

THE COMMON GOOD

EDITORIAL

Since the 1920s anti-intellectualism has been an unfortunate feature of Irish culture and there has been a neglect, almost hostile at times, of thought and ideas. This has been the case within republicanism, as much as elsewhere, in this period.

It is time for us to move forward and begin to construct an environment in which intellectual work is respected and encouraged, and ideas and thinking can flourish. Too often in discourse the words ‘theoretical’ and ‘academic’ are used to silence and disparage. While some academics have brought this upon themselves by élite, obscure or trivial intellectualism, too often, systematic thinking is pushed aside in favour of action that is not informed by theory.

The idea that intellectual work, ideas and theory are somehow unimportant or removed from the ‘real world’ is as unhelpful as it is unreasonable. There is something immature or irrational about a society that believes it can dispense with theory and analysis. Contemporary culture increasingly privileges emotion, impulse and gratification over thought and reflection. But if action is not rational, if it is not informed by reason and reflection, how can it be either meaningful or purposeful?

Another aspect of the anti-intellectual culture is the lack of real engagement and debate. The idea that we need to listen to the other side of the argument and respect the views of those we disagree with seems alien to us. When we encounter arguments that conflict with our own, denial and dismissal are often the response and name-calling may follow. Yet how can we develop any idea or theory without subjecting it to challenge and counter-argument? Listening only to those we agree with and views which bolster our own leads to stagnation, shallowness and plain wrongness.

Modern republicanism owes much to eighteenth-century enlightenment thinking and its culture of reason. Reason, science and rigour demand that we hold only views and opinions that can withstand challenge and contradiction. We can learn much more from challenge and opposition than from voices of agreement. The comfort and self-justification that comes from being in agreement is poor substitute for critical thinking and self-

examination. Finding arguments to support our own case and refute others, or even admitting that our arguments may not stand up to examination, might be more difficult, but, surely, it is also more rewarding.

This issue of *The Republic* looks at republicanism as a body of ideas about politics and society. The articles include an overview of republican thinking from its earliest roots up to the present; several essays on different periods in the development of republican thinking in Ireland; and articles from the perspective of the English, French and U.S. experience of republicanism.

Our contributors were asked to ignore the demands of narrative and concentrate instead on ideas and thinking. In planning the issue and seeking authors, we had a broad idea of the outcome we expected—and, although our guidelines specified a critical approach and a refusal to unquestioningly accept established versions, we did expect a somewhat simple vindication of republicanism and our idealistic view of it. Fortunately, the authors took us at our word and the result is a collection of essays that are challenging and provocative.

The reader of this issue is going to be challenged in many of the ways we have talked about. No reader is going to agree with all of the articles; very few are going to agree with everything in any one of them. Some readers are going to be angered by some of the interpretations and arguments. Others will reach for the easy term of abuse and dismiss, without further thought, that which challenges their preconceptions.

The editors are more than happy with these articles, irrespective of our personal views and beliefs. We are certain that much can be gained from careful reading and consideration of the arguments and opinions presented. Reading with reason and thought, we can confirm and adapt those of our ideas we find supported, jettison ideas which no longer stand up, and incorporate new ideas into our thinking. This is the intelligent, republican approach. It is time to put anti-intellectualism behind us, and for ideas and theory to flourish in Ireland.

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