual agencies we are interacting when we do it. Comparative history raises difficult and proliferating problems, precisely because it is by definition the comparison of the dissimilar and the disconnected; in this case, furthermore, the problems rapidly assume a hermeneutic character.

I shall be comparing certain texts by Harrington 1 — in particular *The Commonwealth of Oceana* — which he published or wrote between 1656 and 1662, when his active life as an author seems to have ended, with certain texts by Spinoza² — in particular the *Tractatus Politicus* — written between 1670 and 1677, when his work on the treatise mentioned was interrupted by his death. Since the writing of the texts forms no part of any shared action intended by the two authors — i. e., neither wrote with reference to any perceived action by the other — I am obliged to state at the outset why I am selecting the two assemblages of texts and offering to construct a comparison between them; and since at the outset it is the texts which I have before me, it is to be presumed that it is elements of the content, the structure, or the attendant contexts of the two that I am selecting and offering to compare. What then am I going to select, and what meaningful act do I think I shall be performing in making the comparison? As we have seen, comparison implies dissociation. If Harrington and Spinoza had been debating with one another, or if Spinoza had been seeking to refute Harrington, I would not have compared them but would have written the story of the debate between them; as it is, however, I must be saying that the two assemblages of texts are similar but dissimilar in ways that it is meaningful to comment on. I may wish to emphasise either the similarities or the dissimilarities; that is, I may emphasise that they possessed similar, or shared, characteristics, but developed these in dissimilar ways, or I may emphasise that they exhibit characteristics which are dissimilar in ways that it is useful to contrast with each other. There may be no need to explain why A is not B, but it can be illuminating to describe A in terms of its not being B. However, it is not usually illuminating to say that a book is not a black hole, and descriptive contrast usually implies that it might have been true or false to suppose that the two dissimilars were in fact similar. At this point arises the danger that we may be constructing straw men, i.e. supposing fallacies for the sake of dispelling them: a procedure which is often uneconomical, and sometimes leaves us imprisoned in our own

1 References to *The Political Works of James Harrington*, edited with an introduction by J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge, 1977).

2 References to Benedict de Spinoza, *The Political Works: the Treatises Theologico-Politicus in Part and the Tractatus Politicus in Full*, edited and translated with an introduction and notes by A. G. Wernham (Oxford, 1958).

straw. I must therefore state what similarities and dissimilarities I select from the assemblages of texts by Harrington and Spinoza, and why I am going to treat them in the way — whatever it be — that I am; and, among other obligations, I must make it clear whether I claim that the similarities and dissimilarities were, or would have been, apparent to the minds of Harrington and Spinoza as historically determined, or whether I mean that they are apparent only to the minds of myself and my like-minded contemporaries. This is an important, perhaps the central, hermeneutic problem in what I am or may be doing.

What do the two assemblages of texts have, or appear to have, in common? *Prima facie*, it appears that both erect and discuss models of government which make it possible to compare monarchy, aristocracy and democracy as forms possessing equal claims on the attention, and perhaps the esteem, of the reader. This degree alone of value-neutrality was enough to merit the epithets 'republican' and 'Machiavellian' in the discourse of seventeenth-century English, and I shall take it for granted that something similar might be said in other seventeenth-century European discourses. Both the *Commonwealth of Oceana* and the *Tractatus Politicus*, moreover, are 'Machiavellian' in the senses that they follow procedures and employ vocabularies which had been mapped out by Machiavelli, and that they use his name and allude to the problems presented by reading his works. But I do not wish to compare them as incidents in a history of European 'Machiavellism', even assuming such a history to be valid and legitimate; I intend instead to employ their 'republican' and 'Machiavellian' components in an exercise of comparison, carried out by examining texts to this extent similar, in the dissimilar but at any rate adjacent contexts in which they were written. What happened when an English gentleman wrote a 'republican' treatise in London about 1656? What happened when a Portuguese-Jewish philosopher wrote a 'republican' treatise in The Hague about 1677? The answers to these questions, as we come to know them, will compel a re-examination of what we were doing when we applied the adjective 'republican' to one assemblage of texts and to the other. Whether the exercise will become a contribution to a comparative study of English and Dutch republicanism, or to one of the modes of discourse constituting English and Dutch 'political theory' remains to be seen; we do not yet know if such a 'comparative history' can usefully be written, or if the comparison we are attempting is a useful way of trying to write it.

