

REPUBLICANISM: LIBERTY, SELF-GOVERNMENT AND THE ACTIVE CITIZEN

In ancient Athens a citizen was someone who participated in 'giving judgement and holding office' (Aristotle, *The Politics*, p. 169). Citizenship for free adult men meant participation in public affairs. This classical definition is noteworthy in two respects. First, it suggests that the ancient Greeks would have found it hard to locate citizens in modern democracies, except perhaps as representatives and office holders. The limited scope in contemporary politics for active involvement would have been regarded as most undemocratic (see Finley, 1973b). Second, the classical Greek idea of citizenship would have found resonance in few communities during or after its initial elaboration (cf. Bernal, 1987). The ancient democracies are quite atypical regimes in recorded political history. The idea that human beings could be active citizens of a political order – citizens of their state – and not merely dutiful subjects of a ruler has had few advocates from the earliest human associations to the early Renaissance and the demise of absolutism. This chapter will focus on the revival of the ideal of active citizenship, beginning with the discourse and practice of the Renaissance republican tradition. But before exploring this remarkable political development, it is useful to dwell on some of the factors which help account for why the ideal of 'the active citizen in a republic' fell from view for so long in political theory and practice.

The eclipse and re-emergence of *homo politicus*

The eclipse in the West of the ideal of the active citizen, whose very being is affirmed in and through political action, is hard to explain fully. But it is clear enough that the antithesis of *homo politicus* is the *homo credens* of the Christian faith; the citizen whose active judgement is essential is displaced by the true believer (Pocock, 1975, p. 550). While it would be misleading to suggest that the rise of Christianity effectively banished secular considerations from the life of rulers and ruled, it unquestionably shifted the source of authority and wisdom from the citizen (or the 'philosopher-king') to other-worldly representatives. The Christian world-view transformed the rationale of political action from that of the *polis* to a theological framework. The Hellenic view of man as formed to live in a city was replaced by a preoccupation with how humans could live in communion with God (Pocock, 1975, p. 84). In sharp contrast to the Greek view that the *polis* was the embodiment of political good, the Christian world-view insisted that the good lay in submission to God's will. How the will of God was to be interpreted, and articulated with systems of secular power, preoccupied Christian Europe for centuries, until the very notion of a single religious truth was shattered by the Reformation.

Christianity certainly did not ignore questions about the rules and goals that humans ought to accept in order to live a productive life. Although Christianity was imposed on many communities, it could scarcely have become a world religion unless it bore values and aspirations which commended themselves to some extent by virtue of their role in human affairs (see MacIntyre, 1966, ch. 9, esp. pp. 114–20). Moreover, it would be wrong to regard Christianity as a complete retreat from a concern with the kinds of ideal which had been so central to parts of the ancient world. The ideal of political equality, for example, was to a degree preserved in Christianity, despite being embedded in a wholly different context. It has been suggested that the Christian affirmation of the 'equality of men before God', with its gesture to the possibility of a community in which nobody has superior moral or political rights, was the only basis on which values of political equality could be preserved for society as a whole in a world of minimal economic surpluses, where the mass of people lived at, near or below subsistence level (MacIntyre, 1966, pp. 114–15). Under such conditions, the religious vision of equality was, at least, a way of maintaining the vision of a better life. Clearly,

Christianity was used to justify a diverse array of institutions, including slavery and serfdom. But it contained contradictory elements, some of which were later to become seeds of its own difficulties.

St Augustine's *The City of God*, written between AD 410 and 423, has frequently been regarded as the most authoritative statement of the superiority of ecclesiastical power over the secular. Augustine's insistence that the history of the Church was 'the march of God in the world' and that the true Christian ought not to focus on the problems of 'this temporal life' was immensely influential in medieval Europe. Written during the early stages of the fall of the Roman Empire, *The City of God* recommended firmly the harnessing of 'the desire for earthly things' to 'the desire for the heavenly city'. The illumination offered by God could guide the true believer to 'the everlasting blessings that are promised for the future'.

The Middle Ages did not give rise to extensive reflection on the nature of the democratic *polis* or to a comprehensive body of texts and writings which enriched the political philosophy of democracy. Moreover, while there were some important political innovations in Europe, these did not crystallize into a major new form of democratic system (see Poggi, 1978, ch. 2). Undoubtedly, the Eurocentric nature of much contemporary political theory has prevented an adequate grasp of important developments outside Europe during medieval times; and no doubt a great deal has been lost to the historical record. But until the work of St Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, the influence of the Church Fathers, and of Augustine in particular, on political thought was profound, and an important factor in explaining its relative stagnation.

The distinction between the spheres of secular and spiritual jurisdiction was re-examined by Aquinas (1225–74), who attempted to integrate the rediscovered work of Aristotle (which had been lost to the West for many centuries, and had been translated from Arabic into Latin by the middle of the thirteenth century) with the central teachings of Christianity. Among the many unsettling aspects of Aquinas's writings was the contention that while monarchy was the best form of government it ought not to be ascribed unlimited authority. In his view, a monarch's rule was legitimate only to the extent that it upheld natural law – that part of the 'eternal law' disclosed to human reason. Since the state had no authority in the interpretation of religious doctrine, the Church could 'stand in judgement' over rulers. Furthermore, rebellion against a ruler was justified if natural law was repeatedly

violated. Thus, the idea of limited, constitutional government, central to the development of the liberal democratic tradition, was anticipated by Aquinas, despite his ultimate overriding concern for the development of the Christian community.

So much was the medieval view of society conceived as a whole – a divinely ordained hierarchy of rank and order in the ‘Great Chain of Being’ – that the idea of secular political power, in anything like its modern form, could not be found. There was no theoretical alternative – no alternative ‘political theory’ – to the theocratic positions of pope and Holy Roman Emperor.¹ The integration of Christian Europe came to depend above all on these authorities. This order has been usefully characterized as the order of ‘international Christian society’ (Bull, 1977, p. 27). International Christian society was conceived as being formed and constituted by Christianity first and foremost; it looked to God for the authority to resolve disputes and conflicts; its primary political reference point was religious doctrine; and it was overlaid with assumptions about the universal nature of human community. It was not until Western Christendom was under challenge, especially from the conflicts generated by the rise of national states and by the Reformation, that the idea of the modern state was born, and the ground was created for the general development of a new form of political regulation.

Within medieval Europe the economy was dominated by agriculture, and any surplus generated was subject to competing claims. A successful claim constituted a basis to create and sustain a degree of political power. Against the background of Christendom, a complex web of kingdoms, principalities and duchies developed alongside the emergence of new power centres in the towns and cities. Cities and urban federations depended on trade and manufacture and relatively high accumulations of capital. They formed distinctive social and political structures and

¹ The Holy Roman Empire existed in some form from the eighth until the early nineteenth century. For while the Roman imperial title had lapsed in the fifth century, it was revived in 800 by Pope Leo III and conferred on Charlemagne, King of the Franks. Later, the title of Holy Roman Emperor was borne by successive dynasties of German kings, although its actual significance, like that of the Empire more generally, varied considerably over time. At its height, the Holy Roman Empire represented an attempt, under the patronage of the Catholic Church, to unite and centralize the fragmented power centres of Western Christendom into a politically unified Christian empire. The polities federated under the Empire spread from Germany to Spain, and from northern France to Italy. However, the actual secular power of the Empire was always limited by the complex power structures of feudal Europe on the one hand, and the Catholic Church on the other (see P. Anderson, 1974b; Mann, 1986; Held, 1992).

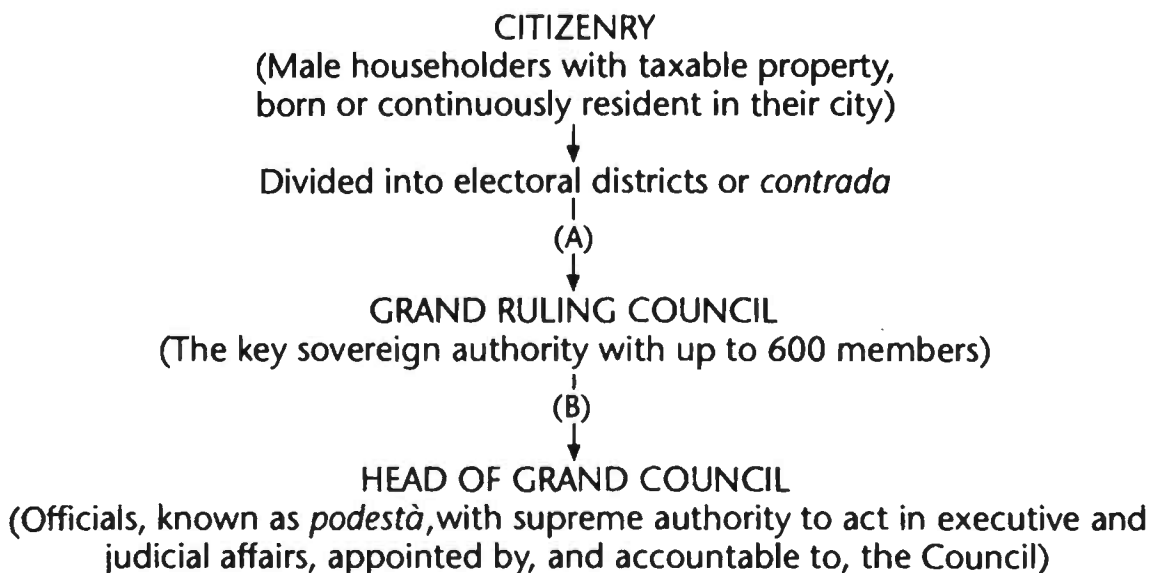
frequently enjoyed independent systems of rule specified by charters. Among the best known were the Italian city-states of Florence, Venice and Siena, but across Europe hundreds of urban centres developed. While these centres alone did not determine the pattern of rule or political identity, they were the basis of a distinctive new trajectory in civic life and political ideas, especially in Italy.

