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Republicanism in Old and New Contexts

Joyce Appleby

WHAT did Americans in the late eighteenth century mean when they spoke about republicanism? This is the question that Lance Banning addresses in the foregoing article and the one that I shall explore in this companion piece requested by the editor of the *William and Mary Quarterly*. For many men—and this was primarily a male discourse—republicanism represented something new. Thus Thomas Paine in *Common Sense* referred to the "new republican materials" of the House of Commons on whose virtue depended the freedom of England. Eight years later, Paine defined a republic as a sovereignty of justice, in contrast to a sovereignty of will.[1] Writing at about the same time, an angry critic denounced the Philadelphia stage for insidiously fostering aristocratic values and alluded sarcastically to "our present state of imaginary republican equality."[2] In this man's mind, republicanism entailed the reformation of social mores along democratic lines. Addressing the American Philosophical Society on the subject of innovative farming techniques, Timothy Matlack spoke of "the great Republican Virtues of Industry and Economy."[3] Here Matlack associated republicanism with private virtues and linked them to productivity.

For John Adams, republicanism retained its historical connection with classical and Renaissance texts. Abigail Adams described her husband's immersion in those texts as his "travelling through the Itallian Republicks."[4] The results of Adams's scholarly perambulations—his *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*—did not, however, restore the pristine meaning of republicanism. We can read James Madison, an equally learned man, lamenting the presence in

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[1] Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York, 1976), 69, and "Dissertations on Government; The Affairs of the Bank; and Paper Money," in William M. Van der Weyde, ed., *The Life and Works of Thomas Paine*, IV (New Rochelle, N.Y., 1925), 234.

[2] *Freeman's Journal: or, the North-American Intelligencer* (Philadelphia), Feb. 11, 1784.

[3] Timothy Matlack, *An Oration, Delivered March 16, 1780, before the ... American Philosophical Society ...* (Philadelphia, 1780), 27.

[4] Adams to Mercy Warren, May 14, 1787, in *The Warren-Adams Letters ...* (Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, LXXII-LXXIII [Boston, 1917-1925]), II, 290.

Adams's *Defence* of so many remarks "unfriendly to republicanism." Four years after its publication, Madison observed to Jefferson that Adams had actually written a "mock defence" of the "Republican Constitutions of his Country" while attacking them with all the force he possessed.[5] Adams no doubt provoked this harsh judgment by insisting on the accuracy of Machiavelli's statement that all republics needed three orders of men. This, he claimed was an "eternal principle, without the knowledge of which every speculation upon government must be imperfect."[6] But clearly Adams expected controversy. He described the *Defence* to Benjamin Franklin as a confession of political faith containing "the only sense in which I am or ever was a Republican."[7]

The passage of time did not clarify the conceptual confusion about republicanism in the early national period. Reading the political pamphlets and private correspondence of the 1790s, one gets the impression that "republican" was a label to be fought over, a prized appellation to claim for one's own views. This is particularly apparent during the political ferment over Adams's reelection that began almost the moment he entered office. In Massachusetts, for instance, a Federalist newspaper exulted that "the inflexible republican virtues of the majority of the people" had foiled the machinations of the Jeffersonians in the Senate,[8] while simultaneously a Jeffersonian editor in Maryland described how the genius of universal liberty had finally combined with the new doctrine of universal rights to draw almost all the people into America's "*modern* republic."[9]

Such quotations leave little doubt that *republican* and *republic* figured prominently, if ambiguously, in the public discourse of the eighteenth century. *Republic* in fact appears as the conceptual equivalent of *union* in the nineteenth century and *nation* in the twentieth. Yet it was only in 1967, with the publication of Bernard Bailyn's *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution,* that historians began to investigate what this protean concept meant to men of the Revolutionary era. It would be surprising if scholars were able to agree upon the meaning of a word that contemporaries themselves used in such disparate contexts. And of course they don't. In part this is because the republican terrain Bailyn discovered turned out to be virtually unknown territory. The pamphlets he examined did not lead him to the familiar lawyerly absorption with constituent powers and

[5] Madison to Jefferson, June 6, 1787, in Julian P. Boyd *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, N.J., 1950-), XI, 402; Madison to Jefferson, May 12, 1791, in Gaillard Hunt, ed., *The Writings of James Madison . . .*, VI (New York, 1906), 50-51.

[6] Charles Francis Adams [ed.], *The Works of John Adams . . .*, V (Boston, 1851), 183.

