

Culture in the Constitution of a Republic

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What should the state do to shape and sustain the society's system of culture? And, just as important, what should it not do? Is it to stay on the sidelines, allowing the system to evolve and take what form it will? Or is it to be an active player, with a firm and directive image of the way the system should develop and operate?

I approach these questions in the step-by-step, unnuanced manner of the philosopher. In the first section, I characterise the republican tradition in its broad historical sweep, drawing on an earlier book on republicanism, and then, in the second section, I give an account of what the system of culture should be taken to encompass.¹ With those matters fixed, I go on in the third section to look at the role and significance of culture in the republican way of thinking. And finally, in the fourth section, I turn to the policy lessons for the state that this picture of the significance of culture would support. These lessons must be seen as important, I think, by anyone who embraces a republican philosophy, and they stand in conflict with the positions that might attract adherents of opposed philosophies, such as libertarianism and communitarianism.

The republican tradition, Irish and otherwise

Republicanism in the Roman form in which it passed down to the northern Italian states of the Renaissance, to England of the civil war period, and to revolutionary America and France—indeed, to Ireland of 1798 as well—was the creation of Polybius, an educated Greek who came as a slave to Rome about a century before the common era. Polybius did for republican Rome what Montesquieu was to do for England in the eighteenth century, and de Tocqueville for America in the nineteenth. He told the Romans how wonderful their way of doing things was and gave an idealised, beguiling account of their institutions that cast them as a model for reformers over the next two thousand years.

Polybius's enthusiasm was kindled by three features that he found in the Rome of his time. First was the fact that it had a mixed constitution in which no one individual or body—not a single monarchical ruler, not the aristocratic elite, not the people—had all of the power in their own hands. This, he thought, would guarantee a balanced representation of interests, while ensuring that bodies like the Senate and the Council of the Plebs and authorities like the consuls and the tribunes were able to serve as a check on one another, improving the chances that the cause of the common good—the *res publica*—would be advanced, rather than the cause of any particular class or faction. Second was the fact that the Roman constitution embodied a variety of further checks and balances against the arbitrary exercise of power, i.e. the exercise of power in the cause of a sectional or factional good, rather than the good of all. These checks included measures like the rule of law, regular election to office, enforced rotation in office, possibilities of challenge to those in power, and a variety of such devices. And third was the fact that this constitutional and institutional framework was reinforced and stabilised by long-established habits of vigilance in the scrutiny of those in authority, of bravery in speaking out against those in power, and of dedication to the constitution or *patria*, in short, the long-established habits of civic virtue.

Set in place among a people of civic virtue, what the mixed constitution and supporting checks and balances could achieve, according to Polybius, was to ensure the *libertas* or freedom of the *cives* or citizens. The *civis* would be a *liber*, so far as he—and the citizens were all male—was incorporated within the protective, empowering field of the Roman dispensation. He would be protected against private power or *dominium*, and, equally, he would be protected against that very protective agency itself, the public power or *imperium* of the state. This legal and civic ecology would ensure that each would know himself, and know himself to be known to others, as someone that no one could expect to push around with impunity: someone who had a protected place, an empowered presence among the denizens of that world.

Each citizen would have the status of being his own master, then, subject to the will of none of his fellows. And those citizens as a whole would be able to protect themselves against being pushed around by other peoples. The defence of their constitution and country was the most prominent element in the common good that they were meant to be institutionally and civically predisposed to serve. Individually and collectively, the citizens would enjoy freedom in the sense that requires the absence of subjection or *dominatio*: freedom as non-domination.

The Polybian ideas became themes on which many changes were rung among Roman writers like Cicero, Livy and Sallust; among Renaissance figures like Machiavelli—the ‘divine Machiavel’ of the *Discourses on Livy’s History*, not the author of *The Prince*; among seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English radicals like James Harrington, Algernon Sidney, and the authors of *Cato’s Letters*; among their contemporaries, French commentators like the Baron de Montesquieu and Jean Jacques Rousseau; and among the leaders of the American revolution like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison as well as its English supporters—radical Whigs—such as Joseph Priestley and Richard Price.

These figures all thought of freedom, in the way the Romans had thought of it, as a status in relation to his fellows which ensured that a person—a citizen—could walk tall amongst them, knowing himself, and knowing himself to be known, as someone that no one could expect to be able to obstruct or coerce with impunity. The freeman—women continued to be marginalised—would be subject to no master; no one would be in a position, emblematic of mastery, where they could interfere arbitrarily in his life or affairs. So long as he did not interfere with others, he would be able to pursue his business without fear or deference, and without a care for having anyone else’s leave or permission. He would be able to look others in the eye, on equal terms.