The reforging of republicanism

Republicanism began to enjoy something of a revival by the late eleventh century. At this time, a number of northern Italian communities established their own 'consuls' or 'administrators' to run their judicial affairs in defiance of papal as well as imperial claims to legal control (see Skinner, 1992, pp. 57–69). Towards the end of the twelfth century the consular system was replaced by a form of government comprising ruling councils headed by officials known as podestà with supreme power in executive as well as judicial matters. Such councils were in place in Florence, Padua, Pisa, Milan and Siena, among other cities, by the century's end, effectively making them independent city-states, or city-republics, as some commentators prefer.² Moreover, the podestà were elected positions, held for strictly limited periods of time, accountable to the councils and, ultimately, to citizens of the city – male householders with taxable property, born or resident continuously in their locales. The structure of institutional arrangements which could be commonly found is depicted in figure 2.1.

Measured against the extent and depth of political participation engendered by classical Athenian democracy, the Italian city-republics may not seem so extraordinary or innovative. But against the background of the structures of authority of feudal Europe – with its complex web of overlapping claims and powers – these developments were remarkable. They were so above all because, as the historian Quentin Skinner has written, 'they represented an explicit challenge to the prevailing assumption that government must be regarded as a God-given form of lordship' (1992, p. 57). Accordingly, it is not surprising that they inspired, and continued to inspire during many periods of modern European and American history, those who questioned tyrannical

² If the idea of the state is reserved for the notion of an impartial or legally circumscribed system of power, separate from both ruler and ruled, with supreme jurisdiction over a delimited territory, it is best thought of as a late sixteenth-century invention (see ch. 3).



Methods of election or selection

- (A) Citizens eligible to vote commonly drew lots to determine who should serve as electors on the Council.
- (B) Councils frequently drew lots to establish a selection committee (of up to twenty) to consider suitable people to head the Council; names of three possible candidates would be put to the Council, which would have the final say. The elected officer, who would receive a salary from the city, was appointed for a period of up to one year, and could not directly serve the Council thereafter for a minimum of three years.

Figure 2.1 City-republics: innovations of government

Source: Adapted from Skinner (1992).

and absolutist rulers who maintained that they alone held the legitimate right of decision over state affairs. But reservations need to be registered about the degree to which the republics can be regarded as democracies (Skinner, 1992, pp. 58–60).

As in Athens, the citizenry was composed of a highly exclusive group of men, with the *podestà*, in many cases, initially the nominees of the nobility. This frequently resulted in civil instability with groups of excluded citizens mobilizing to form their own separate councils and institutions; this, in turn, heightened political conflict, the consequences of which were sometimes violent and chaotic. (The most famous account of such a case can be found in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* with its depiction of the battle between the Montagues and the Capulets.) Ironically, many later political theorists were to reflect on these experiences only to draw the conclusion that, despite their initial classical inspiration, these

republics were a prescription for disorder and weakness and, thus, an argument for the necessary return to strong monarchical government. Venice was the only city-republic to survive as a self-governing regime until the late eighteenth century, the rest being superseded much earlier by new systems of hereditary power.

The second reservation relates directly to the use of the word 'democracy' in connection with city-republics. For the first century of the republics' development, the term was unknown to their supporters; it did not become part of European political language until the reappearance of Aristotle's *The Politics* (in the mid-thirteenth century). Thereafter, following Aristotle's usage, it took on a pejorative connotation and became associated with the politics of the rabble; government conducted for the benefit of the poor rather than the public interest; and a form of power (to anticipate later nineteenth-century sceptics of democratic government) in which the 'common people' can become tyrannical, threatening to level all social distinctions and earned privileges (cf. Aquinas, *De Regimine Principum*, pp. 2–82). In fact, some strains of Renaissance republicanism are better thought of as a form of aristocratic or noble republicanism than as a form of democratic politics at all. Certainly, few of their defenders would have called themselves 'democrats', and they would have been repelled by the idea that their governments were 'democratic'. In addition, it is important to note that Italian city-republics bore little resemblance to modern democratic polities with their emphasis on universal suffrage, the right of all adults to oppose their government and stand for office, and so on (see ch. 3).

None the less, the contribution of city-republics to democratic theory and practice has been considerable both from their institutional innovations, which, in the context of the prevalence of Christian monarchism, offered an important example of the possibility of self-government, and from the extensive political treatises and texts which informed and reflected upon the new politics. The city-republics marked the first occasion in post-classical political thinking when arguments were developed for and on behalf of self-determination and popular sovereignty; and these were to have wide influence not only in Italy but, in the wake of the Reformation and the revival of political discourse in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, across Europe and America as well.

The core of the Renaissance republican case was that the freedom of a political community rested upon its accountability to no authority other than that of the community itself. Self-government is the basis of liberty, together with the right of citizens to participate – within a constitutional framework which creates

distinct roles for leading social forces – in the government of their own common business. According to this position, the freedom of citizens consists in their unhindered pursuit of self-chosen ends; and the highest political ideal is the civic freedom of an independent, self-governing people. The community in its entirety ‘must retain the ultimate sovereign authority’, assigning its various rulers or chief magistrates ‘a status no higher than that of elected officials’ (Skinner, 1989, p. 105). Such ‘rulers’ must ensure the effective enforcement of the laws created by the community for the promotion of its own good; for they are not rulers in a traditional sense, but ‘agents’ or ‘administrators’ of justice.

The distinctive development of Italian city life during the Renaissance stimulated new ideas about political power, popular sovereignty and civic affairs. While many city republicans traced the origins of their new-found beliefs to ancient Greece and Rome, it was the Roman republic especially which inspired their thinking. Unlike the democracies of ancient Greece, which, in their view, were prone to instability, civil strife and internal weakness, Rome set out a model of governance which linked not only liberty and virtue but also liberty with civic glory and military power. Rome offered a conception of politics which connected political participation, honour and conquest and which, accordingly, could defeat the claims made in monarchical polities that only a king, enjoying personal authority over his subjects, could guarantee law, security and the effective projection of power. In this context, for many republicans, ‘freedom meant freedom from the arbitrary power of tyrants, together with the right of citizens to run their common affairs by participating in government. “Virtue” meant patriotism and public spirit, a heroic willingness to set the common good above one’s own or one’s own family’s interests’ (Canovan, 1987, p. 434).

Republicans drew heavily in support of their arguments upon the classical writings of such figures as Cicero (106–43 BC), Sallust (86–c.35 BC) and Livy (59 BC–AD 17) and, in particular, on their histories and celebrations of the ancient Roman republic. The vision of how government may be structured so as to serve in principle the common business of citizens is set out by Cicero in *De Re Publica*:

