

Civil Religion and Anticlericalism in Harrington

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One interesting puzzle that confronts students of modern political philosophy is why certain great thinkers in the political theory canon who were ferociously anticlerical (notably, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau) were nonetheless drawn to the civil religion idea as a desirable theoretical project. In the interpretation that follows, we will be treating James Harrington (1611-1677) as an important figure within this civil religion tradition. So what defines this “tradition” (or sub-tradition)? Put very briefly, it could be encapsulated as follows: For thinkers for whom Christianity and the other major religions seemed far too deeply entrenched both in human psychology and in the requirements of social life for a secular society really to be imaginable at all,¹ the political appropriation of religion seemed to offer a viable “opening gambit,” so to speak, in the endeavor to domesticate religion for political purposes. Ancient polities had seemed to do this in a civically beneficial way, and the hope was to reduce Christianity to a kind of civil cult instrumentalized to the needs of the commonwealth no less than the pagan cults had been. Arguably, as the secularizing Enlightenment gained pace, this civil religion notion came to look more or less redundant, and was displaced by other, bolder strategies for domesticating religion. Hence civil religion presented itself as an attractive strategy precisely to thinkers who were deeply fearful of the damage that churches and priests could do to the commonwealth but who were skeptical about disciplining religion by means other than Erastianism of one kind or another. Harrington displayed his fidelity to the tradition we’re trying to encapsulate when he wrote: “It hath been a maxim with legislators not to give checks unto the present superstition, but to make the best use of it, as that which is always most powerful with the people.”² In other words, Christianity may be a superstition, but this doesn’t derogate in the least from its political utility; and given the “indelible” character of religion within human nature, dispensing with useful superstitions is not an option.³

The first section of Harrington’s The Commonwealth of Oceana, entitled “The Preliminaries, showing the Principles of Government,” relentlessly hammers away at Thomas Hobbes as its central polemical target. Hence, reading this text, the reader cannot help but be led to conceive Hobbes and Harrington as representing the most extreme antitheses in the world of political theory, and as sharing absolutely nothing in common. However, as we approach the end of the first of the two preliminaries (setting out his fundamental principles), Harrington at last broaches the essential question of religion – and we immediately apprehend deep affinities with Hobbes that are intimated nowhere else in this text. It turns out that Harrington, like Hobbes, is a committed defender of civil religion. This, in turn, opens up the whole interesting issue of how Hobbes – notwithstanding the vehement Hobbesian anti-republicanism that Harrington highlights, and to which he responds, throughout the first preliminary – indirectly contributes to the republican tradition by virtue of his championing of civil religion.⁴ The point is relevant

not just to Harrington but to English republicanism more generally. This is encapsulated especially well by Jeffrey Collins:

Despite the currently prevalent image of [Hobbes] as the scourge of republicanism, Hobbes's Restoration influence continued to be felt most strongly among anticlerical, heterodox, and typically republican writers such as John Toland, Charles Blount, John Trenchard, John Gordon, and Robert Molesworth. As [Justin Champion] has observed, these "Freethinkers ... applauded Hobbes's deconstruction of priestly fraud" and his "rigorous Erastianism." Early Enlightenment republicans ... esteemed [Hobbes's] religious thought, which accorded with their anti-Trinitarian skepticism and Machiavellian attachment to civil religion.⁵

Here is Harrington's first pronouncement on the topic of civil religion: "Laws ecclesiastical, or such as concern religion, according unto the universal course of ancient prudence, are in the power of the magistrate; according unto the common practice of modern prudence since the Papacy, torn out of his hands" (Pocock 1992, p. 39).⁶ Since Harrington puts himself forward as a committed champion of ancient prudence and an uncompromising critic of modern prudence, this text amounts to a strong endorsement of Hobbesian Erastianism (representing, paradoxically, the superiority of the ancient policy in these matters). The account that follows is both interesting and peculiar: as already noted, it is presented in the context of Harrington's hearty endorsement of ancient prudence, yet Harrington makes liberty of conscience central to that account, which seems to give it a distinctly modern accent.

Harrington's argument is that religious liberty is "the main" liberty, therefore a government claiming to uphold liberty must honour this liberty above all others.⁷ But corresponding to the private conscience of individuals, there is at the collective level something that one can properly call "the national conscience."⁸ A regime committed to upholding liberty must then honour this national conscience with no less commitment than it honours private conscience, for "a commonwealth is nothing else but the national conscience" (Pocock 1992, p. 39). Just as private conscience yields private religion, so the national conscience must yield a national religion (which would seem to impute more homogeneity to the collective conscience than actually exists, certainly in mid-17th-century England, as Harrington knows perfectly well). Without attempting to give any further explication of the meaning of a national religion in a contemporary context, Harrington proceeds to illustrate how such a national religion functions through a discussion (again, very compressed) of a succession of ancient commonwealths: first Israel, then Athens, then Rome.

