

and more prosperous than ever before in human history, for there has never yet been a time (according to Hobbes) when the errors of the philosophers were fully purged from society, and men could live a life without false belief. Revolutionary moments tend to breed utopianism, and perhaps we have always overlooked the greatest of the English revolutionary utopias.

CHAPTER 7

The rapture of motion:
James Harrington's republicanism

Jonathan Scott

When a thing is in motion, it will eternally be in motion, unless somewhat els stay it.

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651)¹
 When he beheld . . . the rapture of motion . . . into which his spheres were cast, without any manner of obstruction or interfering . . . [he] abdicated the magistracy of Archon.

James Harrington, *Oceana* (1656)²
 I have opposed the politics of Mr Hobbes, to show him what he taught me.

James Harrington, *The Prerogative of Popular Government* (1658)³

I

English republicanism has proved a rich intellectual terrain. This may be some compensation for its abject practical failure. For contemporaries the English republic was the Rump Parliament, the disreputable fag-end of an august political institution. It fell victim to the turbulence of the times, not once but twice. All the bodies upon whose truncation or abolition it was founded preside prosperously over its failure to this day. Yet through the window of this brief break with political custom there shone an intense ideological light. English republican thought was remarkable, both for the depth of its reach back into the past, and for its internal variety. The republican experience became a prism, receiving the broadest rays of antiquity and the Renaissance and refracting them for the use of modern Europe and America. Among their number the

¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. MacPherson (London, 1984), p. 87.

² James Harrington, *Oceana* in *The Political Works of James Harrington*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock, (Cambridge, 1977), p. 342. The words 'were cast' have been moved in this quotation to make the sense clearer.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

republican writers included some of the most innovative and influential of a century exceptionally endowed with both.⁴ This was an extraordinary achievement.

Our understanding of English republican thought rests upon two foundations. One, the older, is the study of its most distinguished author, James Harrington. The other is that of English republicanism in general, which has particularly blossomed since the Second World War. John Pocock has done most to bring the two together, by precisely locating Harrington's *Oceana* within its wider republican ideological context.⁵ For Pocock, Harrington was 'a classical republican, and England's premier civic humanist and Machiavellian'.⁶

What Pocock has taught us above all is that there was such a relationship: between republican thought in general, and Harrington's in particular. This was by no means obvious even to the best of earlier Harrington scholars. When Felix Raab, for instance, detected the presence of fourteen different Harringtons in the scholarly literature, he called for a synthesis 'rigidly disciplined by direct reference to the text'.⁷ This left unanswered however the question of the context within which this text would be read. It was precisely the variety of such contexts which accounted for this Harringtonian proliferation. To this failure to relate *Oceana* to the ideological tradition from which it emerged was linked a tendency to conflate the two. It was Perez Zagorin who declared that with Harrington 'republican thought may be properly said to begin', thus mistaking for a beginning what was in some sense the beginning of the end.⁸ Even where the existence of such an independent ideological tradition was recognised, Harrington's stature has always overshadowed, and sometimes been allowed to define it. This is no sounder than taking Machiavelli to be the definer of orthodox Florentine humanism, or Hobbes of mainstream natural-law theory. Zera Fink clothed all the English classical republicans in Harrington's outrageous Venetian attire;

⁴ I count Harrington here under 'innovative'; Sidney under 'influential'.

⁵ Pocock built here, as he has stressed, on the work of Zera Fink (see note 9). J.G.A. Pocock, 'James Harrington and The Good Old Cause: A Study of the Ideological Context of his Writings', *Journal of British Studies*, 10, 1 (1970); *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, 1975), esp. pp. 350-400; *The Political Works of James Harrington*, Introduction, pp. 6-42.

⁶ Pocock (ed.), *Political Works*, p. 15.

⁷ F. Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli* (London, 1964), ch. 6, p. 187.

⁸ P. Zagorin, *A History of Political Thought in the English Revolution* (London, 1954), ch. 11.

no small matter since here (as elsewhere) Harrington was wilfully disobeying Machiavelli.⁹ Even Pocock himself christened some later republicans 'neo-Harringtonian' for repeating an early republican view of history from which Harrington himself had borrowed. This cart may need reintroduction to the horse: these republicans were not neo-Harrington; Harrington was, as we shall see, neo-republican.

It is true then, that Harrington's *Oceana* cannot be understood outside the context of the republican ideological tradition from which it emerged, and to which it was in turn a conscious contribution.¹⁰ At the heart of this context sits classical republicanism. This essay begins from this conclusion; its purpose is, however, to offer a reassessment of Harrington's relationship to that tradition. This will oppose the history of J.G.A. Pocock, to show him what he taught me. For we are dealing here not only with the most idiosyncratic member of the republican intellectual flock. The more we look at Harrington the more we detect, under that loose sheepskin cover, a full set of whiskers and a low growl. It is true that from a certain perspective Harrington's politics look classical, his economics Aristotelian.¹¹ In some sense they were. But from the perspective which counts, that of classical republicanism itself, and of the whole republican experience from 1649 to 1683, there is reason to look again.

We must begin by sketching this wider context: that of the English republican experience as a whole. We may then see where Harrington stands within it. Although we will find everyone involved reading the same map of this terrain, Harrington's compass appears to have been issuing bearings of a distinctly independent character. We consequently find him occupying

⁹ Z. Fink, *The Classical Republicans* (Urbana, 1945); J. Scott, *Algernon Sidney and the English Republic 1623-1673* (Cambridge, 1988), ch. 2, and pp. 15, 32, 111.

¹⁰ The summary of the tradition which follows draws upon Scott, *English Republic*; and *Algernon Sidney and the Restoration Crisis 1677-1683* (Cambridge, 1991). The best expression of this self-consciousness remains Sidney's to a friend in Paris in 1677: 'The design of the English [republicans] had been, to make a Republic on the model of that of the Hebrews, before they had their Kings, and of Sparta, of Rome, and of Venice, taking from each what was best, to make a perfect composition.' Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Fr. MS.23254, fols. 99-101.

¹¹ John Pocock's pre-Machiavellian Moment trajectory towards this subject is most helpfully laid out in *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (Cambridge, 1957), ch. 6; *Politics, Language and Time* (London, 1972), chs. 3-4, see esp. p. 112.

exceedingly exotic territory.¹² Our final task will be to examine that process, and understand how he got there. One side-effect of this while it is essential for, can also be a distraction from our perception of political substance. If classical republicanism was a language, why do we find its foremost English practitioner speaking in a North Derbyshire accent which Machiavelli would have found incomprehensible?