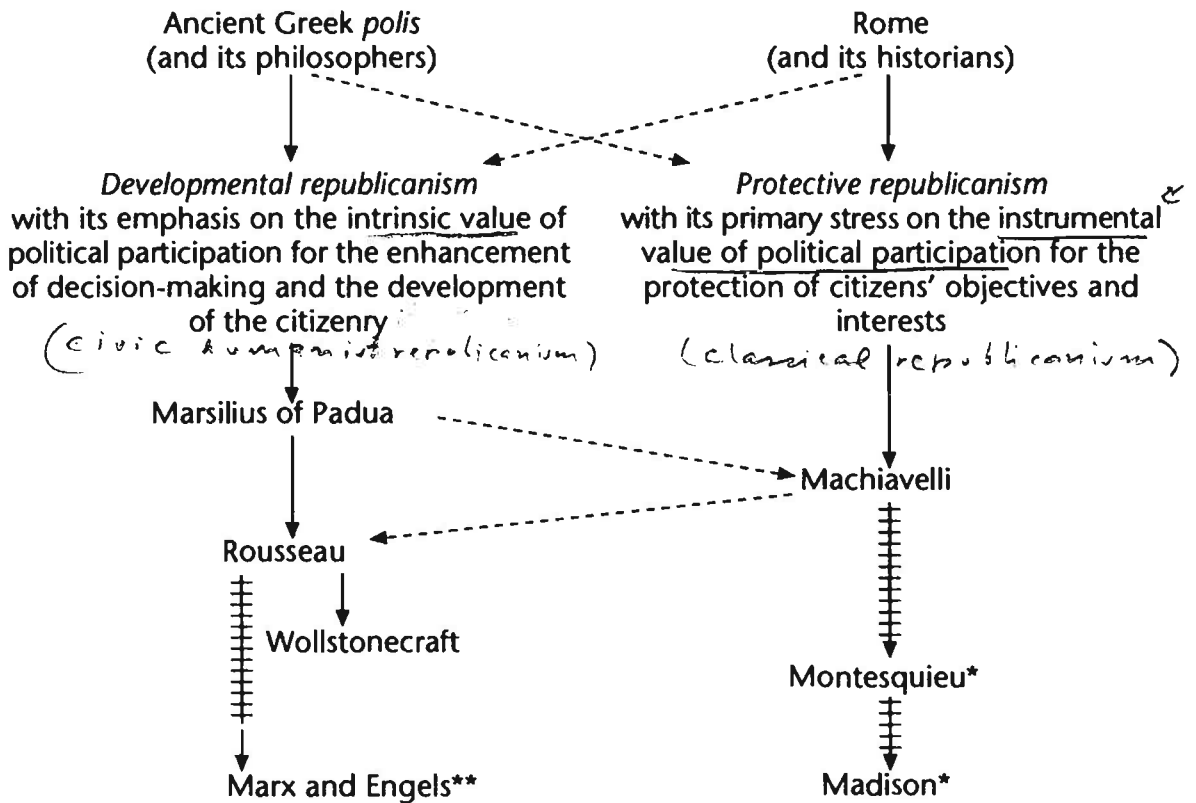
The commonwealth [res publica] is the people’s affair [populi res]; and the people is not every group of men, associated in any manner, but is the coming together of a considerable number of men who are united by a common agreement about law and rights and by the desire to participate in mutual advantages. (*De Re Publica*, p. 124)

Sallust linked the rise of Rome with its achievement of liberty, and argued that when civic virtue prevails citizens are most able successfully to pursue glory for themselves. Indeed, he wrote in glowing terms that 'it almost passes belief what rapid progress was made by the whole state [Rome] when once it had gained its liberty; such was the desire for glory that had possessed men's hearts' (*The Conspiracy of Catiline*, p. 179). And Livy, in his *History of Rome*, held that the expansion of republican power could be linked directly to respect for authority, religious and secular, and to the 'modesty, fairness and nobility of mind' which belonged to the whole people. Such a frame of mind could be sustained when civic virtue presided over factionalism; that is, when the common business of citizens, conducted by them for the public good, prevailed over the tendency to corrupt political practices – the pursuit of private interests in public affairs. But while Rome's greatness was linked to the virtue of its citizens, it was also connected by some writers to its balance of institutions, especially, as will be noted later, to its mixed constitution, which sought to forestall factionalism by ascribing a role, albeit a limited role, to all the main social forces which operated within the public domain.

However, the Renaissance republican tradition, like nearly all traditions of political thought, was not a simple unity. In fact, two strands of republicanism can clearly be distinguished for analytical purposes, strands which have been referred to as 'civic humanist republicanism' and 'civic' or 'classical republicanism' (see Skinner, 1986), but which I shall refer to as 'developmental' and 'protective' republicanism. I shall use these terms because they are general enough usefully to encompass the different ways political freedom and participation are articulated in both republicanism and liberalism. The terms capture, as will be shown, important differences within and across these traditions. In the broadest sense, developmental theorists stress the *intrinsic* value of political participation for the development of citizens as human beings, while protective theorists stress its *instrumental* importance for the protection of citizens' aims and objectives, i.e. their personal liberty. Developmental republican theory builds on elements of the classical democratic heritage and on themes found among the philosophers of the Greek *polis*, notably their exploration of the inherent value of political participation and of the *polis* as a means to self-fulfilment. In this account, political participation is a necessary aspect of the good life. By contrast, protective republican theory, which can be traced to the influence of republican Rome and its historians, emphasizes the highly fragile nature of civic virtue and its vulnerability to corruption if dependent solely upon the politi-

cal involvement of any one major grouping, whether it be the people, the aristocracy or the monarchy. Accordingly, protective republican theorists stress the overriding importance of civic involvement in collective decision-making for all citizens if their personal liberty is to be safeguarded.

Developmental republicanism received a profound and striking articulation in the work of Marsilius of Padua, although it was not until the writings of Rousseau in the eighteenth century that it probably acquired its most elaborate statement. At the same time, Wollstonecraft added important critical insights. Protective republicanism can be most closely associated with Machiavelli, although it was also elaborated later by such figures as Montesquieu and Madison. Figure 2.2 summarizes these two republican threads. Taking these developments chronologically, the focus below, in the first instance, is on Marsilius of Padua.



Note: The figure is offered as an initial means of orientation to the two leading forms of republicanism, and the key figures associated with them here. There is, of course, a great deal of cross-fertilization between the strands as well as significant differences among the political theorists within each strand. And writers sometimes shifted between these analytical types.

- > Political thinkers within each republican strand discussed in this chapter.
- > Patterns of influence across the two forms of republicanism.
- HHH Patterns of influence which combined with later currents of thought.
- * Discussed in chapter 3.
- ** Discussed in chapter 4.

Figure 2.2 Forms of republicanism

Republicanism, elective government and popular sovereignty

The formation of Renaissance republican thought can be traced through the work of diverse thinkers, such as Brunetto Latini (d. 1294), Ptolemy of Lucca (d. 1327) and Remigio de' Girolami (d. 1319) (see Rubinstein, 1982), but it is in the writings of Marsilius of Padua (1275/80–1342), particularly in his *Defensor pacis* (*The Defender of Peace*, issued 1324), that one can find one of the most remarkable early accounts of the significance of elective government and popular sovereignty. Seeking to refute the papalist claims to a 'plenitude of power' and to establish the authority of secular rulers over the Church, Marsilius argued that laws should be made by 'all the people or its weightier part' through the articulation of its will in a general assembly (see *Defensor pacis*, pp. 29–49).³ The teaching of divine law and the administration of religious ceremony should mark out the limits of the powers of the priesthood. In championing a secular polity, under the control of an elective government, Marsilius placed himself in complete opposition to the traditional powers of the Church and to the prevailing conceptions of kingship. *Defensor pacis*, as one interpreter of his work aptly put it, 'was a book at which solid men of the age shuddered. When popes, cardinals, and writers simply concerned with preserving the social order wished to condemn heretics ... they charged them with having gotten their ideas from the "Accursed Marsilius". To be a Marsilian was regarded as subversive in a way similar to that which, centuries later, attached to being a Marxist' (Gewirth, 1980, p. xix). Marsilius was, in fact, branded as a heretic by Pope John XXII and forced to flee to Nuremberg.

There are three major themes in Marsilius's thought (see Gewirth, 1951; 1980). The first comprises an emphasis on civil communities as, in principle, products of reason and as the basis for humans to enjoy what they most naturally desire, a 'sufficient life'. According to this doctrine, each part of the community can be defined in terms of its contribution to the attainment of this end, while government is the just means to ensure that it is attained. Government properly consists of a regulative function

³ The doctrine of the papal 'plenitude of power' was elaborated in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It has been frequently taken to mean that the pope, as vicar of Christ, possessed an authority which was superior to all secular claims; and that the pope was the supreme ruler in temporal as well as spiritual affairs. While this interpretation can be contested, the debate over the doctrine's exact meaning is not of prime significance here. For at issue is Marsilius's concern to restrict the scope of papal authority in all aspects of governance.

which, if pursued adequately, can mean that all citizens can live well and realize the opportunities before them. The adequate pursuit of this function is revealed when government operates for the common benefit – and not for the private interests of a single faction or group, notably the ‘common mass’ (in Marsilius’s terms, farmers, artisans and financiers). Marsilius distinguished ‘temperate’ and ‘diseased’ forms of rule by, among other things, whether or not they act on behalf of the common good (*Defensor pacis*, p. 32).

The second major theme unfolds from Marsilius’s judgement that the work of government is unending due to ever-present strife in human affairs which can undermine political associations. Conflicts among people are inevitable and, therefore, the effective exercise of coercive authority is essential for the peace and prosperity of the community. Rival authorities (above all, those of Church and state) are a recipe for the erosion of law and order. A *unitary* coercive authority is a condition of the survival of civil associations. Effective rule depends on the effective deployment of coercive authority. Good government emerges less from a community dedicated to virtue than from rulers governing in the public interest, backed by coercive power.

These arguments may seem at some considerable distance from the concept of a republican community, but their meaning is not fully articulated without regard for the third theme which runs the course of Marsilius’s *magnum opus*; that is, that the ultimate ‘legislator’ or source of legitimate political authority in the community is ‘the people’ (*Defensor pacis*, pp. 32, 45). The people’s will is the key test of the proper interpretation of the ends to which the community is orientated and the only basis on which coercive power may be legitimately deployed. The authority to make the law belongs to ‘the whole body of the citizens’; they alone have the authority to determine the law (p. 47). In a well-ordered civil community the source of both law and order is ‘the people or the whole body of citizens, or the weightier part thereof, through its election or will expressed by words in the general assembly of the citizens, commanding or determining that something can be done or omitted with regard to human civil acts, under a temporary pain or punishment’ (p. 45). Authority and force are legitimately deployed when they are deployed *rightfully*, that is, with the *consent* of citizens.

