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The serious writer is obliged to reawaken the reader's numbed sense of the concrete through the administration of linguistic shocks, by restructuring the overfamiliar or by appealing to those deeper layers of the physiological which alone retain a kind of fitful *unnamed* intensity. (Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 20–21)

THIS BOOK SEEKS to place Cicero's *Verrines*, Caesarian orations, *Republic*, and *Laws*; Sallust's *Catiline* and *Jugurtha*; and Horace's *Satires* at the center of the republican tradition. In the process, I aim to rewrite the orientation and concerns of that tradition in a different idiom than they are currently understood. I address these writings as the literary texts that they are, not as sources of isolated quotations, and for this reason I proceed through close individual readings. Though I approach each text knowing a good deal about its intended audience and the conditions under which its words were first set down, my ultimate aim is not to make guesses, however highly educated they might be, about what each text could have meant to its readers at the moment of its composition.¹ Nor is my ultimate purpose to discern what these authors intended to convey to their original audience. I agree with Hans Gadamer, who has argued in *Truth and Method* that in seeking to understand the relationship between past text and present reader, we must remember that we are not the direct descendants of the Greeks and the Romans: we never confront the texts in all their freshness as things in themselves, but as things already read, and in the reading, altered.² So I balance contextualist knowledge and regard for the words on the page with possible meanings that were not, perhaps because they could not be, expressed openly or given special

1 Compare the efforts of Skinner in, e.g., *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought and Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (and many other works) and Pocock ("The reconstruction of discourse: the historiography of political thought") to recover rhetorics, the thick textures of political speech: "I shall seek to give an account of how the historian sets about reconstituting political thought as discourse: that is, as a sequence of speech acts performed by agents within a context furnished ultimately by social structures and historical situations, but also—and in some ways more immediately—by the political languages by means of which the acts are to be performed" (Pocock, 959–60).

2 Miriam Leonard eloquently argues along similar lines (citing Gadamer and Jameson) on behalf of preserving "the trace of the past" in the encounter between modern reader and ancient text, in "The uses of reception," especially 116–19.

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emphasis at that originary moment. These are meanings that run just beneath the surface of the text, buttressing its structure, silently helping it cohere. At times, more radically, I treat these texts as prompts that make ideas available for our active use. Being neither for nor of our time, they grant a sense of the past's difference, and in doing so they grant us a perspective of difference and help us see ourselves and our world anew.³

In short, I am doing my best to follow the spirit of Hannah Arendt's quotation of Karl Jaspers in the preface to the first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

To fall prey neither to the past nor to the future.
What matters is to be entirely (in the) present.

Weder dem Vergangenen anheimfallen noch dem Zukünftigen.
Es kommt darauf an, ganz gegenwärtig zu sein.

A thinker consumed by the unique and urgent challenges of modernity, Arendt insisted on rereading Greek and Latin texts. She explained her method as the quest “to discover the real origins of traditional concepts in order to distill from them anew their original spirit which has so sadly evaporated from the very key words of political language—such as freedom and justice, authority and reason, responsibility and virtue, power and glory—leaving behind empty shells.”⁴

Though she compared herself to a pearl diver, bringing up lost meanings from the depths, Arendt was no objective philologist holding a magnifying glass to Greek and Latin terminology. Nor was she a contextualist like the Cambridge School historians J. G. A. Pocock or Quentin Skinner. Arendt placed the recovery of historical words in the context of her belief in the importance of action in the world in the present. In her gracefully emphatic phrase, words are “*something like a frozen thought that thinking must unfreeze*.”⁵ I take this to mean that recovering the spirit of words' original meanings involves transforming something that first resembled ice, hard and clear, into water, which refracts light at different angles and flows this way and that. The liquid of an idea holds the essence of its icy past: it has the same chemical composition, and certain attributes are identical under the exami-

3 I agree with Saxonhouse on the importance of preserving the practice of reading ancient political thought for more than simply providing an alternative “perspective” on modern beliefs and concepts (“Political theory yesterday” 856).

4 Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 15.

5 Arendt, “Thinking,” in *The Life of the Mind*, 171.

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nation of our senses of sight, taste, and touch. If the kind of recovery Arendt has in mind necessarily creates water out of ice, it is also true that in order to process and understand this liquid thought, we must observe and analyze its icy form—the words on the page.

To think about words is not necessarily to define concepts. Try asking the question: what is a republic? Late in life John Adams confessed to his friend Mercy Warren that he had never understood what a republic was, and that “no other man ever did or ever will.”⁶ Twenty years earlier, Thomas Paine had grumbled that courtiers love “to abuse something which they called republicanism, but what republicanism was, or is, they never attempt to explain.” He continued:

What is called a *republic*, is not any *particular form* of government. It is wholly characteristic of the purport, matter, or object for which government ought to be instituted, and on which it is to be employed, RES-PUBLICA, the public affairs, or the public good; or, literally translated, the *public thing*. It is a word of a good original, referring to what ought to be the character and business of government; and in this sense it is naturally opposed to the word *monarchy*, which has a base original signification.⁷

Paine’s stab at defining the republic raises some difficult questions. First, what is the “public good,” who defines it, and by what standard? Should we understand it in moral terms, as his use of the phrase “the character . . . of government” implies, or in material or institutional terms related to the “business” of government? Second, once citizens have freed themselves from domination by a king or tyrant and become free to govern themselves—a key element of the *res publica* for Paine and Adams—what motivates them to turn their freedom to the task of self-government? Might citizens end up “*too free* to consult the general good,” as the educator and political thinker James Burgh worried in 1774?⁸

Before pursuing the question of definition any further, it is worth recalling that the Romans had no written constitution and, if textual evidence is anything to go by, little interest in defining their government in philosophically rigorous terms. This is why Michel Serres invokes the images of a black

⁶ Adams to Mercy Warren, 20 July 1807, cited in Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776–1787*, 48–49.

⁷ Paine, *The Rights of Man*, 279.

⁸ Burgh, *Political Disquisitions*, 116.