II

The English republican paradox, of practical failure and ideological success, was not coincidental. Political instability and intellectual fertility have long walked hand-in-hand (for Plato, as for Machiavelli, and for Hobbes). And throughout its history the practical and intellectual aspects of the English republican experience remained closely linked. This experience spanned thirty-five years (1649-83); that is, a single generation. For it was the product of a single group, bound by a common political experience. For all its variety, all the branches of English republican ideology issued from this one trunk, rooted in the practical experience of republicanism. We may divide its development into five stages.

It was the centrality of political practice that made the first stage (1649-53) the most important. Notoriously the fact of English republicanism arrived slightly in advance of the theory.¹³ The consequent depth of a despised government's need for political legitimation bred its own rich ideological harvest. For European and domestic audiences respectively, John Milton and Marchamont Nedham both showed in their different ways that it would be necessary to reach back behind the whole mediæval experience of monarchy to a time free from the 'superstitious reverence for kings'.¹⁴

¹² See for instance Milton's complaints about Harrington's republic in 1659, a year of more general republican attack upon his thought. J. Milton, *Readie and Easy Way in Complete Prose Works*, vol. vii (New Haven, 1980), pp. 441, 445-6.

¹³ By this I mean positive, as opposed to the negative theory which dominated the engagement controversy. Nedham distinguished himself on both fronts, making the transition in Part 2, Chapter 5 of his *The Case of Commonwealth of England Stated* (1650), ed. P. A. Knachel (Virginia, 1969), pp. 111-28.

¹⁴ J. Milton, *Second Defence of the English People* (1654), Introduction; Scott, *English Republic*, pp. 23-4.

In its second stage, in opposition to the Protectorate, and centred upon the year 1656, republicanism extended its range. This now spanned the considerable intellectual distance from Harrington to Vane. And this marriage of political adversity with intellectual diversity remained characteristic. It was evident in 1659, as republicanism stared its own failure in the face. It persisted as the restored monarchy was assailed from continental exile in 1665 to 1666. And we see it in the last phase of English republican activity, both practical and intellectual, in London in 1680 to 1683. One last time the capital became a republican bastion: even a sheriff, Slingsby Bethel, published something. It took a further wave of exiles and executions to bring this singular chapter of English history to a close.

This was not the end, of course, for the republican ideology. This displayed a prodigious capacity for posthumous (and international) reinvention.¹⁵ But it was the end for the practical experience by which it had been sustained. In all its phases it was the product of men linked with that experience, at first or second hand. Milton and Nedham had been employed by the republican Council of State. Their achievement was built upon by a series of members of that council. In stages two to three (1656, 1659) there was the republican leader Henry Vane. In four to five, there was Vane's close friend and protégé Algernon Sidney. Joining Sidney in the latter was another council member and his own second cousin Henry Neville. All of these senior republican politicians were patrons of other writers (Vane of Sidney and Stubbe; Sidney of Bethel; Neville of Harrington) as well as authors in their own right.

As the product, then, of a common experience and linked authorship, it is not surprising that this ideology shared some characteristics and an identifiable core. English republicanism, it has been said, 'was a language, not a programme'.¹⁶ Indeed it was at least four languages, and usually some combination of them. All drew, logically enough, and with more or less adaptive flair, on the republic's own pre-1649 intellectual heritage. Natural-law theory was the language of civil-war independency (and its other political

¹⁵ C. Robbins, *The Eighteenth Century Commonwealthman* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959); Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*; Scott, *English Republic*, ch. 1.

¹⁶ Pocock (ed.), *Political Works*, p. 15. For the remainder of this paragraph see Scott, *English Republic*, ch. 2.

offshoots, including the Levellers).¹⁷ Interest theory had, by 1648, become the political language of the new model army.¹⁸ Classical republicanism involved a considerable realignment of early Stuart Renaissance culture. Republicanism also employed an historical adaptation of the ancient constitutionalism of the same period. Milton used this, along with classical republicanism and natural-law theory. Nedham used classical republicanism and interest theory. Vane used interest and natural-law languages. Sidney used all four: interest theory to connect with the Dutch republicans in 1665 and 1666; classical republicanism, natural-law theory and ancient constitutionalism to respond to Robert Filmer's (early Stuart) attack upon them in *Patriarcha*. All of these languages are important, but it is upon classical republicanism that we must focus for the context of Harrington's *Oceana*.¹⁹

The character and much of the range of English classical republicanism was established by its pioneers. Milton emphasised its antique basis; Nedham its Renaissance revival. Milton's key sources were Aristotle, Cicero and Livy. Nedham's *Mercurius Politicus* developed the Livian republicanism of Machiavelli. Both writers used many other sources, classical, medieval and early modern: among the most important were Plato, Polybius, Tacitus, Guicciardini and Grotius. Between them, and particularly around this core of Aristotle, Livy and Machiavelli, they laid the basis for everything to come.

Thirty years later, at the other end of the republican chronology, Sidney and Neville remained secure within this tradition. This is true of Sidney in particular, whose political thought reads like Milton and Nedham in a fit of mutual congratulation (no mean feat). At its core sit the same Aristotelian natural-law theory, the same Ciceronian rhetoric of liberty, and the same Livian and Machiavellian militarism that lay at the heart of the Rump's own ideology. Both men borrowed the Anglo-Saxon ancient constitu-

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17 and note 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, chs. 12–13; *The Humble Remonstrance of his Excellency the Lord Fairfax* (November 1648); M. Kishlansky, 'Ideology and Politics in the Parliamentary Armies 1645–9', in J.S. Morrill (ed.), *Reactions to the English Civil War* (London, 1982).

¹⁹ See especially Fink, *The Classical Republicans*; the works of Pocock in notes 5 and 11 above; Lloyd-Jones and Blair Worden (eds.), *History and Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh Trevor-Roper* (London, 1981). This author has made the point (*English Republic*, ch. 2) that even classical republicanism can only be seen as 'a language in the loosest of senses.'

tionalism ('the Gothic polity') adapted by Milton from Tacitus (*Germania*, *Agricola*) and Hotman (*Francogallia*). Neville became the translator of Machiavelli's works.²⁰ None of this is surprising, since both men had, as we have seen, been members of the republic's Council of State. Yet the durability and grip of this early ideology also reflects both the high profile of the propaganda organs through which it had been disseminated, and some salient characteristics of the republic's own political life.