For Marsilius, the people’s will is a more effective guarantee of government for the common benefit than rule by the one (kingship or lordship) or the few (aristocracy). Laws made by the many are both superior to and more likely to be upheld than those made

by other forms of rulership. They are superior because when individuals publicly test their views and ends against those of others, they are forced to modify them and accommodate to others (pp. 46–7). As Marsilius explained: ‘the common utility of a law is better noted by the entire multitude, because no one knowingly harms himself. Anyone can look to see whether a proposed law leans toward the benefit of one or a few persons more than of the others or of the community, and can protest against it’ (p. 47). Thus:

The authority to make laws . . . cannot belong to one man alone . . . for through ignorance or malice or both, this one man could make a bad law, looking more to his own private benefit than to that of the community, so that the law would be tyrannical. For the same reason, the authority to make laws cannot belong to a few; for they too could sin, as above, in making the law for the benefit of a certain few and not for the common benefit, as can be seen in oligarchies. The authority to make the laws belongs, therefore, to the whole body of citizens or to the weightier part thereof, for precisely the opposite reason. For since all the citizens must be measured by the law according to due proportion, and no one knowingly harms or wishes injustice to himself, it follows that all or most wish a law conducing to the common benefit of the citizens. (*Defensor pacis*, pp. 48–9)

Laws made by and for citizens establish a legal structure which can sustain a well-ordered, that is, just, community. In these circumstances, the community is also likely to be a peaceful one because laws made with the consent of citizens are laws which citizens feel an obligation to uphold. Law is ‘better observed by every citizen’ if each one is involved in ‘imposing it upon himself’ (p. 47).

By these arguments Marsilius did not mean to imply that all citizens must govern simultaneously. Rather, he advocated a conception of government not dissimilar to that depicted in figure 2.1, which entrenches popular sovereignty, creates self-governing councils, and establishes, through elections, ‘rulers’ or ‘administrators’ of city life – those whose duty it is to uphold the law for the benefit of all citizens (pp. 22–33). All citizens can, in principle, stand for office and enjoy, in turn, the opportunity to participate in public life. Marsilius concluded that ‘elected kings’ rule ‘more voluntary subjects’ and that the method of election alone can obtain ‘the best ruler’ and, as a result, a proper standard of justice (pp. 32–3). Finally, while ‘rulers’ are necessary to uphold this ‘proper standard’, they are in office as *delegates*, Marsilius insisted. Accordingly, those elected ‘are not and cannot be the legislator in the absolute sense, but only in a relative sense and for a particular

time in accordance with the authority of the primary legislator', that is, 'the whole body of citizens' (p. 45). Executive and judicial officers hold their office on the authority of the people and can be removed from power if they fail to pursue the common interest (see pp. 87–9).

Marsilius, in accord with classical Athenian democracy and Aristotle's conception of politics, conceived of a citizen 'as one who participates in the civil community', either in the government or in 'the deliberative or judicial function' of the polity (p. 49; cf. Aristotle, *The Politics*, p. 169). Citizenship is the means to involvement in a shared enterprise orientated towards the realization of the common good; and political participation is the necessary vehicle for the attainment of the good. Following precedent as well, Marsilius noted, bluntly, that 'by this definition, children, slaves, aliens, and women are distinguished from citizens, although in different ways' (p. 46). One might expect at this point a detailed account of why these groups are excluded in 'different ways'; but the only qualifying remark Marsilius offered concerns the boys who are sons of citizens, lest anyone think they are to be permanently excluded. Marsilius asserted that 'the sons of citizens are citizens in *proximate potentiality*, lacking only in years' (p. 46, emphasis added). Citizenship extends to the ranks of men with taxable property, born or resident for a long period in their city, but excludes all others, a matter which apparently required little explanation.

Moreover, Marsilius's conception of citizenship, like nearly all others at the time, entailed a conception of political participation uniquely adapted to small-scale communities – self-government for city-republics. Few republicans reflected on the relevance of republican government to large, extended territories, a matter of considerable concern to later republican thinkers such as Montesquieu (see ch. 3). And none advocated institutions and procedures which bore any direct resemblance to democracy in its contemporary dominant form: liberal democracy, with its commitment to embrace all mature adults (Skinner, 1992, p. 63; and ch. 3). Renaissance republicans took for granted that popular government was a form of self-rule for those with entrenched (property-based) interests in their local community, who alone were thought to be capable of enjoying and developing the network of public relations and duties to which it gave rise.

The unqualified authority claimed by previous forms of rulership – Church and kingship – is also found in Marsilius's doctrine of popular sovereignty, for 'it entails an absolutism whereby any value, group, or institution can be brought under the authority of

the people's will' (Gewirth, 1980, p. xli). The authority of 'the people' is, in principle, monistic, unchecked and ultimately unbalanced. In other words, there is no argument to be found here – urgently expressed by later liberal constitutionalists and advocates of a modern polity separate, in principle, from ruler and ruled – in support of the contention that for political power to be effective it must be impartial and circumscribed, so that the powers of the state can clearly be distinguished from the power of those who are entrusted with state duties and the power of those who are presided over. City-republicans and their protagonists placed their trust in the judgement of men of civil honour, and in the theory and practice of ancient self-government. For them, self-government was a form of direct democracy among trusted 'club members' – not yet a view of the nature of popular rule for a more sceptical age, one which casts doubt on the beneficence and prudence of all, rulers and ruled alike.

From civic life to civic glory

By the time Marsilius published *Defensor pacis*, the institutions of elective government were in decline in Padua and being replaced by hereditary rule. The infighting and factional disputes that had characterized Paduan politics found parallels in many other cities. The attempt to defend republican ideals in the unstable circumstances of Italian public life required particularly compelling arguments. Given that the ancient republics had suffered decline and defeat, the question of how, and in what ways, the values of the classical *polis* could be adapted and upheld in radically changed circumstances was a pressing one. Few understood this question better than Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), who linked the case for forms of elective government and participative politics to the prospects of civic welfare and civic glory, a connection more easily forged perhaps in his native Florence than elsewhere due to its particular pre-eminence during the Renaissance. Machiavelli, with a firm foot both in the political theory of the ancient world and in that of the new emerging European political order, was able to offer an account of the republican tradition – that is, of protective republicanism – which sought to locate in civic involvement the conditions of independence, self-rule and glorious endeavour. Florentine political culture articulated many of these notions and provided a rich context for his politics.

Often regarded as the first theorist of modern state politics, Machiavelli sought to explore how a proper balance might be

found between the powers of the state and the powers of the citizen in two key texts, *The Prince* and *The Discourses*. For too long *The Prince* has been taken as Machiavelli's major contribution, and this has led to a quite distorted reading of his work. If one places greater stress on *The Discourses*, as contemporary scholars argue we should (see Gilbert, 1965; Pocock, 1975; Skinner, 1981), then a distinctive and, in many respects, compelling position emerges. The study of classical history reveals, Machiavelli argued, that the three major forms of government – monarchy, aristocracy and democracy – are inherently unstable and tend to create a cycle of degeneration and corruption. In passages which parallel strands in Plato and Aristotle, Machiavelli held that after an initial period of positive development monarchy tends to decay into tyranny, aristocracy into oligarchy and democracy into anarchy, which then tends to be overturned in favour of monarchy again (*The Discourses*, pp. 104–11). When the generation that created the ancient democracies died, a situation emerged:

in which no respect was shown either for the individual or for the official, and which was such that, as everyone did what he liked, all sorts of outrages were constantly committed. The outcome was inevitable. Either at the suggestion of some good men or because this anarchy had to be got rid of somehow, principality was once again restored. And from this there was, stage by stage, a return to anarchy, by way of transitions . . . This, then, is the cycle through which all commonwealths pass, whether they govern themselves or are governed. (*The Discourses*, pp. 108–9)

Machiavelli pointed directly to Athens as an example of a democracy which degenerated because of its inability to protect itself from 'the arrogance of the upper class' and 'the licentiousness of the general public' (*The Discourses*, p. 110). The political world, he contended, was always one of flux and potential chaos.