Harrington wrote in English; Spinoza in Latin. Harrington was by birth a member of the English governing classes; Spinoza was by birth a culturally exotic and marginal incomer to Holland, where the governing classes were very differently constructed. Harrington wrote after the dramatic collapse of the English monarchy, at a time when it seemed possible that England might become a republic in some sense never before legitimate or even thinkable; Spinoza wrote after the no less dramatic collapse of the stadholderless regime, but at a time when republican modes of government had by no means lost their accustomed legitimacy in Holland. Such differentia as these — and there are others — can be loosely termed 'contextual' and used as means of explaining why texts display deep-seated dissimilarities at the very

points where they display apparent similarities; by doing so we can construct accounts of how similarity becomes dissimilarity, though this is not necessarily to explain why the similarities were present, or apparent, in the first place. But there is a certain randomness, or at least arbitrariness, about the choice of differences of context when these are initially external to the text; and though I cannot avoid selection, I wish to begin by selecting differentia which may be termed interior to either the form, the content or the premisses of the two assemblages of texts, and proceeding from these to any less immediate contextual differences which they may indicate.

Let me then select the proposition that Spinoza was a philosopher, while Harrington was not but must be termed something else. This is not altogether an arbitrarily chosen interpretative generalisation on my part; Spinoza would have known what was meant by calling him a philosopher and would not, I submit, have objected to the epithet as he understood it. He might not have objected to the further proposition that a philosopher was one who reasoned from first principles concerning the nature of phenomena. It is true that the *Tractatus Politicus* opens with a somewhat acid account³ of how philosophers (*philosophi*) behave in the presence of political reality; they endeavour, says Spinoza, to divorce themselves from the passions that afflict mankind, and so produce accounts of political society in which mankind is displayed as acting as it would if it were not so afflicted. Such accounts may be considered as satires or as Utopias, but are never the kind of theory which can possibly be applied in practice. This scornful description, however, does not issue in a proposal to abandon political philosophy as such. Philosophers are next contrasted with statesmen (*politici*), who thoroughly understand practice but are guided by no theory whatever, and consequently by no reasoned ethical norms, and are justly suspected of following no principle except that of manipulating men's actions as best they can. To replace these *philosophi* and *politici*, Spinoza offers to construct a *scientia* which will deduce 'ex ipsa humanae naturae conditione ... ea quae cum praxi optime conveniunt ... eadem animi libertate, qua res mathematicas solemus [inquirere]'⁴; a liberty of mind which will be altogether objective. Though *philosophi* is not a term used of its practitioners, this *scientia* is an instance of what would come to be known as 'the new philosophy', deducing facts from principles with mathematical rigour; and Spinoza, whose life was given to the construction of such *scientia*, belongs to the history of European philosophy as we are accustomed to write it.

If we turn now to Harrington, we find that he shared Spinoza's view of *politici*, whom he called 'ministers of state', and blamed for acting without understanding the springs of their own action⁵. We may therefore be tempted to engage in rhetoric which depicts him as offering a *scientia* of the same kind as Spinoza's; but far from there being any trace of a mathematical model in his writings, he actually furnished

3 *Tractatus Politicus*, I, 1, 260-261.

4 *Ibidem*, I, 4, 262-263.

5 'Oceana', *Political Works of James Harrington*, 258; 'A System of Politics', *ibidem*, chapter X, 1,851-854.

one of the earliest modern denunciations of quantitative political science. 'Mathematicians, it is true', he wrote, 'pretend to be the monopolists of demonstration; but speak ingenuously, have they, as to the politics, hitherto given any other demonstration than that there is difference between seeing and making of spectacles' 6? I wish I could add that he knew Spinoza was a lens-grinder by trade, but I have no reason to suppose he ever heard of him at all; the mathematicians he had in mind were Wilkins, Wallis and Ward, the Oxford professors also attacked by Thomas Hobbes. Harrington had Baconian and Helmontian leanings, but he did not belong to the new philosophy any more than to the old, and he is not engaged in trying to construct a deductive model of human nature and the natural world.

It is not only by the presence or absence of the mathematical-deductive model that we may judge that Spinoza was a philosopher and Harrington was not. Spinoza was also a philosopher of politics in the sense that he deduced the coming into existence of political society from principles of human nature and principles of natural right; in what is generally held to be the mainstream of European political philosophy, his philosophy is juristic and the concepts of nature and right are for him inseparable. There is a state of nature in which all men, and it is nearly possible to add all things, have right (*jus*) to be what they are and to do what is necessary to preserve their own being. It follows that right is power, since both are modalities of existence; at this stage of the analysis, men have right to do all that they can and are free to do all that they must. We are at the heart of that discourse of *jus* — often miscalled the discourse of liberalism — which flows from the perception that *jus* means both right and power and can be used in the construction of a juristic conception of nature. Because men are both rational and passionate animals, however, the strengths and weaknesses of their nature combine to make them recognise that they need systems of justice, or adjudication of conflicting claims based in natural right, and that the pursuit of justice elaborates the character of both the moral and the political life which they lead in common. Since the determination of norms is the work of a sovereign judge rather than of individual reason, it is natural that men surrender the exercise of rights which they have in nature to such a judge, whom they make sovereign and a lawgiver by doing so; yet the concept of nature is strengthened rather than weakened when the 'state of nature' is left behind.