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box and dark cave to characterize the Romans' account of themselves: he seeks to capture Roman writers' defiance of the narrativization of certain elements of their history by explicitly or indirectly representing them as non-narratable—*non enarrabile*, as Vergil says of the great shield crowded with violent images of Rome's future that Vulcan makes for Aeneas (8.625).⁹ In the Conclusion, I will suggest that living with the fact that our written constitution is constantly under interpretation and reinterpretation retains an important trace of what Jacques Rancière might call the permanent "disagreement" at the core of the Roman civic experience.

In fact, we live with a constitution and with the modern concept of rights.¹⁰ Rather than lament the absence of regime theory and of detailed debate in Latin on the nature of the *res publica*, I will suggest that taking a lesson from Roman thinkers and from Arendt, we can conclude that the most useful response is not to seek to settle on a definition of what the republic was or is or might be, nor to seek the end or purpose of the constitution, as Aristotle did in his *Politics*, nor to construct ideals of civic virtue that exist in denial of the chaotically diverse reality of democratic plurality and embodied life.¹¹ Instead I explore Roman thinkers' image of the republic as they saw it in past and present action, their emphasis on grasping the action around them, and the complex processes involved in making the judgments we make as citizens, all of which together involve reason, imagination, acknowledgment (specifically, the acknowledgment of limits), sensation, memory, and the emotions, especially hope and despair.

In taking this approach I am directly inspired by John Dewey's call in *The Public and Its Problems* for a series of pragmatic recognitions. First, we must recognize the fact that human beings live in communities, and consequently that each of us is always already part of a plural "we." Second, we must recognize this "we"—a project we are most likely to realize if we create a persuasive common set of terms that we can agree defines the community

9 Serres, *Rome: The Book of Foundations*, 13: "We never get out of texts, turning our backs on the dark origins." (The shield of Aeneas features images of conflict, including a man being torn to pieces by horses.)

10 Here with regard to my presumed audience (the "we") I follow Judith Shklar: "Who are the 'we' of whom I seem to talk so confidently? I have assumed that I live among people who are familiar with the political practices of the United States and who show their adherence to them by discussing them critically, indeed relentlessly" (*Ordinary Vices*, 227).

11 Hammer insightfully discusses the expulsion of Roman texts from the political canon that began with Romantic Hellenocentrism and continues in contemporary ancient history and philosophy, in *Roman Political Thought and the Modern Theoretical Imagination*, 13–37.

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as it is, as opposed to what we would like it to be. Our common definition need not exclude all elements of the aspirational, but if it is to avoid generating its own tyrannical dogma, we are best served by anchoring it in lived experience. Third, we must recognize that all actions (including thoughts) have consequences, and we should direct our political thinking to the task of maximizing good consequences and minimizing bad ones.¹²

The challenge Dewey pinpoints, to flesh out a point I made very briefly in my earlier quotation from his book, is that while we each think and reflect as individual subjects, we must build ways to live together, together. How do we think across the gap from our selves to ourselves? To gain “the clear consciousness of a communal life [which] constitutes the idea of democracy” Dewey insists that we begin from the acknowledgment that we cannot treat the relations of self and other as oppositional or antithetical.¹³ Both terms (Dewey prefers “individual” and “social”) are “hopelessly ambiguous.” But because social and political analyses treat them as discrete entities existing in opposition, “‘society’ becomes an unreal abstraction and ‘the individual’ an equally unreal one,” and because it is possible to imagine an individual utterly disassociated from a group, “there develops the unreal question of how individuals come to be united in societies and groups [in the first place]: the individual and the social are now opposed to each other, and there is the problem of ‘reconciling’ them.”¹⁴

Where modern virtue theorists begin by defining individual virtues and explaining their innate worth and public utility, Roman republican writers tackle the nature of the community and individual agency as interlocked problems that need to be handled together. The claim that I want to make is difficult to express in brief, but I want to suggest that it is in precisely the *different* ways Roman writers think about self and community, or private and public life, or life alone and life with others, that the potential exists for reorienting our habits of thinking about these things. At one point in the long course of writing this book I entertained the thought of dividing it into sections on “self” and “community.” Very quickly I realized that a central contribution of Roman political thinking is to prompt reflection on what those terms mean—by which I do not intend to fall back on the familiar mental picture of Romans heroically if horrifyingly subsumed in the rush of patriotism and self-sacrifice for the community’s sake. Instead the

12 Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 17.

13 *Ibid.*, 149.

14 *Ibid.*, 186, 191.

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book spends roughly equal time on the constitution of the self and of the community. This is a fitting approach to a literature that takes shape in an intellectual milieu where a clear boundary between politics (the rules by which a group lives) and ethics (the rules by which a self lives) is nowhere to be found. Note that I say “live,” not “govern” or “rule.” For these Roman thinkers, the founding term of politics is not rule. Desire, hope, passion, time, contest, and fantasy drive and guide political life. It is from this truth that the Romans I treat in this book begin to think the political.

As these terms suggest, my approach differs from those adopted in conventional surveys of Roman political thought, such as D. C. Earl’s study of Sallust, Chaim Wirszubski’s thoughtful book *Libertas*, or the chapters on the Latin historians and Cicero in handbooks such as the *Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*. These works tend to define the content of Roman political thought by singling out pre-existing concepts and values—the pivotal terms *res publica* and *libertas*; the virtues of *virtus*, *fides*, *gloria*, *iustitia*, and so forth; or the causes of decline, *lubido*, *avaritia*, *ambitio*—and tracing their appearance in a given text or texts, often in consideration of their social and legal context. Instead my intention is to explore what Anthony Pagden has called (borrowing a term from Hobbes) the “registers” in which specific kinds of political propositions may intelligibly be cast.¹⁵ Because these registers of ideas and values are largely constructed in Roman literature not through analytic definition-building, but through a rich variety of rhetorical and literary strategies—the proper instruments for works originally designed to instruct by dramatic example and rhetorical flair as well as by logical argument—my readings adopt the tone and techniques of literary and rhetorical criticism. I want to stage a productive collaboration between literary interpretation and the history of political thought: this is another important way antiquity may interface with modernity.