Unlike Marsilius before him, or Hobbes and Locke after him, Machiavelli did not believe that there was a given principle of organization (for instance, a fixed view of the state as subserving the good life or the natural rights of individuals) which it was the task of government to articulate and sustain. There was no natural or God-given framework to order political life. Rather, it was the task of *politics* to create order in the world. Machiavelli conceived politics as the struggle to win, utilize and contain power. Politics is thus ascribed a pre-eminent position in social life as the chief constitutive element of society. Like many other political thinkers from Plato onwards, Machiavelli conceived of 'the generality of men' as self-seeking, lazy, suspicious and incapable of doing any-

thing good unless constrained by necessity (see *The Discourses*, pp. 200–1, 256–7). The question was: under what circumstances might people support political order and commit themselves to the state? Or, to put the question in more Machiavellian terms, how might *virtú* – ‘a willingness to do whatever may be necessary for the pursuit of civic glory’ – be instilled in people?⁴

Machiavelli stressed two key institutional devices as critical to the inculcation of civic virtue: the enforcement of law and upholding religious worship. The former, in particular, provides the basis to compel people to place the interests of the community above their own interests: the law can ‘make citizens good’. But how can good and bad laws be distinguished? The answer is disclosed by historical investigation into the ways the law has been used to foster civic culture and greatness. The instability of all singular constitutional forms suggests that only a governmental system combining elements of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy can promote the kind of culture on which *virtú* depends. The best example of such a government was, in Machiavelli’s opinion, Rome: Rome’s ‘mixed government’ (with its system of consuls, Senate and tribunes of the people) was directly linked to its sustained achievement of glory.

It is not only the historical route to this conclusion that is important; Machiavelli’s reasoning is theoretically innovative as well. A ‘mixed government’, structured to compensate for the defects of individual constitutional forms, is most likely to be able to balance the interests of rival social groupings, particularly those of the rich and the poor. Machiavelli’s argument should not be confused with later arguments for the separation of powers within the state and for representative government based on party competition. None the less, his argument is a precursor of them, anticipating important aspects of their rationale. If the rich and the poor can be drawn into the process of government, and their interests found a legitimate avenue of expression through a division of offices between them, then they will be forced into some form of mutual accommodation. Ever watchful of their own positions, they will expend great efforts to ensure that no laws are passed that are detrimental to their interests. The outcome of such efforts is likely to be a body of law that all parties can agree on in the end. Against the dominant traditions of his time, Machiavelli contended that the existence of opposed social forces and dissen-

⁴ In putting the question in this way, and in exploring a response, I am following Skinner’s admirable analysis of Machiavelli’s writings on this theme (1981, pp. 51–77).

sion, far from eroding all possibility of good and effective laws, might be the condition of them (Skinner, 1981, pp. 63–6). A quite unconventional conclusion was reached: the basis of liberty may not just be a self-governing regime and a willingness to participate in politics, but may also be conflict and disagreement through which citizens can promote and defend their interests.

Writing against the background of competition and war between sixteenth-century Italian city-states, Machiavelli's views were of particular significance; for his argument was that communities have never increased in 'dominion or wealth' except when they have been able to enjoy liberty (*The Discourses*, p. 275). Under tyranny, whether imposed by an external power or by a 'local' tyrant, cities or states degenerate in the long run. By contrast, if a community can enjoy liberty, as Machiavelli hoped his native city would continue to do and a united Italy would do in the future, it is likely that it will flourish. Machiavelli sought to reinforce this point by referring (not wholly consistently) to classical Athens (with its factional disputes) and Rome (with its conflicts between Senate and Commons) as examples of cities which enjoyed liberty and 'grew enormously' in relatively short periods of time (*The Discourses*, p. 275).

The preservation of liberty, however, depended on something more than just a mixed constitution: 'eternal vigilance'. There are always threats to liberty posed by, on the one hand, the particular interests of factions and, on the other hand, competing states. While a mixed constitution is essential to containing the former, the best way of meeting the challenge of competing states is to contain them before one is contained. A policy of expansion is, therefore, a necessary prerequisite to the preservation of a collectivity's liberty: the application of force is integral to the maintenance of freedom. In so arguing, Machiavelli was firmly placing the ends of the state or community above those of the individual, both at home and abroad; 'reasons of state' held priority over the rights of individuals. A person's duties were first and foremost those required by citizenship. However, Machiavelli linked this classical emphasis on the primacy of civic life directly to the requirements of 'power politics'. Accordingly, 'Machiavellianism' in its more 'popular' contemporary sense emerged: the politics of statecraft and the relentless pursuit of power had priority over individual interests and private morality. Machiavelli thus anticipated certain of the dilemmas of liberalism (see ch. 3, pp. 74–5), but resolved them ultimately in a profoundly anti-liberal way, by granting priority to the preservation of society by whatever means necessary.

Political life is ambiguous. In order to create liberty and political stability, it may not always be possible to resort to law and the minimum use of force. Machiavelli unquestionably preferred liberty to tyranny, but he thought the latter might often be necessary to sustain the former. His judgement moved uneasily between admiration of a free, self-governing people and of a powerful leader able to create and defend the law. He tentatively sought to reconcile these preferences by distinguishing between, on the one hand, the kind of politics necessary for the inauguration of a state or for the liberation of a state from corruption and, on the other hand, the kind of politics necessary for the maintenance of a state once it had been properly established. An element of democracy was essential to the latter, but quite inappropriate to the former.

In general, however, Machiavelli believed that 'free government' was difficult if not impossible to sustain in the actual political circumstances of Europe. Thus, there was a clear necessity for the resourceful despot to impose his vision of state and society and to create the possibility of order and harmony. The free state would depend on the strong, expansionary state to secure the conditions of its existence. The good state was first and foremost the secure and stable state. Therefore, while we find in Machiavelli the germs of a theory of democracy – elements of democracy are necessary to protect the governed from the governors, and to protect the governed from each other – they have a somewhat precarious existence in the context of other aspects of his thought.

Further, when Machiavelli is said to defend elements of democratic government, it is very important to be clear what is meant (see Plamenatz, 1963, pp. 36–40). By the standards of his day he was, it should be stressed, a democrat; that is, he conceived of political participation in broader terms than simply the involvement of the wealthy and/or noble in public affairs. Along with the ancient Greek democrats, and many republican thinkers like Marsilius of Padua, he wanted the process of government to include artisans and small traders. 'The people' or citizenry were to be those with 'independent' means who might be expected to have a substantial interest in public affairs. Foreigners, labourers, servants and 'dependents', a category which included all women and children, were not, however, regarded as having such an interest (see Pitkin, 1984). Citizens were men with a 'stake in the country' of unambiguously local descent. Public affairs were their affairs. Moreover, his conception of a self-governing community is by no means yet a conception of democracy embodying many of the elements (such as individual democratic rights entrenched irrespective of class, race and sex, and majority rule) that became central to modern liberalism and democratic thinking. None the

less, his distinctive understanding of politics, linking closely the case for self-determination with that of self-protection, was a fundamental moment in political thought. It is summarized in model IIa, which provides a useful contrast with what is taken here as the leading account of developmental republicanism, the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78).

In sum: model IIa
Protective Republicanism

Principle(s) of justification

Political participation is an essential condition of personal liberty; if citizens do not rule themselves, they will be dominated by others

Key features

Balance of power between 'the people', aristocracy and the monarchy linked to a mixed constitution or mixed government, with provision for all leading political forces to play an active role in public life

Citizen participation achieved via different possible mechanisms, including election of consuls, or representatives to serve on ruling councils

Competing social groups promoting and defending their interests

Liberties of speech, expression and association

Rule of law

General conditions

Small city community

Maintenance of religious worship

Society of independent artisans and traders

Exclusion of women, labourers and 'dependents' in politics (expanding opportunities for male citizens to participate in the public realm)

Intensive conflict among rival political associations

The republic and the general will

Protective republicans hold, it has been shown, that political participation is a necessary condition of liberty; a self-governing republic requires involvement in the political process. Moreover,

freedom is marked by the ability to participate in the public sphere, by the subordination of egoistic concerns to the public good, and by the subsequent opportunity this creates for the expansion of welfare, individual and collective. This emphasis on the significance of participating as a full member in a *polis* was given another remarkable restatement by Rousseau, who, like many of his Renaissance republican predecessors, stood between ancient and modern thought about democracy, but who, writing in the very different context of the eighteenth century, sought to rearticulate this position in the face of both the absolutist claims of kings and the liberal onslaught against them. Born in a small city-republic, the city of Geneva, Rousseau hoped to defend the idea of 'assembly politics' where the people can readily meet together and where each citizen can 'with ease' know the rest. Rousseau was aware that this was democracy for small states and that many of his ideal stipulations could not be met by the world developing before him, with its spread of commercial networks, industrial developments, large states and complex problems posed by size. None the less, his account of the core republican ideas is among the most radical, if not *the* most radical, ever developed, and it is linked to a new view of the rights and duties of citizens. It is important to examine Rousseau's position, not only because of the significance of his thought, but because he had a considerable (though ambiguous) influence on the ideas in currency during the French Revolution as well as, according to some writers at least, on the development of the key counterpoint to liberal democracy: the Marxist tradition, discussed in chapter 4 (see, for example, Colletti, 1972).

