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ESSAY

Republican Revivals

Anton Jäger

University of Oxford, Oxford, UK
Email: ajaeger1@hotmail.be

Quentin Skinner, *Liberty as Independence: The Making and Unmaking of a Political Ideal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025)
Bruno Leipold, *Citizen Marx: Republicanism and the Formation of Karl Marx's Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024)

> L'idéal de non-domination par autrui, cette idée complètement folle.
>
> Jean-Pierre Vernant

The republic is in peril—"the task at hand," so reads the document, "is to reverse this tide and restore [it] to its original moorings."[1] "With freedom and liberty under siege as never before," the state apparatus must be rid of corruption and venality, "a behemoth weaponized against American citizens," while the value of "independence" should again be placed at the center of a philosophy of government.[2]

To students of modern and ancient republicanism, these statements will most likely have a familiar ring—the well-honed insistence on the need for republican regeneration, the claim that "every republic needs to go through rituals of renewal based upon the revivifying principles of the original founding," the fear of public power arbitrarily exercised, the identification of liberty with independence rather than mere noninterference.[3] From a scholarly point of view, such arguments are usually associated with a tradition disturbing the pieties of an academically hegemonic liberalism, buttressed from within political philosophy and comparative political science. The latter is also typically associated with a "third" conception of liberty, lodged between the prevailing emphasis on freedom as the absence of restraint in Anglo-Saxon political theory and the ideal of self-realization usually associated with communitarian or Hegelian currents.

[1] Paul Dans, "A Note on 'Project 2025'," in Paul Dans and Steven Groves (eds.), *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise* (Washington, DC, 2023), xii–xiv at xiv.

[2] Ibid.

[3] John Patrick Diggins, "Republicanism and Progressivism," *American Quarterly* 37/4 (1985), 572–98, at 584.

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None of these traditions are the provenance of the lines cited above. Instead, they appear in one of the opening paragraphs of the 2025 Presidential Transition Project, a practical program for the ongoing Trump presidency drafted by the Heritage Foundation.[4] The document sets out policy signposts to reorient the American state, from loyalty checks for civil servants, to interventions in public-school curricula, to a full-throated reorganization of the imperial tutelage system—here posing as the emanation of a "small-r" republican tradition claiming forebears such as Lincoln, Madison, and Jefferson.[5] Judging from the paragraph, republicans committed to nondomination are now more numerous on the right than on the left, as Alex Gourevitch and Corey Robin already bemoaned in 2020. While the left once understood freedom as emancipation from the economy," they claim, "the right spent the twentieth century neutralizing and appropriating the idea of freedom."[6]

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Two recent monographs offer a powerful corrective to this perceived right-wing monopoly, including its claim on an originating republican idiom: Quentin Skinner's *Liberty as Independence: The Making and Unmaking of an Idea* and Bruno Leipold's *Citizen Marx: Republicanism and the Formation of Karl Marx's Social and Political Thought*. Declared exercises in intellectual recovery, both are hardly shy about their subversive implications for contemporary political practice and culture, moving against the seizure of the republican tradition launched from the right.

Biographically, Skinner and Leipold belong to different generations within the ever-expanding field of republicanism studies: the first is a pioneer of its initial revisionist moment in the 1960s, now a Nestor of the European history of ideas, revolutionizing and then systematizing an entire zone of research from the 1960s onwards. The second counts as a younger inheritor of said tradition, indebted to the recent burst in academic Marxology, but equally taken to the renaissance in radical-republican studies powered by scholars such as Annelien De Dijn, Alex Gourevitch, and William Clare Roberts. Operative on the intersection of history of political thought and political theory, these scholars often put forth explicit preferences for institutional design.

Even with relative overlap both books come with their own chronological and thematic priorities. For Skinner, the task is to map the genesis, efflorescence, and decline of an ideal once central to political thought and practice from antiquity to the early modern era; for Leipold, to probe the impact of republicanism on one of the nineteenth century's best-covered but also contentious thinkers. More than themed studies in republican history, both contain a normative program for how the tradition could be mobilized to criticize forms of unfreedom in the present, outside the orbit of a dominant yet myopic liberalism. In this regard they are anything but purely descriptive or analytical. Historians of political thought might "dive after pearls on the seabed"—as Hannah Arendt once described the thought of Walter Benjamin.[7] For Skinner and

[4] Peter Dans, "The Common Defense," in Dans and Groves, *Mandate for Leadership*, 87–90, at 87.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Alex Gourevitch and Corey Robin, "Freedom Now," *Polity* 52/3 (2020), 384–98, at 384.

[7] Hannah Arendt, "Introduction: Walter Benjamin, 1892–1940," in Arendt, *Illuminations* (New York, 1968), 7–60, at 38.

Leipold, the stated ambition is broader: not mere acts of archaeological retrieval, but attempts at unearthing layers of discourse still faintly visible today but snowed under, proffering the molding clay for a different political order. Finally, both can only awkwardly be grouped in the genre of "intellectual history"—sharing a pretense not just to a history of unit ideas, but to broader accounts of social, political, and cultural change from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth, here centered on a select range of republican motifs.

Liberty as Independence is the coronation of a career dedicated to the professional study of the history of ideas. It is certainly not an aggressive innovation compared to Skinner's previous work. To connoisseurs, segments of the book were already amply teased in previous publications, including handbooks on republicanism, analytical political philosophy, and contained case studies of the politics of Hobbes and Bramhall (including a range of talks to audiences academic and non-academic, in which Skinner at times felt more comfortable inhabiting the persona of a prescriptive political philosopher).[8] The continuity with this previous work is easy to discern; implicitly, Skinner's early historiography was already aimed at a set of orthodoxies in postwar political philosophy in the 1950s and 1960s, exemplified by the tradition's bifurcated vision of freedom between so-called "negative" and "positive" variants. A product of Cold War academe, this view presupposed an underlying binary between the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Benjamin Constant, which Isaiah Berlin had set up in the 1950s and later mapped onto the geopolitical boundaries of the same epoch. The latter had modeled a liberty of the commercial moderns, which sought to regulate rather than steer human behavior in increasingly complex bourgeois societies, while the former sought to retain the civic mores of the classical *polis* through popular war-making and suffrage expansion.[9] Even if contested, Berlin's binary left a lasting imprint on subsequent philosophizing on the topic, canonized in undergraduate syllabi from the 1960s onwards, and even inflecting America's self-presentation in the cultural Cold War.[10]

For Berlin, this binary was usually joined with the insistence that modern political thought had to be understood as a process of liberalism coming into its own. This vision could unite both left and right: Cold War liberals saw a homogeneous liberal tradition dedicated to constitutional government arising out of the Renaissance into the Reformation and the Age of Revolutions, while Marxists focused on the rise of the modern bourgeoisie and its quest for a suitable vehicle for capital accumulation.

[8]For pieces see Quentin Skinner, "Hobbes on the Theology and Politics of Time," in John Robertson, ed., *Time, History, and Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2023), 136–55; Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge, 2008); Skinner, *From Humanism to Hobbes: Studies in Rhetoric and Politics* (Cambridge, 2018); Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 3, *Hobbes and Civil Science* (Cambridge, 2002); Skinner, "A Third Concept of Liberty," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 117 (2002), 237–68; Skinner, "Neo-Roman Liberty: A Genealogy," in Frank Lovett and Mortimer Sellers, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Republicanism* (Oxford, 2024), pre-publication online.