Political philosophy, therefore — the deduction of authority from a model of nature grounded upon a concept of right — was by the middle of the seventeenth century, *ex hypothesi*, an exercise in the constitution of sovereignty which was at the same time an exercise in the constitution of right. The advantage of describing political philosophy as a 'discourse of *jus*' is that it brings us face to face with the dual meanings of that term. But it is a consequence that political philosophy so defined must be an exercise in the definition, the justification, and the genetics of sovereignty, hardly at all of its distribution. When Spinoza has completed those chapters of the *Tractatus Politicus* in which the genesis of sovereignty is explained, he begins to consider the forms of government and the manner of its exercise in

6 'The Prerogatives of Popular Government', I, *ibidem*, chapter VIII, 431.

each. The forms are the classic triad of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy; but the only differential between them must be that sovereignty is lodged in one man, a few men, or all men. It can make no difference to the nature of sovereignty itself where it is lodged, since the nature of sovereignty is to be absolute; as we begin to consider the distribution and exercise of sovereignty, we begin leaving the universe of nature, which is the province of the philosopher, and entering that of contingency, which is the province of someone else — perhaps the jurist, perhaps the historian, perhaps any exponent of the wisdom of experience. The only possible modification of this principle by Spinoza may exist in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, where it is remarked that democracy is the most natural of all forms of government ⁷, apparently because here there is least separation between the individuals who have transferred their rights to the sovereign and the individuals constituting the sovereign to whom right is transferred. But with the constitution of sovereignty the work of philosophy seems to come to an end, and all that the philosophy of sovereignty has achieved is to ensure that philosophy will remain the queen of the sciences even when the jurist or the historian has moved centre-stage in the ancillary role of considering sovereignty in its exercise.

At this point we encounter the important consideration that though Spinoza would have been the first to say that he was living in a republic and was its obedient subject — since he was not a burgher we had better not call him a citizen — there are several senses in which he was not a republican theorist at all. We must use language carefully here. The Latin 'res publica' and the English 'commonwealth' could of course be used neutrally, as terms for any political society whether kingless or (as was more probable) not; but the words had begun (by whatever routes) to acquire associations with kinglessness, and Spinoza was prepared, as we have seen, to separate monarchy from aristocracy and democracy and to give parity of esteem or even preference to one or both of the latter. Europe was full of articulate persons who believed that monarchy was specially favoured by God, and would probably have considered Spinoza a republican (or atheist) merely because he was impartial as between the three forms. But he was impartial in part at least because the form of government was of secondary concern to the philosopher. Philosophy identified political life with the existence of sovereignty, and what differentiated monarchy from aristocracy or democracy was the location of sovereignty, not its genesis or nature. It would have been permissible to say that all three were republics, if by 'res publica' were meant simply sovereign authority — a perfectly legitimate use of words. Unless we place an exclusive and hegemonic emphasis on his dictum that democracy is the most 'natural' mode of government, there is not much to show that Spinoza thought it important to the individual to take part in the exercise of sovereignty over himself; he more than once defines the political good as living quietly, obeying the laws and exercising liberty of mind — which is a long way from the *vivere civile* of the Florentines. The subject of

7 *Tractatus Politicus*, chapter XVI, 136-137.

sovereign power seems to be a subject, not a citizen, if the two words be invested with separate meanings.

I am defining, not denying, a sense in which the adjective 'republican' can be applied to Spinoza's political thinking; and the moment has come to ask whether I am also isolating a general statement which can be made about political thinking at large in the seventeenth-century Netherlands. To James Harrington it appeared that the Republic of the Netherlands was not a commonwealth — or in that sense a republic — but a league or confederation of commonwealths⁸; and there are passages in both of Spinoza's treatises which appear to say the same thing. Since there was no unified commonwealth or state, there was no unified sovereignty either; and Spinoza was one of those who held that sovereignty had always been vested in the States (whom he calls *ordines*) of Holland (and by implication, I suppose, of other provinces), and that they had never given it up to the Counts of Holland or any of their successors, but had always retained the right to resume it in the event of usurpation⁹. What these *ordines* exercise is regularly described by such Latin terms as *jus supremae majestatis* and *imperium*, which in English are translated as 'sovereignty'; but it is clear that in the Netherlands the ideology of 'sovereignty' was a justification of the local and particular powers in whose hands it lay, not in the unity, *majestas* or *imperium* of any *respublica ordinum*. In the *Tractatus Politicus*, written after 1672, we read indeed of a 'subita ... ejusdem reipublicae eversio', which arose 'ex deformi ejusdem imperii statu et paucitate regentium', but this does not mean that Holland (of which alone Spinoza seems to be writing) was a single oligarchy unified in too few hands. It was rather a 'corpus sine capite' in which the 'subditi plerique ignoraverint penes quos summa esset imperii potestas'¹⁰. The republic is seen to have failed because sovereignty was not unified or intelligible; yet the paradox is that the language of sovereignty has been used as a means of keeping it scattered and incoherent. I shall suggest that it is an effect of this paradox that Spinoza can conceive of a republic only in terms of a transfer of sovereignty into the hands of a few or a many; and I shall show that this is not the only way of conceiving of a republican form of government.