Wolfe Tone, the first outstanding Irish republican—an ‘independent Irish Whig’, as he once signed himself—captured the idea nicely: ‘true Republicans fight only to vindicate the rights of equality and detest ever the name of a Master’. Thus, he could write to a friend that he would not tolerate having to depend on the good will of the authorities, or of anyone else. ‘I would live in no country *permissu superii*’—by the permission, and therefore at the goodwill, of a superior.²

But, not only did later republicans, Tone included, inherit this guiding idea of freedom from the Roman bequest, they also took on board the main constitutional and institutional themes: the emphasis on the need for democratic representation, of course—this became more and more prominent in later republicanism—but also the insistence that power must be divided up amongst contending bodies and hands, checks and balances put in place to ensure against the triumph of sectional or factional interest, and the constraints of a rule of law imposed on legislature and executive alike. Thus, in praising the way ‘democracy is daily gaining ground’ in America, Tone could argue in absolute fidelity to established republican themes: ‘I am convinced of the wicked folly of entrusting power long in the hands of one man, no matter how virtuous or how able. Power long exercised would corrupt an angel’. He saw that

such corruption was rife in Ireland, where a parliament of ‘placemen and pensioners’ looked after their special interests only, and where the interest of government failed to be ‘the same with that of the people’.³

But, later republicans, Tone included, also argued that in the last analysis there was no hope for any constitutional or institutional order that was not supported by political understanding, civic vigilance and a habit of forthright expression on the part of the citizenry. Tone railed at the failure of his fellow citizens to denounce the state of things in Ireland, where ‘the fact of corrupt influence is fairly admitted’. ‘What! are we become stocks or stones, that the hot constitution of corruption should thus throw off the last thin veil of decency, and walk, unblushing and unabashed, before the land?’. He looked for a shift in civic habits towards a pattern that he found better established in England— notwithstanding his unrelenting criticism of England’s Irish policy— where radical Whigs like himself could speak up openly and with effect. The ideal would be a situation where ‘constitutional liberty is studied and known, where the influence of the crown is comparatively much weaker than with us, and where there is, out of doors, a jealous vigilance, a fund of knowledge, and a spirit of resistance not yet found in Ireland’.⁴

The best way to understand any philosophy, political or otherwise, is to see what the alternatives are. So where should we situate republicanism, with its emphasis on freedom as non-domination and its insistence that such freedom is available only in a political world with certain constitutional, institutional and civic aspects? Where should we situate it today as a philosophy of government for an inclusive society, not a society that privileges only mainstream propertied males?

There are many philosophies of government that string a hodgepodge of ideas together, angling for the right policy results with little concern for the unity of the overall position, but, among purer philosophies, republicanism contrasts sharply with two: classical liberalism (or libertarianism) and what can be described as communitarianism.

The libertarian alternative focuses on freedom as non-interference rather than non-domination. While it inherits the republican fear of public power, even to the point of morbidity, it has no quarrel with life in the shadow of private power, provided the power is benignly exercised— provided it is in the hands of the Christian husband, in an image from early liberals, or the economically rational boss. The best early statement of this position is in the highly influential work of William Paley, where he acknowledges that the republican conception of freedom is the established and received one, but argues that it is too radical: it would ‘inflare expectations that can never be gratified, and disturb the public

content with complaints, which no wisdom or benevolence of government can remove.⁵ His view, as I have tried to show elsewhere, seems to have been that if women and workers were to count in the new inclusive state, and if their freedom from domination was to remain the goal of government, then an impossibly radical revolution would be required: one involving the overthrow of existing family and master-servant law.⁶

If libertarianism is flawed by its lack of concern about the threat of *dominium* or private power—provided that the power-holder is benign enough not actually to interfere—communitarianism is flawed by a similar lack of concern about the danger of *imperium* or public power. For, according to this philosophy, a people are free just so far as they are enfranchised within a community that is licensed to impose the communal norm—in effect, the will of the collective majority—on those who would belong to it, including those of a minority provenance or persuasion.

Republicanism stands in contrast to both of those philosophies in so far as it equates freedom with not having to live under the threat of arbitrary power, private or public. In this respect, and in others, it occupies a middle position. It stands with libertarianism in emphasising that the individual is the primary locus of political concern, and it stands with communitarianism in insisting that only the communal ecology provided by a society with an appropriate constitutional, institutional and civic character can enable the ordinary person to enjoy freedom. The good of freedom is a good of the individual person, but it is a good that requires a setting among other people—it is not available to the solitary hermit—and, in particular, a setting in which the individual is empowered to the extent of being able to command the respect of his or her fellows.⁷

The system of culture

Assuming that a system of culture will inevitably emerge in any society, my aim in this essay is to look at what a renewed, contemporary republicanism would seek in such a system. The project requires us to have a sense of what constitutes a system of culture, however, and, by way of a further preliminary, I turn now to that theme.