Milton wrote, theatrically, for a European audience. Nedham's *Mercurius*, the Rump's official journal, 'flew every week to all parts of the nation for more than ten years'; 'tis incredible what influence [it] had'. When we find Nedham's writing referred to by a contemporary as 'like a weaver's beam' – around which subsequent ideology spun itself – we have reason to pay attention.²¹ Of these practical political characteristics, two in particular generated and typified English republican ideology. The first was an emphasis on arms: the equation of political liberty with military strength. English republicanism was deeply militaristic because these elements of Livy (Milton) and Machiavelli (Nedham) spoke to the republic's own extraordinary military achievements. The conquest of England, Ireland and Scotland, and the humbling of the mightiest naval power in Europe, all within four years, left an indelible mark upon everybody involved. The second characteristic was an equally pervasive awareness of contingency, for the republic's life, though militarily glorious, was turbulent and short. Nedham took to the republican stage pointing at Fortune's wheel: there is 'a perpetual rotation of all things'.²² Milton exited from it bewailing the same movement, 'making vain . . . the blood of so many thousand valiant Englishmen, who left us in this libertie, bought with their lives'.²³ Sidney improved upon the Machiavel-

²⁰ A. Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government* (1698); H. Neville, *Plato Redivivus* (1680), *The Works of the Famous Nicholas Machiavel* (1675); J.H. Salmon, *The French Religious Wars in English Political Thought* (Oxford, 1959), p. 160. See Nathaniel Bacon, *A Historical and Political Discourse of the Laws and Government of England* (1648); J. Milton, *A Defense of the People of England* (1651), in *Complete Prose Works*, vol. iv, ed. D.M. Wolfe (New Haven, 1966), pp. 479–83; Scott, *English Republic*, p. 107.

²¹ These quotes are from Wood, cited in the introduction to Milton's *Complete Prose Works*, vol. iv, pp. 53–6.

²² Nedham, *Case of the Commonwealth*, p. 7.

²³ J. Milton, *Readie and easie Way* (1659), *Prose Works*, vol. vii (New Haven, 1980), pp. 358–9.

lian insight that political change was unavoidable, insisting that it was essential.²⁴

There was indeed then, a Machiavellian moment in England. As a whole English republicanism both faced, and embraced, its instability in time. As a body of thought it was distinguished by openness, a flexibility, and a scepticism entirely characteristic of the humanistic context from which Machiavelli's own had emerged.²⁵ In Nedham and Sidney in particular it had two supreme Machiavellians, who understood and supported every hard decision taken before them by the master. The most important of these was the choice of vigour, of armed force and of the 'tumults' they would bring, at the expense of longevity and stability. Faced with the choice, for them as for Machiavelli, the longevity of Venice could not compare with the *grandezza* of Rome. That Harrington was a participant in this tradition is, however, much less clear.

III

Harrington's relationship to the republican experience, both practical and intellectual, was most unusual. On the one hand he did indeed draw heavily upon this classical republican heritage. Almost every major feature of *Oceana* was prefigured in some way between 1649 and 1656. One the other hand, everything so borrowed was fundamentally transformed. The intention and result was to produce a body of thought completely different in kind. *Oceana* is, in fact, a deliberate subversion of classical republicanism with its roots in a post-humanist rebellion linked to that of Hobbes. We will need to consider each of these relationships — of dependency and transformation — in turn.

One of *Oceana*'s fundamental laws, rotation of office, has long been recognised as a hobby-horse of Nedham's *Mercurius Politicus*. It was also a feature of the republican Council of State's own political practice.²⁶ But the other, the agrarian, or at least the concerns behind it, had also been adumbrated in this period. Milton had used Cicero's *De lege agraria* in his *Defence of the English People*

²⁴ Scott, *English Republic*, pp. 30–5; *Restoration Crisis*, chs. 10–11.

²⁵ This is no less true of figures like Vane and Stubbe than of those whose ideas have been discussed here: see Scott, *English Republic*, pp. 105–12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 100.

(1651).²⁷ Nedham, in one three-issue run of *Mercurius* (no. 5, 101–3, 6–27 May 1652) had insisted upon three essentials of republican policy that lie at the heart of *Oceana*. They were: that a free state must 'limit . . . the wealth' of its citizens, and particularly its senators, 'that none of them grow over rich'; that it must limit their term of office 'that the affairs of the commonwealth [not] be made subservient . . . to a few persons'; and 'that the people be continually trained up in the exercise of arms'.²⁸ In these three policies, drawn from Aristotle, Cicero, Livy and Machiavelli, Nedham anticipated both of *Oceana*'s basic laws, and its armed citizenship. Moreover Nedham illustrated the first principle, as Harrington was to do, by reference to the 'policy of Harry the 8, who when he disposed of the Revenues of the Abbies' followed the example of Brutus in distributing 'the Royal Revenues among the people'.²⁹ When the pamphlet *A Copy of a Letter from an Officer in Ireland* used this same historical account in early 1656 its author was accused of stealing from the still-unpublished *Oceana*. The reality may have been more complicated.³⁰ Harrington himself noted the anticipation of his concept of the balance by Aristotle ('You have Aristotle full of it in divers places, especially where he says that immoderate wealth . . . [is] where one man or a few have greater possessions than the . . . frame of the commonwealth will bear').³¹

These borrowings form part of what was a wholesale adoption by Harrington of the sources and the range (classical, medieval and Renaissance) of the early republican tradition. These included aspects of interest and natural-law theory, and the history of the Gothic polity. What is more important however is the use to which these borrowings were put. For the distance between the type of thought upon which Harrington drew, and the type to whose construction he now set himself, was extreme. It was a transition from general principles to specificity; from the sceptical humanism of the Renaissance to the pursuit of perfection, fixity and permanence. Harrington set his sights upon this extraordinary objective: political immortality. To this would be sacrificed all the fundamen-

²⁷ Milton, *Complete Prose Works*, vol. iv, pp. 485–6.

²⁸ *Mercurius Politicus*, pp. 1,586–7, p. 1,594.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1,586–7.

³⁰ See below; and Pocock, *Political Works*, pp. 10–12; Scott, *English Republic*, pp. 115–16.

³¹ Harrington, *Political Works*, p. 166; see also M. Downs, *James Harrington* (Boston, 1977), pp. 24–6.

tals of the classical republican tradition. And behind this intellectual chasm lay divergent assumptions about nature itself. According to Harrington: 'A man is sinful yet the world is perfect, so may the citizens be sinful, and yet the commonwealth be perfect.'³² According to Algeon Sidney: 'Nothing can or ought to be permanent but that which is perfect. And perfection is in God only, not in the things he has created.'³³

The peculiarity of Harrington's relationship to the republican experience begins with its practical dimension. Alone of the major republican writers Harrington was not himself actively involved in the cause. He was not, that is, an exponent of the *vita activa*, in practice any more than in theory. This is important not only because the sceptical qualities of English republican thought are closely related to the political practice of its authors (as was true of Machiavelli). We will shortly have reason to question the quality of political participation in *Oceana* itself. It is also important because Harrington himself placed great emphasis upon it:

Some have [said] that I, being a private man, had been . . . mad . . . to meddle with politics; what had a private man to do with government? My Lord, there is not any public person, not any magistrate, that has written in politics worth a button. All they that have been excellent in this way have been private men.³⁴

Hardly less importantly, Harrington's personal involvement in England's troubles in the middle of the century had been on the other (royalist) side. As an intimate of the captured Charles I he 'passionately loved his Majesty', and contracted 'so great a griefe' at his death that 'never any thing did goe so neer to him'.³⁵ Among the subsequent features of *Oceana* remarkable within the republican canon were a denial of the right of political resistance (shared with Hobbes),³⁶ and an insistence upon the right of defeated royalists to full citizenship which embroiled him in controversy with other republicans including Nedham, Stubbe and Vane.³⁷ At the same

³² Harrington, *Political Works*, p. 320.