Rousseau has been described as 'the Machiavelli of the eighteenth century' (Pocock, 1975, p. 504). He referred to his own preferred political system as 'republican', stressing the centrality of obligations and duties to the public realm. And, indeed, Rousseau's account of the proper form of 'the republic' is clearly indebted to his republican forebear. Like Machiavelli, Rousseau was critical of the notion of 'democracy', which he associated with classical Athens. In his view, Athens alone could not be upheld as a political ideal because it failed to incorporate a clear division between legislative and executive functions and, accordingly, became prone to instability, internecine strife and indecision in crises (*The Social Contract*, pp. 112–14, 136ff). Moreover, like his forebear, he tended to emphasize continuity between his conception of a defensible form of government and the legacy of republican Rome (although, in fact, it is not hard to see elements of continuity with the Athenian heritage). But while Rousseau appears to have admired Machiavelli, referring to him as 'a gentleman and a good citizen', he also regarded his work as something of a

compromise with the power structures of the actual republics of his age (*The Social Contract*, p. 118). In his theoretical writing about the ideal government at least, Rousseau was not prepared to make any such compromise, developing an interpretation of the proper form of 'the republic' which was, and came to be seen as, unique in many respects.

In his classic *The Social Contract*, published in 1762, Rousseau explored how human beings were contented in their original 'state of nature', a period before the development of civil governments. During this time humans were fundamentally equal, living somewhat isolated but free lives in a diversity of natural circumstances. However, people were driven from their original state to develop new institutions by a variety of obstacles to their preservation: individual weaknesses and egoistic desires, common miseries and natural disasters. Human beings would have 'perished' if they had not 'changed their mode of existence' (*The Social Contract*, p. 59). They came to realize that their survival, the development of their nature, the realization of their capacity for reason and their fullest experience of liberty could be achieved only by the establishment of a system of cooperation upheld by a law-making and enforcing body. Thus, people joined together to create through a 'social contract' – a new basis of understanding and agreement, 'perhaps never formally stated . . . everywhere tacitly admitted and recognized' – the possibility of living together under laws which treat all individuals equally and give all the opportunity to develop their capacities securely (*The Social Contract*, p. 60). The public association thus formed was 'once called the *city*, and is now known as the *republic* or the *body politic*' (*The Social Contract*, p. 61). For Rousseau the fundamental question was: 'How to find a form of association which will defend the person and goods of each member with the collective force of all, and under which each individual, while uniting himself with the others . . . remains as free as before' (*The Social Contract*, p. 60).

Rousseau saw individuals as ideally involved in the direct creation of the laws by which their lives are regulated, and he affirmed the notion of an active, involved citizenry: all citizens should meet together to decide what is best for the community and enact the appropriate laws. The ruled should be the rulers. In Rousseau's account, the idea of self-rule is posited as an end in itself; a political order offering opportunities for participation in the arrangement of public affairs should not just be a state, but rather the formation of *a type of society*: a society in which the affairs of the state are integrated into the affairs of ordinary citizens (see *The Social Contract*, pp. 82, 114, and for a general account

book 3, chs 1–5). Rousseau set himself firmly against the post-Machiavellian distinctions between state and civil society, government and ‘the people’ (although he accepted, and this will be returned to below, the importance of dividing and limiting both access to ‘governmental power’ and governmental power itself). For him, sovereignty originates in the people, and it ought to stay there (Cranston, 1968, p. 30). In a justly famous passage he wrote:

Sovereignty cannot be represented, for the same reason that it cannot be alienated . . . the people’s deputies are not, and could not be, its representatives; they are merely its agents; and they cannot decide anything finally. Any law which the people has not ratified in person is void; it is not law at all. The English people believes itself to be free; it is gravely mistaken; it is free only during the election of Members of Parliament; as soon as the Members are elected, the people is enslaved; it is nothing. (*The Social Contract*, p. 141)

The role of the citizen is the highest to which an individual can aspire. The considered exercise of power by citizens is the only legitimate way in which liberty can be sustained. The citizen must both create and be bound by ‘the supreme direction of the general will’, the publicly generated conception of the common good (*The Social Contract*, pp. 60–1). Rousseau recognized that opinions may differ about the ‘common good’ and he accepted a provision for majority rule: ‘the votes of the greatest number always bind the rest’ (p. 153). But the people are sovereign only to the extent that they participate actively in articulating the ‘general will’.

In order to grasp Rousseau’s position, it is important to distinguish the ‘general will’ from the ‘will of all’: it is the difference, according to him, between the judgement about the common good and the mere aggregate of personal fancies and individual desires (pp. 72–3, 75). Citizens are only obliged to obey a system of laws and regulations on the grounds of publicly reached agreement, for they can only be genuinely obliged to comply with a law they have prescribed for themselves with the general good in mind (p. 65; cf. p. 82). It is freely chosen obligation, accepted by the citizen body acting as a whole with the well-being of the community in mind, which constitutes the basis of ‘political right’ (cf. Manin, 1987, pp. 338–68).

Rousseau drew a critical distinction between independence and liberty:

Many have been the attempts to confound independence and liberty: two things so essentially different, that they reciprocally exclude each other. When every one does what he pleases, he will, of course, often do things displeasing to others; and this is not properly called a free state. Liberty consists less in acting according to

one's own pleasure, than in not being subject to the will and pleasure of other people. It consists also in our not subjecting the wills of other people to our own. Whoever is the master over others is not himself free, and even to reign is to obey. (From letter 8, *Oeuvres Complètes de J. J. Rousseau*, quoted in Keane, 1984a, p. 255)

Independence comprises the pursuit of self-interested projects without regard for the position and will of others. Liberty, by contrast, is attained by participating in the generation and enactment of the general will, which establishes equality among citizens in that they can all enjoy 'the same rights' (*The Social Contract*, p. 76; cf. p. 46).

By 'the same rights' Rousseau did not simply mean equal political rights and the equal application of all political rules to each citizen. However equal political rights may be in law, they cannot be safeguarded, he maintained, in the face of vast inequalities of wealth and power. Rousseau regarded the right to property as sacred, but he understood it as a limited right to only that amount of property commensurate with an individual's need for material security and independence of mind. Free of economic dependence, citizens need not be frightened of forming autonomous judgements; for citizens can, then, develop and express views without risk of threats to their livelihood. Rousseau desired a state of affairs in which 'no citizen shall be rich enough to buy another and none so poor as to be forced to sell himself' (*The Social Contract*, p. 96). Only a broad similarity in economic conditions can prevent major differences of interest developing into organized factional disputes which would undermine hopelessly the establishment of a general will. But Rousseau was not an advocate, as he is sometimes taken to be, of absolute equality; for equality, he made clear, 'must not be taken to imply that degrees of power and wealth should be absolutely the same for all, but rather that power shall stop short of violence and never be exercised except by virtue of authority and law' (*The Social Contract*, p. 96).

Rousseau argued in favour of a political system in which the legislative and executive functions are clearly demarcated. The former belong to the people and the latter to a 'government' or 'prince'. The people form the legislative assembly and constitute the authority of the state; the 'government' or 'prince' (composed of one or more administrators or magistrates) executes the people's laws (book 3, chs 1, 11–14, 18).⁵ Such a 'government' is necessary

⁵ There are additional institutional positions set out by Rousseau, for instance, that of 'the Lawgiver', which will not be elaborated here (see *The Social Contract*, pp. 83–8, 95–6). For a critical discussion, see Harrison (1993, pp. 59–60).

on the grounds of expediency: the people require a government to coordinate public meetings, serve as a means of communication, draft laws and enforce and defend the legal system (*The Social Contract*, p. 102). The government is a result of an agreement among the citizenry and is legitimate only to the extent to which it fulfils 'the instructions of the general will'. Should it fail so to behave it can be revoked and changed; for its personnel are chosen either directly through elections or by lot (*The Social Contract*, pp. 136–9, 148).

Rousseau's conception of republican government, summarized in model IIb, represents in many respects the apotheosis of the attempt throughout the republican tradition to link freedom and participation directly. Moreover, the connection he forged between the principle of legitimate government and that of self-rule in the collective interest challenged not only the political principles of the regimes of his day – above all those of the *ancien régime* – but also those of later liberal democratic states. For his notion of self-government has been among the most radical, contesting at its core some of the critical assumptions of liberal democracy, especially the notion that democracy is the name for a particular kind of state which can only be held accountable to the citizenry once in a while.

But Rousseau's ideas do not represent a completely coherent system or recipe for straightforward action. He appreciated some of the problems created by large-scale, complex, densely populated societies, but did not pursue these as far as one must (see, for example, *The Social Contract*, book 3, ch. 4). Furthermore, Rousseau himself by no means thought that history would culminate in the fulfilment of his model of democratic reason. He did not think history unfolded progressively towards a better life; on the contrary, he was sceptical of the Enlightenment's view of progress, since, having left the state of nature, humans had unleashed political and economic forces and forms of competitive and self-seeking behaviour which had generated 'civilization' only at a very high cost (cf. Masters, 1968; J. Miller, 1984). Corruption and social injustice typically followed from the inequalities wrought by 'progress'. Rousseau's view seems to have been that the ethical democratic political community would have to surmount these inequalities if it were to have any chance of becoming entrenched, and that this was a highly unlikely prospect.