The thinking behind this collaboration deserves further explanation. J. G. A. Pocock, one of the most learned and sophisticated contemporary readers of the diverse texts that constitute the tradition of Western political thought, has tried to account for the two simultaneous, mutually provocative tendencies he sees at work in it over time: one toward the preservation of tradition and the other toward innovation in theory and practice. For Pocock, the answer lies in the central role literary interpretation plays in the transmission of ideas:

15 Pagden, *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, 1; cf. Pocock, “Languages and their implications: the transformation of the study of political thought,” esp. 25–26.

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Societies exist in time, and conserve images of themselves as continuously so existing. . . . The fact is that a literate tradition is never a pure tradition, since the authority of written words is not dependent on usage and presumption only. As durable material objects they cut across the processes of transmission and create new patterns of social time; they speak directly to remote generations, whose interpretation of them may differ from that of intervening transmitters of the tradition they express. . . . [E]very reader is a potential radical; non-traditional interpretations arise, and with them the question of the authority to be employed in reading and interpreting documents; this authority may be thought of as traditional, rational, charismatic or simply mysterious. Books breed sybils to read them.¹⁶

“Books breed sybils”: this may be the most condensed and provocative statement of words’ effect on readers that I know. Yet it rings uncannily true. Do we, can we fully understand what happens to a person when that person reads—especially when the person reads a book about political ideas, about the self’s relation to others in the public sphere?

In her brilliant book *Ordinary Vices* Judith Shklar makes a strong argument for giving stories a central place in political thought. Those philosophers who avoid stories, preferring to “copy the theologians more closely,” she says, have been less than ideally deft at dealing with change and individual character.¹⁷ Her account of the changes storytelling encourages in the reader wavers in its location of agency. First she gives agentic capacity to the text as able to “force us to acknowledge what we already know imperfectly,” which she suggests is equivalent to illuminating the world as it is, “things as they are.” Next, she echoes Shelley’s *Defence of Poetry*, where poetry “purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being. It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe.” She invites the reader into the picture:

A great story brings us to that point. . . . They impose understandings upon us, sooner or later, by removing the covers *we may have put* on the mind’s eye. . . . They do not, in fact, tell us how to think, but what to think about, and make us “see things as they are.” [*My emphasis.*]¹⁸

16 Pocock, “Time, institutions and action; an essay on traditions and their understanding,” 254–55.

17 Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, 229.

18 *Ibid.*, 229–30. Shelley, “A defense of poetry.”

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Here, *we* put the covers on the mind's eye; *we* think about the matters the text recommends. And it is we who, after reading a book, may change—the mystery being that no one, not even we ourselves, can predict whether we will change or not. As Joshua Landy emphasizes, any effect literature may have on us involves our will as well: it is a gift “we are always free to leave unopened.”¹⁹ We are sybils—those opaque, unpredictable prophets—even to ourselves.

When Pocock says that every reader is a “potential radical,” his words recall Schiller's letters, the text that opened my preface. Like Pocock, Schiller starts from a concern with time. His object is to explain not the evolution of ideas in the collective or public context, but the changes possible in a particular self living in the world. “Since the world is developed in time, or change, the perfection of the faculty that places men in relation with the world will necessarily be the greatest possible mutability and extensiveness.”²⁰ Schiller means the faculty of perceiving the world, that is, the aesthetic faculty. Its task is difficult, because the self that relates to the world has a sense of itself that includes a sense of permanence. So any potential change for the better or the worse in a self stands in tension with its own sense of selfhood. For this reason, Schiller says, though the aesthetic faculty naturally possesses independence and intensity, it requires strengthening over time. He has already observed in the eighth letter that an enriched understanding of the world “only deserves respect” when it affects the character in its fullness of being in the world, that is to say (in true Romantic form) in both the heart and the head. What is needed is “to educate the sensibility, because it is the means, not only to render efficacious in practice the improvement of ideas, but to call this improvement into existence”—to ensure that ideas are put into practice. How can character be improved? Schiller concludes that the instrument of improvement cannot be sought in the state or other external entity. It rests in the self, in the aesthetic faculty. This is and must be enriched by contact with different experiences.

The more the receptivity is developed under manifold aspects, the more it is movable and offers surfaces to phenomena, the larger is the part of the world seized upon by man, and the more virtualities he develops in himself. Again, in proportion as man gains strength and depth, and depth and reason gain in freedom, in that proportion man

19 Landy, “Formative fictions,” 199.

20 Schiller, Letter 13.

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takes in a larger share of the world, and throws out forms outside himself. (Letter 13)

A longer explanation of my belief in the efficacy of literature would require another book.²¹ I have tried here to set the stage for showing how my readings of central republican thinkers—Cicero, Sallust, and Horace—should be understood as training in political thinking, in understanding “things as they are,” and thus in taking in “a larger share of the world.”

WHY ROMAN REPUBLICANISM?

The turn to Rome in political philosophy has a long history. Cicero, Sallust, Horace, Livy, and Tacitus were required reading for most educated people starting in the fifteenth century—the core of the Latin canon taught in virtually every school and college across Europe.²² Key tenets of republican values begin to color political debates in England up to and through the Civil War. “Democratical Gentlemen” (as Hobbes bitterly called them) cited Cicero and the Twelve Tables to justify their argument for the ultimate authority of Parliament over the king, and poets on the side of Parliament attacked Vergil and Horace as flatterers who played for Augustus while “Roman Liberty was lost.” By the late eighteenth century, references to Rome populate political essays, philosophical works, treatises on education, art, architecture, and fashion in Europe and both Americas. John Adams, Thomas Paine, and James Burgh are examples of the passion for republican ideas and images that raged during the eighteenth century age of revolution. Conservatives like William Burke ardently claimed their share of the

21 Joshua Landy has written just such a book about fiction (*Doing Things with Fiction*). He argues there that the efficacy of fiction lies in its “formative” function. Distinguishing this from three other conventional explanations of what fiction does (the exemplary, the affective, and the cognitive), he argues against those who believe that fiction grants us access to knowledge, and that increase in our knowledge is “the very point of our engagement” with fiction. He encourages us to stop talking about what fiction “says” or “means” and to talk instead about “what it does” (“Formative fictions,” 183). He reminds us of Dewey’s premise that an artwork is not an object but an experience, and suggests that the experience of fiction helps us fine-tune our mental capacities: it equips us with skills, from “emotional control” to “Zen-like detachment” to being “better at handling and producing figurative language” (189). His strikes me as a productive way to read non-fiction (political thought in particular) as well, *mutatis mutandis*; I must pursue further investigation elsewhere.