[7] Adams to Franklin, Jan. 27, 1787, in John Bigelow, ed., *The Works of Benjamin Franklin . . .*, XI (New York, 1904), 298-299.

[8] *Boston Gazette, Commercial and Political,* Nov. 24, 1800.

[9] "The American: A Country Gazette," Baltimore, 1800, broadside, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

prescriptive rights—the accessible principles that could be captured in the slogan "no taxation without representation." Rather, he found himself in the midst of a thicket of references to degeneration and corruption attached to a rhetoric of passionate outrage and unbounded fears. This excursion into the colonial mind convinced Bailyn that Americans had formed their world view—more particularly, their grasp of political reality—from the republicanism of the English commonwealthmen. From these Opposition writers of Augustan England, he explained, colonial pamphleteers had put together a social theory that stressed the eternal opposition of liberty and authority, the aggressive nature of power, and the dependence of the common good upon a delicate constitutional balance of the one, the few, and the many.[10] This world view, which Bailyn evocatively portrayed, was wholly traditional in its emphasis upon the essential fragility of civil order.

Since 1967, the thesis of the centrality of this classical republican model in American thinking has been extended through the constitutional period, the 1790s, and beyond.[11] Lance Banning best described the revisionist position in 1974: "Most of the inherited structure of eighteenth-century political thought persisted in America for years after 1789. And this persistence was not a matter of a shadowy half-life of fragmentary ideas. A structured universe of classical thought continued to serve as the intellectual medium through which Americans perceived the political world, and an inherited political language was the primary vehicle for the expression of their hopes and discontents."[12] J.G.A. Pocock spelled out the larger implications for the history of the United States: the new research displayed the American Revolution less as the first political act of revolutionary enlightenment than as "the last great act of the Renaissance."[13]

With admirable clarity, Banning has epitomized the essential points of the revision that has restored republicanism to the conceptual world of our Founding Fathers. With the same lucidity he has recapitulated my criticisms of the "republican hypothesis" as it pertains to the opposition between the Jeffersonians and Federalists. What remains to be resolved in the scholarly dispute about republicanism in America is whose republicanism are we talking about—that of the Founding Fathers or ours? And if theirs is ours, which one of ours: the chaste and venerable classical

[10] Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 34-93.

[11] Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1969); Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1978). See also the special issue on republicanism edited by Joyce Appleby of *American Quarterly*, XXXVII (1985).

[12] Banning, "Republican Ideology and the Triumph of the Constitution, 1789 to 1793," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXXI (1974), 173.

[13] J.G.A. Pocock, "Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, III (1972), 120.

republicanism distilled by Harrington for English needs and updated by Montesquieu for eighteenth-century readers or the liberal republicanism that contemporaries traced to the inquiries of Bacon, Newton, Locke, and Smith. My answer is that both were present and that they represent the contending republican paradigms of Federalists and Jeffersonians. Banning, after generously conceding the presence of some liberal tendencies in those who opposed the Federalists, insists that the Jeffersonians retained their intellectual moorings in English Opposition thought. Only confusion will result, he writes, if we suppose that the analytical distinctions we detect were evident to the thinkers we study. Further, he maintains that it was the striking similarity between Alexander Hamilton's program and the policies of the English "court" party that called forth a "country opposition" in the United States.[14] Here he is following Pocock, who described the polemics over Hamilton's policies as a "replay of Court-Country debates" held in England seventy years earlier.[15]

Our interpretations on this point are mutually exclusive, for in my view it was precisely the recrudescence of both court and country thinking in the Washington administration that crystallized the liberal political vision of Jefferson and propelled him into action once he became convinced that in style, purpose, and personnel the new federal government belonged to men like Hamilton and Adams and not to those like Madison and himself. Here I would summon Jefferson's own words. From the year of his presidential election until his death Jefferson wrote about the issues that had been at stake in that famous contest. During this twenty-six-year period his account never varied. The Jeffersonians had liberated themselves from the bondage of old systems. They recognized that theirs was a new era. The advances in science and learning were so striking that the past need no longer haunt men's minds. Hopes for humanity once deemed chimerical could be embraced as practical for those who could free themselves of encumbering prejudices. Writing to Joseph Priestley in 1801, Jefferson criticized his opponents for believing in an education that looked backward, not forward, and hence failed to see what was new in America. "We can no longer say there is nothing new under the sun," he wrote. "For this whole chapter in the history of man is new. The great extent of our Republic is new. Its sparse habitation is new. The mighty wave of public opinion which has rolled over it is new." Exercising more tact with Abigail Adams, he left it to time and experience to determine whether the public good had more to fear from the people or its rulers, pointing out that those who feared the people had long controlled government while those who feared governments independent of the people represented a new idea. When he resumed correspondence with Adams himself, Jefferson characterized their parties as composed of

[14] Banning, "Jeffersonian Ideology Revisited: Liberal and Classical Ideas in the New American Republic," pp. 00-00, 00-00, 00, and n. 46 above, and "Republican Ideology," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXI (1974), 180-185, esp. 183.