³³ Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government in Sydney on Government: The Works of Algeon Sidney* (1772), p. 406.

³⁴ *The Examination of James Harrington, in Political Works*, p. 858. See also p. 395.

³⁵ J. Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, ed. O. L. Dick, (London, 1958), p. 124.

³⁶ Zagorin, *Political Thought*, p. 140.

³⁷ See particularly Stubbe's *An Essay in Defence of the Good Old Cause* (1659) written under Vane's patronage. J.C. Davis, 'Pocock's Harrington: Grace, Nature and Art in the Classical Republicanism of James Harrington', *Historical Journal*, 24, 3 (1981) discusses this feature of *Oceana*.

time he was attacked by royalists for dabbling in republican theory and betraying an impeccably loyal background.³⁸

Harrington's one personal link with the republican experience was through his friend Henry Neville. It was Neville who persuaded him to stop writing bad poetry and turn to political thought. Subsequently Hobbes claimed of *Oceana* that Neville 'had a finger in that pye' and (as Aubrey remarked) 'tis like enough' Neville was also rumoured to be the author of *A Copy of a Letter* (1656) already mentioned.³⁹ Certainly when Neville's own *Plato Redivivus* was published twenty-four years later its editor remarked that it was no fairer to accuse Neville of borrowing Harrington's ideas than to accuse Harrington of borrowing those of *A Copy of a Letter*.⁴⁰ When *Oceana* was published, Samuel Hartlib noted in his 'Ephemerides': 'Oceana a Polit[ical] Book about all Govern[men]ts written by Mr Harrington. Mr Nevil the witt commends it as one of the best books written in that kind.'⁴¹

In *Oceana* Harrington used classical republicanism as that other ex-royalist Hobbes had used (and similarly subverted) natural-law theory: to research the tragedy of the civil wars, and to find a way out of them. Both *Leviathan* and *Oceana* have the same object: stability and peace. As Harrington restated Hobbes: 'The ways of nature require peace. The ways of peace require obedience unto laws. Laws in England . . . must [now] be popular laws; and the sum of popular laws must amount unto a commonwealth.'⁴²

What is most immediately unusual about *Oceana* (within the republican tradition) is its utopian form and the extreme particularity of its orders. These features are related to the object of permanence. It is through a constitutional order that will be eternal that Harrington seeks his exit from civil war. One can only imagine the bafflement of Machiavelli (for whom internal 'tumults' were essential to republican greatness) faced with Harrington's

³⁸ J. Lesley, *A Slap on the Snout of the Republican Swine*, quoted in Downs, *Harrington*, pp. 40-1.

³⁹ J. Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, pp. 124-5. See footnote 33. A copy of the *Letter* in Cambridge University Library features a contemporary attribution to Neville.

⁴⁰ Neville, *Plato Redivivus* in C. Robbins (ed.), *Two Republican Tracts* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 68.

⁴¹ Samuel Hartlib 'Ephemerides' (1656), transcript p. 65. Hartlib Papers, Sheffield University. I am indebted for this reference to Dr Jan Kumpura, visitor to the Hartlib Papers Project from Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, and the translator of Harrington's *Oceana* into Czech (1986).

⁴² Harrington, *The Art of Lawgiving, Works*, p. 660.

fifth order: requiring that upon the first Monday next ensuing the last of December the bigger bell in every parish throughout the nation be rung a eighth of the clock in the morning, and continue ringing for the space of one hour.⁴³

Set out in 'The Model of the Commonwealth'; bounded by 'The Preliminaries' on one side and 'The Corollary' on the other. Harrington's 'orders' account for the bulk of *Oceana's* length. They are the most important (though the least read) part of the work. And they may have had an interregnum model of their own of sorts. This was the reigning constitution, the Instrument of Government (enacted December 1653).⁴⁴ *Oceana* shares the Instrument's concerns with property qualification, with the composition of the governing bodies, with tenure and rotation of office, with political participation more generally and with the size and distribution of Horse and Foot. Since Harrington said he began writing in 1654, and since what he was offering Cromwell in *Oceana* was an elaborate alternative to the Instrument, it makes sense to read it in this way.

Our major concern in the work of 'England's premier civic humanist' must be with the quality of civic participation these orders allow. Civic humanism, Pocock reminds us, was 'a style of thought . . . in which . . . the development of the individual towards self-fulfillment is possible only when [he] . . . acts as a citizen . . . [in] a conscious and autonomous decision-taking political community'. This 'polis, or republic . . . had to be conceived of as finite and localised in time, and therefore as presenting all the problems of particularity'.⁴⁵ Yet what is striking about *Oceana* is precisely the absence of these characteristics. *Oceana* is not to be finite in time (nor, incidentally, localised in space). Its triumph over particularity, over time itself, is exactly the purpose of the construction: 'it hath no principle of mortality'.⁴⁶ And this purpose is achieved by an equivalent conquest of the participatory capacities of its citizens.⁴⁷ Nobody is autonomous in *Oceana*, for everyone

⁴³ *Political Works*, p. 214.

⁴⁴ J.P. Kenyon (ed.), *The Stuart Constitution 1603-1688* (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 393-6.

⁴⁵ Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, discussed in Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time*, p. 85.

⁴⁶ *Political Works*, p. 321.