In the case of the national religion of Israel, Harrington maintains that its compatibility with religious liberty is demonstrated by the "liberty of conscience" conceded to the prophets.⁹ Harrington also claims (counter-intuitively) that Christ and his disciples were covered by this "prophetic right." "Nor was liberty of conscience infringed by this government [according unto the orders of the commonwealth of Israel] till" civil liberty in general succumbed to Roman tyranny (Pocock 1992, pp. 39-40). This claim has to appear fairly puzzling, given the palpably unhappy fate suffered by Christ. It would seem that what Harrington is claiming here is that Christ would have been a beneficiary of "prophetic right" and the liberty of conscience that it permitted if the commonwealth of Israel had not been submitted to Roman hegemony (in which case, it is surmised,

Christ would have been treated merely as a prophet like the other Old Testament prophets). That is, liberty of conscience ceased to be respected not on account of the national religion (i.e., Israel's national religion), but only on account of the wholesale abolition of civil liberty by their Roman governors.¹⁰ This very clearly involves a counterfactual claim (persuasive or unpersuasive) about how the commonwealth of Israel would have reacted to Christ's prophetic right in the event that the Israelites had remained politically autonomous.

As regards the Athenian tradition of religious liberty, Harrington appeals to St. Paul being at liberty to convert Dionysius the Aeropagite (an Athenian senator) to Christianity.¹¹ As regards religious liberty in Rome, Harrington appeals to Cicero being able to mount challenges to "the national religion of that commonwealth" in his work De natura deorum (that "most excellent book") without damage to his political career (Pocock 1992, p. 40).¹² Relative to these ancient republics, Harrington notes "a meanness and poorness in modern prudence" (i.e., political orders during the Christian era). Religious belief becomes a matter of priestly coercion; notwithstanding the emphatic pacifism inscribed in the essence of Christianity, Christianity gave rise to wars of religion never previously seen in the pre-Christian world; and liberty of conscience came to be thoroughly annulled first by the Pope and then by the princes subject to the Pope's authority. Christianity, without precedent in the history of commonwealths, denies religious jurisdiction to the magistrate, with the consequence that "the magistrate, losing the power of religion, loseth the liberty of conscience which in that case hath nothing to protect it" (ibid.).¹³ It's fairly stunning the extent to which the major themes of Rousseau's civil religion chapter are already mapped out in these two pages of Oceana: the need for a civic cult under the full control of the civil magistrate; the insistence on a conception of civil religion that incorporates liberty of conscience (hence a nascent concept of toleration); the theme of how wars of religion originate in monotheistic religion (though Rousseau, unlike Harrington, traces this back to the Old Testament); the theme of religious toleration in the pagan republics; and, not least, the theme of how Christianity corrupts the best impulses of ancient commonwealths (hence, by implication, the political superiority of the religions of Moses, Lycurgus, and Numa to the religion of St. Paul -- which is perhaps the very heart of Harrington's distinction between ancient prudence and modern prudence).

Harrington's comparison of modern (Christian) prudence and ancient (Israelite or pagan) prudence is pretty straightforward. But his account of national conscience and its relation to a national religion is far too compressed to give us much conception of what a national religion is supposed to look like or how it is supposed to function in the context of a modern commonwealth.¹⁴ Some degree of helpful elaboration (though still falling well short of a fully-developed account) is offered in Chapter VI of A System of Politics.¹⁵ Again, Harrington insists on liberty of conscience. And again, he asserts the legitimacy of a national religion. How are these two ideas compatible? As Harrington highlights on p. 63 of Pocock 1992, the warring sides during the conflagration of the 1640s had presented "a national religion" and "liberty of conscience" as opposing causes. The analysis proposed by Harrington is intended to establish the essential compatibility of the two ideas (and thus heal the tear in the national ligament associated with the Civil War?). Here Harrington makes a distinction between the religion of "the major part of the people" and the religion of "the minor" (Pocock 1992, p. 283; cf. Aphorisms Political,

Pocock 1977, pp. 766-767). The majority religion must be affirmed as the national religion in order to give expression to the majority's liberty of conscience, but assertion of such a national religion, it is presumed, does not injure the liberty of conscience owed to minority religions.¹⁶

"Liberty of conscience entire, or in the whole, is where a man according to the dictates of his own conscience may have the free exercise of his religion, without impediment to his preferment or employment in the state" (Pocock 1992, p. 282, aphorism 2). Of the various regimes, democracy naturally tends to bestow this full liberty of conscience because it is the regime of civil liberty, and civil liberty and liberty of conscience go hand in hand, and reinforce each other. It is for the same reason that absolute monarchy is naturally averse to religious liberty, although Harrington notes (p. 282, aph. 7) that Turkish hegemony over its subjects was such that it was possible for Greek Christians living under this regime to be allowed liberty of conscience without this opening the door to a broader civil liberty. This was true as well to some extent under French absolute monarchy (p. 283, aph. 10), although here the king and the clerics had to be more careful to keep liberty of conscience in check, for "if it ever comes to pull down the hierarchy, it pulls down that monarchy as well."