Rousseau's insistence on the democratic nature of a community's government, however, sits uneasily with a number of restrictions he himself imposed upon this polity. In the first instance, he too excluded all women from 'the people', i.e. the citizenry, as well as, it seems, the poor. Women are excluded because, unlike

In sum: model IIb
Developmental Republicanism

Principle(s) of justification

Citizens must enjoy political and economic equality in order that nobody can be master of another and all can enjoy equal freedom and development in the process of self-determination for the common good

Key features

Division of legislative and executive functions

The direct participation of citizens in public meetings to constitute the legislature

Unanimity on public issues desirable, but voting provision with majority rule in the event of disagreement

Executive positions in the hands of 'magistrates' or 'administrators'

Executive appointed either by direct election or by lot

General conditions

Small, non-industrial community

Diffusion of ownership of property among the many; citizenship depends on property holding, i.e. a society of independent producers

Domestic service of women to free men for (non-domestic) work and politics

men, their capacity for sound judgement is clouded by 'immoderate passions' and, hence, they 'require' male protection and guidance in the face of the challenge of politics (see Rousseau, *Émile*, esp. book V; Pateman, 1985, pp. 157–8). The poor appear to be outcasts because citizenship is conditional upon a small property qualification (land) and/or upon the absence of dependence on others (see Connolly, 1981, ch. 7).

There are other notable difficulties. Rousseau has been portrayed as advocating a model of democracy with, in the end, tyrannical implications (see, for example, Berlin, 1969, pp. 162–4). At the root of this charge is a concern that, because the majority is all-powerful in the face of individuals' aims and wishes, 'the sovereignty of the people' could easily destroy 'the sovereignty of individuals' (Berlin, 1969, p. 163). The problem is that Rousseau not only assumed that minorities ought to consent to the deci-

sions of majorities but he also posited no limits to the reach of the decisions of a democratic majority. In fact, he thought that civic education ought to bridge the gap between the individual's will and the common good while common beliefs ought to be enforced through a 'civil religion' (*The Social Contract*, book 4, ch. 8, esp. pp. 185–7). While questions posed by such positions do not engender fatal objections to all aspects of Rousseau's vision (see Pateman, 1985, pp. 159–62), it is hard to avoid the conclusion that he failed to reflect adequately upon the threats posed by 'public power' to all aspects of 'private life' (see Harrison, 1993, ch. 4). (This issue will be returned to in the next section of this chapter and in subsequent chapters.)

Rousseau's overriding concern was with what might be thought of as the future of democracy in a non-industrial community, that is, a community like his native 'republic of Geneva', which he greatly admired. His vision of democracy was evocative and challenging; but it was not systematically linked to an account of politics in a world faced by rapidly entrenching nation-states and by change of an altogether different kind, the industrial revolution, which was gathering pace at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning to undermine traditional community life. It was left to others to think through the nature of democracy in relation to these developments. In doing so, many came to see Rousseau's thought as utopian and/or irrelevant to 'modern conditions'. But this was – and is – by no means the judgement of all democratic theorists. For, as will be seen throughout the chapters which follow, there have been some political thinkers who have returned to the central 'moral' of the republican tradition, that is, that citizens must 'never put their trust in princes' and that '[i]f we wish to ensure that governments act in the interests of the people, we must somehow ensure that we the people act as our own government' (Skinner, 1992, p. 69). How enduring this moral has been can be disclosed by a critical assessment of the dominant model of democracy in modern politics: liberal democracy. However, before turning to it, the meaning of republican thought needs further explication in relation to one fundamental element of its conceptual framework which has as yet been insufficiently explored: its gendered conception of citizenship.

The public and the private

The history of republican thought is, as one critic aptly noted, 'ominously dismissive of femininity and women' (Phillips, 1991,

p. 46). But one figure especially stands out against the 'male stream', Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97), whose pioneering inquiry into the nature of the interconnections between the public and the private realms is discussed below. Wollstonecraft's work did not issue in a new model of a self-governing community or of democratic government, but it is properly understood as a central contribution to the analysis of the conditions for the possibility of democracy. As such, it sheds new light on the strengths and limitations of the traditions of thought discussed so far.

Reflecting on the significance of the French Revolution and the spread of radicalism across Europe at the close of the eighteenth century, Wollstonecraft found much in Rousseau's work to admire. Partly inspired by those events and the issues posed by Rousseau, Wollstonecraft wrote one of the most remarkable tracts of social and political theory, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (written in 1791 and published in 1792). While the text was received with considerable enthusiasm in the radical circles in which she moved (circles which included William Godwin and Thomas Paine), it was treated with the utmost scorn and derision in others (see Kramnick, 1982; Taylor, 1983; Tomalin, 1985). In fact, the latter reaction has largely characterized the reception of *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* since its inception. The reasons for this lie at the very heart of its argument, an argument barely considered in political theory again until the work of John Stuart Mill (1806–73), and, then, along with his work on the subjection of women, much neglected thereafter. Mary Wollstonecraft has rarely been considered one of the key theorists of democracy, but she ought to have been.

Wollstonecraft accepted the argument that liberty and equality were intertwined. Like Rousseau, she was of the view that all those who are 'obliged to weigh the consequences of every farthing they spend' cannot enjoy liberty of 'heart and mind' (*Vindication*, p. 255). Like Rousseau, she argued that from excessive respect for property and the propertied flow many 'evils and vices of this world'. The possibility of an active, knowledgeable citizenry depends on freedom from poverty as well as freedom from a system of hereditary wealth which instils in the governing classes a sense of authority independent of any test of reason or merit. Wollstonecraft was firmly of the view that while poverty brutalizes the mind, living off wealth created by others encourages arrogance and habitual idleness (*Vindication*, pp. 252–3, 255). Human faculties can only be developed if they are used, and they will seldom be used 'unless necessity of some kind first set the wheels in motion' (*Vindication*, p. 252). And Wollstonecraft maintained, like

Rousseau, that more equality must be created in society if citizens are to gain an enlightened understanding of their world, and if the political order is to be governed by reason and sound judgement. In a typically bold passage, she declared:

The preposterous distinctions of rank, which render civilization a curse, by dividing the world between voluptuous tyrants and cunning envious dependents, corrupt, almost equally, every class of people, because respectability is not attached to the discharge of the relative duties of life, but to the station, and when the duties are not fulfilled the affections cannot gain sufficient strength to fortify the virtue of which they are the natural reward. (*Vindication*, pp. 256–7)

However, unlike Rousseau and republican tradition more broadly, Wollstonecraft could not accept the powerful strand in political thinking which subsumed the interests of women and children under those of 'the individual', that is, the male citizen. Wollstonecraft was critical of any assumption of an identity of interests among men, women and children, and deeply so of Rousseau's portrait of the proper relation between men and women, which denied women a role in public life (see *Vindication*, ch. 5). Although not the first to ask why it was that the doctrine of individual freedom and equality did not apply to women, she offered a more far-reaching analysis of this question than anyone before her and, indeed, after her for several generations to come (cf. Mary Astell, *Some Reflections upon Marriage*, first published 1700). For Wollstonecraft, the very failure to explore the issue of women's political emancipation had been detrimental not only to the equality of the lives of individual women and men, but also to the very nature of reason and morality itself. In her view, relations between men and women were founded on largely unjustified assumptions (about natural differences between men and women) and unjust institutions (from the marriage contract to the direct absence of female representation in the state). In Wollstonecraft's words, this state of affairs was 'subversive' of human endeavours to perfect nature and sustain happiness (*Vindication*, pp. 87, 91). If the modern world is to be free of tyranny, not only must 'the divine right of kings' be contested, but 'the divine right of husbands' as well (p. 127). Given this standpoint, it is scarcely surprising, then, that *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was treated with such alarm by so many people.

Against the widely accepted portrait of women as weak, volatile, 'unable to stand alone' and passive, 'insignificant objects of desire', Wollstonecraft argued that to the extent that women were pitiful creatures this was because of the way they had been

brought up (*Vindication*, pp. 81–3). What was at issue was not women's natural capacities, but marked inadequacies in their education and circumstances. Isolated in domestic routines and limited by restricted opportunities, women's abilities to become full citizens were constantly attacked and undermined. Women *learned* a 'feminine ideal' which they were pressured on all sides to uphold; they were taught to be delicate, well-mannered and uninterested in worldly affairs. Women's rank in life *prevented* them from performing the duties of citizens and, as a result, profoundly degraded them (*Vindication*, pp. 257–8). The position and education of 'ladies', for example, appeared to be designed to develop the necessary qualities for 'confinement in cages': 'like the feathered race, they have nothing to do but to please themselves, and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch. It is true they are provided with food and raiment, for which they neither toil nor spin; but health, liberty and virtue are given in exchange' (p. 146). In short, what women are and can become is a product of human and historical arrangements, not a matter of natural differences.

It is necessary, therefore, Wollstonecraft contended, for political relations to be rethought in connection with 'a few simple principles', accepted by most thinkers who have sought to challenge arbitrary and despotic powers (*Vindication*, p. 90). The pre-eminence of human beings over 'brute creation' consists in their capacity to reason, to accumulate knowledge through experience and to live a life of virtue. Humans can – and have a right to – order their existence according to the dictates of reason and morality. Human beings are capable of understanding the world and seeking the perfection of their nature (*Vindication*, p. 91). What distinguishes Wollstonecraft's invocation of these classic Enlightenment tenets, however, from that of nearly all her predecessors is that she turned them against the 'masculinist' assumptions of radical and liberal thinkers alike. Both men and women are born with a God-given capacity to reason, a capacity too often denied 'by the words or conduct of men' (*Vindication*, p. 91). 'If the abstract rights of men will bear discussion and explanation', Wollstonecraft avowed, 'those of women, by a parity of reasoning, will not shrink from the same test' (p. 87). And she concluded, if women are to be effective both in public *and* private life (as citizens, wives and mothers), they must, first and foremost, discharge their duties to themselves as rational beings (p. 259).