⁴⁷ Colin Davis has pointed out that 'in *Oceana* no citizen does anything in a fully moral sense, and what he does do he doesn't do for very long'. J.C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 209; Pocock's 'Harrington', *ibid.* This article is indebted to Davis's work.

is enslaved to the state. The 'people' have no moral political personality; they are 'materials' (Harrington's word) in the greater construction of the Commonwealth. Thus Oceanic political participation is actually restricted to the tedious repetition of prescribed rituals which cannot be changed. Moral behaviour has been abolished with its precondition, choice. Members of the popular assembly work in silence upon pain of death. Even 'self-consciousness' is unnecessary since 'it is not possible for the people, if they can but draw the balls, though they understand nothing at all of the ballot, to be out'. It is upon the grounds of this rigid control of civic participation that Harrington defended his part-royalist citizenship against republican criticism. Sedition was impossible because the quality of civic behaviour could not affect the quality of the state. Most noticeable throughout *Oceana* is the strength of the language Harrington uses to describe this control of the exercise of power. 'Receive the sovereign power . . . hold her fast, embrace her forever . . . The virtue of the lodestone is not impaired or limited, but receiveth strength, by being bound in iron.'⁴⁸

Since the quality of his citizenship counted for nothing ('a man may be sinful, yet the world be perfect') Harrington boasted that he had rendered redundant the moral basis of political science. Thus he criticised Machiavelli:

'If a commonwealth' saith he [Machiavelli] 'were so happy as to be provided often with men that, when she is swerving from her principles, should reduce her unto her institution, she would be immortal.' But a commonwealth . . . swerveth not from her principles, but by and through her institution . . . a commonwealth that is rightly instituted can never swerve . . . wherefore it is apparent . . . Machiavel understood not a commonwealth as to the whole piece.⁴⁹

The truth is that we see in Harrington's *Oceana*, no less than in Hobbes's *Leviathan*, the abolition of the participatory basis of classical citizenship. In both cases the reason is the same: that this is what it takes to achieve peace. Unlike Hobbes, however, while abolishing the *substance* of participation Harrington does, throughout *Oceana*, preserve and ritualise the external appearance of it. This civic 'motion' plays, as we will see, a vital function within the work. The result, however, is a classical republican Trojan horse.

⁴⁸ *Political Works*, pp. 222, 230.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 321-2.

Within an empty shell there has been pushed into the world a fundamentally different type of politics. Even the linguistic 'shell' is full of peculiarities which should alert us to the fact that something is wrong.

While removing choice, the precondition of Aristotelian virtue, Harrington has also abolished 'liberty', the foundation of the classical republican tradition.⁵⁰ In its place he has substituted another foundation, not moral but material: the balance of property. Equally absent is *fortuna*, the precondition of Machiavellian *virtu*.⁵¹ For *fortuna* is precisely that element of contingency which Harrington's system has eradicated. Gone, too, is Milton and Sidney's free 'Gothic polity'. In *Oceana* this has become the unstable and (therefore) imperfect 'Gothic balance'. This use of 'balance' is in turn a transformation of Polybius, for whom it had meant a stabilising balance within the three-part classical constitution (the one, the few, and the many). In Harrington this stability is provided by the 'balance of dominion', the material foundation upon which the whole constitutional superstructure will rest. That constitution in turn has an internal balancing principle which is not tripartite but bi-polar. It is the superstructural twin of the balance of property: the second of Harrington's great 'discoveries'. 'That which great philosophers are disputing upon in vain is brought into light by two silly girls: even the whole mystery of a commonwealth, which lies only in dividing and choosing.'⁵²

⁵⁰ Classical liberty was active and collective: the self-government of cities, rather than individuals. *Oceana* is not free in these terms: its 'citizens' do not rule themselves; its empire of laws is not of its own making. Following Aristotle this liberty also presupposed individual choice: civic virtue, the moral quality upon which the free city depended, involved the voluntary placing by the citizen of private means and talents at the service of the public (Sidney and Milton particularly emphasised this). That there is little such choice in *Oceana* should not surprise us since it is (as we will see) a material rather than a moral political construct. Hobbes had rejected the Aristotelian concept of liberty (Q. Skinner 'Thomas Hobbes on the Proper Signification of Liberty', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 40 (1990), 140-1). Harrington stated: '[Hobbes's] treatises of liberty and necessity . . . are the greatest new lights, and those which I have follow'd, and shall follow'; 'as is admirably observed by Mr. Hobbs . . . [the human] will is caus'd, and being caus'd is necessitated'. It should not surprise us then that Harrington viewed the Commonwealth as a constitutional 'frame' which 'causeth everyone to perform his certain function . . . necessarily'; see below p. 160 (and note 80). James Cotton, 'James Harrington and Thomas Hobbes', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 42 (1981), 416-17.

⁵¹ In its place we get a single phrase: the definition of 'empire' (political power) as 'the goods of fortune'. *Political Works*, p. 163. Needless to say the word here has a different meaning, and performs a different function.

⁵² *Political Works*, p. 172.

What so delighted Harrington about this discovery, its simplicity, is precisely what is apt to strike the humanistic observer as so ludicrous about it. It is vintage Harrington: all the problems of politics throughout the ages have been solved by one material object (the cake: the superstructural image here of dominion) and one mechanism for disposing of it (dividing and choosing). That political behaviour might amount to anything more serious or complicated than the division of material spoils seems not to have occurred to him. That this metaphor for the relationship between two assemblies is irrelevant to the great majority of transactions in which they would engage has equally been ignored. Exactly the same syndrome is visible in *Oceana's* treatment of the key republican term 'interest'. Another moral fundamental, the relationship between private and public interest had exercised all classical thinkers from the Greek (Plato, Aristotle) to the English (Milton, Vane, Sidney). Harrington, however, had little difficulty with it. 'Whereas the people, taken apart, are but so many private interests . . . if you take them together they are the public interest.'⁵³ Again, that the transition from one to the other might hinge on anything more than the collection of citizens ('the being of a commonwealth consisteth in the methodical collection of the people');⁵⁴ that it might hinge on the quality rather than quantity of participation, seems not to have occurred to him. The appropriate response to all this came from Mathew Wren who, increasingly exasperated by *Oceana's* meaningless use of words like 'virtue', 'interest' and 'soul', demanded of Harrington the moral philosophy within which their meaning could be located. Harrington's reply shows that he had no answer, and may not have understood the question.⁵⁵

Oceana, then, both abandons and mutilates a good deal of classical language. Even where the words are retained the meanings have changed. We must turn away from the apparently clever things in *Oceana* to see what is really clever about it. Historical attention has focussed upon its main building blocks, which come in three pairs. There are the two 'discoveries': the balance of dominion (in the foundation), and dividing and choosing (in the

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁵⁵ M. Wren, *Considerations upon Mr Harrington's Oceana* (1657) p. 20; Harrington, *The Prerogative of Popular Government* (1658); *Political Works*, p. 415, and Book 1, ch. 5 in general.

superstructure). There are the basic laws which follow from them: the agrarian, and rotation. And there are the historical (The Second Part of the Preliminaries) and constitutional (The Model) frameworks through which each principle is elaborated. Modern admiration, perhaps credulity, has particularly attached to the former in the wake of Karl Marx. It remains to be seen whether the decline of Marx will prefigure the decline of Harrington. Altogether more important however is the nature and intention of the whole construct.