The more interesting case is what Harrington calls "regulated monarchy" (i.e., monarchy subject to constitutional constraints). Here, concession of liberty of conscience really does open the floodgates of civil liberty, "as was lately seen in England by pulling down the bishops, who, for the most part, are one half of the foundation of regulated monarchy" (p. 282, aph. 8). Expressed very compactly in this text is an analysis of why Charles I was prepared to jeopardize his own regime by allowing the High-Anglican hierarchy to make depredations against religious liberty in Scotland (which ultimately led to the termination both of the regime and of Charles himself). Regulated monarchy would like to claim for itself the same religious infallibility as is asserted by absolute monarchy, but lacks the social-material basis for doing so: the former, unlike the latter, must contend with "proprietors" (an independent gentry) who possess the material basis for defending the cause of "dissent" (p. 283, aph. 20). (Here we see Harrington's trademark sociological penetration on display.) Harrington aligns himself with democracy because this regime alone embraces both full liberty of conscience and full civil liberty. However, according to Harrington's argument, this not only permits but in fact requires "a national religion," for "the result in democracy being in the major part of the people [that is, given the fact that the majority determines political outcomes], it cannot happen but that the national religion must be that of the major part of the people" (p. 283, aph. 11).

Coercion must be excluded, because (as Harrington insists, in anticipation of Locke) "the true religion" is not something that can rely upon coercive imposition.¹⁷ However, Harrington does not exclude what he calls "a public leading" (p. 283, aph. 12). It's appropriate for a democratic regime to seek to educate those who freely embrace the national religion (p. 284, aph. 21); hence the inclusion in Oceana's constitution of the institution of a "council of religion" (Pocock 1992, pp. 126-127) to help instruct "a right application of reason unto Scripture, which is the foundation of the national religion." Harrington allows for "a national ministry or clergy" (p. 284, aph. 22), but insists that it be "a popular clergy" founded on "election by the people" rather than "a hierarchical clergy" relying on "monarchical ordination" (p. 284, aph. 28). As had been legislated for Oceana, it's appropriate for a democratic regime to contain "a directory ... and a council

for the equal maintenance both of the national religion and of the liberty of conscience” (p. 285, aph. 31), so the clear suggestion is that appointment of a national clergy does not in principle violate liberty of conscience. But such liberty of conscience is violated by both of the other two regimes analyzed by Harrington – absolute monarchy and regulated monarchy. In the case of the former one has “an alcoran (or some book received in the nature of Scripture) interpretable by the prince only and his clergy, willingly permitting to them that are not capable of employments a liberty of conscience” (p. 284, aph. 29); that is, this is a regime where only the idle and useless priests enjoy liberty of conscience. In the case of the other regime – that of regulated monarchy – interpretation of Scripture is once again a monopoly held by “an aristocratical hierarchy,” and as analyzed previously, the social-material basis of this regime is sufficiently fragile that one does not dare to admit liberty of conscience “except through mere necessity” (pp. 284-285, aph. 30). As the English Civil War illustrated very starkly, there is a sense in which concession of religious liberty is more perilous for this regime than it is for absolute monarchy. If the true religion cannot be coerced, and therefore liberty of conscience is of the essence of authentic religion, then it follows that a popular regime is the only safe depository of religion.

The idea of a national religion that expresses liberty of conscience rather than constrains it is obviously a key notion here.¹⁸ Collins writes that Harrington “qualified [his] general support for liberty of conscience with calls for a statist national religious establishment.”¹⁹ However, Harrington’s intention, whether it succeeds or not, is precisely that the religious-liberty idea and the civil-religion idea be presented as complementary rather than competitive notions (as is generally the case with Erastians). One can see the point that where a majority religion does in fact exist, liberty of conscience requires that this religion be allowed to have full play. But the conception of a national religion seems to envision something more ambitious. Shaftesbury offers a gloss on these texts that is somewhat helpful in spelling out what is involved in the Harringtonian idea. Here is Shaftesbury’s gloss:

“[The soothing of religious passion by the magistrate] was ancient policy and, hence (as a notable author of our nation expresses it), it is necessary a people should have a ‘public leading’ in religion. For to deny the magistrate a worship or take away a national church is as mere enthusiasm as the notion which sets up persecution. For why should there not be public walks as well as private gardens? Why not public libraries as well as private education and home tutors?”²⁰

Private religion and public religion, so the suggestion goes, are complementary rather than contradictory, and Shaftesbury’s reference to “ancient policy” makes clear that he, no less than Harrington, privileges the pagan civil-religion model.