[15] Pocock, "Virtue and Commerce," *JIH*, III (1972), 131.

reformers and the enemies of reform who divided on the question of "the improvability of the human mind, in science, in ethics, in government."[16] Whatever the truth of these assertions, the language suggests that Jefferson made sharp analytical distinctions in assessing how lines were drawn in 1800.

Jefferson was also clear about the import of the new learning, the innovations, and the novelties that preoccupied him. They marked a great divide in human history. No longer need eighteenth-century men be in the thrall of the great philosophers of antiquity, he wrote. The loss of the political writings of Aristotle or any other ancient philosopher need not cause regret, he maintained, because the "new principle of representative democracy has rendered useless almost everything written before on the structure of government." Similarly he believed that the new science of economics had brought to light the essential truths that were transforming the material world. He insisted upon emphasizing the break in old continuities. Power and force in international relations, for instance, "were legitimate principles in the dark ages which intervened between antient and modern civilisation." Disturbed by contemporaries who failed to appreciate the significance of the dramatic changes they had witnessed, Jefferson ridiculed those who "look at constitutions with sanctimonious reverence, and deem them like the arc of the covenant, too sacred to be touched." Purists about language were equally antediluvian in his eyes. Dictionaries were mere depositories, while society, he said, was the great workshop for the smithing of new words.[17] These are the statements of a man intent on making hard-edged divisions between himself and his opponents. However exaggerated Jefferson's insistence upon the newness of the intellectual terrain may appear to us, it clearly reflected a proposition of central importance to his world view. There is little evidence here of a mingling of liberal and classical traditions or of a concern for those staple fears of country thought—standing armies, public debts, executive influence, and government by money.

Although Hamilton sounded like a latter-day Robert Walpole, the attacks he provoked owed little to the influence of English Opposition thought because Hamilton's opponents—Jefferson and the largely unknown group that formed around him—had far different goals. They did

[16] Jefferson to Priestley, Mar. 21, 1801, in Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, 1892-1899), VIII, 54-56; Jefferson to Abigail Adams, Sept. 11, 1804, in Lester J. Cappon, ed., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1959), I, 278-280; Jefferson to John Adams, June 15, 1813, *ibid.*, II, 332.

[17] Jefferson to Isaac H. Tiffany, Aug. 26, 1816, in Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh, eds., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington, D.C., 1903-1904), XV, 65-66; Jefferson to James Madison, Aug. 28, 1789, in Boyd *et al.*, eds., *Jefferson Papers*, XV, 367; Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, July 12, 1816, in Ford, ed., *Writings of Jefferson*, X, 42; John Dewey [ed.], *The Living Thoughts of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, 1940), 9.

not look to the past for wisdom; they did not yearn for a government of balanced estates in a society of stable relationships; they did not celebrate participation in the polis. The conceptual language of classical republicanism had little relevance to their social realities and positively impeded their political purposes. It was just because of their disassociation from the cherished convictions of English political thought that Jefferson and his allies had to create an image of the society they hoped to bring into existence. In their depiction of America's future, freedom was expanded by drastically limiting the scope of government so that individual citizens could be empowered to act on their own behalf. Democratic values were invoked not to enlarge the people's power in government but rather to justify the abandonment of the authority traditionally exercised over them. In espousing limited government the Jeffersonians endorsed a redrawing of the lines between the public and private spheres, and this meant reordering their significance for the whole human enterprise. Old and well-documented abuses rendered government suspect because it relied on coercion. The new realm of voluntary associations—for worship, for study, for enterprise—held out the wonderful promise of shedding past oppression. The virtue whose fragility required a carefully balanced constitution grew robust when freed from old systems. Adams certainly knew his man when he brought to Jefferson's attention his good fortune in preferring "the dreams of the Future" to the histories of the past.[18]