It would be possible to conclude, from the writings of Professor Kossmann and others, that the political thinking of the Republic of the Netherlands was exclusively Bartolist, in the sense that it was concerned only with a devolution of *imperium* upon *civitates*. The Seven Provinces, a fragment of an older *Burgunderkreise* which had wielded great power on the western marches of the Holy Roman Empire, broke away from an *imperium* which had passed into Spanish hands, and claimed first that *imperium* (or *majestas*) had devolved upon them in consequence of misrule, second that it was theirs aboriginally and had never been given up. If for a moment we view such claims in Italian terms, they will appear rather Lombard than Tuscan, rather Ghibelline than Guelf, rather Milanese than Florentine. This is to

8 'Oceana', *Political Works of James Harrington*, 241, 261, 263.

9 *Tractatus Politicus*, chapter XVIII, 202-203.

10 *Ibidem*, IX, 14, 426-427.

say, they have their starting point, and they remain, within a concept of *imperium*, and do not make the dramatic assertion, put forward by a few Florentines, that the origins of the commonwealth antedate, if not *imperium* itself, at least any *lex regia de majestate*. This assertion liberated a few Florentine thinkers from the necessity of conceiving politics in terms of the generation of *majestas* and the subsequent alternatives of its retention by the *populus* or its translation to the *princeps*, its translation to a sovereign on conditional or on unconditional terms. A discourse of *imperium* must result in either a populist or an absolutist theory of sovereignty, and we conceive the mainstream of European political thought as the conduct of this discourse by jurists and (as we have seen) philosophers; but it was possible to go behind *imperium* and arrive at something more like a discourse of *polis*.

In such a discourse sovereignty, *majestas* or *imperium*, will be at once more and less central. Because it is assumed to be inherent in the assembly of the citizens, who are *zoa kata phusin politika*, it will not be necessary to specify its origin or its transfer to any authority distinguishable from the *ekklesia*. The subject will be the distribution, not the alienation, of the powers of government and the exercise of the moral life; the being naturally political will appear one who rules and is ruled in his own person, not one whose original constitution of his own nature entails the alienation of his own capacities to another person artificially, created. Which of the two discourses I am outlining has been the more fruitful in political self-understanding is a question useless to debate.

It is a consequence, at all events, that Spinoza's understanding of *res publica* was predicated exclusively upon the alienation of sovereignty into the hands of a one, a few, or a many; and if we confine the term 'republic' to the non-monarchical forms, these will appear (as they did to Bodin or Hobbes) nothing more than modes of locating a sovereignty which is essentially always the same. But this formalisation of sovereignty arose from conceiving it as a thing to be alienated, so that even its retention by the people had the effect of giving the people a dual personality. There was an alternative approach, in which self-government was conceptualised not as a *jus* but as a *virtus*, an attribute of personality which it was meaningless to think of giving away; and in this scheme monarchy, aristocracy and democracy appeared not as three incompatible modes of locating an alienated sovereignty, but as three modes of exercising power contained within the *politeia* itself. Since sovereignty was diffuse to the point where it was hardly defined as an original *res* at all, it was perfectly possible to think of three (or more) modes of exercising it as existing at the same time; and therefore there could arise theories of shared, mixed and balanced government, to which the epithet 'republican' could come to be attracted. It is these which are apparently not to be found in Spinoza. The *Tractatus Politicus* is incomplete, but I do not find any hint that the three modes of sovereignty were going to be exhibited in combination; and it is easy to fit Spinoza's thinking into a juristic model which would make mixed government formally impossible. I will not ask — since others must already know — how far theories of mixed government became part of Netherlandish political discourse; but I will proceed to show that in English discourse such a theory assumed a central role, and could

become at one and the same time a doctrine of conjoint sovereignty, which was monarchical, and one of the separation of powers, which was republican. This is why David Hume found it necessary to devote an essay to the question 'whether the British government inclined more to absolute monarchy or a republic', a problem which would have had a very different meaning if posed in Dutch or Walloon. Spinoza might have supposed that the Dutch government must be one or the other; scarcely that it was a mixture of the two.

