

## Imperial Republics and the Agrarian Law: Machiavelli in the Eighteenth Century

### Introduction

Although the scholarly literature on Machiavelli has emphasized his republicanism<sup>1</sup>, recent work on Machiavelli's imperialism<sup>2</sup> has complemented this emphasis. This paper serves to question the antithesis of republic and empire through an examination of Machiavelli's analysis of Rome as an imperial republic, and of the views of James Harrington and of eighteenth-century followers of Machiavelli, especially John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, and Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu.<sup>3</sup> Although David Armitage has claimed that "republicanism and empire were never entirely happy bedfellows,"<sup>4</sup> I intend to show that, for Machiavelli and his followers, republicanism and imperialism were quite compatible; indeed much of the attraction of Rome to the eighteenth century pertained to republican Rome's ability to create a great empire.

Various thinkers of the eighteenth century distinguished Greek colonies, which were autonomous from the mother country, and Roman provinces, which were subject to Roman rule, but Adam Smith was one of the few thinkers that recommended the Greek, rather than the Roman, model for Britain's American colonies. Smith wrote that Rome was initially founded on the agrarian law that stipulated that conquered lands were to be divided amongst the plebeians on condition that they furnish the public treasury with a tithe of the produce of the public lands. Later the Licinian law stipulated that land holdings were to be limited to five hundred acres. These laws were "either neglected or evaded, and the inequality of fortunes went on increasing. The greater part of the citizens had no land" and as a result, the dispossessed plebs were sent to

establish colonies as garrisons in conquered territories.<sup>5</sup> Voltaire anticipated Smith in his *Letters Concerning the English Nation*<sup>6</sup>:

The *Roman* Senate who were so unjustly, so criminally proud, as not to suffer the Plebeians to share with them in any thing, cou'd find no other artifice to keep the latter out of the Administration than by employing them in foreign wars. They consider'd the Plebeians as a wild beast, whom it behov'd them to let loose on their neighbours, for fear they should devour their masters. Thus the greatest defect in the Government of the *Romans* rais'd 'em to be Conquerors.

I intend to show that, for Machiavelli as for Voltaire and Smith<sup>7</sup>, the imperial dynamic of republican Rome arose from the flouting of the agrarian laws by the senatorial classes and that Harrington, Trenchard, Gordon and Montesquieu wanted the incompatible objectives of republican equality and senatorial authority. Monarchists, such as Voltaire, criticized the Roman senate but republicans tended to see the senate as the head and heart of Rome and exempted it from criticism in violating the agrarian laws.

### **Machiavelli and the Eighteenth Century**

James Harrington repeatedly insisted that an agrarian law was essential to republics<sup>8</sup>, but did not blame senatorial intransigence for the failure to implement the laws regulating accumulation of property, as his contemporary, Marchamont Nedham did.<sup>9</sup> Harrington celebrated the Roman senate's role in public deliberations, confining popular assemblies to accepting or rejecting the senate's counsel without debate, whereas Athens was ruined by popular assemblies debating as well as resolving public policy.<sup>10</sup> Oceana can copy Rome by having "the empire of the world". Moreover, by avoiding the mistakes of Rome (not observing the agrarian law and rotation of magistrates), Oceana may create an unlimited and immortal empire; "*Imperium*

*Oceano famamque terminet astris.*"<sup>11</sup> Trenchard and Gordon wrote that "A free people are kept so, by no other means than an equal distribution of property."<sup>12</sup> They elaborated; "liberty can never exist without equality, nor equality be long preserved without an agrarian law" and that "if the Romans had well observed the agrarian law," Caesar could never have established his tyranny.<sup>13</sup> Gordon, in *The Works of Tacitus*, praised the "Agrarian Law, a Law so necessary to the State, so necessary to preserve equality among Citizens, without which they could not be long free...."<sup>14</sup> Yet, Trenchard and Gordon so identified the Roman senate with the republic that they, like Harrington, justified the senate ordering the death of those supporting equality or the agrarian law as would-be Cromwells.<sup>15</sup> Although Sallust thought the Gracchi "attempted to recover to the people their ancient liberties, and to expose to view the iniquity and encroachment of a few domineering grandees,"<sup>16</sup> Gordon wrote that he translated Sallust "on purpose to supply the Defects of *Sallust*."<sup>17</sup> Specifically, Gordon thought Sallust misjudged the Gracchi who were "aiming avowedly at the Abasement, probably the Destruction, of the Senate, as well as the Relief of the poor Plebeians." In reality, Gordon thought, "the *Gracchi* breathed the true spirit of the Tribunal Power, ever turbulent and aspiring, ever producing popular tyrants." They aimed to cripple the state: "The Senate, the great Council, one of the two Limbs of the State, was to be lopped off, or laid aside, or rendered intirely useless, and the State itself to be disabled and mutilated, and consequently the Constitution changed, to make Way, not for a popular Government, but for the furious and unnatural Sway of a few Demagogues, naturally and necessarily ending in the tyranny of One."<sup>18</sup> Political balance required the authority of the Roman senate: "In *Rome*, for a great while, no Ordinance of the People could pass, without the Authority and Sanction of the Senate, a most reasonable Restraint, to keep popular Passion and Folly from gaining the force and Terror of Law. Afterwards, by the Violence of popular Faction, this wise