[9]Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford on 31 October 1958* (Oxford, 1961). See also Samuel Moyn, *Liberalism against Itself: Cold War Intellectuals and the Making of Our Times* (New York, 2023), 39–62.

[10]See David Caute, *Isaac and Isaiah: The Covert Punishment of a Cold War Heretic* (New York, 2013), 112–16.

Both had evident methodological correlates: a "mythology of doctrines" which treated previous thinkers as teleological predecessors of its liberal synthesis (Berlin), or an "epiphenomenal" account of how ideas both expressed and tracked the rise and fall of certain classes (Althusser).[11]

Methodologically and philosophically, Skinner's work can be read as a patient correction, if not rebuttal, of this Cold War *doxa*. This first became visible in his critique of the new empirical theorists of democracy, the liberal consensus history of the 1950s which his colleague J. G. A. Pocock also contested, and which the ascent of Rawlsian or Habermasian approaches consolidated in the 1980s.[12] In the Cambridge register, such a contextualist approach was premised on the idea that readers could only achieve proper access to past thinkers when their work was placed in its original setting. Skinner's recently deceased colleague Pocock—warmly remembered in an obituary for the *Journal of the History of Ideas*—set out the battle plan for this critique in his 1976 *The Machiavellian Moment*, itself a splendid illustration of the new approach.[13] With hundreds of pages covering a dizzyingly large historical span, the book's conceptual core was nonetheless easy to discern: Pocock pleaded for the revaluation of a republican tradition conceived somewhere in the Renaissance (it was, after all, not a "Catonian" but a "Machiavellian" moment he was after) and persisting into the age of the revolutions of the eighteenth century.[14] It was different both from the Marxism born in the nineteenth century and from the liberalism which Cold Warriors celebrated as the West's great civilizational achievement. Its central categories were not so much ahistorical notions of freedom or equilibrium but virtue and corruption, two concepts with an immediate historical index to Pocock. This republican tradition, he claimed, had been obscured or retrospectively collapsed into other hegemonic political traditions, its distinctiveness lost to the historical record.

Published after the 1973 oil price shock, the book inevitably reflected other elements: the declinist mood in the US after Nixon's retreat from Vietnam and worries about imperial adventurism, including the idea that the former settler colony had irreversibly shed its status as a small agrarian republic and become an industrial empire. As the historian Mira Siegelberg noted, this mood continued to shape Pocock's own thinking in the 1960s; unconsciously, Pocock claimed, Americans still conducted their debates in these older republican categories.[15] Yet the ascent of postwar liberalism meant that they inhabited a political culture they did not understand, rendering at least part of Skinner and Pocock's revisionist ambition therapeutic: an attempt at American and European self-understanding, rather than a direct call to action.

[11] See Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 1, *Regarding Method* (Cambridge, 2002), 24, 145–65.

[12] Quentin Skinner, "The Empirical Theorists of Democracy and Their Critics: A Plague on Both Their Houses," *Political Theory* 1 (1973), 287–306; Skinner, "Habermas's Reformation," *New York Review of Books*, Oct. 1982, 35–8.

[13] Quentin Skinner, "J. G. A. Pocock: A Life in Letters," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 86 (2025), 1–19.

[14] See J. G. A. Pocock, "States, Republics, and Empires: The American Founding in Early Modern Perspective," in J. G. A. Pocock and Terrence Ball, eds., *Conceptual Change and the Constitution* (Wichita, 1988), 55–77, at 65.

[15] Mira Siegelberg, "Things Fall Apart: J. G. A. Pocock, Hannah Arendt, and the Politics of Time," *Modern Intellectual History* 10/1 (2013), 109–34.

Pocock and Skinner's rediscovery never had a pretense of complete novelty. German scholars such as Hans Baron had already discerned a "small-r" republican tradition in the 1950s, while nineteenth-century scholars as Jean Charles Léonard de Sismondi eulogized Italian city republics in the same classical tonality.[16] Keeping the downfall of the Weimar Republic in mind, Baron stated that Machiavelli had devised an offensive theory of how republics could guard themselves against instability and halt a potential slide into tyranny. Their version of the argument acquired a newly iconoclastic slant in the 1970s, however, when dominant orientations in political thought were still firmly organized around the idea that modernity meant the culmination, for better or for worse, of a liberal tradition, enshrined in Daniel Bell and Raymond Aron's insistence that the 1960s had witnessed "an end of ideology," or Berlin's partisan preference for the American half in the Cold War.[17]

One line of attack proved particularly prominent in this counteroffensive, closely related to the interpretive formula that Skinner himself had pioneered.[18] Against Berlin's tendency to pack Stalin, Constant, and Rousseau in one and the same transhistorical seminar, it cast their theories as illocutionary interventions in debates with direct political valence. No moment more clearly evinced this quality than the epoch in which Berlin's opposition between two visions was first set up. The latter often claimed that it was first officialized by Constant. Against this late conception, Skinner claimed that the origins of Berlin's ideal in fact lay further back, in the "general crisis of the seventeenth century" and the debates on the Stuart state culminating in the Civil War.[19] Rather, the adaptation of the negative ideal could be traced to a battle retrospectively won by a certain camp of Royalist pamphleteers, which began to give up on divine-right defenses of kingship and instead looked for more egalitarian arguments for royal power (most famously defended by Thomas Hobbes). In the 1650s, Hobbes's anti-patriarchal defense of Stuart absolutism birthed a more restrictive notion of liberty than the one championed by Parliamentarian writers. This notion was less demanding than the ancient ideal of the *liber homo*, less conceptually ambiguous, unabashedly modern in its disregard for status hierarchies, and better suited to the administrative rationalization which the English monarchy embarked on in the 1620s.[20] Rather than Berlin's philosophical proposition, Hobbes's plea for negative liberty was self-consciously partisan, pitted against the fantasies of a new Rome which Cromwell and other republicans had traded in.

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[16]Hans Baron, *Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (New York, 1966); Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism*, vol. 2, *Essays on the Transition from Medieval to Modern Thought* (New York, 2019); Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1, *The Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1978); Skinner, "Introduction," in Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (New York, 1988), i–xi; J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (New York, 1976); Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (London, 1972); Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford, 1998).

[17]See Christopher Hitchens, "Moderation or Death: Isaiah Berlin," *London Review of Books* 20/23 (1998), 3–11. See also John A. Hall, *Ernest Gellner: An Intellectual Biography* (London, 2014), 141, where the latter classifies Berlin as the "CIA's John Stuart Mill."

[18]Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 1, *Regarding Method*.

[19]Eric Hobsbawm, "The General Crisis of the European Economy in the 17th Century," *Past and Present* 5 (1954), 33–53.

[20]Neal Wood, "The Social History of Political Theory," *Political Theory* 6/3 (1978), 345–67.

This was anything but a purely antiquarian endeavor. By refusing the debate's polarization into these two camps, Skinner claimed, the history of political thought could also prove its worth for political theory, helping it gain consciousness of its own prehistory. It could recover a tradition once central to European political culture, treated as heritage even, yet increasingly shunned in a postwar culture in which liberalism pretended to be the *telos* of world history and in which the term "republic" had been emptied of polemical meaning.[21] Even if Skinner's critiques at times had a slightly backward-looking quality—reminiscent of Marx's bourgeois revolutionaries draped in "Roman garb and with Roman phrases"—the import of history to theory was all too clear to see here.[22] Berlin's binary did not exhaust all imaginable options; there was a world of political thinking and acting to be recovered.