Jefferson believed devoutly in progress, and like all such devotees he had to explain why the future would be different from the past. His answer lay with the prospect of making fundamental changes in human institutions. The new understanding of nature and society, as well as the evidence that ordinary men could order their lives properly, argued for the possibility of establishing a new direction for social development. This was Jefferson's goal and the reason why his iconoclasm was basic to its attainment. Freedom for him meant liberation. Civilization's spiritual and material advances depended upon free initiatives and creative intelligence. Progress had been impeded just because the public realm had been dominated by the few who used their power to keep the many ignorant. Unlike country party rhetoric with its lamentations about corruption and decay, Jeffersonian campaign literature ran to hyperbolic descriptions of America's future greatness once universal freedom, equal representation, and natural rights were firmly established.

Because these themes have pervaded American politics ever since, it has been difficult for historians to appreciate their novelty in the 1790s. And so the liberal tradition in America has been treated as a mindless reaction to a supposed New World or—worse yet—construed as what all human beings believe when not constrained by the elaborate intellectual constructions of Old World societies. For both Banning and me, the significance of the recent republican revision has been the discovery that

[18] Adams to Jefferson, Aug. 9, 1816, in Cappon, ed., *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, II, 487.

many eighteenth-century Americans thought within a classical republican frame of reference. For me, the importance of this fact is that it enables us to see that liberalism did not sprawl unimpeded across the flat intellectual landscape of American abundance, as Louis Hartz maintained.[19] Hence we can begin to study it as a complex construction of reality put together, as all world views are, through a selective interpretation of experience, to serve profound human values.

While on the face of it Banning and I are arguing about facts—which conceptual order animated the Jeffersonian opposition—our differences are encumbered by theoretical issues as well. Since the evidence and arguments around which we have constructed our contrasting accounts of the 1790s are readily available in print, I think it will be more productive to address these issues.[20] Banning's presentation of the Jeffersonian persuasion rests upon a theory about how ideas function in society that permeates his entire interpretation. When Bailyn extended the range of Caroline Robbins's original work on the impact of the English Commonwealthmen in colonial America, he integrated this research with the compelling concept of ideology. In his study, the Cassandras of the British Opposition did not just furnish the articulate colonial mind with notions about power, corruption, and liberty. Their literature could be counted as a cause of the American Revolution because it fused "into effective formulations" opinions and attitudes "otherwise too scattered and vague to be acted upon." In this famous passage describing the heady potency of ideology, Bailyn distinguished between mere ideas and those capable of crystallizing inchoate social discontent, turning unrealized private emotions into a public possession and elevating to structured consciousness the mingled urges that stir within us all.[21] This association of ideology with the deep structuring of social consciousness has necessarily affected the reading of texts. When Banning writes that the opponents of Hamilton seized the only political language available to them or that evocative words and phrases were assented to without further explanation because of shared understandings of classical republicanism, he is working within the scholarly conventions established a decade earlier by Bailyn and anatomized before that by Pocock and Quentin Skinner.[22] Disentangling the theory from the evidence in the "republican hypothesis" is basic to understanding Banning's and my differing approaches to the disputes between the Jeffersonians and Federalists.

A myriad of assumptions about how ideas become social facts is packed into Bailyn's statement about ideology, and these assumptions have

[19] Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York, 1955).

[20] Centrally in Banning, *Jeffersonian Persuasion,* and Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York, 1984).

[21] Bailyn, "The Central Themes of the American Revolution: An Interpretation," in Stephen G. Kurtz and James H. Hutson, eds., *Essays on the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1973), 11.

[22] Banning, *Jeffersonian Persuasion,* 185, 41, 177, 127, 148, 164.

unavoidably affected how he and his followers have interpreted their evidence. Bailyn's understanding of the role of ideas in history rests heavily upon the work of Clifford Geertz, and Geertz's thinking on ideology flows from anthropological studies of small face-to-face communities.[23] In these, the sharp differentiation between the social practices under observation and those familiar to the scholarly observers has encouraged scholars to search for the cues behind the patterned actions they were analyzing. In time they found these cues in the consciousness of the people under observation—those unspoken assumptions, visceral reactions, and value-laden convictions that reside within individuals but, from the outside, appear as patterned reactions. The exploration of this link between belief and behavior has produced a theory that emphasizes both the systematic and the social in our thought processes. Our construction of reality is not random but ordered, and it is not ours even though we experience our knowledge as a personal possession. Just as significantly, society's messages are constantly being conveyed to us through gestures, intonations, symbols, and rituals, as well as by more articulate aspects of human communication. Society, as Geertz has said, supplies the media for expression, and the media mold the expresser.[24] Of central importance to this theory is that language is encoded through social practices. The words used in any particular sentence acquire their meaning through previous discourse; behind their utterance lies a richly textured interpretation of reality. Human reason, in this view, operates within acquired consciousness; it does not stand outside socially conditioned thought as a tool in the service of objective criticism.