Why does a national religion mean a civil religion? The fact that Harrington’s national religion gets treated under the rubric of ancient prudence (the first “Preliminary” is devoted to ancient prudence while the second “Preliminary” is devoted to modern prudence) tells us that Harrington intended his idea of national religion to correspond to what Varro called civil theology,²¹ and what Rousseau called civil religion. As for what we are to understand by civil religion according to the model of ancient prudence, one could hardly improve upon Harrington’s encapsulation in “The Corollary” of Oceana (Pocock 1992, p. 245): “It hath been a maxim with legislators not to give checks unto the

present superstition, but to make the best use of it, as that which is always the most powerful with the people.”²²

The marks of a Hobbes-like Erastianism are not hard to locate.²³ A key part of Harrington’s agenda is the reining-in of clerical power. Hence his endorsement of a council of religion and a “national clergy” is in no way meant to be an encouragement of clerical power; quite the contrary.²⁴ Harrington makes perfectly clear his thoroughgoing rejection of all manner of theocracy: “They of all the rest are the most dangerous,” he avers, who are committed to political rule by the saints (Pocock 1992, p. 63; cf. pp. 202-203). According to Harrington, members of the commonwealth who harbour theocratic ambitions “are against Scripture, where the saints are commanded to submit unto the higher powers, and be subject unto the ordinance of man. And that men pretending under the notion of saints or religion unto civil power have hitherto never failed to dishonour that profession, the world is full of examples” (p. 63). In a later text, Harrington asserts that universities (as guardians of correct theology) are essential “both unto religion and government,” but insists that one not fall into the trap of thinking “them or the ministry in any wise fit to be trusted so far as to exercise any power not derived from the civil magistrate, in the administration of either” (p. 201). Yes, the Israelite, Roman, and other commonwealths of antiquity duly honoured their ecclesiastics, but in no way did this extend to allowing themselves to be “governed by them”; Machiavelli was right that ecclesiastics should be in the service of statemen rather than statesmen in the service of ecclesiastics (ibid.)

Familiar motifs of Hobbesian civil religion are much in evidence. Harrington, for instance, goes out of his way to affirm the same view of Christian salvation that gets articulated (heterodoxly) by Hobbes (Pocock 1992, p. 64), and does so for the same reason that Hobbes does. As Pocock notes, Harrington, like Hobbes, “is denying the present existence of a Church Triumphant, on the grounds that the saved are not to live again before a point in future time” (p. 64, n. 27), entailing bodily resurrection in a reborn Mosaic commonwealth.²⁵ Harrington insists that an account of the ordination of priests that is faithful to Scripture bases it on nothing other than popular “suffrage.”²⁶ Harrington endorses the kind of Hobbesian-Spinozist critical philology based on “insight of the times in which [the Holy Scriptures] were written and the circumstances unto which they relate” (p. 200).²⁷ And like both Hobbes and Spinoza, Harrington completely rejects a Scriptural basis for excommunication (Pocock 1992, p. 82).²⁸ While Harrington is adamantly opposed to Hobbes’s monarchism, and strenuously endeavours to rebut Hobbes’s debunking of republicanism, he is tacitly indebted to Hobbes’s subversive theology. This fits well with, or, to put it more accurately, is of a piece with, his embrace of Hobbesian civil religion. The fact that there is a civil religion in Hobbes shows that Hobbes has more in common with the republican tradition than Hobbes acknowledges, and despite all the anti-Hobbesian polemics in *Oceana*, Harrington is acutely aware of this political-theological basis for an intellectual alliance between himself and Hobbes.²⁹ Overall, it seems reasonable to say that Harrington is a disciple of Machiavelli (hence an enemy of Hobbes) in politics, but a disciple of Hobbes in theology and ecclesiology.³⁰

What we referred to above as Harrington’s privileging of a pagan civil-religious model comes out in an interesting way in Harrington’s late (March 1659) response to a challenge by Henry Stubbe. One of the challenges put to Harrington by Stubbe was

whether it was reasonable to claim a natural harmony between a national religion and religious liberty in the light of ancient republics such as Athens and Rome, which indeed offered civil religions but where it made little sense to appeal to liberty of conscience. Interestingly, Harrington came to the defense of Athens and Rome on the issue of religious liberty:

albeit there were in Athens laws for the national religion, yet it by law was in the Areopagites also to give liberty unto any other way of worship, which liberty so given was law and became a man's right, whether it were to a public or private way of worship.... [In both Athens and Rome,] besides the national religion of that country, were introduced the religions of almost every other country.... [As regards Rome,] notwithstanding the national religion therein established by Romulus, it is vulgarly known that scarce any country was subdued by them whose religion they did not insert into their own.³¹