Until recently, these remained predominantly sidelong interventions. Never did Skinner attempt a book-length philosophical defense of the "third" notion of liberty that he was often seen to champion, and for which Hobbes served as the first mighty antagonist. A shorter essay on *Liberty before Liberalism* set out a program of research but never moved into prescriptive theorizing.[23] Instead, lectures gestured at the unsettling consequences for dominant understandings in political philosophy, and how the disconnect between history and theory could handicap the latter. To more socially minded historians of ideas, such as Canadian Marxists Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neal Wood, this payoff seemed all too meagre, even in contrast to Berlin's liberal bromides. "There is certainly nothing radical about Berlin," the former concluded, yet "for better or worse, there is in his argument a palpable preoccupation with social realities, domination and conflict, which is lacking in Skinner, whose republican liberty suffers from its own insensitivities."[24]

Liberty as Independence marks a departure from these more teasing gestures. Instead, it plainly focuses on what has been lost in the codification of Berlin's binary and what options lay buried beyond it. More centrally, it covers the question *when* the conception of liberty as independence was displaced from its central place in Anglo-American political culture—freedom here meant not being "subject to the exercise of arbitrary power, and … consequently able to act according to your autonomous will and live as you choose," not the simple absence of physical restraints on action (1). Inevitably, this question equally covers the problem of when the ideal of independence suffered its first legitimation crisis, contested and finally buried under new paradigms, and, more concretely, whether the motives for its abandonment warrant the costs of excluding it from our armory today. Contra some expectations, this is still a resolutely intellectual history, not the type of historically grounded political theory practiced by members of Skinner's generational cohort—such as Richard Tuck,

[21] See Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner, *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, vol. 1, *Republicanism and Constitutionalism in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 2002).

[22] Karl Marx, *Later Political Writings* (Cambridge, 1998), 33.

[23] Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998).

[24] See Ellen Meiksins Wood, "Why It Matters," *London Review of Books* 30/18 (2008), 3–6, at 6. See also Meiksins Wood, "The Social History of Political Theory," in Meiksins Wood, *Liberty and Property: A Social History of Western Political Thought from the Renaissance to Enlightenment* (London, 2012), 1–27, at 27.

Sylvana Tomaselli, or John Dunn.[25] *Liberty as Independence* tracks conceptual change rather than offering tools for critique (the conclusion to the book, for instance, will seem cursory for a book aiming to revalue the concept against contemporary noninterventionist approaches, and might strike veterans and novices of the current debate as cruelly short). Instead of articulating a positive case for his "third view," Skinner shows where it came from and what factors were paramount in suppressing it in the second half of the eighteenth century—clearly implying that the motives for its marginalization were anything but disinterested or neutral, and that its repression scars current theorizing.

Considerable depth has been added to previously scattered critiques of Berlin and Cold War liberalism, however. Above all, Skinner's book targets a period typically beyond the remit of his previous work as an early modernist—the eighteenth century, usually considered the province of other veterans of the Cambridge school, such as Istvan Hont, Gareth Stedman Jones, or Michael Sonenscher.[26] Yet the move is inevitable given the interpretive aims of the book: *Liberty as Independence*'s focus is on explaining the rise and evanescence of an ideal whose decline, so Skinner claims, can be put down more to political factors than to the inevitable implausibility it attained in a world of rising commercial complexity, as writers such as Ira Katznelson, Andreas Kalyvas, and Hont have often claimed.

In these scholars' view, the ideal of freedom as independence was too closely dependent on an agrarian gentry at relative distance from the modern financial economy, leaving no place for the new forms of commerce which had grown out of the late medieval city republics and which made the notion of a self-sufficient homestead an improbable utopia.[27] The opposition between virtue and commerce which Pocock analyzed had been muddied in the course of the eighteenth century, such authors claimed. It led thinkers such as Adam Smith to seek a careful fusion between both, while Thomas Paine hoped that modernity's passion for commerce could be used to end the historic curse of poverty.[28] This led to republics' civic humanist presuppositions' becoming an unattractively martial relic, a crisis first powerfully diagnosed in the conditional plea for commercialism by Smith, while historically bemoaned in Rousseau.[29]

Skinner's book openly contests this established Cantabrigian reading. References to a diffuse process of "commercialization," he claims, are insufficient for dating the marginalization of the third view. As he claims, liberalism might have been "'born from the spirit of republicanism' and gave it a new direction," as the rival camp insists, yet

[25] Richard Tuck, *The Sleeping Sovereign: The Invention of Modern Democracy* (New York, 2016); Tuck, *Active and Passive Citizens: A Defense of Majoritarian Democracy* (New York, 2024), John Dunn, *Setting the People Free: The Story of Democracy* (London, 2005).

[26] See Michael Sonenscher, *After Kant: The Romans, the Germans, and the Moderns in the History of Political Thought* (New York, 2023).

[27] See Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1986).

[28] See Gareth Stedman Jones, *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate* (New York, 2008).

[29] See Istvan Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith* (New York, 2015).

still cannot explain why the ideal of independence began to shimmer at the moment it did:

> The new view of liberty may well have been especially attractive to proponents of market values, and it was undoubtedly espoused and popularised by the early utilitarians. But both these lines of argument arguably suffer from the same deficiency. They fail to see that the new view of liberty long pre-dated the eighteenth-century rise of commercial society and the emergence of utilitarian political thought. As a result, both explanations fail to provide an answer to the main historical puzzle that needs to be solved. What caused the tradition of legal thinking in which the new view of liberty was embedded to ascend so suddenly to a position of ideological dominance in less than twenty years between the late 1770s and the 1790s? (175)

To Skinner, this is not a necessarily republican rescue operation—the tradition of independence should neither be confused with the more theoretically thick republicanism analyzed by Pocock (whose view of liberty was, if anything, more openly *positive*), nor is it coeval with the "nondomination" favoured by philosophically inclined republicans such as Pettit. Many of the characters in his story on liberty-as-independence would be appalled to see themselves characterized as "republicans," nor did every republican necessarily endorse a view of liberty close to the third conception (even if there clearly was tendential convergence between both). As Skinner insists, even antirepublican writers couched their arguments in the dominant categories of the Roman tradition, indicating the ecumenical standing that the ideal enjoyed until the late 1800s.

Neither did it make it a conception solely of interest to Civil War polemicists. By the middle of the seventeenth century, two concepts of liberty were available to claimants on both sides of the Civil War divide—a Gothic, negative one which identified it with absent state power, another with guarantees of freedom as pertaining to personhood rather than segmented actions. Despite its availability, Skinner shows how noninterference arguments retained a relative marginality in the British case, taken up by Continental writers such as Samuel Pufendorf after Hobbes, yet rejected by Whig thinkers such as John Locke, who stuck to the old ideal of independence, while Old Whig writers such as Bolingbroke also retained the commitment. Until deep into the eighteenth century, Skinner shows, freedom-as-independence was the abiding premise of British political thinking, both radical and establishment.