Merging with this theory of ideology derived from anthropology have been equally important reflections on the way human knowledge is organized through interpretive schemes. These have been introduced into the scholarship on republicanism through Pocock, who has approached ideology by way of Thomas Kuhn and the sociology of knowledge. What Kuhn offered historians, Pocock explains, was a way of treating social thought as a process both linguistic and political because thinking could be viewed as a means of distributing authority as well as a system of communication.[25] The complementary insights of Geertz and Kuhn entered scholarly works at the same time that hermeneutics and structural-

[23] Clifford Geertz, "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man" and "Ideology as a Cultural System," in his *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973). See also Ronald G. Walters, "Signs of the Times: Clifford Geertz and Historians," *Social Research,* XLVII (1980), 537-556.

[24] Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in his *Interpretation of Cultures,* 212. "The sociology of knowledge ought to be called the sociology of meaning, for what is socially determined is not the nature of conception but the vehicles of conception."

[25] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1962); J.G.A. Pocock, "Languages and Their Implications: The Transformation of the Study of Political Thought," in his *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York, 1971), 14-15.

ism were transforming the way all texts were being examined. The net result has been to diminish drastically the independence of the word and the autonomy of the author. Nothing speaks to us directly; every text must be comprehended within the linguistic, conceptual, and social systems that controlled its creation and reception. What becomes paramount for historians is ferreting out the connections that relate the part to the whole. This means that the texts that are the most valuable typify an age while those that deviate from a reigning paradigm may be interesting but less relevant to the enterprise of decoding public discourse. Thus Pocock dismisses Locke's *Second Treatise of Civil Government* on the grounds that his thought was notoriously not organized around historical concepts at a time when his contemporaries were placing their politics in a context of historical change.[26]

Bringing these theoretical insights to bear on Revolutionary America, Pocock has made explicit their impact on the revision underway. The classical view of politics, he writes, was a closed ideology, introducing into eighteenth-century America a Renaissance pessimism concerning the direction and reversibility of historical developments. Any change was likely to evoke fears of corruption and, through corruption, degeneration with its accompanying loss of liberty. The static ideal of the Americans, according to Pocock, was embodied in the word *virtue,* a heroic concept metaphorically braced for attack from the corrupting disruptions embodied in the word *commerce.* So firm was the grip of the notion of the incompatibility of virtue and commerce on the colonial mind that Americans were compelled to interpret change as a threat to their liberties.[27] This was true apparently whether the change issued from the English imperial authorities before Independence, the popular involvement with tax and debt policies after the Revolution, or the fiscal program of Hamilton during Washington's administration.

This emphasis upon the social component in thought has had the salutary effect of disengaging intellectual historians from their great texts and plunging them into the systems of communication in which those texts, and lesser ones, acquired meaning. The accomplishments of the ideological school in this regard are major and permanent. However, this achievement should be separated from theoretical assumptions about the constraining effect of those ideas said to have paradigmatic stature. Among scientists sharing a discipline or in small custom-oriented communities a single conceptual order may in fact suppress imaginative deviation. This is far less likely to happen in complex, literate societies. Such societies with their plurality of religions and occupations naturally generate distinct groups with diverging interests. Power relations within them are frequently troubled, and men and women enjoy an access to information that can supply materials for alternative interpretations of reality. Ideologies in such societies rarely enjoy an uncontested supremacy—which is why we so often refer to them as persuasions.

[26] Pocock, "Virtue and Commerce," *JIH,* III (1972), 129.
[27] *Ibid.,* 120-123.