22 Waquet, *Latin: Or The Empire of a Sign*, 7–39, with rich bibliography; see also chapters on specific authors in Reynolds, *Texts and Transmission*; Grafton and Jardine, “Studied for action”; Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 3.

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republican legacy. In the early nineteenth century, European and American thinkers turned to Rome in an effort to redress the weaknesses of liberal democracy as it was taking shape in industrial capitalist society. Pioneering feminist and revolutionary thinker Margaret Fuller, who learned Latin at the age of six, drowned in a shipwreck before she could finish her history of the Roman republic, which she believed would inspire modern revolutions.²³

Republicanism's popularity as a political idea declined from the middle of the nineteenth century as egalitarianism and democratic populism caught fire, the experience of empire soured, commerce grew in scope, variety, and social consequence, and military virtues disappeared from the index of elite achievement.²⁴ In the twentieth century, several waves of renewed interest arose in reaction to current political crisis. First the rise of totalitarianism drove émigrés like Leo Strauss and Hannah Arendt to the United States, where they built their midcentury critiques of modernity on classical thought and values. Meanwhile, spurred by the research of John Pocock, particularly his 1975 book *The Machiavellian Moment*, American historians debated the degree to which Locke or republican thinkers had influenced the American founders. Later, after the social, economic, and political tumult of the 1960s and 1970s, interest in the republican tradition among political philosophers reignited once more.

Most neo-republicans today are communitarians or liberal democrats who worry that liberalism, concentrated as it is on the individual and individual rights and freedoms, offers an excessively slender conception of community and civic duty—too low-calorie a diet for the vigorous political lifestyle of the engaged, well-informed citizen idealized by post-1960s theorists of democracy. Others are radical democrats searching for ways to unsettle conventional ideas about democracy. In the republican ideal they find a promising corrective to an impoverished civic life.

Neo-republican arguments tend to develop along two paths. The first, evolving in the modern era from the work of Hannah Arendt and overlapping in some thinkers with communitarian concerns, takes on the fundamental human question “how shall I live?” and offers a powerful if demand-

23 On Fuller, see Reynolds, “Subjective vision, romantic history?”

24 On the fortunes of republicanism from the seventeenth through the early nineteenth centuries, consult the useful essays in *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, ed. van Gelderen and Skinner. Malamud, *Ancient Rome and Modern America*, traces the evolution of Rome's impact on the United States from an eighteenth century political ideal to a nineteenth century moral symbol—and in the twentieth century, a commercial symbol, the sign of a luxury brand.

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ing answer: live well, which is to say live politically, acting—as Rousseau recommends in the *Social Contract*—with a view to the effects our choices will have on our fellows, all part-owners of public affairs (*res publica*). Richard Dagger, Michael Sandel, and Maurizio Viroli (to take a few examples) understand the republican legacy as resting in the ideal of a virtuous collective of engaged citizens bound by agreement about the law and by the common bond of interest strengthened by the affections of patriotic affiliation (a gloss on *coetus multitudinis iuris consensu et utilitatis communiione sociatus*, Cicero, *Rep.* 1.39). A second major direction is represented by the philosopher Philip Pettit, who finds in the republican definition of liberty a strong rejection of arbitrary domination and whose liberal goals lead him to concentrate on procedural and constitutional questions.

Attracted by the prospect of somehow constructing a community of virtue, committed to love of country and shared values grounded in collective memory, neo-republicans advocate for the essence of the republican legacy as they see it: in Rome’s ideal of a virtuous community bound together by zeal for self-government and the creation of a deliberative consensus regarding the common good. Some of the dreamier propositions demand contributions from citizens that it is difficult to imagine putting into practice. Cullen Murphy goes the furthest in his popular 2007 book *Are We Rome?*, which suggests that the United States should fortify “institutions that promote assimilation” by establishing a national service program for American youth, a modern version of Rome’s ancient military.

For all these thinkers, virtue is central. Tightly knit communities and habits of vigorous civic deliberation can’t run on air. Their fuel is a *common culture* of civility, generosity, and trust. Here neo-republicans find themselves in a bind. Common culture, by most accounts, arises out of the affective dimension of political life: the sense of belonging, the love citizens feel for their *patria*, exemplified in (for instance) Aeneas’ devotion to Anchises and Iulus and his companions. Yet to liberals, in the wake of the nationalist catastrophes of the twentieth century, patriotism is a dangerous romance indeed. These charges are given weight by strident calls from movements like the American Tea Party for the revival of putatively foundational, putatively republican ideals: cultural homogeneity, love of country, and the willingness to sacrifice much (notably economic equity) in exchange for personal freedom from what they perceive as interference by the state. Desire for common ground slides into horror of racial and cultural difference, and passion and prejudice corrode civility.

Philip Pettit responded to this danger with his books *Republicanism* and *A Theory of Freedom*, and most recently, *On the People’s Terms*, which

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argued that the Roman definition of freedom was more robust than the classical liberal definition of freedom as negative freedom, non-interference, freedom *from*.²⁵ The Romans, he claimed, understood freedom as non-domination: the condition of being free from any threat of domination, real, possible, or imagined, which might limit the scope of free choice and action. Pettit sought to ground his book in the real world of politics and to avoid the “patriotism problem” in his insistence that a strong democratic republic incorporate mechanisms of public accountability, and in the end, he proposes a common culture of civility, generosity, and trust. Here he draws on a very long tradition of republican thought about civic virtue, especially the four canonical virtues of Plato and Cicero: wisdom, justice, courage (especially the kind of courage that cultivates the citizen’s readiness to sacrifice herself for the common good), and moderation or self-control.