It would take a new constellation of forces to endow the Hobbesian concept with a renewed momentum. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the ideal began to face accusations different from the antique idolatry which Hobbes had still launched at it in the 1650s and 1660s. As Skinner shows, this crisis would gradually lead a Whig establishment to disavow its principle and move to an unqualified defense of liberty premised on noninterference. Its critics were internal and external; first, a group of writers who saw that a Whig establishment which had presumably achieved a free state securing independence still excluded lower-class and female subjects from full citizenship; second, imperial subjects, particularly in the New World, who thought that the Whig ideal partially applied. Later, these pressures were conjoined with the democratic activism of the 1790s, which redeployed the ideal of independence to

argue for suffrage expansion. Here, Skinner offers a newly sophisticated analysis of the provenance of the negative tradition through Hobbes, Blackstone, and Bentham, also casting a damning light on the wellsprings of utilitarianism as a tradition supposedly conceived against common-law orthodoxy. This transmission covered several stages. First, the neo-Hobbesian definition was smuggled back into the United Kingdom via Continental thinkers such as Samuel Pufendorf, after which it found its way into Blackstonian legal thinking, surreptitiously recuperated by Bentham and early utilitarians. For Hobbes and proponents of the "Gothic" conception, the English gentry's obsession with classical ideals blinded them to the requirements of a new absolutist state insisting on centralizing mechanisms of feudal rent.[30] It also had to achieve administrative means to manage populations and accept the need for a professionalized army. By the 1770s, however, Skinner's conception was faced with a wholly different problem: the deployment of the ideal of independence by subjects in the British Empire. In Britain's long imperial crisis with the American colonies, the subversive consequences of the Whig ideal now came out in full force. Indebted to the same Whig culture, American colonists deployed the ideal of independence to argue against the fiscal exaction asked by the metropole, which unchained a crisis of governance. Here, too, Skinner shows how the ideal might be mobilized against the very pretensions of its carrying oligarchy—showing how claims to virtual representation hid a form of arbitrary power.

Yet an ambiguity already latent in the early English reception of the Roman concept also was to resurface with a vengeance. As colonists argued, to be at the mercy of an external will was to be in a state of dependence. This state of dependence, they further claimed, was itself akin to slavery. As pamphleteers such as Samuel Butler were to relish pointing out, such a view of liberty sounded increasingly implausible in the face of the new forms of chattel slavery spreading across the southern states. "The leading hypocrites are two of the greatest American champions for the unalienable right of mankind, one the generalissimo of the republican army, the other lately the President of the Congress"—both demonstrating "by their own example that they have no objection against slavery provided they shall be free themselves and have the power of enslaving others."[31] While the Whig ideal was now mobilized for anticolonial purposes, it justified racial forms of bondage at home.

This contradiction generated an opportunity for a later generation of Hobbesian thinkers, bent on both modernizing an archaic body of British law and debunking lofty pretensions to natural law; Jeremy Bentham in particular was able to exploit the ambiguity to properly launch the case for liberty as noninterference.

It is here that Skinner detects one of the earliest ironies in the success story of the negative conception. Ostensibly a revolt against common-law orthodoxy, Bentham in fact used Blackstone's concept when articulating his first statist vision. A narrow view of freedom as simply consisting in the absence of constraints, rather than a collectively guaranteed capacity for agency, now became a favored justificatory tool for bipartisan elites across the British political spectrum. Through the young Bentham, this negative

[30]Neal Wood, "The Social History of Political Theory," *Political Theory* 6/3 (1978), 345–67, at 356.

[31]Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society*, 221.

notion then found more sway in the counterrevolutionary offensive of the 1790s and 1800s, when British elites increasingly thought that an insistence on independence did too little to counter the radicalization of the Whig ideal in British Jacobinism.

Liberty as Independence presents a comprehensive and multifaceted view of this twilight period, including an elaboration on what was lost and gained in its replacement (with a predictable emphasis on the first). Even as a *pièce de résistance*, however, there are undeniable blind spots. Beyond description, Skinner's argument remains equally shy on the explanatory part—the "why" rather than the "how" or "what." Insisting on the primacy of economic factors, Skinner claims, amounts to the same epiphenomenalist account of the history of ideas which treats it as little but a causal aftershock or reflection of deeper economic changes. Yet while not denying their existence, the economic changes in question are insufficient to explain the abnegation of the Whig regime's ideal. By the late 1790s, claims to freedom as independence were animating Jacobin activism across the Channel, now perceived as a fatal threat. Instead of returning to *ancien régime* arguments, however, a reference to a purely negative conception of liberty could defang the potentially dangerous implications of what then became known as the third conception.

This certainly is a compelling reading of the decline of the Whig ideology, slowly giving way to the Peelite police state in the early nineteenth century. There, the ideal of independence became a mainstay of Chartist agitation and socialism, but no longer the shared premise of a political culture. The cross-class consensus on liberty had been broken; freedom rather than liberty now was the hegemonic ideal around which British political culture was to orient itself, as Skinner notes. In Britain, this fade-out certainly appears compelling. In the United States, however, such an early dating certainly seems unduly premature—in the rhetoric of Lincoln, at the helm of a new "Yankee Leviathan," the rhetoric of independence was to retain equal potency to voters and poets alike, and in the 1890s Populists and agrarians were still invoking independence as the *sine qua non* for any political order. By the 1920s, the hold of these republican languages was indeed becoming too weak for American contemporaries to recognize their hereditary traits; in the meantime, Progressivism let go of the republican aspiration altogether, and to adherents of this "New Republic" the Machiavellian moment and its exit routes had simply passed.

As it stands, Skinner offers a remarkably Anglocentric account of the twilight of the independent ideal, which leaves several questions unanswered, both explanatory and descriptive. First, it is unclear whether notions of commercial society sufficiently capture the social changes wrought on British society in the late eighteenth century, between Bolingbroke and Peel. Here, Skinner remains a captive of the analytic of his opponents, such as Katznelson, who insisted on seeing the reinvention of republicanism as a product of a diffuse commercialization in the eighteenth century, in which the preponderance of mercantile interests across society made gentry ideals of independence impractical. Yet this is hardly an adequate explanation of the sociohistorical changes of the eighteenth century, nor does it fully discount the possibility that they were causally efficacious in decreasing interest in the ideal of independence.

Second, it is unclear how the twin political crises Skinner focuses on—the imperial overstretch of the 1770s, the Jacobin threat of the 1790s—could somehow be decoupled

from all economic factors whatsoever, isolated from the wider currents that might have set the Whig empire wandering (the fiscal crisis unchained by the costs of increasing frontier warfare, of course, had much to do with the first waves of Atlantic emigration which Britain's sprawling agricultural revolution was unleashing).

If these twin crises are insufficient, what might be a better explanation for the marginalization of Skinner's ideal of independence? A different explanation might indeed be that British society experienced a turmoil that robbed the republican concept of its probability or made it an exclusively radical preoccupation, related to the issue of industrialization. British society's self-understanding as an inheritor of the classical tradition began to fade in the nineteenth century, yet this had as much to do with the situational crises of the 1770s and 1790s as with the increasing need for administration of a society subject to a commercial interdependence, which removed the gentry from its previous position as political power. As Bentham insisted, it was not simply the repercussions of Jacobin agitation which decreased elite adherence to classical notions of liberty—it was also the increasing demands of imperial management and administration that came with the center of a new capitalist world economy.