We come at this point upon a complex and deepening set of problems. The political order of the Netherlands was one of plurality, with little unifying structure, yet the theory of politics used to legitimate it entailed a concept of absolutely transferable sovereignty. The political order of England was one of unity; there was a common weal or *communitas regni*, unified by a monarchy whose judicial and legislative sovereignty could be traced to Domesday Book and beyond; yet among the organising theories used in it came to be one of mixed and balanced government, capable of assuming a republican form in theory and (ultimately, beyond the Atlantic) in practice. It was as if the concept of the state were invented and cherished where the thing did not exist, mistrusted and modified where it did; as if the function of political theory were corrective and counterfactual, or in Spinoza's terms satiric and Utopian. In England, the theory of mixed government — not, by the way, the same thing as mixed monarchy — arose from the unity of the realm's sovereign institutions, and was used in an attempt to guard sovereignty when it was threatened and to restore it when it had broken down. In the present state of the history of English political theory, we see this attempt beginning with that crucial move, the issue in the king's name of *His Majesty's Answer to the Nineteen Propositions of Parliament* in the summer of 1642. This manifesto presented monarchy, aristocracy and democracy — in English terms king, lords and commons — not as three possible localities of sovereignty, but as three possible modes of exercising power; each had its strength and weaknesses, and the wisdom of the ancestors had combined them, 'as far as human prudence can contrive', in such a way that the virtues of each checked and controlled the degenerative tendencies latent in the others. The allusion to prudence is important because it informs us that the creation of such a balance was not only not an act performed by philosophers — that after all is obvious and trivial — but equally not a process to be rendered intelligible by philosophers investing human nature with *jus* and tracing its transfer to the exercise of *imperium*. It may be doubted whether such a philosopher would ever arrive at a theory of mixed government, from which it would follow that the construction of such a theory must be pursued by someone else. Certainly the philosopher had yet to make his appearance on the English political stage; he had gone to Paris, taking the text of *De Cive* with him.

The *Answer to the Nineteen Propositions* may be read in at least two ways. It is a theory of conjoint sovereignty, in the sense that when the three powers are at unity they jointly exercise every known mode of government; but it is also a theory of the separation of powers, in the sense that nothing maintains their unity except their ability to balance one another. (I should find it easy to believe that the latter

concept was understood by Netherlands theorists, less easy to believe that they saw it expressed in a central complex of governing institutions). The *Answer to the Nineteen Propositions* was intended as a last-minute attempt to preserve the threatened unity of king, lords and commons; but when it failed, and the three drew sword against one another—civil war, in this sense, was an experience unknown to Netherlands — it could designate no one of the three as empowered by the balance to restore the balance. The victor in such a conflict might derive from heaven a right of conquest, and this might empower him to set up what form of government he pleased; 'human prudence' might possibly advise him to re-create balanced government in some more durable form. The *jus conquestus* formed part of the vocabulary of *jus gentium*, and this was one of the routes by which the doctrines of Hugo Grotius passed into England; but if the construction of the balance was the work of human prudence, it must draw on more sources of wisdom than a theory of *jus* could alone provide. Civil philosophy and the discourse of *jus* were very much prevalent in England; but there were, and there were needed, other modes of political discourse as well.

The experience of civil war predictably had the effect of convincing some English theorists that the scheme of balanced government was unworkable. By 1648 Sir Robert Filmer was writing *The Anarchy of a Limited or Mixed Monarchy*, and a few years later Thomas Hobbes was to follow with a theory of unmixed sovereignty very differently constructed, of which I need say only that it reveals Hobbes to have been a jurist and philosopher in the same way that Spinoza was. His works were soon available in Latin and well known to the learned in the Netherlands, where they reinforced a discourse of sovereignty already well established in an often republican form. In England Hobbes could be read only as lodging sovereignty in monarchical hands, but this is the point at which England generated a political philosophy communicable to lands of *imperium* and civil law. I have offered however, to compare Spinoza with Harrington, and the point of doing so is proving to be that it enables me to say that English republican theory was grounded on mixed government rather than on sovereignty, on prudence rather than philosophy, and on sources of learning which were humanist rather than jurist. The question I must leave open is whether these dichotomies distort the nature of Dutch political discourse; in other words, whether the latter is distorted by supposing its sole or dominant vocabulary to have been that used by Spinoza.