By accepting the idea of a presiding paradigm, ideological historians have created the notion of a collective mind that furnishes the promptings that structure action. Ideologically the society is undifferentiated. Some may benefit more than others from the distribution of authority built into the society's conceptual language, but the distribution nonetheless presents itself as a given embedded in the minds of all. There is no room in this conception of social thought for the kind of ideological warfare that Jefferson injected into national politics. Conflicts instead are psychologized. As Gordon S. Wood explained about Bailyn's findings, the ideas of the Revolutionaries took on an "elusive and unmanageable quality, a dynamic self-intensifying character that transcended the intentions and desires of any of the historical participants."[28] With this theoretical approach, novelties and altered circumstances become intellectual problems for the whole society. A collective case of cognitive dissonance produces a collective effort to accommodate the nonconfirming evidence. Within each person rage the battles generated by the ideological contradictions of the whole. An ideology once in place, so it seems, imposes itself upon the range of human interests that generated interpretive schemes in the first place.

The ideological historians' emphasis upon the social structuring of communication has greatly enhanced our ability to understand the process of expression, but it has led to a neglect of the motives behind expression, not the least of which is testing the validity of one's assumptions. Human beings think for a purpose, for many purposes. It is possible to explore with an anthropologist's sensitivity the riches of symbolic systems without subscribing to the view that these systems possess a power to inhibit the creation of new symbols. One of the most insistent intellectual demands for men and women in the early modern period was the need to understand the dramatic changes transforming their world. Since these changes carried opportunities as well as threats, interpreting them had unavoidable implications for existing institutional arrangements. But it is just this play of intellectual power and imaginative virtuosity that the ideological approach obscures. Wishing to move beyond the aridly rationalistic search for causes in explanations of great historical events, the republican revisors have come dangerously close to cutting the taproots of human thought. While it is undeniable that human beings begin their thinking with an established world view, it does not follow that the reality testing that constitutes mature thought will necessarily stay confined within that view. This is a fortiori the case if the different groups in an open and pluralistic society are confronting changes powerful enough to reshape the social landscape.

These criticisms of the ideological approach are particularly relevant to the treatment of economic change in the "republican hypothesis." Again Pocock has elaborated the controlling interpretation. In his *Machiavellian Moment* he explains how commerce became arrayed against virtue. Late

[28] Wood, "Rhetoric and Reality in the American Revolution," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXIII (1966), 22.

seventeenth-century Englishmen confronted a series of fiscal innovations that left the king with a bank, an expandable debt, and the means of buying both an army and a complaisant Parliament. The political nation split along the lines marked out by the classical republican model. Those who embraced the ideal of an uncorrupted domain for political participation reserved to the propertied and independent members of the polity endorsed the alarmist country position; those receptive to the new engines for national wealth and power accepted the outlook of the court. Henceforth the reigning republican paradigm controlled the reaction to the accelerating advances in trade. Those who identified with the state welcomed the new wealth-producing systems without removing the onus of corruption from them; those who identified with the independent gentry viewed commerce as the foe of virtue. Since civic virtue was counted upon to maintain the constitutional balance that guaranteed liberty and the survival of the polity, the commercial penetration of England's agricultural economy represented an unalloyed threat.[29]

Revisiting his Machiavellian moment in 1981, Pocock reasserted the primacy of the financial revolution in the history of ideology. It—not the Glorious Revolution, certainly not the commercial revolution—produced the nodes of significance that would dominate political discourse in the Anglo-American world throughout the eighteenth century.[30] Not the least of the astounding historiographical consequences of his revision, he said then, had been the displacement of Locke. Here Locke represents for Pocock a code name for those earlier historical accounts—both whig and Marxist—that interpreted the past from the front to the back and assumed that the great Mr. Locke came into being to prepare the way for modern industrial democracies. This Locke, of course, can be easily dispensed with, but coming to terms with the Locke who was notoriously ahistorical will require a less heroic view of how ideologies organize consciousness.

It has been a major goal of the ideological historians to move beyond the bootless efforts of materialists and idealists to establish either social facts or conceptions of them as fundamental. By making conceptual languages part of the structure of personality and the world, they have tried to envelop rather than transcend the epiphenomenal-phenomenal split. "Men cannot do what they have no means of saying they have done," Pocock has written, "and what they do must in part be what they can say and conceive that it is."[31] We sense that that must be true. Indeed, it is not uncommon now to read in scholarly works that a group—usually a subordinate one—did not embark on a particular program because its members did not have a language for discussing new goals. This equating of conceptual languages with the actual structuring of our consciousness is

[29] J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, N.J., 1975).

[30] J.G.A. Pocock, "*The Machiavellian Moment* Revisited: A Study in History and Ideology," *Journal of Modern History*, LIII (1981), 64-66.