Here, the limits of what Samuel Moyn once termed a "pan-textualist" approach reveal themselves.[32] Skinner's corpus of eighteenth-century texts, for instance, is rather top-heavy and "deliberately circumscribed," composed of the sermons of Tory parsons and Whig publicists, yet relatively light on more popular literature or interventions, even if there is a wonderful survey of radical Civil War pamphleteering and some delightful forays into literary analysis in the chapter on the eighteenth century. Yet as a history of the eighteenth century it is segmented, shielded off from the wider social developments that inflected the fate of the independent ideal.

In the end, it might also explain the relative precarity of Skinner's ideal of independence in the contemporary age, in which, in his view, the recovery of the ideal could bring to light patterns of domination and dependence too often analytically neglected. Today's negative conception, Skinner claims, too often sees citizens as in need of pastoral guidance, objects of governments, whose area of liberty amounts to a law that is silent rather than enabling. As with previous writings, there is a whiff of longing for a less "administered society" genre, to use Adorno's term, decreasing the arbitrary power of both employer, husband, and judge in the modern societies, holding out the hope that we remain capable of undoing our self-imposed immaturity.[33]

* * *

Or did Skinner's ideal disappear? Reading up on the recent radical republican literature—of which Bruno Leipold's work is but a visible exponent—the statement now seems ever more improbable, certainly for scholars who have tracked the afterlives of the classical ideal in an increasingly industrial century. This new literature certainly moves against old preconceptions in the literature on republicanism. With roots running back to the 1950s at the earliest, mainly in Baron's work on the Florentine

[32] Samuel Moyn, "Imaginary Intellectual History," in Darrin McMahon and Samuel Moyn, eds., *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History* (New York, 2014), 112–72, at 124.

[33] Theodor W. Adorno, "The Totally Administered Society," *Telos: Critical Theory of the Contemporary* 35/170 (1978), 169–84.

republics, a republican revival was christened in works by Pocock, Skinner, and Pettit in the late 1970s, extended by generations of scholars afterwards. From a bird's-eye view, this discussion remains an uncharitable starting point for a possible fusion between republicanism and currents hospitable to popular power—as recent work by Philip Pettit, Pierre Rosanvallon, and Nadia Urbinati exemplifies. To Urbinati, for instance, the potential tension between democracy and republicanism finds its most explicit expression in populism: since republicans usually defended restrictive suffrage provisions and were suspicious of purely plebiscitary rule, the continuity between earlier republican and later liberal mutations has become much more explicit.

Earlier work by Andreas Kalyvas and Ira Katznelson criticized by Skinner only tends to widen this gap, of course.[34] In their view, a modern republican tradition evolved into a liberal hybrid after its encounter with the new commercial society in the eighteenth century. To them, this allows for a continuity rather than a break between the liberal and republican currents which the original literature was unaware of. Conversely, however, these visions render the incompatibility between republicanism and populism even starker: as the prefiguration of a later civic liberalism, republicanism had little truck with arguments about unbridled popular sovereignty or far-reaching economic redistribution.

Instead of collapsing a republican tradition into a liberal offshoot, such scholars see an extension and radicalization of Katznelson's tradition across the nineteenth century. And rather than gradually evolving into a liberal tradition, republicanism splinters into laissez-faire and interventionist blocs.[35] This has also meant granting a new labor republicanism a proper place in the historiography of republicanism, including Marxist currents. For Second International socialists such as Kautsky, this also led to a clear demarcation between "really existing" republican orders in France and the United States and the future republican state form desired by socialist writers. Anchored around a demand for economic, and not just political, *libertas*, this republicanism also engineered a specific theory of capitalism as a system of domination rather than mere distribution; here, the republic appeared as the essential political premise for an impending social revolution.

Once delineated, the representatives of this more radical republicanism easily crop up across the nineteenth century: Eduard Bernstein spoke of "republican factories," as did Bebel; de la Martine would still use it. Yet even in France the language of independence continued to dominate political discourse. For the English case, it might be convincing, as the Whig oligarchy removed its official self-justification—even if we might detect traces of it in Gladstonian populism, Mills's civic liberalism, or later Tory rhetoric on self-employment and petty bourgeois independence.

[34] Andreas Kalyvas and Ira Katznelson, *Liberal Beginnings: Making a Republic for the Moderns* (Cambridge, 2008).

[35] See Alex Gourevitch, "Servitude and Independence" (unpublished PhD thesis, Columbia University, 2010), *passim*; Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2014); Eric MacGilvray, *The Invention of Market Freedom* (Cambridge, 2011); Geneviève Rousselière, Jason Frank, and John McCormick, "Labor Republicanism: Symposium on Alex Gourevitch's *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, 2014," *Political Theory* 48/4 (2020), 496–527.

Bruno Leipold's *Citizen Marx* is itself a careful tonic against Skinner's thesis of evanescence. Leipold chronicles in Marx's writings an ideal of independence that was still active in the second half of the nineteenth century, surviving in the annals of the Second International. The tradition left its mark on Marx's own writing itself, as he tried to mediate the poles of the newly radical worlds of the nineteenth century caught between Jacobinism and the new sciences of society making headway in France and Germany.

Leipold's is not simply an exercise in conceptual conscription, trying to marshal Marx for a canonical tradition to which other thinkers belonged. Rather, as he claims, he wants to show how a republicanism conditioned, whether through attraction or repellence, the formation of his thought. As Leipold insists, such an act of historicization in no way locks Marx away from contemporary debate. Rather, it shows him to be all too alive to his own time, rather than only towering above it, reestablishing a link between past and present which has proven all too hard for those engaged in a consciously historical engagement with a canonical thinker. As Leipold shows, Marx's own thought was a conscious negotiation with and at times rebuttal of the dominant model of radical politics in the nineteenth century—Marx not simply as a republican fellow traveler, but as redeploying and rewriting its maxims in wholly new settings, keeping in mind the potential constituencies for his brand of socialism.

Citizen Marx is, once again, a monument to the rewards of a contextualist approach. Even if previous authors have given us hints on the contained coordinates for Marx's own thinking—certainly with regard to his relation to political economy—it is precisely the insistence that Marx was historically embedded without thereby decreasing his originality that stands out as the book's main achievement. Rather than reducing his *oeuvre* to a work of social science or political theory, Leipold's historicist approach allows for a renaturalization of Marx as a fully nineteenth-century thinker.

The main formula is here due to Leipold's refusal to take Lenin at his word on the tripartite influence of Marx's thought in French Jacobinism, English political economy, and German philosophy. As he notes, this not only discounts the influence of Belgium, the premier industrial nation on the Continent in the 1830s and 1840s, but also writes out Marx's deep engagement with British mid-century radical currents, which never simply stood out as a confused form of bourgeois radicalism. Starting off from a program of research first constituted by David Leopold, he shows Marx to both reject and integrate a multitude of political currents. Prominent amongst these was the lingua franca in which radicals articulated their opposition to both capitalist and *ancien régime* elites from the seventeenth century onwards. Following in the footpath of his *Doktorvater*, Leipold at last offers us a comprehensive panorama of Marx's thought, on both general and academic tracks.[36]

In doing so, Leipold kicks over several stubborn misconceptions about Marx that still stalk the current literature—in many areas curiously unaffected by the contextualist revolution which is now common sense in other disciplines, and which at times also

[36]David Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx: German Philosophy, Modern Politics, and Human Flourishing* (Cambridge, 2007).

affects the most arcane corners of academic Marxology. He also shows how the existing historiography of republicanism all too often opts for an early cutoff point in the eighteenth century, thereby taking the self-presentation of its liberal successor at face value (as Skinner's book too often also seems to do). As Leipold insists, those who see the republican tradition fading rather than modulating in the nineteenth century face a wall of evidence against them—whether it is the pamphlet wars leading up to the 1848 revolutions, the languages of radicalism that made up the debates on the Commune in the 1870s, or the debate about constitutional reform in the 1830s. Rather than rushing to the margins, republicanism undergoes a vibrant metamorphosis against the backdrop of economic development, and becomes a multifold tradition.