Everyone who has written about culture tells us, correctly, that the word refers properly to all the folkways of the community, as they have materialised over the years and as they are reproduced in the imitative homage that later generations inevitably, and often unwittingly, pay the past. Culture in that wide sense encompasses the habits of speech and writing present among the people; the small behavioural modes in which

they present themselves to one another and establish mutual recognition; the norms they honour in matters of dress and habitation; the routines of labour and production and exchange whereby they secure their material existence, as well as their routines of leisure and enjoyment; the customs that dictate what they eat, how they eat and when they eat; the ceremonials in which they mark births, deaths, and marriages, as well as collectively important events and transitions; the procedures whereby they assume group identities, familial and local, religious and political, voluntary and commercial; and the state institutions whereby existing conventions are identified, altered, imposed, and contested. Culture in this sense is the sort of thing we want to be told about when the anthropologist or the travel writer returns from an unknown land.

It is well to be aware of culture in the broad, anthropological sense; for, while my topic is much narrower, it is certainly related. Culture as I will be talking of it refers to the conduits whereby a society in its full anthropological character is reflected back to its own members—and inevitably, in the global course of things, to those on the outside also. It is the system whereby people learn of what is happening among them and, indeed, beyond their shores; are jolted into an awareness of some aspect of that world that had passed unnoticed; gain a novel take on things they had become inured to in their lives and environment; or enjoy a release from the humdrum or hurly-burly in modes of entertainment that give it a frame or that provide it with a foil. Or at least, it is the system whereby these things are done, when they are done well; for, of course, information may give way to misinformation, illumination to obfuscation, and release to mere escape.

Culture in this narrow sense operates through the channels—the media, in our Latinate usage—of television and radio, film and theatre, concert hall, opera house and art gallery, cds, dvds and video tapes, newspapers, journals, and books. As it materialises in those media, it may take the form of news report, analysis or commentary; soap, thriller or drama; chamber, rock or symphony concert; art exhibition or installation; story or poem; essay or monograph. And, as if that's not enough variety, the cultural event or object may come in an open-ended number of modes. It may be straight or ironical, quizzical or didactic, celebratory or distancing; it may seek to represent what it explores in explicit detail, or to exemplify it in particular events, settings and personalities, or, indeed, in the sensuous presence of shape and colour, rhythm and harmony, timbre and melody; and it may attempt any of these things, of course, at Wagnerian length and intensity or with the precision and punch of the well-turned phrase, whether it be a phrase in language or music, or in one

of the other materials that art seeks to work and transform.

A good term for culture in this narrow sense would be reflective culture, since its various modes are reflective of ordinary life, and often on ordinary life. The reflection ranges from that which is purely informational at one end of the spectrum, through more analytical and philosophical forms, to reflection of a more properly artistic kind at the other extreme. It is well to keep this informational-artistic range in mind, as I shall not always be commenting on it and some of the phrases I use will, inevitably, answer better to one part of the spectrum than to others.

Why speak of a system of reflective culture, however, rather than just a battery of cultural phenomena? Reflective culture is subject in any society to various controlling elements, and the system of culture is nothing other than the pattern of controls that dictates its configuration there. Here is a simple taxonomy of the main factors involved:

- the educational elements that determine how far there will be people to work in reflective culture and how far there will be an audience for that work;
- the infrastructural resources, ranging from television and radio stations to concert halls, theatres and publishing houses, to studios and galleries for painting and sculpture, that are required for reflective culture to reach ordinary people in contemporary society;
- the personnel who direct or author what is broadcast and written, what is composed, painted and sculpted, and in what tone and voice all this is done: these are the directors, writers and artists themselves—the producers at the centre of the system;
- the parties who are in a position to regulate what those producers do, whether in the negative mode of censoring and perhaps penalising their work, or in the positive mode of fostering and rewarding it;
- the individuals and organisations that facilitate reflective culture, by providing commissions for work to be done, by subsidising work already in hand, and by protecting cultural work against alien pressures, for example.

I am sure that the system of reflective culture involves other elements too, but I shall concentrate on these five controls, respectively educational, infrastructural, productive, regulatory and facilitative. I now go on to ask about the significance for a republic of having a system of culture that assumes one or other form. The question is: how far does the system of culture matter from the point of view of republican ideals? I shall argue that the system has enormous significance for a republic, and

then, in the fourth and last section of the essay, I will try to sketch some policy lessons that this image of its significance supports.

The significance of culture in a republic

Reflective culture in this sense can be a source of personal enlightenment and entertainment, perhaps even of inspiration, for those who participate. The highest purpose of any cultural initiative—certainly any at the more purely artistic end of the reflective spectrum—is to engage the individual mind, moving the person to collaborate in making sense of the work and, through the work, of that to which it testifies. Working in this participatory way with the painting or sculpture, play or concert, novel or poem can jolt the person into fresh thoughts, new patterns of seeing things, and even new modes of imagination and feeling.

But, whatever its small-scale, personal effects, and however far the work of culture is shaped with a view to such effects, they are not at the centre of our concern here. The question we have to consider is whether, in addition to those effects, or in consequence of those effects, the system of culture can also have large-scale, social effects that connect with republican aspirations.