IV

Wren understood *Oceana* immediately because he was a participant in the same intellectual world: that of 'natural philosophy'.⁵⁶ Natural philosophers in the middle of the century varied considerably in their methods and objectives. These ranged from the deeply religious to the almost secular, and from the empirically to the metaphysically grounded. They also squabbled incessantly, and Harrington and Wren, when they were not arguing with one another, were arguing with Hobbes, and quoting Hobbes against one another. All however were indebted to Bacon's search for 'the pure knowledge of nature', the handiwork of God. For Bacon: 'the true end' of such knowledge was a 'restitution . . . (in great part) of man to the Sovereignty and power . . . which he had in the First state of creation'. Through the understanding of nature 'natural philosophy proposes to itself, as its noblest work of all, nothing less than the renovation of things corruptible'.⁵⁷

Harrington's debt to Bacon is widely understood. Less so, however, is his much greater debt to a more immediate influence. Once again Wren saw it instantly:

⁵⁶ On this context see Craig Diamond; 'Natural Philosophy in Harrington's Political Thought', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 16, 4 (1978) 387-98. Diamond emphasises Harrington's attraction both to Neoplatonism and to the 'new, mechanical philosophy', both features of his thought noted here.

⁵⁷ Bacon, *Works*, vol. III, pp. 264-5, 286; vol. IV, p. 721, quoted in Davis, *Utopia*, pp. 124-5. The Hartlib Circle formed one wing of this enterprise, which may partly explain *Oceana*'s appearance in Hartlib's 'Ephemeries', and a utopian form to Harrington's work more like Hartlib's *Macaria* and Bacon's *New Atlantis* than like other republican works. See Charles Webster, *Samuel Hartlib and the Advancement of Learning* (Cambridge, 1971) and *The Great Instauration* (London, 1975). *Oceana* includes, as Pocock noted, an 'academy of provosts' which looks like Hartlib's 'Office of Addresses': *Political Works*, pp. 251-2.

though Mr Harrington professes a great Enmity to Mr Hobs in his politiqes, underhand notwithstanding he . . . does silently swallow down such Notions as Mr Hobs hath chewed for him.

To this Harrington replied, candidly: 'It is true that I have opposed the politics of Mr Hobbes, to show him what he taught me [my emphasis] . . . I firmly believe that Mr Hobbes . . . will in future ages be accounted, the best writer at this day in the world.'⁵⁸

Although it has often been quoted, this statement by Harrington has not been taken literally by historians. The similarity of Hobbes's and Harrington's ecclesiology has been noted,⁵⁹ but no equally close relationship between their political thought has been discerned. This is, not least, because the first part of *Oceana*'s Preliminaries is a point-by-point refutation of *Leviathan*; and because the connection has not been obvious between 'the theorist of absolute sovereignty and the theorist of the commonwealth of participatory virtue'.⁶⁰ But how does *Oceana* look if we accept literally the claim of its author that he wrote it, opposing *Leviathan* in the process, to show Hobbes what he had taught him?

Like Harrington, Hobbes believed that it was only upon the principles of nature that a science of government could be erected. Political art was an imitation of nature, the art of God. 'Nature is by the Art of Man . . . so imitated, that it can make an Artificial Animal . . . For by Art is created the great Leviathan called Commonwealth . . . which is but an artificial man.'⁶¹ Hobbes was also a sceptic, who had become alienated from both classical history and Baconian empiricism as roads to knowledge. For according to Hobbes 'experience concludeth nothing universally'. Both history and experimentation produced information about human perception, not about the world, unless they were grounded in a theory of perception 'set in the context of a general metaphysical theory'.⁶² It was Hobbes's metaphysical assumptions which formed the basis of *Leviathan* (and, as we will see, of *Oceana*).

For Hobbes the world, or nature, consisted of material in motion.

⁵⁸ Wren, *Considerations*, p. 41; Harrington, *Prerogative*, in *Political Works*, p. 423.

⁵⁹ Pocock, *Political Works*, Introduction, ch. 5; M. Goldie, 'The Civil Religion of James Harrington', in A. Pagden (ed.), *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1988).

⁶⁰ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, p. 397.

⁶¹ *Leviathan*, p. 81.

⁶² Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, I.4.10, and Richard Tuck, *Hobbes* (Oxford, 1989), p. 49.

Leviathan was subtitled 'the Matter, [and] Form . . . of a Commonwealth', the purpose of the 'form' being to give direction to this motion. Natural motion was perpetual unless arrested or diverted by pressure (motion) from a different direction: 'when a thing is in motion, it will eternally be in motion, unless somewhat els stay it'.⁶³ Hobbes's famous picture of a state of nature as a 'war of all against all' expressed this ballistic vision. Nature was an unregulated billiard table full of perpetually moving and colliding balls. Yet man's greatest fear was of the permanent cessation of motion (death). Hobbes built upon this fear a series of universal 'laws of nature' the object of which was peace.⁶⁴ In a commonwealth this object would be secured by the public sword. The members of this commonwealth accepted some collective restraint on their motion (peace) in exchange for protection from the prospect of its end (death). They accepted Leviathan's restraining hand upon the billiard table.

In his growth towards this position Hobbes had passed many Harringtonian landmarks. He had been an accomplished humanist scholar and poet. He had been deeply impressed by Venice, and by Bacon.⁶⁵ It is significant however that his major humanist achievement was a translation of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (1628), the magisterial account of a brutal and catastrophic conflict which had all but destroyed the golden age of Greece. This can only have reinforced Hobbes's interest in peace, and his scepticism about the popular political participation which had turned to *hubris* and then disaster in ancient Athens.

The first chapter of Harrington's reply to Wren, *The Prerogative of Popular Government* (1658), turns upon a lengthy argument over Hobbes's *Thucydides*. Later in the *Prerogative* Harrington remarked that his 'opinion that riches are power is as ancient as the first book of Thucydides . . . and not omitted by Mr Hobbes or any other politician'.⁶⁶ The cause of the argument was Wren's taunting of Harrington's division of history into 'ancient' and 'modern' prudence. For Harrington's abandonment of classical usage included the exchange of 'history' for this Hobbesian term. According to

⁶³ *Leviathan*, p. 87.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, part 1, chs. 14 and 15.

⁶⁵ Tuck, *Hobbes*, ch. 1.

⁶⁶ Harrington, *Political Works*, pp. 397-400, 412.

Hobbes, prudence was a derivation from 'experience: it was 'a Presumption of the Future, contracted from the Experience of time Past'.⁶⁷

Both Zagorin and Raab discerned in *Oceana* a Hobbesian search for universal laws of nature, tethered however by a Machiavellian historical empiricism governing their recovery. This did not, then, interfere with their perception of Harrington as a Machiavellian and a humanist. For Harrington (said Zagorin) the principles of politics must 'come from history, and history alone'.⁶⁸ Yet this is not actually what Harrington said. According to Harrington: 'Policy is an art. Art is the observation or imitation of nature . . . by observation of the face of nature a politician limns his Commonwealth.' Therefore 'No man can be a politician except he be first a Historian or a Traveller' (my italics). Except he be, that is, an observer of nature, either in 'what has bin' or 'what is'.⁶⁹ Lycurgus became a supreme politician in Sparta without any knowledge of history: 'Lycurgus, by being [only] a Traveller, became a legislator; but in times when prudence was another thing.'⁷⁰ In the ancient world prudence (the political observation of nature) was recorded in what is, not only (as in the Gothic world) in what has been.