Keeping in mind that politics in a diverse pluralistic society entails disagreement, Pettit treats this final virtue with special care. To have a democratic politics where a plurality of views can circulate and be taken seriously, but where agreement on action must be reached, everyone has to accustom themselves to losing every once in a while (and perhaps often). Clearly, Pettit concluded, we need norms in place for political opinions and judgments: they must be based not on whim or sentiment, but reasoned deliberation undertaken in a civil mood. (The nature of deliberation and popular politics will be an important theme in this book, though not quite in Pettit’s terms.)

To many observers in the academy, despite efforts like Pettit’s to reconcile ancient and modern concepts and expectations, the latest turn to Rome was frankly unwelcome.²⁶ Why bother with this two-thousand-year-old re-

25 Further discussion of Pettit’s work below.

26 A sample of well-argued critiques: Robert Goodin, “Folie républicaine”; Don Herzog, “Some questions for republicans”; Anne Phillips, “Feminism and republicanism: is this a plausible alliance?”; Jacques Rancière, “Democracy, republic, representation.” Now see John McCormick’s excellent *Machiavellian Democracy*, which argues that Pocock’s supposed “Machiavellian” moment should be called a “Guicciardinian” one, since Pocock and most neo-republican theorists dwell almost exclusively (unproductively, in his view) on aristocratic, anti-populist republican thinkers. Through a reading of Machiavelli that underlines its popular concerns and goals, he seeks to recover a refreshed version of early modern neo-Roman republicanism, with particular emphasis on its remaking of the tribunate as a tool of public accountability and the people’s restraint of governing elites. Note that McCormick places Cicero at the head of the aristocratic (senatorial) republican tradition. My own reading in chapters 1 and 5 acknowledges Cicero’s special pleading on behalf of the senatorial order, but I see productive internal contradictions in his writing whose presence McCormick would likely deny or deprecate.

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public, except as an exercise in revisionist history or antiquarianism? On the face of things, Rome is a totally unpalatable model for politics. Neither modern theories of rights nor Athenian-style notions of equality existed there. Among the beliefs and practices that serious Roman thinkers endorsed or took for granted were slavery, the disenfranchisement of women, staggering economic inequality, the near-total domination of politics by a rich and self-righteous senatorial elite, popular reverence for entrenched authority, the devotion of resources to warfare on a massive scale, and the adulation of the battlefield and the gladiatorial arena as the natural theater for the performance of *virtus*, manly courage. How can the neo-republicans ignore the Roman bias toward aristocratic warrior values and the preservation of elite wealth and power? Clifford Ando and Janet Coleman have recently argued that the blindness of the Romans to the concepts of equality and individual rights, as well as their passionate defense of massive inequities of property and opportunity, make any contemporary attempt to recover the republican tradition hopelessly blinkered at best, immoral at worst. Coleman dismisses the Roman republic as an evil regime with a “tendency throughout history to excommunicate the deviant. . . . I have no doubts whatever that a liberal will remain completely unconvinced of the virtues, either of the mythic or the real republic.”²⁷

It is one of the ironies of the history of political thought that Roman republicans are condemned both for advocating an excessively demanding model of active citizenship and for passively bearing witness to the republic’s death throes. D. C. Earl, the author of a book on Sallust that is still commonly cited in contemporary scholarship and reflects the current picture of Roman thinking, concludes that Sallust’s political thought “centres on a concept of *virtus* as the functioning of *ingenium* [talent] to achieve *egregia facinora* [great and glorious deeds] and thus to win *gloria*, through *bonae artes* [good or honorable skills]. . . .” To Earl, Sallust’s principal innovation is his reconception of aristocratic *virtus* as “inclusive of all men of whatever class of society and engaged in whatever activity.”²⁸ Critics also complain that the Romans’ moralistic critique of republican decline is not matched by meaningful prescriptions for reform. To Quentin Skinner, tracing the

27 Janet Coleman, “El concepto de república: continuidad mítica y continuidad real” (I quote from the text of an English version delivered at NYU in 2009); Clifford Ando, “A dwelling beyond violence: the uses and disadvantages of history for contemporary republicans.” In chapter 1 I will treat in more detail Patchen Markell’s insightful critique of Pettit’s theory of freedom, which Markell places in the context of class and colonialism, “The insufficiency of non-domination.”

28 Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust*, 111.

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influence of Sallust on Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*, James Harrington's *Commonwealth of Oceana*, and Marchamont Nedham's *Excellency of a Free State*, the Romans' signature contribution to the republican tradition is like a snake swallowing its own tail: their belief that a free state is best adapted to attaining glory and greatness is cancelled out by their fear that the vicious byproducts of glory and greatness will ultimately destroy the state.²⁹

In his magisterial survey of the historiography of Rome, J.G.A. Pocock argues that the escalating nihilism of the struggle for power in the late republic was something the Romans' highly stylized historical narratives allowed to act as its own explanation; it was a cycle of competition no one knew how to stop.³⁰ Eric Nelson echoes Skinner and Pocock when he cites Jacob Burckhardt's comments on the Roman preoccupation with glory to support his contention that the Romans recognized the causes of republican doom but, blinded by their nostalgia for archaic civic values and by their conservative reverence for the past, they believed that "there was nothing the republic could legitimately do about it."³¹ Worst of the Romans' intellectual failures was their inability, even in theory, to reconcile their commitment to the common good with their refusal to address gross fundamental inequalities in their society and economy—a charge most often levelled at Cicero, who is taken to be the spokesman of conservative aristocratic privilege.³²

As for the Roman preoccupation with self-sacrifice for the common good idealized in artworks like Jacques-Louis David's *Oath of the Horatii*, Benjamin Constant raised perhaps the most famous objections. In his 1816

29 Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism*, 61–64.