The system of culture will have effects of this kind in so far as it impacts on the way people conceive of freedom itself, or of the constitutional, institutional and civic means of promoting freedom as non-domination. And, equally, it will have such effects, pro-republican or counter-republican, to the extent that it impacts on how far people are motivated to develop or maintain the measures that protect and empower them in their freedom. Is the reflective culture of a society liable to have consequences—perhaps unintended consequences—that might reinforce or undermine such preconditions, conceptual and motivational, of a flourishing republican dispensation? I believe it is.

Conceptual effects

Take the possibility of conceptual consequences first. Under a republican vision of the polity—a modern polity that is inclusive of all adults—it is of the first importance that the image of normal human life which is projected and endorsed in the channels of reflective culture affirms the robust human capacity for independence—‘independency upon the will of another’⁸—as well as the right of every member of the inclusive republic to such an independent standing.

This image can clearly be either compromised or reinforced in the reflective culture of a society. If it is compromised, that will bode very badly for the capacity of the society to provide for the enjoyment of

freedom as non-domination on the part of all citizens. In almost any society, the culture will affirm the capacity for ‘independency’ of some privileged class or classes as well as the associated right of class-members to a corresponding status, but it doesn’t require much imagination to see that it may fail to provide this service for all. It may fail to do so for women as distinct from men, or for the working class as distinct from other classes, or for members of ethnic, religious or homosexual minorities. The possibilities are salient and numerous.

Consider the disservice done to women, for example, in all those pious novels and poems that endorse the sort of infantilising, maudlin image of their capacities and roles, which prevailed into the twentieth century, if not right through it. Or, consider the disservice done to women by those representations that accentuate their standing as the objects of sexual desire to the exclusion of their standing as agents, or, indeed, as the subjects of a reciprocal desire. And, by contrast, think of the service women enjoyed in the various works of reflective culture that began to make the prospect of enfranchisement and liberation inescapable.

Think in this vein of the irony with which George Eliot treats male presumptions about women, even in her most conservative moments. Dorothea, the protagonist of *Middlemarch*, makes her mistakes and achieves satisfaction in the underspecified, somewhat ambivalent future we are told she had as wife to Will Ladislaw and mother to his children. But, it is the presumptions that her uncle and first husband make about her that are truly ridiculous. Women, it is quite clear, are not uniformly light and frivolous, just as it is clear that men are not reliably sensible and intelligent. Think in a similar vein of the effect that Ibsen achieved in *A Doll’s House*, where Nora lives under the gentle but dominating and infantilising rule of her husband, and where it becomes wholly intelligible that she should rebel. Or think, indeed, of O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock*, where women are certainly cast in the role of victim, but where, nonetheless, they display a capacity and a resilience that would put their men to shame, if they had any. In such works, we go beyond gentle irony and approach the point of explicit protest.

Just as women have routinely been ill served by literature—and, indeed, the other arts—so, some works stand out for the conceptually liberating effect that they must have had, and the same is also true for other groups: the unemployed, the working class, the uneducated, and the disabled, as well as those in a variety of religious, ethnic and other minorities. Reflective culture may serve such classes ill, and has often done so in our societies, but, equally, it may do them a great service, providing the intellectual and imaginative underpinnings for self-

assertion and recognition.

The potentially liberating effects of culture in this conceptual dimension are not confined to high art. The common currency of film and photograph, story and verse, popular song and newspaper headline can be even more deeply liberating, or indeed demeaning. Think of the tone of ‘A Bushman’s Song’, a ballad in which Banjo Patterson gave expression to an assertive Australian attitude to the pretensions of private power.

I went to Illawarra, where my brother's got a farm;
 He has to ask his landlord's leave before he lifts his arm:
 The landlord owns the country-side—man, woman, dog, and cat,
 They haven't the cheek to dare to speak without they touch their hat.⁹

I have been illustrating the conceptual effects that make the system of reflective culture potentially significant in the republican audit of a society. While I have concentrated on how the culture can undermine or reinforce the idea of freedom as non-domination, and its status as an ideal in human life, the system may also serve people well or badly in how it leads them to conceive of the civic, institutional and constitutional means whereby, according to republican thought, individual and collective freedom is ensured.

The system can obviously fail in this way if it does not provide a reliable and comprehensive source of information about the way things are going in the society. Let people be convinced that all is fine with the public world, when truly it is not—when politicians are in the pocket of business, for example, or abuses against the vulnerable are rife—and opportunities for manipulation and domination will be massively increased. Let people be convinced that the public world is in jeopardy when it is not—that crime is on the increase, or hostile presences under every bed, when actually things are quite good—and almost as much damage can be done.

But, the system can also fail, not through failing to provide information, but through failing to support and nurture a proper understanding of how things should be organised and configured if freedom is to prosper. The reflective culture that critiques adversarial politics in the name of a romantic ideal of national cohesion, for example, that suggests that the voice of the latest public opinion poll has oracular authority, or that questions the democratic credentials of duly appointed but unelected judicial or bureaucratic figures is unlikely to serve well the purposes of a vibrant republic. It will promulgate an image of social and political life that misinterprets the requirements of freedom as they are understood in the tradition.