For Harrington, then, history was indeed Hobbesian prudence. 'Experience of time past' was one kind of experience of the world. Although it 'concludeth nothing universally' it could be used to recover, and demonstrate, principles which were otherwise derived (from nature). *Oceana* used the terms ancient and modern prudence in just this way.⁷¹ Nor, similarly, could unaided experimental (as opposed to historical) empiricism give true knowledge. But like prudence experimental demonstration could reveal to the world the

⁶⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 98.

⁶⁸ Raab, *Machiavelli*, ch. 6; Zagorin, *Political Thought*, ch. 11.

⁶⁹ Harrington, *Political Works*, p. 417; Raab, *Machiavelli*, pp. 193, 249.

⁷⁰ Harrington, *Political Works*, p. 310.

⁷¹ Harrington makes this relationship between history and demon-

stration clearest in *A Note Upon the Foregoing Eclogues*, *Political Works*, pp. 580-1. Having said elsewhere that 'the doctrine of the balance is as old in nature as herself, and new in art as my writing', he continues: 'The doctrine of the balance, not being sufficiently discovered or heeded by ancient historians and politicians, is the cause why their writings are more dark . . . in the principles of government than otherwise they would have been; nevertheless he who . . . shall rightly answer these quæres out of story, must strike the inevitable light of this truth out of nature; which once mastered, the whole mystery of government . . . becometh as obvious and facile . . . as the meanest of the vulgar arts.'

universal principles inherent in nature itself. In this connection both Harrington and Hobbes admired the anatomist Harvey. His demonstration, from the dissection of particular bodies, of the universal principle of the perpetual circulation of the blood, accorded perfectly with the metaphysical assumptions of both men.⁷² For *Oceana*, like *Leviathan*, and following it, assumes a world of material in perpetual motion.

The First Part of *Oceana's* Preliminaries is structured as an argument between 'The Leviathan' and Machiavelli. On the face of it Harrington abhors the one, and adores the other. Upon Machiavelli he heaps praise as the 'only retriever of ancient prudence'; and it is precisely 'that which Machiavel . . . hath gone about to retrieve . . . that *Leviathan* . . . goes about to destroy'.⁷³ Even in the first Preliminary however, this relationship is not what it seems: there is even something dishonest about it, for in both cases Harrington protesteth too much.

Machiavelli, having been slapped on the back as an old friend, is then systematically reprimanded. Every important decision made by him within the Florentine humanist tradition is up-ended. He had sensationally rejected Venice for Rome: Harrington disagrees, accusing him of 'Saddling the wrong horse'.⁷⁴ He had disparaged the political role of the gentry: Harrington corrects him, and insists that they are indispensable.⁷⁵ He had concluded as a fundamental principle that a state cannot have preservation and expansion, it must choose; Harrington observes that this is incorrect, they are compatible. All of this culminates in the statement that 'Machiavel understood not' republican politics 'as to the whole'. In particular the fundamental of the balance 'hath [been] missed . . . narrowly and more dangerously by him . . . [yet] the balance . . . though unseen by Machiavel, is that which interpreteth him'.⁷⁶ This is the language of the used-car salesman. Machiavelli's civic humanist world having been dismantled, a material principle foreign to it now poses as the key by which to unlock its true meaning.

No more is *Oceana's* relationship to Hobbes what Harrington initially makes it appear. For the argument of the First Preliminary

⁷² Tuck, *Hobbes*, pp. 48, 53; for Harrington's use of Harvey see below (and also 77).

⁷³ Harrington, *Oceana*, in *Political Works*, p. 161.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 166-7, 173.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

is actually the squabbling of sblings: it derives from a deeper intellectual cousinage (and rivalry). When it is complete Harrington proceeds (as we will see) to erect the 'Model of the Commonwealth' upon Hobbesian foundations. Harrington's initial argument with Hobbes has one basis: this relates to means, rather than assumptions or ends. Hobbes's scepticism has led him to reject ancient prudence: one kind of 'experience of the world'. Even so he grasps (unlike Machiavelli) the material basis of government. 'But Leviathan, though he seems to skew at antiquity, following his furious master Carneades, hath caught hold of the public sword, unto which he reduceth all manner and matter of government.'⁷⁷ Harrington's point is that to reject the prudence (experience) of the ancients, as *Leviathan* did, on the grounds that 'the Greeks and Romans . . . derived . . . [politics] not from the principles of nature but . . . the [particular] practice of their own commonwealths' is 'as if a man should tell famous Harvey that he transcribed the circulation of the blood not out of the principles of nature, but out of the anatomy of this or that body'.⁷⁸ In other words Harrington thought the ancients had perceived the principles of nature, Hobbes did not.

Harrington wrote *Oceana* to demonstrate, on the contrary, that ancient prudence was perfectly conformable with Hobbes's metaphysics. More importantly, and to his intense excitement, Harrington succeeded by this route in constructing a *better* political form for a world of material in perpetual motion. As Wren disgustedly observed of *Oceana's* orders: 'this libration is of the same nature with a perpetual motion in the mechanics'.⁷⁹ By its own metaphysical criteria *Leviathan* was crude. It could only produce peace from a ballistic world by restraining motion. Harrington believed he had transcended this need. Leviathan's hand could come off the billiard table, to be replaced by an intricate frame or cage. This allowed the balls to move perpetually, though along preconceived paths. All danger of collision was thereby removed. Thus Harrington explained in *A Discourse upon this Saying* (1659):

at Rome I saw [a cage] which represented a kitchen . . . the cooks were all cats and kitlings, set in such frames, so tied and so ordered, that the poor creatures could make no motion to get loose, but the same caused one to

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 165, 174.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 162, 178.

⁷⁹ Wren, *Considerations*, p. 67, quoted by Harrington in *Political Works*, p. 430.

turn the spit, another to bake the meat, a third to skim the pot and a fourth to make green sauce. If the frame of your commonwealth be not such as causeth everyone to perform his certain function as necessarily as this . . . it is not right.⁸⁰

How much is left in *Oceana* of classical liberty (self-government, collective and individual) is clear enough from this passage. The truth is of course that Harrington's peace was achieved by restraint on motion of a different, subtler, but no less pervasive kind.