Harrington in 1656 was attempting to reconstruct the theory of mixed government in a form applicable to England, and took that form to be republican in a sense which excluded monarchy. That is to say, he shared the assumption, momentarily possible after 1649, that the king and the lords had failed to establish the balance of governing powers which had been claimed as their accomplishment, and had now disappeared from the English political scene. The grounds which he gave for both these assertions were historical and not juristic, and the language in which he posed and offered to solve the problems of English government was a historical language. The processes by which such a language came to be put together in seventeenth-century England are now to some extent understood; on the

one hand, it drew on Roman and Spartan history as interpreted by Machiavelli and other Florentines, with their emphasis on the significance of keeping the sword in the hands of free citizens who were neither vassals nor mercenaries; on the other, it drew on English history as interpreted by common lawyers and antiquaries, with their need to come to terms with the conquest by the Normans and the introduction of feudal tenures. Harrington's understanding of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, and of civil government in general, is situated wholly within the historical schema formed by the convergence of these discourses; it is not situated within the natural and juristic schema formed by the convergence of philosophy with jurisprudence. There can have been no political theorist since Machiavelli in whose mind the philosophy of civil law had less place than it had in Harrington's.

In contrasting Harrington with Spinoza, we have been led to emphasise the presence, though not the hegemony, in English political discourse of a complex historical language, humanist in its origins, which pointed to other political conclusions than did the language of natural jurisprudence. It was impossible to formulate a theory of sovereignty without employing the concepts of nature, *jus* and *imperium*, and it seems arguable that the order of this sentence could be reversed. In order to formulate a theory of mixed government, one did not have to deny the state of nature and the genesis of natural right, but there was no need to employ these concepts because one would be using another mode of discourse. In the latter, moreover, the individual might be a citizen by nature; in the other, he could become a subject only by alienation. From Harrington we learn that the humanist mode of discourse was prevalent in England; from Hobbes that the juristic mode was prevalent there too. From Spinoza we learn only that the latter was prevalent in Holland; we have so far learned nothing about the presence or absence of the former.

At this point we encounter a substantive problem in ideology. Harringtonian humanist discourse — like much of the discourse of English common law — was formed by supposing relationships between law, arms, civic capacity and land, and was quite consciously linked with the presence, interests and rhetoric of a landowning gentry. It was both assumed and asserted that the citizen who must possess his own arms must normally, though not invariably, be a freeholder possessed of real property, and it was doubted whether those engaged in the manufacture and exchange of moveable goods could be citizens in the political sense; this point is as crucial in the social theory of Adam Smith as it is in that of Harrington. When the latter, and those like him, looked at the Netherlands, they saw Holland and believed it to be a society in which most of the population was engaged in trade and manufacture; and they affirmed that individuals so engaged could not be called from their desks and benches, as peasants could be called from the plough, to serve in the legions. Holland must therefore be, like Carthage, Venice and other commercial republics, a Machiavellian 'commonwealth for preservation'; it must employ mercenary soldiers and be ruled by an oligarchy. The question is not whether they were right, but — I follow here the valuable lead given us by Dr. Haitsma Mulier — how far Dutch political thinkers expressed a view of themselves

based on the antithesis between real and moveable property. I understand that there existed a class of arms-bearing landed gentry beyond the IJssel, but I do not know if they articulated any political ideology of their own, though I have been assured by Professor Kossmann that it is in vain to search for any East Netherlands 'country party' in the troubles of the eighteenth century. This would imply that there did not develop any Dutch 'civic humanism' based on the association of land with military and civic virtue, in which case I should still like to know what the Netherlands nobility and gentry thought of themselves. Possibly they accepted paradigms of political behavior formulated by the burghers to the west of them; possibly they saw themselves as the servants of a real prince and a theoretical state, which would tend to make the development of Dutch political theory more like that of German. But if the assertion that the citizen must bear arms did not base itself in the Netherlands on the possession of land, one would next want to ask whether it was based on the possession of moveable property. There seems no reason why there could not have arisen a 'civic humanism' (to use that term) whose symbolic figure was less Cincinnatus called from the plough than Captain Banning Cocq and the Night Watch.

Burgher militias were as possible in Amsterdam as they had been in London, and only in gentrified England and Scotland was it assumed that a militia could only be based on the county as a unit of organization; the British, one must remember, have never understood what a bourgeoisie is, or had a word for it. But if this did not happen either — or if one concluded that Dutch political thought lacked the constant English tension between real property and moveable, militia and standing army — one might decide that it lacks a developed humanist character and remains fundamentally juristic. These are merely speculative questions, to which I desire to know less the answers than whether they are the right questions to ask, and if not, what questions are. This is where an exercise in the comparative history of political thought tends to leave one.

Spinoza's *Tractatus Politicus* supplies us with a certain amount of information. Having completed his analysis of sovereignty and the subject's relation to it, Spinoza turns to consider the forms of government and constructs ideal models of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy one after the other. It is here that he uses Machiavellian materials and assumes postures of Machiavellian detachment. But there is a sharper caesura between this part of his work and that preceding it than anything we may find in Harrington, for whom the characteristics of each form of government are part of its previous history in nature. All of Spinoza's moral intensity has gone into his erection of a theory of sovereignty; if he is morally detached in considering the practice which follows from locating it with this or that group, it is because the exercise of sovereignty is detached from its essence. Like Harrington, he constructs models aimed at showing how each of the three forms may be protected against its own weaknesses, but because he does not aim at combining them in a perfect mixed government, he does not provide them with a common history.