[31] Pocock, "Virtue and Commerce," *JIH*, III (1972), 122.

what gives plausibility to the idea of a single, shared world view operating within a given society. This claim, which has not always been made explicit, undergirds Pocock's and Banning's insistence that the classical republican paradigm controlled how eighteenth-century men reacted to change. With their reconstruction of the conceptual world of classical republicanism we can appreciate just how discordant progressive economic development could be. Men living with sensibilities formed in an agrarian society and struggling to interpret change with an ideology pivoting on the preeminent importance of stasis could only be disconcerted by the intrusive vigor of the market. This much has been established, and the fatuities of whig history can be quietly forgotten. However, by insisting that the only significant intellectual accommodation to change took place within a presiding paradigm, the revisionists have made it difficult to recognize that alongside the Machiavellian conception of citizenship, order, and liberty there grew up another paradigm.[32]

Men did find the means of talking about commerce that over time produced a language totally unassimilable to the social grammar of civic humanism. Indeed, they were forced to do so in part because their political language had no means for discussing the early modern economy as it in fact operated.[33] Classical theory asserted the predominance of politics over all other aspects of social life. This predominance reflected and perpetuated the subordinate position of all other social institutions. Economic life served purely private, household needs. The political whole was not only greater than the sum of the parts; it alone possessed sufficient unity for a history. Time existed within the polity; outside churned a meaningless sequence of events ruled by fortune. To catalog in this manner the central propositions of classical republicanism is to state the problem. No concepts existed for analyzing a trading system that had not only moved beyond the confines of political boundaries but had created wealth essential to the conduct of politics. There was no classical language for understanding a commercial system that was public, progressive, and orderly. However appealing civic humanism was to English gentlemen involved in public issues, it did not help persons who sought to understand the private transactions that were determining the shape and direction of the Anglo-American economy.

Publications on agriculture, trade, and manufacturing grew in volume and range during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and these writings indicate that the imagination of men who studied commerce was not imprisoned within the classical republican world view. Many observers were able to see that their economic system represented a wholly new

[32] *Ibid.* Pocock here suggests that it was unlikely that there would be only one language in use within a given society but goes on to accept that this was so.

[33] On this subject see Nicholas Xenos, "Classical Political Economy: The Apolitical Discourse of Civil Society," *Humanities in Society*, III (1980), and Charles Nathanson, *Adam Smith and the Making of Market Society* (New Haven, Conn., forthcoming).

phenomenon. They interpreted the evidence of material advance as part of a complicated transformation requiring new modes of analysis. Men were able to talk about trade, in time to fashion a bold new conceptual language capable of transforming traditional assumptions about the human personality. They created an abstract model of the market. They constructed powerful hypotheses to explain to one another how regularities emerged from the apparently random behavior of market bargainers. They recognized, too, the implications for their political order in the existence of an international organization for the production and distribution of wealth. They saw that trade engaged men as individuals rather than as members of a polity. And they extrapolated new truths from their observations and attached them to new models of human association. Necessity was the mother of this intellectual invention in part because classical republicanism offered only a language for lamenting, as opposed to understanding, commerce. From the 1620s, when Gerald de Malynes and Thomas Mun exchanged views on the English coin shortage, to the 1776 publication of Adam Smith's masterly synthesis, men thought about the market economy in ways that incessantly impinged upon politics. In exactly the way that Pocock has described the creation of all matrices of language, writers decomposed old meanings about civil order and recomposed the elements of time, citizenship, and the distribution of authority. Outside the polity, they constructed a model of economic life that borrowed its order from nature—the newly conceptualized nature of predictable regularity.[34] As this economy absorbed more and more of the attention of men and women it supplied a new identity for them. By the end of the eighteenth century the individual with wide-ranging needs and abstract rights appeared to challenge the citizen with concrete obligations and prescribed privileges.

In the 1790s when the Jeffersonian Republicans and Federalists confronted each other, the battle lines had been drawn around opposing conceptions of civil society. The passions mobilized by this contest over national leadership reflected this fact. However diffuse the ideas of ordinary participants, the parties' champions were disciplined and rigorous thinkers, filled with a sense of the portentousness of the events they sought to control. For the Jeffersonians the economy offered an escape from the predicaments implicit in traditional ways of looking at social order. Here was a system operating independently of politics and, like the physical universe, taking its cues from nature. Where politics achieved stability by imposing its structure of power, the economy appeared to elicit voluntary participation as it wove ever more extensive networks of free exchange. It also discovered a rationality in the humblest person whose capacity to take care of himself could be used as an argument for freedom. Like so many other staple concepts in traditional political discourse, freedom underwent a transformation in this newly imagined

[34] I have discussed this development in *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton, N.J., 1978).

society of the future. Freedom now could be construed as a universal liberation wherein men—and, of course, it was a white male vision—were free to define and pursue their own goals.