30 Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion* vol. 3, 48–49. In this work, and in his *Machiavellian Moment*, Pocock combines the Greek (especially Aristotelian) and Roman (especially Ciceronian) traditions of active citizenship: the *vita activa*. Building on and critiquing Pocock's work, Quentin Skinner appeals to the rhetorical studies of the Italian humanists of the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries, which, he argues, were worked out within the frame of a neo-Roman ethics that drew on Sallust, Cicero, Livy, Valerius Maximus, Tacitus, and Justinian's late antique Codex. The result, as Skinner sees it, was a notion of liberty as the opposite of slavery, or as non-domination, and a commitment to a participatory ideal of civic virtue through which citizens agreed and were attentive to justice and the common good (Cicero, *Rep.* 1). Writing in the context of an aristocratic court culture, and seeking ways in which the non-nobility might participate in its own government, these very early modern rhetorical treatises became the new models of citizenship, and a transformed *vita activa* of public speech, advice-giving, and voting became the new ideal. Gaining honor and glory for oneself and one's family was imagined as part of gaining honor and glory for the *civitas*: it was the natural offshoot of fulfilling one's moral obligations and duties (*officia*) to friends and relations.

31 Nelson, *The Greek Tradition of Republican Thought*, 74; see also 8–10.

32 Wood, *Cicero's Social and Political Thought*, esp. 105ff.

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lecture on “The liberty of the ancients compared with that of the moderns,” Constant compellingly described the conditions of modern life: the enormous size of modern states, the abolition of slavery, the “vivid love of independence” satisfied by commerce, and the “infinite multiplication” of the means of happiness created by the diversity of private pursuits. All these things place the “active and constant participation in collective power” that for Constant is the central characteristic of classical politics beyond serious consideration for us moderns, whose freedom consists of “peaceful enjoyment and private independence.” The message here is that the Romans have little to teach us today.

Finally, critics point out that democratic politics may give due regard to cultural and individual diversity, particularly competing ideas about vice and virtue, only so long as it sustains public faith in, and standards of, deliberative reason. Here too, thanks to its emphasis on a common notion of civic virtue and affective attachments that trump reason, the republican tradition strikes many as falling short. Its rhetorical practices are manipulative and used to incite violence as much as to contain it; its concentration on emotion over logical argument encourages demagoguery. Instead of recuperating this dangerous junk, critics conclude, we had better recognize that the useful elements of recuperated republicanism are in essence liberal arguments and attempt to reform liberalism (Don Herzog), or invent a new politics of the extraordinary (Andreas Kalyvas), or reinvent radical democracy from the ground up (Jacques Rancière, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe).³³

From a historical point of view, looking to Rome for help in thinking through the challenges of citizenship in a liberal democracy, especially the tragically pressing predicaments of poverty, exclusion, and apathy, certainly seems intuitively unpromising at first. Parts of the Roman electoral system were sharply skewed to favor the rich; elite and masses alike revered the ancestral *nobilitas*, returning members of ancient families to magistrical office year after year; it was illegal for a private citizen to address a public assembly without an invitation from an elected magistrate; and nearly all the elected magistrates who conceived and passed legislation were very well-off.³⁴ To be a citizen meant to be free: the quality of being a *liber*, a free man,

33 For Herzog and Rancière, see note 26; also, Andreas Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary*, 254–90, on Arendtian politics. Kalyvas has revised (with Ira Katznelson) the conventional opposition between republicanism and liberalism in the history of political thought in *Liberal Beginnings: Making a Republic for the Moderns*.

34 Lintott, *Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 199–207.

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was defined by not being a slave—a foundational opposition in the Roman conceptualization of *libertas*.³⁵ The Stoics' indifference to external goods, though it may seem at first a likely jumping-off point for these lines of thought, engendered neither a critique of property ownership nor a theory of property redistribution. Cicero, the leading Roman theorist of republican government, is not above voicing contempt for the populace when he is not seeking its favor for politically expedient reasons, and his ardent defense of property rights corresponds with his firm conviction that the landed wealthy provide the most prudent political leadership for the republic. If he views the republic as a partnership (*societas*) between senate and people, it is quite clear which, to Cicero, is the senior partner.

Yet as I see it, these are precisely the reasons why Rome is relevant to contemporary experience. The array of resemblances between the ideological and material conditions of Roman and modern politics is striking and suggestive. Like us, the Romans faced the challenges of severe economic inequality, corruption, and deeply rooted civil distrust, manifested most prominently today in voter apathy. Like most of us, they placed a high value on individual liberty, the freedom from arbitrary interference from government; they hated tyrannical domination and the forces of corruption that feed it. And like us, they struggled with questions that the republican commitment to liberty raises about various forms of inequality, especially economic equality. But my reason for rereading Roman thought reaches beyond these resemblances.

It is because elitism, racism, sexism, slavery, and nativism have been and to a degree remain institutionalized in the exclusionary and discriminatory laws and practices of modern democracy that the Romans are still useful to us.³⁶ Contemporary democratic citizens continue to define their communities against outsiders—including constructed “outsiders” who live within the community, such as queer people, people of color, immigrants, those suffering from disease, and the poor. We need to understand how these prejudices can live alongside the belief that the republic is free and just, and further, how that belief is preserved and strengthened (consciously or not) by prejudice.³⁷ It is because money still holds immense power to silence and mislead modern citizenries that Roman writing about the consequences of corruption retains significance today. It is because liberal democrats are un-

35 Brunt, “*Libertas*.”

36 This is the reasoning behind Shklar's consideration of the historical impact of slavery on attitudes toward citizenship in the United States: *American Citizenship*, 13.

37 I am grateful to Andrew Riggsby for pressing me to think harder about the relationship between Roman slavery and liberty and the problematic implications for my project.

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willing, for the most part, to make radical property redistribution the solution to economic inequality that Roman explorations of political solutions to economic problems, and the ways in which they at once recognize and evade economic inequity as destructive of politics, are directly relevant to our ongoing efforts to minimize poverty and pull down the psychological and social barriers dividing the poor from the rest of the citizenry.³⁸

Contradictorily dedicated to liberty and to the reverent preservation of social and economic hierarchies, to popular consent and elite authority, to persuasive eloquence and strict limits on popular deliberation, the Romans hold up a mirror to our political weak spots and our deepest sources of silent social discomfort. They force us to acknowledge values and dispositions we might prefer to disregard, as we do when we devote ourselves, say, to the recuperation of Athenian democracy and its commitment to equal participation, its eradication of political inequality, its inspiring language of civic friendship and popular consensus. This is not to dismiss the study of Athens, of course, but to stress that hierarchical, class-divided, patriotic Rome brings to the theoretical table certain issues that Athenian participatory democracy does not.