In order for women to be in a position to discharge their duties as well as possible, it is not enough merely to reform their position by, for instance, altering the nature of their education, as some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century figures had held. For the rule

of reason is stifled by arbitrary authority in many forms. It is, in particular, 'the pestiferous purple', she says in a memorable phrase, 'which renders the progress of civilization a curse, and warps the understanding' (p. 99). Wollstonecraft directs most of her criticism at all those whose power and authority derive from inherited property and/or a system of titles. Three institutional groupings are singled out for especially harsh comment: the nobility, the church and the army. Their privileges, idle lives and/or ill-thought-out projects – the corrupt relations which 'wealth, idleness, and folly produce' – oppress not only women but also 'a numerous class' of hard-working labourers (pp. 260, 317). Accordingly, it is the whole system of politics – 'if system it may courteously be called, consisting in multiplying dependents and contriving taxes which grind the poor to pamper the rich' – which must be altered if the rule of reason is to be created firmly (p. 256). Only when there is 'no coercion *established* in society', Wollstonecraft declared, will 'the sexes . . . fall into their proper place' (p. 88).

For women and men to enjoy liberty requires that they enjoy the conditions and opportunities to pursue self-chosen ends as well as social, political and religious obligations. What is especially important about Wollstonecraft's statement of this position is, it should be stressed, the deeply rooted connections it sets out between the spheres of 'the public' and 'the private': between the possibility of citizenship and participation in government, on the one hand, and obstacles to such a possibility anchored heavily in unequal gender relations, on the other. Her argument is that there can be little, if any, progressive political change without restructuring the sphere of private relations, and there can be no satisfactory restructuring of 'the private' without major transformations in the nature of governing institutions. Moreover, she endeavoured to show that private duties (to those closest to one, whether they be adults or children) 'are never properly fulfilled unless the understanding [reason] enlarges the heart' and that public virtue cannot properly be developed until 'the tyranny of man' is at an end; for 'public virtue is only an aggregate of private [virtue]' (*Vindication*, pp. 316, 318). The emancipation of women is, then, a critical condition of liberty in a rational and moral order.

Among the practical changes Wollstonecraft sought were a national system of education, new career opportunities for women ('women might . . . be physicians as well as nurses') and, though 'I may excite laughter', a 'direct share' for women in 'the deliberations of government' (pp. 252 ff). With such changes a woman might come to enjoy the opportunity to make a major contribution to

society: 'she must not, if she discharge her civil duties, want individually the protection of civil laws; she must not be dependent on her husband's bounty for her subsistence during his life, or support after his death; for how can a being be generous who has nothing of its own? or virtuous who is not free?' (*Vindication*, p. 259). Given the financial wherewithal to sustain themselves and to contribute to the well-being of others, women would at last be in a position to become equal members of the polity. The social and political order would be transformed to the benefit of both women and men: order might then be based on no authority other than reason itself.

Wollstonecraft's work makes a significant contribution to the illumination of the interrelation between social and political processes and, thus, to a new appreciation of the conditions of democracy. Until the twentieth century, there were few, if any, writers who traced as perceptively as she did the relation between public and private spheres and the ways in which unequal gender relations cut across them to the detriment of the quality of life in both. The radical thrust of her argument posed new questions about the complex conditions under which a democracy, open to the participation of both women and men, can develop. After Wollstonecraft, it is hard to imagine how political theorists could neglect the study of the different conditions for the possibility of male and female involvement in democratic politics. Yet relatively few did pursue such a line of inquiry (see Pateman, 1988). The reasons for this no doubt lie, in part, in the dominance, as Mary Wollstonecraft would have understood it, of men in political and academic institutions; but a contributing factor lay in ambiguities in her thought itself.

To begin with, Wollstonecraft's work did not issue in a clear alternative model of democracy as, for instance, Rousseau's did before her or John Stuart Mill's after her. Wollstonecraft's arguments hovered uneasily between liberal principles familiar since Locke's *Second Treatise* (discussed in the following chapter) and the more radical principles of a participatory democracy. In *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* she indicated that an additional volume was soon to be written which would pursue the political implications of her analysis, but sadly it never appeared (*Vindication*, p. 90). Wollstonecraft's exact view of the proper role of government and the state is regrettably unclear. Although she often speaks of the need to extend the participation of women (and labouring men) in government, and argues clearly for the extension of the franchise, the implications of these views for the forms and limits of government are not spelt out in any detail. To the extent that implications are drawn, they point in different and

sometimes competing directions: to a model of liberal democracy, on the one hand, and to quite revolutionary democratic ideas, on the other (see Taylor, 1983, pp. 1–7).

The difficulties in unfolding Wollstonecraft's position are highlighted by the rather surprising boundaries she herself drew around the relevant audience for her work; in 'addressing my sex . . . I pay particular attention to those in the middle class, because they appear to be in the most natural state' (*Vindication*, p. 81). Leaving aside questions about what she meant by women living in 'the most natural state' (a phrase which is in some tension with her emphasis elsewhere on the historical nature of social relations), the issue is raised as to whether she was vindicating the rights of middle-class women only. Although such a position would itself have been a quite radical one to take at the time (most previous writers preoccupied with the position of women, as Wollstonecraft herself pointed out, had generally addressed themselves exclusively to upper-class 'ladies'), it is curious that she thought to limit the application of her doctrine to the middle classes. That she did so wish to limit it was made even clearer when she wrote that an emancipated woman would have a 'servant-maid to take off her hands the servile part of the household business' (*Vindication*, pp. 254–5). Despite many of her arguments being of great relevance to the conditions of all women, Wollstonecraft does not seem to have applied them to all women: in fact, the emancipated woman seems to require female servants. Further evidence of this view is found in Wollstonecraft's discussion of women (and men) in the 'ranks of the poor', who – destined for domestic employment or manual trades – would, even in a reformed society, still need philanthropic attention and specialized schooling if they were to attain a modicum of enlightenment (see Kramnick, 1982, pp. 40–4; *Vindication*, pp. 273ff).

None the less, Wollstonecraft set out central questions which any account of democracy, which was not simply to assume that 'individuals' were men, would have to address in the future. One of the few who actually addressed these questions was, as previously noted, John Stuart Mill, who attempted to integrate concerns about gender into a new version of liberal democratic arguments (see pp. 111–15). Mill's political thought is, of course, of the greatest importance. But even Mill, it should be borne in mind, did not pursue the implications for democracy of raising questions about gender as far as one must: it is only with the advent of contemporary feminism that the relevance and implications of many of Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas have begun to be appreciated fully (see chs 7 and 9).

Republicanism: concluding reflections

The revival of a concern with aspects of 'self-government' in Renaissance Italy had a significant influence on Britain, America and France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The problem of how civic life was to be constructed, and public life sustained, was one faced by diverse thinkers and political practitioners (see Pocock, 1975; Ball, 1988, ch. 3; Rahe, 1994). But different contexts yielded quite different results. In Britain, strands of republican thought continued to exert an impact, although they were most often enmeshed with powerful indigenous currents of thought dominated by monarchical and religious concepts. The relation between monarch and subjects was the main preoccupation (see Pocock, 1975, part III; Wootton, 1992). In America republican concepts remained contested, but their connotation shifted strikingly, and the meaning of the ideal of the active citizen was altered. In the debate surrounding the US constitution, some of America's 'founding fathers' repudiated ancient and Renaissance republicanism and sought to initiate a new republican order for a country with a large population, extended territory and complex commercial networks (cf. Ball, 1988, ch. 3; Rahe, 1994, pp. 3–18). In revolutionary France republican ideas remained uppermost and became part of the momentous challenge to the old monarchical order; however, even in France, republican ideas were transmuted many times, especially after the trajectory of the revolution – from popular revolt to terror – became more widely understood.

Across diverse backgrounds, thinking moved against reliance on virtuous citizens and civic restraint as the basis of political community and shifted towards a greater emphasis on the necessity to define and delimit the sphere of politics carefully, unleash individual energies in civil society, and provide a new balance between the citizen and government underwritten by law and institutions. Over time, the fundamental meaning of liberty as interpreted by the republican tradition changed; and liberty progressively came to evoke less a sense of public or political liberty, 'the right of the people to share in the government', and more a sense of personal or private liberty, 'the protection of rights against all governmental encroachments, particularly by the legislature' (Wood, 1969, pp. 608–9; and, for a discussion, Ball, 1988, pp. 54ff). Old words took on new meanings and were rearticulated with other threads of political language and tradition. The strengths and weaknesses of these political currents are explored in the chapter which follows.