By engaging in a form of negative contextualization, rather than trying to slot Marx into certain categories or make him "a fish in the water of the nineteenth century," as Foucault and recent historians have had it, Leipold renders both Marx studies and the republican historiography a service.[37] Along the way, Leipold clears a field for Marx studies rarely found before; contra work by Jonathan Sperber or Gareth Stedman Jones, the contextualist approach chosen by Leipold is closer to what Michael Heinrich has done in his biography of Marx, revealing continuity precisely where the first historians discern discontinuity.[38]

Leipold is particularly adept at rendering the illocutionary nature of Marx's social-theoretical writings beyond the more directly political polemic he was known for, including tussles within the left Hegelian *groupuscules* of the 1830s and 1840s. Marx's battle here was on two fronts—against an apolitical or even antipolitical socialism, and against an antisocialist republicanism that disparaged its emphasis on socialization instead of the equalization of property holding. It is the abiding merit of Leipold's book to have placed Marx at the crossroads of these traditions, showing how he both diverged from and adopted its themes.

Particularly worthwhile are the chapters detailing Marx's oppositional interaction with prominent, yet now greatly neglected, figureheads of nineteenth-century radical republicanism, such as Hinton and Heintzen, and his insistence that the more openly appreciative tone of the Elizabethan yeoman indicated if not a deference, then at least an acknowledgment of the abiding attraction of the ideal of independence for both the Anglo-American and the Continental socialist movements. Even if propertied democracy could not be restored, its political attractions could now be achieved on a higher level. Through this contextual lens, Leipold ably illuminates some of the less examined corners of Marx's thought.

Leipold here divides Marx's career into three phases: an initial radical republican one which insisted on a Hellenic ideal of inclusive democracy, a later socialist one that was more agnostic about the republican type of state forms which a socialist movement was to require, and a later post-Commune re-radicalization which returned to the philhellenic habits of his youth, insisting on the need for a substantive rather than formal

[37] See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, 2002), 419.

[38] See Jonathan Sperber, *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life* (New York, 2013); Gareth Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion* (New York, 2016); Michael Heinrich, *Karl Marx and the Birth of Modern Society*, vol. 1, *The Life of Marx and the Development of His Work* (New York, 2019).

democratization of existing commercial republics as the only viable stepping-stone for socialist transformation.

There are two side notes to add to this correction. The first is a tendential slippage in Leipold's book equating democracy and republicanism, going against the distinction which authors such as Katznelson and Urbinati have insisted on. The concepts of "democracy" and "republic" seem to spontaneously shade into each other in much of the book, as two sides of the same doublet. Yet it is unclear whether Marx and Engels were that prone to collapsing both traditions. As Marx and Engels noted in their writings on Bonapartism, this association became less self-evident in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was well known that republics could function without popular authorization. But the notion that popular authorization need not take a republican form was a less explored possibility, and it was only when a variety of popular authoritarianisms began to crop up in the 1850s and 1860s that the co-originality of republicanism and democracy was properly put in question by socialist thinkers. Leipold usually practices elision between these two state forms.

Questions also remain about the subversive potential of this republican retrieval. As with Skinner, one might wonder why, except for intellectual inattention, this republican reading was first neglected and then forgotten, only for early-century historians to finally retrieve it. Here the descriptive neglect and the normative potential are indubitably linked: an error theory of republican liberty needs to account for why generations of thinkers found it hard to maintain their commitments in the face of twentieth-century realities. Without sounding Whiggish, the structural pressures on the ideal cannot be reduced to attempts at elite containment or simple intellectual incoherence—rather, they require insertion into the wider "space of reasons" in which arguments about republican state forms were circulated and conceived in the late nineteenth century, and what made them lose probability in the face of new social forces.[39]

Kautsky's writings on republicanism in the 1880s already registered this problem, when he insisted on distinguishing his own republicanism against the "actually existing republics" in France and the United States, both with strongly oligarchic features and clearly not responding to the ideal that socialist writers had had in mind.[40] The democratic republic that Marx and Engels saw as the necessary but insufficient precondition for a socialist transformation was a more slippery creature than presupposed. Similarly, he claimed that plebiscitary mechanisms would usher in pseudo-democratization and mostly serve as a ploy in the hands of presidential contenders.

The revolutionary wave of 1917–23 finally ripped away this republican background from Kautsky and his generation. By the early 1920s, the divide was no longer between an antisocialist republicanism and an antirepublican socialism. Rather, the new divide

[39] For this notion see Wilfrid Sellars, *In the Space of Reasons: Selected Essays of Wilfrid Sellars* (Cambridge, MA, 2007).

[40] Ben Lewis, "Karl Kautsky's Democratic Republicanism" (unpublished MA thesis, University of Sheffield, 2013); Lewis, "Karl Kautsky's Democratic Republicanism," in Karl Kautsky, *Karl Kautsky on Democracy and Republicanism*, ed. and trans. Lewis (London, 2023), 1–36.

was between a socialist republicanism which could not make true on its promise, and a non-republican socialism which had to suspend dominators' rule to maintain its position in a hostile world system. Kautsky thereby celebrated the Weimar Constitution as finally bringing about the democratic republic, paving the way for the social republic afterwards. At the same time, he refused to criticize the discretionary *Obrigkeitsstaat* that remained in place under the republican surface: a highly undemocratic police force, judiciary dictatorship, central-bank power, and the presidency remained beyond the remit of his critique.[41] Kautsky reneged on his previous promise to properly "republicanise" the Weimar Republic and kept Germany's deep state intact. While he initially claimed that "the republic is the only possible form of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'," he now began to turn it from a necessary into a sufficient precondition, to distinguish his socialism from the new Bolshevik variants further east.[42] In this environment, it was unlikely that the original republican galaxy of Marx and Engels's thought could hold much longer, nor could one retain the idea that the democratic republic was a suitable launch pad for a socialist transformation.