Motivational effects

I turn now to the category of motivational effects. Is the system of culture liable to impact on how far people are motivated to sustain the constitutional, institutional and civic measures needed for the widespread enjoyment of freedom as non-domination? The answer, as clearly as in the other case, is that yes, the system of culture is liable to have an impact on people's motivation on this front. There are many ways in which it may fail the republican cause of freedom as non-domination and equally, of course, many ways in which it may advance it.

Thus, a culture that is excessively reverential or deferential in its attitude to dominating authorities and powers, or that is paralytically sceptical about the motives of anyone who would seek to curtail the domination practised, will tend to sap people's will, credence and energy in public matters. It will reconcile people to a fate in which the mighty or the manipulative always succeed, so that they had better keep to their own corners and make the best of it.

Equally, a culture that is assertively privatistic and atomistic in the images and values it endorses, or that is utterly pessimistic about the possibility of anyone escaping the hold of their own egoistic concerns, will encourage a general apathy about political matters. It will surrender the vision of a society where everyone can achieve a fulfilling independency and status thanks to the sustaining matrix provided by the civic, institutional and constitutional republic. The retreat advocated may be towards the cult of the commercial market, the more alluring charms of the aesthetic life, or even the high-flown isolation of the spiritual or philosophical guru.

Again, a culture that promulgates a conservative religious vision in which subservience to one's superiors or one's betters is held up as a great virtue is going to be deeply in tension with the republican vision. In the republican vision, freedom can be won from under the very shadow of power, provided that the appropriate civic and public dispensation is supported by all. But, in the sort of picture I am envisaging here, such freedom will be denied any value, being inconsistent with the hierarchical order that is supposedly proper and right. The order hailed may be one in which priests rule over people, husbands over wives, and employers over employees, for example.

The picture of the oriental despot—no doubt of questionable ethnocentric provenance—was used throughout the modern history of republicanism to combat such a conservative hierarchical ideology. The oriental despot served as a safely remote model, in which people were

invited to see the profile of priest, aristocrat or king, or even, as the theory developed feminist and socialist forms, husband or master. The feminist potential of the doctrine, already obvious in the work of Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft, gave rise to the metaphor of women as slaves of their husbands, no matter how kindly and placable husbands might prove. The socialist potential appeared in republican authorship of the metaphor, so important in later socialist writings, of industrial workers as ‘wages slaves’.¹⁰

I have been illustrating how the reflective culture of a society can corrode the motivational underpinnings of republicanism by being reverential and deferential towards the powerful, by being atomistic and privatistic, or by being straightforwardly conservative in its view of the prevailing power structure. There are many other ways in which the culture can have a similarly corrosive or corrupting effect, and I mention two further dangers.

Not only may the reflective culture of a society be too deferential, atomistic or conservative for republican tastes; it may also be excessively moralistic. The moralism I have in mind is that which would pin on the individual the responsibility, or part of the responsibility, for every ill that is evident in the society or in the world at large. It argues that the way to respond to the problems people suffer that might interfere with their enjoyment of the life of independency—problems of hunger, homelessness or lack of education—is to give to benevolent causes and relieve oneself of personal guilt. And, it suggests that the way to respond to the problems that some impose on others—problems of crime and corruption, for example—is to join in the chorus of punitive moralistic condemnation that a sensational press will always find profit in orchestrating. While these may be understandable and useful responses, they are inappropriately moralistic in taking the focus off the main resources for dealing with such issues: the resources activated under a republic that has the right civic, institutional and constitutional character.

An additional danger to the motivational underpinnings of republican life is represented by complacency, or, if you prefer, credulity. By this, I mean complacency about how the abstract structures of the society—optimistically assuming that they are well designed—work in ensuring that no one is vulnerable to the arbitrary influences of self-serving elites or powerful lobby groups. There is no abstract structure that is proof against corruption and faction, and so, it is important that people remain alert to this possibility. It is important that they remain vigilant in the efforts they make—individually or through social movements and non-governmental organisations—to keep the workings of power in the public view. And, as this is clearly important, it is also important that the

this is clearly important, it is also important that the reflective culture of the society gives support to such an invigilation of the powerful.