We have his models for monarchy and aristocracy in what seems to be their

completed form, and in each there are some remarkable reflections on the place of both arms and property in the state. In a monarchy all are to serve the sovereign in arms¹¹, and this is important not only as a means of ensuring warlike *virtù* but also as a means of ensuring that all shall furnish the sovereign with wise counsel, since their bearing of arms will interest them in the outcome of the advice they give. The citizens are to be divided into tribes, and the sovereign is to choose his own counsellors from lists which each tribe shall present; it is specially provided — as it is not in Harrington — that one counsellor from each shall be a *jurisperitus* skilled in the laws¹². In Harrington's republic the dispensation of justice is not reserved to specialists but merged in the general activity of citizenship.

It is provided that the fields, the land, and if possible the houses also shall pertain to the sovereign 'qui jus civitatis habet', and shall be leased at an annual rent to the citizens whether urban or rural. They shall pay no tax other than this rent, and the sovereign shall live of his own in time of peace, spending his revenue on ships, fortifications and his privy purposes (*usum domesticum*)¹³. Nothing is said about the duration of leases, and we may suspect that there is no association in Spinoza's mind between the tenure of property and the performance of military service; he may intend no more than that in a monarchical sovereignty *dominium* is necessarily in a single person and subjects may enjoy property only in *usus*. If we read his chapters on monarchy through Harringtonian lenses, however — if we supply the association between property, arms and citizenship which seems to be lacking here — we will at first sight suspect him of supplying the formula for a Turkish or feudal monarchy, in which all land is the king's and the subjects occupy it only on condition of military service. But there are two objections to this reading. In the first place the tenant citizenry are bound to furnish the king only with rent, and in time of war with taxes, from which it follows that their lands and houses furnish them with income and are not, as in Harrington's mind they were, the guarantee of their armed independence. From this it might follow that the function of property is to generate wealth, and that there is no necessary connection between the economy (as we might say) and the function of citizenship, which is to generate service in arms and counsel. In the second place, it is provided that the citizens, whose militia forms the only army by which the king makes war, are to serve without pay unless dependent on their own labour, expecting no profit from service other than booty¹⁴, though in time of war they will be chargeable with both rent and taxes. The conclusion seems to be that both the use of property and the performance of service are modes of subjection to sovereign authority, and that Spinoza (unlike Harrington) sees no necessary or organic connection between them; none which determines the form of the state itself. That has been predetermined by the choice of a location of sovereignty.

There is one further comment on the political sociology of property under

11 *Ibidem*, VI, 10, 318-319.

12 *Ibidem*, VI, 15, 320-321.

13 *Ibidem*, VI, 12, 320-321.

14 *Ibidem*, VI, 31, 330-331.

monarchy. Spinoza declares that since the citizens enjoy no *bona fixa*, but hold their lands and houses by an annual rent, they will be obliged to engage in trade with one another. What the economy would be if they held by hereditary right and real property he does not say, but he is not seeking to ensure an expanding capitalism. There is to be a further law prohibiting money to be lent outside the state; the citizens are to trade, but only with each other, and this will ensure their unity with one another in giving counsel or in waging war¹⁵. The shift from real to mobile property is a philosopher's provision, designed to create a city as self-contained and self-sufficient as any in Plato or Sir Thomas More; it has nothing to do with possessive individualism.

When Spinoza erects a model of aristocratic government, we might expect him to replicate these arrangements; Harrington certainly insisted that aristocracy could flourish only where the many were dependent tenants of the few. However, he specifically refuses to design any such system. The reason seems to be that he thought an aristocracy more likely to behave as a selfish dominant class, and less likely to behave as an impersonal sovereign, than a king; for he says that when the many are excluded from *imperium* by a few, they become *peregrini* and have no share in the state. If they were only leaseholders, they would be liable to take their mobile wealth and go to live somewhere else; and to retain their presence in the state, it is important that they be permitted (not compelled) to serve in the army for pay, and that they be encouraged to purchase, not to lease, their lands and houses¹⁶. The first provision, we may note, makes them mercenaries, the latter proprietors, and Spinoza does not seem attentive to any possible contradiction between the two; Machiavelli and Harrington would have joined in insisting that once the many began purchasing freeholds, the state was headed for democracy. What modes of property Spinoza thought appropriate to that form of government, the *Tractatus* breaks off without telling us.