At the end of his book, Leipold advises sortition as a potential solution, claiming that modern bureaucracies could be democratized by subjecting them to stronger citizen checks and staffing them with regular citizens (it is unlikely that contemporary attempts to reduce bureaucracy as practiced by the Trump administration would in any way be of fancy to Marx, of course). As with Hal Draper, he insists on a strictly republican reading of Marx's notion of dictatorship, an emergency office instituted by a Jacobin-like legislature, who would move outside constitutional norms. Whether Marx and Engels's notion of dictatorship can that easily be made palatable to our latently liberal mores is a different question—Lenin at least admitted that Marxism's founding fathers had never properly addressed the question, and left eternally ambiguous exactly what powers a party in charge of the democratic republic would have to appropriate. Kautsky's hope that the only cooperative commonwealth he could imagine was a House of Commons with a socialist majority elected through general suffrage has a nearly affectionate naivety to it.[43] As Mike Macnair has noted, it might obscure the fact that precisely the entry of suffrage has increased the non-republican features of Europe's constitutional orders, including an increase in judiciary power—expanding the age of suffrage and "gradually letting the *hoi polloi* into voting and juries, requir(ing) the reduction of the democratic/republican elements of the constitution."[44]

* * *

This throws up the question of what precisely the unsettling implications of this vision are today. What are the concrete targets of the republican critique? Changing the position of the privy council, or critiques of arcane monarchical prerogative, are rather

[41] Mike Macnair, "Kautsky and the Myths of Manchesterism," in Karl Kautsky, *Karl Kautsky on Colonialism* (London, 2013), 5–48, at 7. See also Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905–1917: Origins of the Great Schism* (New York, 1965), 294–314.

[42] Macnair, "Kautsky and the Myths of Manchesterism," 11.

[43] Quoted by John H. Kautsky, *Karl Kautsky: Marxism, Revolution, and Democracy* (New York, 1993), 129.

[44] Mike Macnair, "Very Essence of Marxism," *Weekly Worker* 1528 (2025), 8–9, at 9.

narrow routes for republicans to follow in the new century, not mentioning the question of how it is precisely the omnipresence of state power that might make possible the reimagination of this republican heritage today. More concretely, one could say that it is precisely the persistent power of states that also facilitates the type of discourses on republican liberty that have enjoyed such a resurgence in the last thirty years, particularly from within academe. This may invite a sense of paradox: only in states founded on a negation of the republican ideal did a revitalization of the debate on republican liberty become possible in the first place. "Insofar as we are egalitarian citizens today," Chris Brooke noted in 2009, "this may owe a great deal to the 'awesome' power (that is, quite straightforwardly, the power to keep us in awe) of the more or less Hobbesian social institutions that we have constructed for ourselves since Hobbes's time."[45] In his view, it is the "bureaucratic welfare state that is able, among other things, to humble the proud, to enforce the law, and to deliver a uniform mass education," which has meant that "the manufacture of something approximating the reality of liberty as non-domination, on this view, is dependent on there being already in existence something approximating well-functioning Hobbesian institutions."[46]

Brooke's precondition might also explain a different facet of the uptake of the republican thesis today. His interpretation suggests why the republican mode of critique has predominantly flourished in academia, rather than in party politics or popular activism. Professionals have long formed the administrative layer most crucial to modern capitalist societies, a functional necessity to mediate their contradictions and tensions. Their embrace of the language of republican independence could, then, be seen less as a revolutionary ambition than as the symptom of an attempt at self-absolution—the exorcism of a bad conscience concerning the arbitrary power which late modern societies bestow on professionals as the stewards of a complex, interdependent polity.[47]

These challenges, of course, are hardly exclusive to our twenty-first-century moment. In 1918, Weber already articulated a version of this republican dilemma against scientific planners such as Otto Neurath, who, in his view, underestimated that "modern men could find themselves caught up in a new form of absolutist rule."[48] In Weber's view, administrative management remained the main challenge for modern republics embedded in commercial networks completely incomparable to previous iterations. Weber's response to this republican dilemma was familiar: an imperial presidency with a popular mandate, which could save Germany from geopolitical extinction. As Peter Baehr noted about *belle époque* political thought, Weber and his generation already offered an "analysis of modern democracy" that saw it

[45]Christopher Brooke, "'In Roman Costume and with Roman Phrases': Skinner, Pettit and Hobbes on Republican Liberty," *Hobbes Studies* 22 (2009), 178–84, at 183.

[46]Ibid.

[47]For recent and older discussions of this "professional–managerial" question see Brent Cebul and Lily Geismer, *Mastery and Drift: Professional-Class Liberals since the 1960s* (Chicago, 2025); John Ehrenreich and Barbara Ehrenreich, "The Professional–Managerial Class," *Radical America* 11 (1977), 3–6.

[48]Keith Tribe, *Strategies of Economic Order: German Economic Discourse, 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2007), 168.

"simultaneously (as) the negation of classical, republican ideals and their enfeeblement and malaise."[49] Caesarism thus became "not an option that was open to political debate" but rather "a datum of sociological enquiry," "render(ing) something previously contentious into something inescapable":

> Just as Weber sought to strip off the blinders of those benighted enough to believe that republican self-governing freedom was still a latent possibility under conditions of modern "mass democracy," so he sought, in a related move, to compel his readers to face the hard facts about the inevitability of Caesarism … The parliamentary Caesarist leader was Weber's political answer not simply to Germany's travails, but to a crisis of liberalism more generally.[50]

In the end, it was precisely such a presidency which ushered in the antirepublican, praetorian dictatorship of Nazism, when Kautsky had already fled into Dutch exile.

For Weber, the notion that a republican restoration required targeted acts of violence was also historically couched. In the nineteenth century, after all, republicanism came with a specific philosophy of history: a notion of the brittleness and precarity of republics emerging out of a "sea of particulars," always subject to exercises of renewal which had to be externally imposed.[51] Republican receptivity to dictatorship, rather than an embrace of totalitarian mythology, should be read as part and parcel of a republican historicism that still held sway across party lines in the late nineteenth century. Within this philosophical history stood an older republican puzzle whose outlines were traceable to thinkers such as Plutarch, Rousseau, and Machiavelli. This puzzle revolved around the question whether a politics of republican reform should be kept separate from a turn to empire or dictatorship. Once a people had lost its access to independence, it also forfeited the instruments by which it could return itself to a state of purity. This fall generated a quandary: to halt the democratic republic's slide into aristocratic tyranny, only a tyrannical corrective would do. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau articulated this quandary in the 1750s, "As soon as its chains are broken, a republic falls apart and ceases to exist: from then on it needs a master, not a liberator … freedom can be gained; but it is never recovered."[52]

Here, dictatorship serves not as a negation but as an uneasy complement to republican politics, the necessary emergency politics that is involved in any attempt at republican restoration. Before the eighteenth century, as Adam Lebovitz noted, "it was considered standard for republics facing war, or internal unrest, to appoint a dictator with plenary powers," while by the "early nineteenth century, 'dictatorship' had become

[49] Peter Baehr, "An 'Ancient Sense of Politics'? Weber, Caesarism, and the Republican Tradition," *European Journal of Sociology* 40/2 (1999), 333–50, at 334. See also Wilhelm Hennis and Keith Tribe, "'Hellenic Intellectual Culture' and the Origins of Weber's Political Thinking," *Max Weber Studies* 6/2 (2006), 257–303; Jeffrey Edward Green, "Max Weber and the Reinvention of Popular Power," *Max Weber Studies* 8/2 (2008), 187–224.

[50] Baehr, "An 'Ancient Sense of Politics'?", 347.

[51] Richard Nelson, "The Cultural Contradictions of Populism: Tom Watson's Tragic Vision of Power, Politics, and History," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 72/1 (1988), 1–29.