To sum up this discussion of the conceptual and motivational effects that make reflective culture relevant to republican life, there are two demands republicans will expect a culture to satisfy: first, that it keeps alive a way of thinking that makes freedom as non-domination important for all and that holds out a real hope of achieving such freedom by public means; and second, that it fosters attitudes that are not so deferential, conservative, atomistic or moralistic that they alienate people from those public instrumentalities. What reflective culture is required to support is, in Tone's words, a world 'where there is, out of doors, a jealous vigilance, a fund of knowledge, and a spirit of resistance not yet found in Ireland'.¹¹

The policy lessons

The conclusion of this discussion is that there are clear *desiderata* that republicans will have for how the system of culture should work in their society. The hope must be that there is:

- an educational pattern that ensures an audience for reflective culture and a supply of candidates to work within the system;
- an open infrastructure of resources whereby directors, writers and artists are assured of accessible channels of communication;
- a population of cultural contributors who have the taste, the talent and the temperament to produce work whose net effect is to sustain the conceptual and motivational requirements of a vibrant republic;
- a regulatory system that encourages work of this kind, eliciting and fostering the sort of work that serves the republic well;
- a facilitative set of arrangements which means that there are commissions, subsidies and protections enough to promote work of the desired kind.

With these *desiderata* sketched, it might be tempting to move straight away to a programme for what government should do on these different fronts. But this would be a mistake, for *desiderata* are one thing, policies another. I do not mean that policies have to be more specific; specificity is not something we can hope to achieve here. What I have in mind is that policies need to take account of real-world constraints in a way that *desiderata* do not. They have to allow for constraints on financial and human resources, of course, but, in particular, they have to recognise that sometimes the attempt to achieve the best can work, paradoxically, against the achievement of the good. They need to see that this policy

paradox may strike against the best-intentioned plans, and they have to try to ensure that the danger is avoided.

The threatening paradox has long been recognised in the old republican question: *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* Who will police the police; who will watch the watchers? It represents a particular challenge for republican policies, for it is manifest that should the state have the control that is needed to reduce the degree of domination suffered as a result of private power (*dominium*), it may itself constitute a public power (*imperium*) that exercises more domination than any private masters could ever have imposed. It is because they recognise the threat from the very *imperium* that is designed to redress forces of *dominium* that republicans have always emphasised those constitutional, institutional and civic measures required to block the government itself from becoming an arbitrary, dominating power: to channel it into becoming an agency that can be called to book by the people, both as individual contestors of policy and as a collective electorate.

Republican thought in any policy area, then, is bound to be driven by two factors. One, crusading, will look for a pattern that is capable of protecting, empowering and energising people, so that they can walk tall, knowing that they are known as men and women of standing: people who, regardless of class, creed or gender command the respect of their fellows. The other, cautionary in character, will be alert to the need to examine all political initiatives to ensure that they do not themselves create unchecked centres of power and bring new sources of domination into play. The policy programme has to work in a generate-and-test routine, with the crusading motor proposing potential new ways of politically securing results of the kind that might promote the enjoyment of non-domination, and with the cautionary filter operating to weed out those proposals that carry any danger of doing more harm than good.

The generate-and-test routine applies fairly readily to the policies that we might hope to develop for promoting the cultural republic. The *desiderata* sketched above point us towards the sorts of thing that, in the abstract, the policy generator will propose. And so, the question is how far the policy filter will call for them to be trimmed back and reshaped?

I cannot try to run that policy dynamic here, following the back-and-forth pattern in which generator and tester are likely to operate, and I hope that it will be enough to point up three lessons for policy that I think it is almost certain to support. Republican policy-making, whether in cultural or other areas, requires time, data and engagement with a specific milieu, and these lessons should be taken merely as indicators of where, in one person's view, cultural policy is likely to be driven by a republican

agenda.

Lesson 1: the limits of the free market

The free market, on its own, cannot be relied upon to ensure a system of reflective culture that will serve republican purposes, upholding people in a sense of what they can achieve for their own freedom and that of others. One reason for this is that, in quite a number of areas, those countries with larger home markets (most notably the United States) will be able to undercut and undermine local competitors, introducing at best a facile cosmopolitan diet of culture. Another is that the free market will tend to generate covert monopolies of power—in the ownership of crucial media, say—which will represent a powerful manipulative threat. And a third is that the pressures of the market are not always well designed to ensure the emergence of a reflective culture with a robust republican aspect. The urgent often drives out the important in private life, as we all know, and a similar rule applies in public life, where the sensational news item sells more readily than the substantive, where the sugar of situation comedy is a better commercial bet than the salt of irony and satire, and where the new label and fashion can always be marketed to advantage against anything more traditional and (as it can always be stamped) more staid.

This lesson shows a need to bolster reflective culture on such fronts, softening the blast of the unfettered market. There is also a need to protect a minimum level of local cultural activity from the predations of a global economy. There is reason to guard against monopolies, ensuring that there is always an opening—however that is to be ensured—for the smaller, more innovative ventures that are slow to get off the ground, but that often win an important public of their own. And, equally clearly, there has to be a way of ensuring that what proves urgent on the market does not drive out that which is ultimately of greater social and political importance.

Lesson 2: the limits of the benign state

If the first lesson points up ways in which the market is not likely to work for the republican good, the second emphasises that we should not harbour any facile optimism about the ability of the state to do the job better. The state claims a normally unchallenged monopoly of the use of legitimate force, and any agency that has such coercive power and authority is bound to be a potential source of domination; hence, as we saw, the republican emphasis on the need to hold its power in check. If we allow the state to step in and control the operation of the cultural

system so that the limits of the market are overcome, then we may end up in a worse pass than before.