But this brings us back to the question: what is the republic? And what counts as republican political thought? The ideal of a free, unified, cohesive, neighbor- and nation-loving deliberative collective whose aim is *concordia* under the rule of law and whose defenders are staunch exempla of sovereign, self-knowing, self-governing virtue is one important part of the republican tradition. This tradition includes the philosophical works of Aristotle and Cicero, Machiavelli's study of an expansionist, militaristic Rome in his *Discorsi*, Guicciardini's treatment of republican virtue for early sixteenth century *ottimati*, Venetian thinkers on the optimal form of *governo misto*, English agrarian disputes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the early American belief in a "natural aristocracy."³⁹ Knotting together these strands are certain normative concepts, especially freedom and the rule of law, congenial to modern political analysis.⁴⁰

38 Though redistribution is still very much on the table in liberal thought, from the work of Amartya Sen and John Rawls to the recognition vs. redistribution debate: see, e.g., Benhabib, "From recognition to redistribution? The paradigm change in contemporary politics," in *The Claims of Culture*.

39 See J. G. A. Pocock's influential account in *The Machiavellian Moment*; Philip Pettit, *Republicanism*; Quentin Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism*; Elizabeth Asmis, "A new kind of model: Cicero's Roman constitution in *de republica*."

40 On the much-studied question of how concepts get articulated in the field of discourse over time through changing idioms and rhetorics, which I cannot treat in detail here, see the essays in *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, ed.

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Neither defenders nor critics of this version of republicanism are entirely wrong. But they are arguing over just one strand of Roman republican filiation. (This is what Richard Rorty has called the “calamity” of intellectual history: that most historians “know in advance what their chapter headings are going to be” and thus fail to question their categories.⁴¹) This book ventures a different approach.

THE ROMAN SCENE AND ITS RELEVANCE

Picture the Roman political scene: a rich and righteous senatorial elite versus an impecunious People whose identity was bound up in the memory of repeatedly having fought and overcome that elite for the sake of liberty.⁴² The Roman republic was a polity shaped by the collective experience of almost nonstop war, intense if often corrupt electoral competition, and above all by a tense class conflict fueled by massive economic inequality, elite exploitation, and a social hierarchy with sharply limited permeability. Traditional animosity across socioeconomic lines was intensified by a political system that baldly translated economic status into political power and influence. In its public discourse, moral values and ideology were closely intertwined. The urgent political questions of the early and late republic revolved around which individuals and groups had voices and who could make voice translate into property and power—early on, in the establishment of the tribunate and the legislative powers of the people’s assembly; later, in agrarian reform, the conflict over control of the judicial system, and the granting of emergency powers. By the lifetimes of Cicero and Caesar, the status quo was frequently interrupted by violence.⁴³ Such are the un-

Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan; Pocock, “The concept of a language and the *métier d'historien*: some considerations on practice” in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe*. Paul Patton provides an overview of the twentieth-century paradigm shift in political thought in “After the linguistic turn: post-structuralist and liberal pragmatist political theory,” in the *Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*.

41 Rorty, “The historiography of philosophy: four genres,” 70.

42 Yavetz, *Plebs and Princeps*, 136. T. P. Wiseman quotes this passage, recalling Sallust’s tribune-hero Licinius Macer telling a crowd in the Forum to remember what their *maiores* (ancestors) had achieved (Sallust, *Histories* 3.48.1, 6, 12, 15), *Remembering the Roman People* (3).

43 Side note: my thinking about Rome has been influenced by the work of the brilliant Africanist Achille Mbembe, and especially his comments on his own field of study: “we must speak of Africa only as a chimera on which we all work blindly, a nightmare that we produce and from which we make a living—and which we sometimes enjoy, but which somewhere deeply repels us, to the point that we may evince toward it the kind of disgust we feel on seeing a cadaver. . . . What we designate by the term ‘Africa’ exists only as a series of disconnections, superimpositions, colors, costumes, gestures and appearances, sounds and rhythms,

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stable political conditions out of which republican self-understanding emerges. These belie the abstract discussion of liberty and civic virtue that has so far dominated the republican revival.

In the critical preoccupation with concepts and constitutions dominant in liberal thought today, what is lost is Roman writers' attention to the deep contradictions at the core of their own thinking, the prominent elements of fantasy in their representations of the *res publica*, the central role of passion and action (especially speech), and above all, their attention to the complex social and psychological elements of self-constitution and what the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman calls the "waywardness of constitutive agencies."⁴⁴

My approach rests on two propositions. First, I draw a distinction between what I want to call "republican thought" and the particular values espoused by the Roman governing class. It is easy to misinterpret the existing evidence into a neatly uniform set of dispositions, by defining "Roman ideology," as A. A. Long does, as "the system of values expressed by such terms as *virtus*, *dignitas*, *honestas*, *splendor*, *decus*, and above all, *laus* and *gloria*."⁴⁵ He proceeds to admit that these are values that a noble Roman "would give his life for," but a broader view of Roman ideology must take into account the high value the Romans placed on justice, popular liberty, equity, self-sacrifice, and the rule of law, and the complex interconnections that link each to the rest. It is true that senatorial *libertas* and *dignitas* are interdependent in Cicero's philosophical and epistolary writings and elsewhere in elite literature, but as historians Nicholas Horsfall and P. A. Brunt point out, this is only half the story.⁴⁶ Tacitus saw disempowerment, not moral corruption, as the cause for the Roman people's willingness to yield up their traditional rights of legislation and election (*Ann.* 1.2). Cicero himself believed that the development of popular *libertas* was powered by economic unrest engendered by debt-bondage (*Rep.* 2.59).

Second, I will approach these texts with particular contemporary questions in mind, from the extent of individual participation required from citizens of modern democracies to the relationship between poverty and political apathy. The particular relevance of Sallust and Cicero and Horace to these questions will emerge in due course, but I want to declare immedi-

ellipses, hyperboles, parables, misconnections, and imagined, remembered, and forgotten things, bits of spaces, synopses . . ." (from the conclusion to *On the Post-Colony*, 241–42).