[52] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings* (Cambridge, 1997), 73.

a byword for usurpation and tyranny."[53] In these unideal cases, lawgivers had to step in and force a "republican dilemma" in which new founders had to turn themselves into "unmoved movers" who would "break the causal chain of history" and its concomitant cycles of corruption.[54] Even for Marx, the republican concept of "dictatorship" hinted at the social domination that is required for nondomination, a necessity for any constitutional republic which the historian Clinton Rossiter already investigated in the late 1940s.[55] To John Dunn, in turn, the modern republic relied precisely on a neutralization of civic virtue, and supervision over the complexity which modern capitalist subjects require from their rulers—"not its detailed constructive statecraft (which was often as accident-prone as anyone else's) but its relatively steady imaginative acceptance of the economic limits to modern politics, and its continuing readiness to adjust to these limits in the face of disappointing experience."[56] Steadily, contemporary political culture has interiorized (if not naturalized) economic limits to the exercise of freedom which Marx would have frowned upon; in the end, it is unclear whether republican themes are a sufficient resource for breaking with these self-imposed constraints when, as a tradition, republicanism has always been so heavily implicated, if not dependent, on the creation of artificial constraints. Hegel had already noted how the republican conception of independence was both opposed to and presupposed slavery—just as the notion of "immediacy" presupposed mediation, independence *presupposed* dependence and thereby could not escape its founding logic. As Terry Pinkard resumed this Hegelian reading, ancient freedom "was ultimately an awareness of what slaves lost and what it was that those who were not slaves possessed"—"they did not fully articulate that view, and thus, they lacked its proper 'Idea.'"[57] Only in modernity did the notion of freedom as not merely consisting of independence come into its own—"the ideal of nondomination by others, that utter folly," as the French classicist Jean-Pierre Vernant once dared to claim.[58]

* * *

It might also go a long way in explaining why certain republican motifs have found a strangely comfortable lodging in the critical registers of the right today. In the 1950s, C. B. MacPherson already noted how the entry of "market concepts in political theory," such as the neoclassical notion of an equilibrium, was facilitated by an older republican preoccupation with stability. In MacPherson's view, "the attractiveness of the market concept" involved a proximate reason why "a notion of equilibrium, in a

[53] Adam Lebovitz, "Dictatorship in the American Founding," *Journal of American Constitutional History* (forthcoming 2025).

[54] See Hannah Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Chicago, 1999), 290; David Armitage, "Empire and Liberty: A Republican Dilemma," in Quentin Skinner and Martin van Gelderen, eds., *Republicanism*, vol. 2, *The Values of Republicanism in Early Modern Europe: A Shared European Heritage* (Cambridge, 2002), 29–35. Armitage sees the playing out of this dilemma in a conflict between "liberty" and "empire" (*libertas* and *grandezza*).

[55] Clinton Rossiter, *Constitutional Dictatorship* (New York, 2010).

[56] John Dunn, "The Identity of the Bourgeois Liberal Republic," in Biancamaria Fontana, ed., *The Invention of the Modern Republic* (Cambridge, 2010), 206–25, at 209.

[57] Terry Pinkard, *Does History Make Sense? Hegel on the Historical Shapes of Justice* (New York, 2017), 156.

[58] Cited in Paul Veyne, *L'empire gréco-romain* (Paris, 2005), 88 ("l'idéal de non-domination par autrui, cette idée complètement folle"—my translation).

much looser sense, had been familiar in political thinking ever since Machiavelli."[59] Yet its valence can also be seen in pro-market thinkers with little proclivity for the neoclassical equilibrium, such as Friedrich Hayek, who saw the anonymous domination of the market as the most probable guarantor of republican independence than a popularly controlled legislature, and the only viable alternative to personal caprice.[60]

More pertinently for the contemporary right, one could also trace its legacy in the work of a doyen of postwar conservatism such as James Burnham. The latter's 1943 *The Machiavellians* already reclaimed a classical heritage against the liberal idealism he associated with Progressive and New Deal thinkers. Earlier, in his critique of the twentieth-century managerial revolution that put an end to the bourgeois family firm, Burnham also returned to Machiavelli in an age of universal bureaucracy.[61] His right Machiavellianism has had plentiful offspring in the United States, midwifing William Buckley's conservative fusionism in the 1960s and inspiring the Cold War right.[62] In his 1943 founding manifesto, Burnham explicitly refers to Skinner's concept: "For any given group of people, 'liberty,' as Machiavelli uses the word, means: independence—that is, no external subjection to another group; and internally, a government by law, not by the arbitrary will of any; individual men, princes or commoners … Tyranny is liberty's opposite, and no man has been a clearer foe of tyranny."[63] Burnham's claim—including its uneasy echoes in the anti-administrative crusade which the American right has embarked on—may perhaps be dismissed as an archival curiosity. Looking at post-liberalism's current assault on what they term the "global administrative state," however, the resonance appears more than homological. It is rather "based in a managerial sociology that provides a wide-ranging critique of the administrative state and liberal power," symbolized by a "remarkable resurgence of interest in (Burnham's) writings" across the contemporary right.[64]

As Martijn Konings has surmised, another element of the movement's electoral attraction might be that it "effectively appeal(s) to a republican tradition of thinking about capitalism" which presents "the market as a check on arbitrary authority, a bulwark against monarchical concentrations of power and wealth"—"a flat, decentralized way of organizing society that is inclusionary, potentially universal, and systematically

[59] See C. B. MacPherson, "Market Concepts in Political Theory," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science/Revue canadienne d'économique et de science politique* 27/4 (1961), 490–97, at 491.

[60] See Sean Irving, *Hayek's Market Republicanism: The Limits of Liberty* (London, 2019). Hayek himself had commented on Pocock's history of the ancient constitution and common law; see Friedrich Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (London, 2015), 115.

[61] James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution: What Is Happening in the World* (New York, 1941).

[62] For an overview of the connection see David T. Byrne, *James Burnham: An Intellectual Biography* (New York, 2025), 138–80.

[63] James Burnham, *The Machiavellians, Defenders of Freedom* (New York, 1970), 69.

[64] Rita Abrahamsen, Jean-François Drolet, Michael C. Williams, Srdjan Vucetic, Karin Narita, and Alexandra Gheciu, *World of the Right: Radical Conservatism and Global Order* (Cambridge, 2024), 67, 72.

counteracts corruption."[65] The critique of wage slavery, unaccountable executive power, and gendered dependence which the republican tradition prided itself on in the nineteenth century—now obscured by a narrowly liberal view of freedom as purchasing power rather than collective control in the workplace and public sphere—certainly sits extremely uneasily with contemporary habits. Both for Skinner and for Leipold, however, the danger remains that languages of republican independence are more suited to critiques of today's commercial republics or capitalist democracies (the two now fully synonymous, perhaps not in the way Marx envisaged it) bent on deconstructing than democratizing the arduously composed structures of administration and mediation they require.

Without any doubt a democratic republic of lesser hybridity remains a state form to be achieved in the twenty-first century. Yet the question is whether the battle for this properly democratic republic carries enough motivational force in a society in which instances of arbitrary domination might enjoy ample intellectual criticism, but in which its alternatives are either anti-administrative hooliganism or improbable flights into preindustrial simplicity. Both books under review articulate this challenge with admirable acuity.

[65] Martijn Konings, "In the Biden Era, Neoliberalism Is Alive and Kicking," *Jacobin Magazine*, 4 May 2020, n.p.

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