The fact that Harrington accepts the terms in which Stubbe poses his challenge seems to concede what had already been powerfully suspected by Harrington's contemporaries, namely that Harrington puts Christianity on the same level as the religions of the ancient commonwealths (Israel, Sparta, Athens, Rome), and that in the context of Harrington's ancient-intoxicated republicanism, Christianity is reduced to a civic cult functionally equivalent to the civic cults put in the service of the pagan republics.³² That is: if one really wants to harmonize a public religion and liberty of conscience (which is a crucial aspect of Harrington's project), one is most likely to succeed either by conceiving modern commonwealths according to the model of the ancient commonwealths, or (perhaps another formulation of the same project) by recasting Christianity so that it functions politically in the way that ancient Judaism and the pagan religions did.³³ Rousseau's project is fundamentally akin to this, except that Rousseau puts more emphasis than Harrington does both on Christianity's unshakable claim to being the true religion and on how the universalism of Christianity places an unbridgeable chasm between it and the other religions.

Harrington offers an important example of a thinker who embodies what one might call the Spinozist paradox – that is, the attempt to further empower the state vis-à-vis the church while simultaneously trying to further empower the free individual vis-à-vis the state. This paradox is nicely encapsulated in a programmatic statement in the Preface to the Theological-Political Treatise:

“[In Chapter 19] I prove that governments are the guardians and interpreters of religious law as well as civil law, and they alone have the right to decide what is just and unjust, what is pious and impious. [In Chapter 20 I] conclude that they can best retain this right and preserve the state in safety only by granting to the individual citizens the right to have his own opinions and to say what he thinks.”³⁴

One (anachronistic) way of characterizing this project would be to say that Spinoza is trying to be Hobbesian and Lockean at the same time. This is Harrington's project as well.

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NOTES

¹ In regard to Harrington's view, consider the following text: "religion is every whit as indelible a character in man's nature as reason." James Harrington, The Commonwealth of Oceana and A System of Politics, ed. J.G.A. Pocock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 273; cited hereafter as Pocock 1992.

² The Political Works of James Harrington, ed. J.G.A. Pocock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 245. Pocock's edition of works by Harrington is hereafter cited as Pocock 1977.

³ See Pocock 1992, pp. 273-274, aphorisms 13-16 and 19-20. Works immediately relevant to the theme of Harrington and civil religion include J.A.I. Champion, The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Mark Goldie, "The Civil Religion of James Harrington," in The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P.: 1987), pp. 197-222; and Pocock's Historical Introduction to The Political Works of James Harrington, ed. Pocock, pp. 77-99. In this context, one should take note of Leo Strauss's dictum that for the modern political philosophers, the "fight [against religion] was more important ... than any merely political issue" (Strauss, Thoughts on Machiavelli [Glencoe, Il.: The Free Press, 1958], p. 231). Justin Champion (referring to Toland's version of neo-Harringtonian republicanism) offers a dictum quite similar to Strauss's: "The war against priestcraft was more necessary than that against kings"; Champion, Republican Learning (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 111.

⁴ Pocock's Historical Introduction offers very illuminating discussion of ways in which Harrington converges with Hobbes and ways in which he departs from Hobbes: see p. 89, citing Harrington's "ambiguous relation to Hobbes," as well as pp. 32, 76, 78-82, 83-84, and 90-96. (Judith Shklar, in her review of Pocock 1977 in the November 1978 issue of Political Theory, made the astonishingly unjust complaint that Pocock's Historical Introduction provided "no sustained account of Harrington and Hobbes.") For another excellent statement of the complexities in the Hobbes-Harrington intellectual relationship (and especially their strong affinities), see Jeffrey R. Collins, The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 183-191 and 277-280; see also Collins, "Quentin Skinner's Hobbes and the Neo-Republican Project," Modern Intellectual History, Vol. 6, no. 2 (2009), pp. 361-362 and 363. Similar conclusions are drawn by Jon Parkin in Taming the Leviathan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 182-185. Tracing subterranean affinities between Harrington and Hobbes is also a key concern for Paul A. Rahe in Against Throne and Altar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Chap. 11, where Harrington's political theory is dubbed "Hobbesian republicanism." The efforts by scholars such as Pocock, Collins, and Rahe to trace lines of connection between Hobbes and Harrington run directly contrary to Quentin

Skinner's argument, in Hobbes and Republican Liberty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), that Hobbes and republican thought are fundamentally at loggerheads. On p. 212, Skinner cites Harrington's most conspicuous challenge to Hobbes; on p. xiii, he refers to Oceana as a "classical statement of the republican theory" targeted by Hobbes. In neither place is there any acknowledgment of the rich complexities in the Hobbes-Harrington relationship, which are amply acknowledged by Pocock and the other scholars I have cited. In fact, one of my primary purposes in what follows is to show that one non-trivial "payoff" of further investigation of Harringtonian civil religion is precisely better insight into the nature of the Hobbes-Harrington relationship.