Spinoza's perceptions of the relations between property, arms and citizenship are unlike Harrington's, and appear incoherent if we apply Harringtonian criteria to them. From this it of course follows that we should not apply those criteria, and I may not have gone far enough towards discovering criteria which show these perceptions to have been coherent in Spinoza's very coherent mind. Yet I suspect that the relationships in question were incidental in his political theory, where they were crucial and essential in that of Harrington; and I incline to connect this with the generalisation that Spinoza was a philosopher of natural jurisprudence and Harrington a Machiavellian humanist. For this reason also, the nature of politics to Spinoza rested on artifice and alienation, whereas Harrington excluded mathematics and mechanics from its study; he placed citizenship before sovereignty. It could be shown — but would require a separate lecture — that the two men differed profoundly in their theology and anthropology. Spinoza, we say, was a philosophical pantheist, but we cannot imagine him writing, as Harrington did, that 'man is a

15 *Ibidem*, VII, 8, 340-342 and 341-343.

16 *Ibidem*, VIII, 9-10, 374-376 and 375-377.

spirit, raised by the magic of nature', he was too much a Cartesian for that. Finally, the comparison of the two raises questions as to the ways in which English and Netherlandish political thought may have differed structurally and ideologically from one another; to answer such questions, we should have to compare the modes of discourse prevalent in each more widely than any two assemblages of texts, however remarkable, permit.

'Hoofsche papegaaien' of 'redelyke schepsels': Geschiedschrijvers en politiek in de Republiek in de eerste helft van de achttiende eeuw

E. O. G. HAITSM A MULIER

INLEIDING

De geschiedenis van de achttiende-eeuwse geschiedschrijving in Nederland is in grote trekken bekend. Na een hoogtepunt van humanistische geschiedschrijving halverwege de voorgaande eeuw, bereikt met het tot stand komen van de werken van Hooft en Grotius, stuit men al snel op de grote reeks van de *Vadetiandsche Historie* van de Amsterdamse geschiedschrijver Jan Wagenaar ongeveer honderd jaar later, waarna vooral de veelzijdige, scherpzinnige figuur van de Leidse hoogleraar Adriaan Kluit in het laatste kwart van de eeuw de aandacht trekt. In bijna alle studies op dit gebied van de historiografie wordt in de eerste plaats belangstelling getoond voor het nieuwe dat zich in de achttiende eeuw en haar representanten manifesteert. Dat is natuurlijk niet verwonderlijk gezien het feit dat deze eeuw sterk geïdentificeerd wordt met de Verlichting en men er derhalve toch wel vanuit kan gaan dat ook in Nederland de nieuwe denkbeelden invloed hebben uitgeoefend en met name bij het schrijven van geschiedenis. Terwijl de positie van Jan Wagenaar wat zijn vaderlandse geschiedenis in dit opzicht aangaat nog niet erg duidelijk omschreven is¹, wordt het verlichte ideaal van geschiedschrijving ten volle waargenomen in *De opkomst en bloei van de Republiek der Vereenigde Nederlanden* van Simon Stijl uit 1774. Een vlot geschreven niet van geleidingen voorzien verhaal, dat samenvatte wat bekend was en in zijn stelregels een vrijheidsideaal en zijn lotgevallen uitdroeg. Daar hebben we dan onze eerste typisch wijsgerige geschiedschrijver voor wie het zoeken of vaststellen van de feiten niet voorop stond, maar die aan rangschikken, vergelijken en het bij de politieke geschiedenis betrekken van andere aspecten van het verleden de voorkeur gaf².

1 R. J. Castendijk, *Jan Wagenaar en zijn 'Vadetiandsche Historie'* (Schiedam, 1927) roert deze vraag niet aan; L. H. M. Wessels, 'Jan Wagenaar (1709-1773). Bijdrage tot een herwaardering', in: P. A. M. Geurts, A. E. M. Janssen, ed., *Geschiedschrijving in Nederland. Studies over de historiografie van de Nieuwe Tijd* (2 dln.; 's-Gravenhage, 1981) I, 117-140, 131 spreekt van 'nauwelijks enige indruk' en *idem*, 'Jan Wagenaar's 'Remarques' (1754); a Reaction to Elie Luzac as a Pamphleteer. An Eighteenth-Century Confrontation in the Northern Low Countries', *Lias*, XI (1984) 19-82, aldaar 42, merkt op dat Wagenaar 'susceptible' is; C. Offringa, 'Classicisme en Verlichting: Wagenaar, Stijl en Van de Spiegel over de Middeleeuwen', in: H. B. Teunis, L. van Tongerloo, ed., *Middeleeuwen tussen Erasmus en heden. Bundel aangeboden aan prof. dr. F. W. N. Hugenholtz bij zijn afscheid als hoogleraar aan de Rijksuniversiteit te Utrecht* (Amsterdam/Dieren, 1986) 63-87, 76 ziet 'menig Verlichtingselement' aanwezig.

2 De literatuur over de filosofische geschiedschrijving is groot, zie bijvoorbeeld E. Chili,