44 Quotations from Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, 39, 42; see also the critique of Alain Touraine, "Is sociology still the study of society?" *Thesis Eleven* 23.

45 Long, "The politics of Cicero's *de Officiis*," 216.

46 Horsfall, *The Culture of the Roman Plebs*, 26–30; Brunt, "Libertas," 330, 348.

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ately what this book does *not* advocate: a defense of the classic *vita activa*, the ideal of life fully engaged with civic affairs, which is regularly understood in contemporary political theory as the core of classical republican thought. I identify priorities, above all attention to economic inequity, around which Roman writers build a strident moralistic tradition that fortifies itself against change even in the act of calling for it (itself a strategy worth exploring and understanding). I articulate a set of dispositions, habits of reading the world that empower citizens to live in a state of uneasy balance between security in the law and the understanding that laws alone are insufficient to guarantee everyone's freedom, and carrying on from that, the understanding that laws must be resistible. This understanding comes, I think, from the habits of perceiving the world from a standpoint divided and not one's own, and of sustaining ironical self-awareness of one's own investments and assumptions—not least about oneself.

OVERVIEW

I begin with Cicero's dialogue *de Republica*, where I examine the roles of antagonism, consensus, and institutionalization in republic politics. For Roman citizens, contest and strife were daily features of their lives, from energetic verbal and physical abuse to the emphasis on competition in political discourse. Struggle characterized the relations within the governing elite, between senate and tribunes, between senate and popular assemblies, and among familial and economic interest groups. Chapter 1 presents Cicero as a thinker concerned with a collective of antagonists and competing interests, against conventional portrayals of his ideal republic as a homogeneous, unified, harmonious community.

Chapter 2, "Justice in the World: The Execution of *Jugurtha*," turns to questions of justice and ends with a close reading of Sallust's *Jugurtha* (and to a lesser extent, his *Catiline*). Sallust organizes his history of Jugurtha's war against the Romans in the North African kingdom of Numidia around the themes of justice and corruption; he ends by abruptly cutting off the conclusion of his story, the execution of Jugurtha. I argue that Sallust's withholding of judgment at the end of *Jugurtha* signifies the ways in which agents in the decaying republic withhold justice on a larger scale. The silence at the ending caps a narrative pattern of repetition and deferral, creating a fundamental dislocation of consequentiality, the notion of an essential relation between intention and action. The civil conflicts that traverse the republican order, together with the desire for power that corrupts politi-

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cal leaders, Sallust suggests, deform civic judgment, the execution of justice, and the passage of time itself. His text proposes that along with calling leaders to account and demanding transparency in the exercise of power, citizens must form habits of orienting themselves in the political world and of assessing the structural violence of that world, in order to defend themselves from the tyranny of domination. Meanwhile, his fine-grained attention to bodies, especially bodies in states of extremity, draws our attention to the corporeal aspect of political life, including a kind of knowledge of the world that only bodies can give us.

With the third chapter I continue the theme of judgment as it is addressed in the poetic genre devoted to passing judgment on one's fellows: satire. Here, as I read Horace's first book of *Satires*, my main question is the influence of others over the subject, and the degree to which the subject's desire for, or fantasy of, autonomy is interrupted by his reliance on, and pleasure in, the influence of those around him. The satiric narrator is a complex subject, mercurial, self-divided, and self-critical, highly attentive to his own faults and suspicious of his capacity to render judgment even in the act of doing so. The divided self is the subject of the short fourth chapter, which takes up several orations of Cicero in their historical context. It reflects on the Roman preoccupation with faces, situations, the mutability of selfhood, and the degree to which the divided self mirrors the division of the polity. Both chapters seek to suture the false opposition between authenticity and artfulness. In Horace and in Cicero, a person's persona is something he refines—a work of art. We too put forward appearances to the world. What does the Roman attention to appearance—how we look to others and how they look to us—teach us about our capacities for moral judgment and our sense of obligation to others?

With the advent of Julius Caesar come the end times of the republic, and the final chapter thus turns to one of Cicero's Caesarian orations. Several key themes from previous chapters come together: responsibility to the other, the significance of imagination and recognition, the politics of irony, the limits of self-sovereignty. Interwoven with these themes is an emphasis on the necessity of speech, speech that may retain some element of resistibility even in the face of tyrannical domination. By including in a book about republican political thought a speech that is commonly taken as the starting point of imperial panegyric, I also intend to foreground the fact that all the texts under consideration here emerge in conditions of disruptive and disrupted politics. It is the shock of the repeat experience of autocracy (after the "decisive rift" created by Marius' seven consulships in the late

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second century) that distills the republican vision at the heart of Cicero's speech on behalf of the exile Marcellus.⁴⁷

I call this a book about the life of republicanism because it examines aspects of lived self-awareness to which the Roman writers treated here draw special attention, and that I take to be key to contemporary life as well. In his book *The Ethos of the Late Modern Citizen*, Stephen White warns against dismissing too quickly “the subtle but significant role that certain dispositions and actions may have for the enhancement of democratic life.”⁴⁸ We had better be concerned with a notion of citizenship that grants a certain standing to citizens, a certain sense of self-worth, and that embodies a strong sense of obligation to others and others' opinions. We too should see economic inequity as the central danger to the republic—even if we must look beyond the ancient political canon for solutions to our problems. We must guard against the hubris that comes with uncritical certainty and confidence in our ability to know and master ourselves. And we must learn to live with antagonism as a fundamental condition of politics, and choose our political priorities accordingly—giving first place to the preservation of speech from all quarters of society, including those that we forget to count in the census and in our imaginations.

47 Flower, *Roman Republics*, 27–29.

48 White, *The Ethos of the Late Modern Citizen*, connects his projects to Michel Foucault's recovery of the word *ethos* (4). Like Landy, who emphasizes the voluntary element in his account of fiction's power to mold and enhance our mental capacities, White insists that “the depth of one's commitment [to the ethical stance he describes] does not translate immediately into absoluteness of conviction”—an unsatisfying but honest observation.