⁵ The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes, p. 277; cf. p. 184: "Hobbes did not hold himself aloof from the company of republican theorists. A number of his Interregnum associates ... were republicans of varying levels of commitment." Also, p. 278: "In [the fight over religion and politics], the proto-liberal Hobbes and the 'neo-Roman' republicans ... were essentially on the same side"; p. 191: "Harrington was, [with respect to his Hobbesian religious inclinations,] more paradigmatic than idiosyncratic"; and pp. 204-206. The impact of Hobbes on this whole generation of anti-clerical republicans is a major theme of Collins's book.

⁶ Cf. Aphorisms Political, Pocock 1977, p. 767: "a national religion under inspection of the magistrate."

⁷ On p. 232 of Pocock 1992, Harrington states that Oceana must not only embrace liberty of conscience for itself but also "propagate" it universally (that is, pursue an imperial crusade to spread religious freedom to other states). Harrington claims (p. 231) that the commonwealth that fails to do this is unfaithful to its own nature. Cf. Charles Blitzer, An Immortal Commonwealth: The Political Thought of James Harrington (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 172; and Pocock, Historical Introduction, p. 72.

⁸ Cf. Walter Moyle's use of the phrase "the national conscience" in the context of Roman paganism: Two English Republican Tracts, ed. Caroline Robbins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 214.

⁹ I pursue this theme in a companion essay entitled "James Harrington on the Hebrew Commonwealth." For an illuminating and thorough account of how 17th-century theorists, including Harrington, attempted to build a case for toleration by appealing to what these theorists conceived as an ancient Hebrew "republic," see Eric Nelson, The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard U.P., 2010), Chap. 3; but Nelson's other two chapters are no less relevant to Harrington. Concerning Harrington's reliance on the example of ancient Israel, see also Gary Remer, "After Machiavelli and Hobbes: James Harrington's Commonwealth of Israel," in Political Hebraism: Judaic Sources in Early Modern Political Thought, ed. G. Schochet, F. Oz-Salzberger, and M. Jones (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2008), pp. 207-230. Another very helpful discussion of Harrington's engagement with the Hebrew commonwealth is offered in a yet-to-be-published essay by Justin A.I. Champion: "Mosaica respublica: Harrington, Toland, and Moses."

¹⁰ Obviously, Harrington also has a stake in the defense of the Roman national religion, hence it might be thought that this defense of Israel simply opens up vulnerability on

another front. However, presumably Harrington can invoke a distinction between the era of republican virtue and that of imperial corruption in order to meet such a challenge.

¹¹ Cf. Aphorisms Political, Pocock 1977, p. 767, where Harrington makes the significant point that Paul was at liberty to pursue his work of conversion precisely because he didn't attempt to displace the "endowed priesthood."

¹² On the Roman attitude towards liberty of conscience, cf. Pocock 1977, pp. 513-514. This text is in tension with the claim, cited in the previous paragraph, that the Romans were to blame for the Jewish persecution of Christ.

¹³ Cf. Two English Republican Tracts, ed. Robbins, pp. 211 and 213-216. A long list of both antecedents of and successors to Harrington's argument concerning the superiority of the pagan religions to Christianity in regard to religious toleration (though Harrington himself is omitted) is offered in Ronald Beiner, Civil Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 75, n.5.

¹⁴ As Blitzer puts it (An Immortal Commonwealth, p. 271), "the religious institutions of Oceana are a strange combination of congregationalism, a national church, and almost complete toleration" (but as regards Blitzer's reference to "almost complete toleration," see the next note). Interpreted in a modest way, this is perhaps not so far removed from the modern religious regime that has evolved in Britain and Scandinavia; but Harrington's appeal back to the civic cults of antiquity would seem to suggest a more ambitious interpretation. When Rousseau declares in Social Contract IV.8 that "national religion" of the ancient variety is no longer a possibility – because it necessarily contravenes the universalistic truths disclosed by Christianity – he presumably means to concede that civil religion such as it had existed in the ancient republics is irrecoverable. Harrington fails to give an account of why it is recoverable.

¹⁵ See pp. 120-121 of Pocock's Historical Introduction for some acute suggestions, in the context of A System of Politics, to the effect that nature rather than Christianity provides the foundations for Harrington's national religion; cf. pp. 112-113.

¹⁶ One must note that for Harrington liberty of conscience is limited to Protestant Christians; in Oceana it is explicitly ruled out for Jews and Catholics (Pocock 1992, p. 127). S.B. Liljegren (Harrington and the Jews [Lund: C.W.K. Gleerups Förlag, 1932], p. 26) claims that Harrington supported the Cromwellian policy of re-admission of the Jews to England, which Liljegren interprets under the rubric of religious toleration; but again, the actual text of Oceana seems not to extend its tolerationism to Judaism.