Let the state have unrestricted power to protect local cultural activity, for example, and it may end up producing a backwater of North Korean dimensions, say. Let the state have such power in restraining the growth of market monopolies, and it may promote those in favour with the government of the day or with important electoral lobbies. Let it have the authority to decide what is important and worthy of support, and it may use that power to bolster its preferred ideas and interests and mobilise the system of culture as an arm of government policy.

Lesson 3: the hope of civic power

The dangers of the free market give rise to a need to wrest control of the cultural system away from profit-maximising businesses; the dangers of the benign state give rise to a need to avoid control being left to vote-seeking representatives. Those are the instrumentalities favoured, respectively, by the opposing philosophies of libertarianism and communitarianism. The only hope of having a robust republican system of culture, I would argue, lies in the possibility of a civic society that is sustained by state support, but not compromised by it, and that sponsors free market activity without allowing economic powers and priorities to dictate the overall pattern of things.

But, is such a civic society as elusive as Lewis Carroll's snark? I hope not; and I think not. For, if we look again at the five elements that we identified in the system of culture, it is not difficult to see how the state might help to create a civic power of the desired sort.

On the educational and infrastructural front, the state might clearly work to establish and maintain the opportunities necessary for a reflective republican culture, without taking over in a politically-controlling manner. There are precedents aplenty for the operation of a subsidised, but relatively hands-off, system of general education and of education in areas of particular cultural relevance. Equally, there are precedents for national systems of hands-off management in maintaining radio and television networks, in providing for national film and theatre production, and in making various musical and artistic events possible.

Something similar holds, I would say, in regard to the regulatory and facilitative programmes that the state is in a position to put in place. A regulatory system need not be designed to censor out of existence those works that displease the political authorities, or the lobby groups to which they are sensitive. Such a system, no matter how hands-off, carries with it an inherent threat of inhibition and domination, but the system can

be designed to foster work of a desirable sort, without risking that oppressive effect, by providing scholarships, prizes and other positive rewards. At least, it can do this provided that the committees that determine who shall receive such rewards are staffed by members who are chosen according to an agreed, representative formula and for agreed terms of office. They must not be staffed by, in Tone's words, placemen and pensioners who will heed the nods and winks of their political masters.

These comments on the regulatory framework associated with the system of culture apply equally well to the facilitative framework. By recourse to suitably appointed committees that work at arm's length from government and with the independence that we generally accord the courts—this is part of the broader republican heritage—there is every reason that it might prove possible to protect local cultural products against predatory levels of foreign competition. And there is equal reason that a suitable pattern of national commissions and subsidies might work in beneficial support of the cultural system.

But, I have said nothing about the central element in any system of culture: the directors, writers and artists who are actually responsible for the works of reflective culture that are produced. What is there, if anything, to ensure that they have the taste, talent and temperament to produce work the net effect of which supports the conceptual and motivational requirements of republican life? Nothing can be done about talent over and beyond the educational and other provisions mentioned already. But, what about inducing the taste and the temperament—in particular the courage, which it will often require—to work in desired modes? It is clear that neither the invisible hand of the market nor the iron hand of the state is going to be of any utility in fostering the taste and temperament required. So, can we do nothing as republicans, then, but pray and hope that the muse will work to good effect?

We certainly have to rely on the whims of the muse for the emergence of cultural greatness; there is no planning for a Yeats, an O'Casey, or a Joyce. But, is there any basis for confidence that a culture will materialise in which the directors, writers and artists, however varied their output, work with the net effect of sustaining the conceptual and motivational preconditions of republican life?

There may not be grounds for the sort of confidence that will appeal to the managerial mentality. But, there are grounds for a different sort of confidence: that which is associated with the notion of trust. I argue that as republican theorists and planners we should place our trust in the directors, writers and artists themselves, inviting them to follow their

own instincts and inspirations and welcoming the challenge they will inevitably bring to various aspects of the status quo.

That challenge, it should be stressed, will often be very uncomfortable. It is as certain as night follows day that much of what the producers in the system of reflective culture do will offend those individuals—and *we* may be those individuals—with more settled, satisfied views of society's achievements. Reflective culture at its best has little truck with celebrating what has already been achieved, for that task can be safely left to other hands. The leading practitioners in literature and the arts will usually prefer to probe at everything complacent and clichéd in the world about them, undermining its assumptions and evoking the sort of discontent in which new growth can start.

Why trust the directors, writers and artists, especially in view of the inherently irreverent momentum to cultural life? For one thing, because we have no other choice; any attempt to control them or suppress them would certainly be counterproductive; but mainly because such trust is grounded in a republican article of faith that has been tried and tested in practice. That faith is that the society as a whole will prosper just so far as the different sectors and streams do not disdain one another's challenges or despair of their effects, but persevere in the ever renewed attempt to achieve understanding and coexistence.