All this Harrington accomplished by erecting, following Hobbes, an artificial copy of the natural art of God. Nature was a universe whose planets and stars (Harrington's 'orbs' and 'galaxies') moved in perpetual circular motion. By so copying nature's perfection Harrington believed he had harnessed for politics its very immortality. *Oceana* is full of the wild excitement produced by this extraordinary ambition. This culminates (in 'the Corollary') in an exultant paraphrase of *Leviathan's* own famous opening paragraph. Passionately admiring his own creation, Harrington's lawgiver

conceived such a delight within him, as God is described by Plato to have done, when he finished the creation of the world; and saw his orbs move below him. For in the art of man, being the imitation of nature which is the art of God, there is nothing so like the first call of beautiful order out of chaos and confusion as the architecture of a well ordered commonwealth. Wherefore Lycurgus, seeing . . . that his orders were good, fell into deep contemplation how he might render them . . . unalterable and immortal.⁸¹

Both the scale of this enterprise, and the emotions and language attending it, make Harrington's later descent into madness less of a distant journey than it has hitherto appeared.⁸²

Thus in the main body of the work, 'the Model', *Oceana's* concerns are *Leviathan's*. They are material and motion; 'the matter and forme of a Commonwealth'.⁸³ *Oceana* has a material foundation (the balance) fixed by the agrarian law. The superstructure emerging from it has its own internal mechanism for motion (rotation). 'In the institution or building of a commonwealth, the

⁸⁰ *Political Works*, p. 744 (also quoted by Davis, 'Pocock's Harrington').

⁸¹ Harrington, *Political Works*, p. 341.

⁸² Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, p. 126. As Aubrey says, Harrington was 'a Gentleman of a high spirit and a hot head'. Prolonged exposure to *Oceana's* wheeling 'orbs' and 'galaxies' make the later picture of the philosopher sitting in the sun surrounded by swooping bees and flies seem more of a reduction in scale than a change in kind.

⁸³ Harrington left a summary of his politics in these terms in *A System of Politics*, *Political Works*, pp. 834-54.

first work is no other than fitting and distributing the materials. The materials of the commonwealth are the people.⁸⁴ The 'form of the commonwealth is motion'. 'In motion consisteth life . . . [and] the motion of a Commonwealth will never be current, unless it be circular.'⁸⁵ It is in imitation of the heavens that 'the motions of *Oceana* are spherical'. Order by order, the 'materials' of *Oceana* are pitched into perpetual circulation, 'the parishes annually pour themselves into hundreds, the hundreds into tribes, the tribes into galaxies'.⁸⁶ Like *Leviathan's* 'Artificial Man' this is also a giant imitation of Harvey's human body.

so the parliament is the heart which, consisting of two ventricles, the one greater and replenished with a grosser store, the other less and full of a purer, sucketh in and gusheth forth the life blood of *Oceana* by a perpetual circulation.⁸⁷

Perfectly constructed, it followed from the teaching of Hobbes that such a commonwealth:

should be immortal, seeing the people, being the materials, never dies, and the form, which is motion, must without opposition be endless. The bowl which is thrown from your hand, if there be no rub, no impediment, shall never cease; for which cause the glorious luminaries that are the bowls of God were once thrown forever.⁸⁸

Thus when Olphaus Megelator, having 'cast the great orbs of this commonwealth into . . . perpetual revolution . . . observed the rapture of [their] motion . . . without any manner of obstruction or interfering, but as it had been naturally', he saw that his work was done. He 'abdicated the magistracy of Archon'.⁸⁹

Harrington did indeed then write *Oceana*, opposing *Leviathan* in the process, to 'show Hobbes what he taught me'. This was not only that ancient prudence could be the ally, rather than the enemy, of their common enterprise. It could furnish the way to the first perfect fit between their metaphysical assumptions (material in motion) and their political objective (peace). For Hobbes, classical republicanism was a recipe for perpetual civil war. This was demonstrated by the violence of the classical Greek, republican

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

Roman, and Renaissance Italian political worlds. Machiavelli had recognised this, and turned the 'tumults' of Rome from its greatest liability into its chief political asset. But Harrington turned to an entirely different construction: a world of perpetual motion, locked into permanent peace.⁹⁰

The problem for Harrington was that Hobbes had been right. As he wrote *Leviathan*, Aristotle, Cicero, Livy and the rest were being welded by the real classical republicans into a genuinely Machiavellian ideology of vigour, instability and war. This process began with Milton and Nedham, and culminated with Sidney.⁹¹ Despite opposing one aspect of Hobbes's post-humanist rebellion Harrington of course shared its assumptions and its objective. He consequently echoed its substance. Upon the altar of peace he sacrificed the moral and the participatory bases of the classical republican tradition. *Oceana* is a dead landscape: a political Frankenstein's monster raised from the anatomists' slab. It is not art's imitation of, but its triumph over nature. It is a world without liberty, and without meaningful political activity. But it is clever, and it establishes its author as the greatest English disciple, not of Machiavelli, but of Hobbes.

It would be a mistake to ignore the humanist context from which the thought of both Harrington and Hobbes emerged. Both remained humanists of a kind. Their classicism was not, however, civic humanism: that of *quattrocento* Florence, of Machiavelli, or of his genuine English followers. It was that of the generation who had witnessed the Spartan humiliation of Athens. Its ruling spirits were not Aristotle, Cicero, Machiavelli; but Plato, Lycurgus, Thucydides.⁹² It was aristocratic and circumspect; it spoke of the

⁹⁰ Harrington allowed for foreign war (having carefully separated foreign and domestic government). Here too, however, the ultimate object was peace, gifted to a war-ravaged Europe by the establishment of a universal empire. 'A commonwealth . . . is a minister of God upon earth . . . for which cause . . . the orders last rehearsed are buds of empire, such as . . . may spread the arms of your commonwealth like an holy asyllum unto the distressed world, and give the earth her Sabbath of years or rest from her labours, under the shadow of your wings.' *Political Works*, p. 323.

⁹¹ See Scott, *Algernon Sidney and the Restoration Crisis*, chs. 11-13.

⁹² The links with Thucydides have been mentioned. The one classical philosopher for whom Hobbes retained frank admiration was Plato (J.W.N. Watkins, *Hobbes' System of Ideas* (London, 1965), p. 80). The influence of Plato throughout *Oceana* is pervasive. Lycurgus was not, of course, a member of this generation but a symbol for it; his strong presence in the writing of both Plato and Harrington reflects this. Machiavelli had explicitly dissociated himself from the Spartan example. *Discourses*, Book 1, ch. 6 (ed. Crick), pp. 121-4.

dangers of uncontrolled political participation; the importance of harmony and peace; the ultimate evil of war. After England's own shattering conflict we hear in the great writings of the Interregnum these far echoes from the Peloponnesian War.