¹⁷ Cf. Pocock 1992, p. 127: The council of religion, in addition to promoting piety and accurate theological scholarship, will be charged with ensuring that religion remains free of coercion, "the teachers of the national religion being no other than such as voluntarily undertake that calling, and their auditors or hearers no other than are also voluntary."

¹⁸ In Aphorisms Political (Pocock 1977, p. 767), Harrington makes the following sequential assertions: "That there may be liberty of conscience, there must be a national religion" and "That there may be a national religion, there must be an endowed clergy." This yields the startling suggestion that the idea of an endowed clergy follows from the idea of liberty of conscience! See also Aphorism XXIX (Pocock 1977, p. 765); Pocock's commentary (Historical Introduction, pp. 111-113) points out that in insisting on the commonwealth's need for an endowed clergy, Harrington's polemical target was Milton.

¹⁹ The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes, p. 185.

²⁰ Shaftesbury, Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1999), p. 11.

²¹ See Civil Religion in Political Thought: Its Perennial Questions and Enduring Relevance in North America, ed. Ronald Weed and John von Heyking (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), Chap. 3 (chapter by David J. Bobb). As Pocock notes: “although ‘Harrington is preoccupied with ‘ancient prudence’ in its Israelite form, ... the noun itself strongly implies a human and temporal origin” (Historical Introduction, p. 47).

²² This is accompanied by a jab at the religious credulity of Plutarch and an endorsement of the religious skepticism of Cicero. In “A System of Politics” (Pocock 1992, p. 287, aph. 15), Harrington suggests that deception of the people in regard to religion is a mark of absolute monarchy and aristocracy, whereas in this “Corollary” text, the suggestion is that exploitation of popular credulity is a necessary aspect of republican politics as well.

²³ Recall again Harrington’s foundational claim (Pocock 1992, p. 40) that “the magistrate, losing the power of religion, loseth the liberty of conscience which in that case hath nothing to protect it”; cf. p. 202. This is pure Erastianism. (On this topic, namely the Erastian state as the guardian of toleration, see Nelson, The Hebrew Republic, Chap. 3.) This Erastian conception of a national religion is directly opposed to “the demands of [17th-century] Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians that a national church should enforce uniformity of belief and worship throughout the commonwealth” (Blitzer, An Immortal Commonwealth, p. 272).

²⁴ Harrington-style anti-clericalism is also a consistent theme in post-Harringtonian English republicanism. For a notable example, see Plato Redivivus, by Harrington’s disciple and the editor and translator of Machiavelli, Henry Neville: Two English Republican Tracts, ed. Robbins, pp. 81, 91, 112, 115-119, 132, 150, 153-155, and 158-159; cf. Robbins’s Introduction, pp. 17 and 49-50. Section 7 of Pocock’s Historical Introduction offers a helpful account of the rise of “neo-Harringtonianism” as a distinct ideology. Borrowing Harrington’s habit of giving easy-to-decipher nicknames to the notable figures cited in his drama, Neville’s Plato Redivivus is really Harrington Redivivus. But the followers of Harrington were not the only republicans to be vehemently anticlerical: see Rahe, Against Throne and Altar, for accounts of how the critique of priestcraft figures in various incarnations of mid-17th-century English republicanism (including the republicanism of John Milton).

²⁵ A related text is Pocock 1992, p. 232: “as the kingdom of God the Father was a commonwealth, so shall be the kingdom of God the Son.”

²⁶ Pocock 1992, p. 82; cf. p. 142, pp. 201-202, and p. 284, aph. 28. As Collins points out on p. 190 of The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes (cf. pp. 126-128, 130, 197, and 261-262), Harrington here was actually following Hobbes’s lead; see Leviathan, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 365-367 (Chap. 42). Tuck, in “The ‘Christian Atheism’ of Thomas Hobbes” (in Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment, ed. M. Hunter and D. Wootton [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992], pp. 111-130), shows that Hobbes, both in Elements of Law and in De Cive, was still committed to a doctrine of chirothesia (apostolic succession). It is only in Leviathan that Hobbes makes the decisive ecclesiological move towards ordination as chirothonia (by popular suffrage) – thereby outraging his Anglican erstwhile friends and allies. This issue is of such

enormous significance for Harrington that he devotes the whole of Book II of The Prerogative of Popular Government (amounting to over 60 pages of the Pocock edition of the Political Works) to Scriptural exegesis bearing on this question. See also Two English Republican Tracts, ed. Robbins, pp. 116-119. As Harrington goes out of his way to emphasize on p. 202 of Pocock 1992, this issue of ordination by popular election is directly linked to the theme of civil religion, for the essential point is that this mode of ordination “was plainly derived from the same civil power by which [citizens in the ancient commonwealths] ordained the rest of their magistrates”; that is, the pastor so ordained is precisely (or at least is equivalent to) a “magistrate” of the commonwealth. I pursue these themes further in the companion essay cited in note 9 above.