Only in the United States, with its undeveloped resources and flexible social norms, could reality lend support to this proleptic vision of a free society. The persuasiveness of the liberal paradigm, however, depended less upon palpable evidence than upon powerful, new, analytical models explaining human psychology, physical causation, and the workings of the market. It would be hard to exaggerate the subversive role abstract reasoning played in this retreat from politics. Science became the lodestar for those who thought they were at the dawn of a new age; modern scientists, not ancient philosophers, guided them into the future; the inquiring mind presented itself as the inexhaustible resource for endless improvement. The importance of the free market to this development cannot be reduced to economics. Nor can Jeffersonians be distinguished from Federalists on the basis of their enthusiasm for economic development. It was the economy's ordering of society with minimal compulsion that stirred the Jeffersonian imagination, not its capacity to produce wealth. Even after the incessant tendency of the unregulated market to make the rich richer and the poor more vulnerable had fully revealed itself, belief in spontaneous harmony died hard, for with it went the expectation that progress inhered in the natural order.

Liberalism and capitalism have undeniable historical links, but the concept of capitalism that we use today only obscures their connection in the eighteenth century. Our postulates about capitalism crystallized in the nineteenth century when the relentless dynamic of unimpeded economic development became apparent. For us the end of capitalism is the accumulation of capital, the means to that end the capitalist's organization of hired labor, and the social consequence a permanent division between dependent laborers and independent employers. Attached to the notion of a bourgeois ethic, the culture produced by this capitalism appears in an altogether different light from the Jeffersonian vision. Constricting rather than generous, manipulative rather than emancipating, its values never rise above the interests of its beneficiaries. This capitalism shimmers beneath Banning's statements that the Jeffersonians had many reservations about the "eager, unrestrained pursuit of economic opportunity" or the "unrestrained pursuit of purely private interests." Similarly, when he writes that liberalism "is comfortable with economic man, with the individual who is intent on maximizing private satisfactions," it is William Graham Sumner's liberalism, not Jefferson's, that provides the model.[35]

The recovery of classical republican thought has, as Banning writes, enabled us to understand that the Revolutionary generation left "a lasting commitment to ideas that were not part of a liberal consensus."[36] However, by presenting this mode of political discourse as encapsulating

[35] Banning, "Jeffersonian Ideology Revisited," 12, 14, above.
[36] *Ibid.*, 13.

Americans within a closed ideology, the republican revisionists have gone beyond their evidence. It is of course possible that Jefferson and his followers were simultaneously liberal and classical, as Banning has argued. However, when we find a man as methodically reflective as Jefferson repeatedly stating that his party distinguished itself by its commitment to scientific advances in the knowledge of government, by its faith in the self-governing capacities of ordinary men, and by its liberation from reverence for the past, it makes good sense to believe him. Not to do so is to interpret his triumph as a defeat and to construe the emergence of liberalism as a disappointing capitulation to the overpowering force of economic development.

Republicanism in the 1780s, according to Gordon Wood, was essentially anticapitalistic, representing "a final attempt to come to terms with the emergent individualistic society that threatened to destroy once and for all the communion and benevolence that civilized men had always considered to be the ideal of human behavior."[37] It is this meaning that scholars have in mind when they speak of the new republican hypothesis that has transformed our understanding of political discourse in eighteenth-century America. Undeniably, *republicanism* continued to convey this complicated message to some, but the men who claimed *republican* for a party title in 1800 had elaborated a new meaning—equally complex—that embraced and celebrated the free individual. No longer seen as a threat, the emerging individualist had become the instrument of progress. What was exhilarating in their world was not the experience of organizing society around new principles—for that they had not had—but rather the hopes such a prospect inspired. When Jefferson hailed his age as a whole new chapter in the history of man, we sense that his opponents' reverence for the past was uppermost in his mind. Indeed, the excitement generated by the election of Jefferson tells us something about the connection between American optimism and the promise of a different future. Jefferson's victory stirred deeply his champions just because his republicanism represented a carefully constructed alternative to the human predicament so forcefully depicted in classical republican texts.

[37] Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 418-419.