The republic does not promise the sepulchral quiet of the marriage bed, in Oscar Wilde's wicked metaphor, but rather the hurly burly of the chaise longue. It answers to the image in which Machiavelli saw the greatness of republican Rome: an image of a finely balanced equilibrium, wrested continually from the conflictual, contesting instabilities occasioned by differences between nobles and plebs, consuls and tribunes, Senate and Council. The pattern of the healthy republic is to have no settled pattern, to be a world always in the making, where there is no threat of apathy among ordinary people and no danger of a comfortable dominance on the part of the major stakeholders.

But, what are republicans to think of the prospect of directors, writers and artists being seduced into ways of thinking—aestheticist, rationalist, or postmodernist, for example—that threaten to undermine the conceptual and motivational foundations of the republic? Shouldn't something be done to create a barrier against that possibility? No, I would say, it should not. The only hope of a healthy republic lies in our recognising the independence of those who work in the cultural realm—as well as the independence of those who work elsewhere—and in our sustaining a level of trust that truly enfranchises them.

This trust, I should say, need not have the cast of blind faith.

Republicans have routinely held that, while it is necessary to trust in people to have the civic virtue that the tradition praises, there is one important safeguard that may help to sustain such virtue. This is the force associated with the natural human desire to win opinion and status in the eyes of one's peers, particularly the peers who fully understand the constraints and challenges one faces. It is something that I have elsewhere contrasted with the iron hand of the state and the invisible hand of the market, describing it as the intangible hand whereby civic society exercises a firm but respectful control on those who would find a place amongst their fellows.¹²

If a civic world is established 'where there is, out of doors, a jealous vigilance, a fund of knowledge, and a spirit of resistance', as we saw Tone put it, then there is every hope that in this world the intangible hand will operate to provide a particular reward for the sort of work that answers to the central value of freedom as non-domination and that incorporates a recognition of the dangers of private and public power. The hope is that the civic world necessary under any republican dispensation will be a world sufficient to ensure the sorts of standards, and the sorts of attitudes, that will reward and reinforce the initiatives in reflective culture that a thriving republic requires.

The reflective culture is a many-faceted reality, of course, and works of culture should not generally be expected to answer to republican needs; if they did, then the culture would constitute a wasteland, repulsive to the human spirit. What may be expected is only that the reflective culture that emerges in a republic should not undermine the republican value of independency or weaken the republican spirit of resistance. Its net effect, materialising in all the colour and motley of a varied culture, should be to keep the republic alive in the habits of mind and heart where, in Yeats's phrase, all ladders start.

Notes

¹ P. Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997). P. Pettit, *A Theory of Freedom: From the Psychology to the Politics of Agency* (Cambridge and New York: Polity and Oxford University Press 2001). The historians of thought who had a big influence on my work are Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli. For recent work by them, see Q. Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997) and M. Viroli, *Republicanism* (New York: Hill and Wang 2002).

² S. Cronin and R. Roche (eds.), *Freedom the Wolfe Tone Way* (Tralee: Anvil 1973), pp. 86, 78, 162, cf. 199.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 159, 87, 153.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 87, 88, 87.

⁵ 'The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy', in W. Paley, *Collected Works*,

vol. 4 (London: C. and J. Rivington 1825), p. 359.

⁶ P. Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (op. cit.), ch. 1.

⁷ Communitarianism in this sense is sometimes described as republicanism. It surfaced in the nineteenth century, with new romantic enthusiasms for the Athenian *polis* that had been rejected among ancient, Renaissance and modern republicans on the grounds that, in Polybius's famous metaphor, it was a ship without a captain, buffeted by the winds of public opinion: it was not a mixed constitution, but one in which power was exercised more or less absolutely by the collective assembly. Such neo-Athenian communitarianism appealed to nationalists bred in the spirit of German romanticism and would have repelled someone like Wolfe Tone. For more on this theme, see P. Pettit, 'Reworking Sandel's Republicanism', *Journal of Philosophy* 95, 1998, pp. 73–96. The sense I give to the term 'communitarianism' would not be endorsed by all those who use it to characterise their own position. Thus, what Philip Selznick defends in the name of the communitarian persuasion is quite congenial to republican sentiments. See M. Krygier, 'Philip Selznick, Normative Theory, And the Rule of Law', in R. A. Kagan, M. Krygier and K. Winston (eds.), *Legality and Community: On the Intellectual Legacy of Philip Selznick* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield 2002).

⁸ A. Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics 1990), p. 17.

⁹ A. B. Paterson, *The Collected Verse of A.B. Paterson* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson 1921).

¹⁰ The point is made in M. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press 1996); P. Pettit, 'Reworking Sandel's Republicanism', op. cit.

¹¹ S. Cronin and R. Roche (eds.), op. cit., p. 87.

¹² P. Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (op. cit.), chs. 7 and 8; G. Brennan and P. Pettit, *The Economy of Esteem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003).

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