²⁷ Of course, Oceana was published several years before the publication of the Theological-Political Treatise. But it seems reasonable to say (as Leibniz did) that the real pioneer here was Hobbes, and both Harrington and Spinoza take their cue from him. See Noel Malcolm, Aspects of Hobbes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 383-431, 482-484, and 536; and Beiner, Civil Religion, p. 105, n. 90. No less than Spinoza, Harrington and his followers were pursuing a set of agendas mapped out by Hobbes.

²⁸ Once again, Harrington is clearly following Hobbes’s lead here: Pocock cites the relevant texts in Hobbes (Pocock 1992, p. 82, n. 14). See also Two English Republican Tracts, ed. Robbins, p. 117. On rejection of excommunication as a key marker of Erastianism, see Beiner, Civil Religion, p. 94, n. 138.

²⁹ The principle that clerics are subordinated to the authority of civil magistrates rather than the reverse is stated most directly on pp. 201-203 of Pocock 1992. The text alludes both to Machiavelli’s manipulated poultrymen in Discourses I.14 and to Hobbes’s account of Mosaic theocracy (where Moses founds a civil commonwealth rather than a religion, or founds the latter in service to the former). This makes the key point very powerfully: notwithstanding their other differences, on this issue (the issue of civil religion), Machiavelli, celebrated by Harrington throughout Oceana, and Hobbes, condemned by Harrington throughout Oceana, are comrades-in-arms!

³⁰ Collins’s The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes offers an exceedingly powerful and provocative account of what it means to be an Hobbesian in ecclesiology. Collins argues for the bold thesis that Hobbes was in effect a full-fledged Commonwealthman in 1651, and was driven to embrace this (for him) radically new political commitment primarily by considerations related to issues of church and state (namely, Hobbes’s ultra-radical Erastianism). One puzzle that Collins’s interpretation fails to address is the seeming inconsistency between Hobbes’s endorsement of Independency in Chapter 47 of Leviathan and his affirmation of unified “Publique Worship” in Chapter 31. But whether one is fully persuaded by Collins’s thesis or not, there is at least one important sense in which an accommodation between Hobbes and Cromwell is easier to accomplish than one between Harrington and Cromwell. For Harrington and his followers, Cromwellian despotism was merely resumed monarchy under another name (and the same was true for Spinoza). For Hobbes as a principled absolutist, on the other hand, all that can be legitimately asked of the Cromwellian regime is that it pacify the situation, exercise sovereignty, and protect its subjects.

³¹ Pocock 1977, pp. 828-829.

³² Felix Raab aptly cites the hostile reference of John Rogers, a Fifth Monarchy man, to “the Heathens whom Mr. Har. most follows”; Raab, The English Face of Machiavelli (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 212; see also Richard Baxter as quoted in Rahe, Against Throne and Altar, p. 344. Cf. Blitzer, An Immortal Commonwealth, p. 40, referring to Harrington’s “own essentially pagan view of the position of religion in his projected commonwealth,” as well as the helpful discussion on pp. 165-169; and Collins, The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes, pp. 188 and 278. See also Walter Moyle’s celebration of pagan civil religion in Two English Republican Tracts, ed. Robbins, pp. 210-225; for a commentary on the relevant text, see Champion, Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken, pp. 186-192. The notion that paganism furnishes the standard for a true civil religion did not end with Harrington and his disciples, nor did it end in the 17th century; the same idea is to be found in Montesquieu’s early “Dissertation sur la politique des romains dans la religion” (1716).

³³ This is pretty much exactly what Harrington asserts in Pocock 1992, p. 39, when he contrasts ancient and modern prudence on the basis that the former puts “laws ecclesiastical ... in the power of the magistrate” whereas in the latter these laws are “torn out of his hands.”

³⁴ Spinoza, Theological-Political Treatise, trans. Samuel Shirley, 2nd edition (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), p. 7. Harrington’s dual emphasis on (Erastian) national religion and liberty of conscience offers precisely this kind of Spinozist having-your-cake-and-eating-it. Collins suggests that Harrington was here inspired by the actual religious policies of Cromwell, as embodied in the Erastian church settlement of 1654 (The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes, p. 188). Shaftesbury’s Characteristics offers another instance of the same Spinozist paradox. Consider p. 435: “where the supreme powers [meaning: “the magistrate”] have given their sanction to any religious record or pious writ ... it becomes immoral and profane in anyone to deny absolutely or dispute the sacred authority of the least line or syllable contained in it”; and p. 384: coercion in matters of religion is self-defeating because the “weakest mortal ... can never be forced in what relates to his opinion or assent” (cf. p. 264). In the former passage, Shaftesbury, like Spinoza, affirms an unbounded Hobbesian sovereignty in the sphere of religion; in the latter passage, Shaftesbury, like Spinoza, affirms an inviolable liberty of conscience.