Precaution was lost; and the People could make Laws, without the Senate: but the Senate none, without the Consent of the People.”<sup>19</sup> Rome’s senate prevented the democratic anarchy of Athens; when Pericles “broke the power of the Areopagus, the senate of Athens, a court of magistrates that balanced the power of the populace; who, being set free from that restraint, ran into all manner of licentiousness and corruption.”<sup>20</sup>

Trenchard and Gordon contrasted Greek colonies, which were legislatively autonomous, from Roman provinces, and recommended an empire of trade for the Americas but advocated subjecting Ireland to the status of a Roman province.<sup>21</sup> Montesquieu followed Trenchard and Gordon in distinguishing empires of trade from empires of conquest<sup>22</sup> but supported England’s having “crushed” Ireland’s linen and wool trade “by the right of nations.”<sup>23</sup> Montesquieu’s *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and Their Decline* also followed Trenchard’s and Gordon’s view of the necessity of social equality in republican regimes<sup>24</sup> but championed a wealthy senatorial class as authoritative policy makers for expanding or imperial republics.<sup>25</sup> In *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu again tied republicanism to equality<sup>26</sup> but perceived an indispensable role for the senate in imperial policy.<sup>27</sup> Montesquieu favored a maritime empire of trade to land-based empires of conquest but, in Athens’ maritime empire, “the common people distributed the public revenues to themselves while the rich were oppressed.”<sup>28</sup>

Machiavelli and his eighteenth-century followers thought the discord concerned with the implementation of the agrarian law was the cause of the decomposition of the Roman republic. Monarchists, such as Voltaire<sup>29</sup>, Nathaniel Hooke,<sup>30</sup> Giambattista Vico<sup>31</sup> and Jean-Louis de Lolme<sup>32</sup> attributed the fall of the republic to senatorial intransigence in refusing to provide land for landless Roman soldiers and compelling the plebeians to live from conquest. However, the

dominant view amongst eighteenth-century republicans blamed popular or tribune ambition for the failure that led to the civil wars between the popular and senatorial champions, Marius and Sulla, Caesar and Pompey, Anthony and Brutus, culminating in the Principate of Octavius.

Machiavelli's account of the conflict over the agrarian law in *Discourses on Livy* (I.37) suggests both popular ambition and senatorial intransigence for the failure to maintain the Roman republic. Machiavelli wrote that "it was not enough for the Roman plebs to secure itself against the nobles by the creation of the tribunes...; for having obtained that, it began at once to engage in combat through ambition, and to wish to share honors and belongings with the nobility as the thing most esteemed by men. From this arose the disease that gave birth to contention over the Agrarian Law, which in the end was the cause of the destruction of the republic." He also indicated that "the greater part of the nobles" violated the egalitarian provisions of the law, were violently opposed to any limits on accumulation of land; the three hundred year conflict over the agrarian law was not disastrous because the Romans "would perhaps have been led into servitude much sooner if the plebs had not always checked the ambition of the nobles, both with this law and with its other appetites." Men value property over honor; "the Roman nobility always yielded honors to the plebs without extraordinary scandals, but when it came to property, so great was its obstinacy in defending it" that scandal and bloodshed could not be avoided. In the chapter on the agrarian law, Machiavelli did not mention that the senatorial class murdered every proponent of the agrarian law from Spurius Cassius in 486BC, through Spurius Maelius, Manlius Capitolinus to Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus. Machiavelli concluded the chapter on the agrarian law by asserting that the Gracchi deserve praise for their intentions to provide land for citizens but deserve censure for not letting sleeping dogs lie, and arousing plebeian ire by resurrecting the agrarian law, which had lain dormant during the Punic Wars during which time the power and

property of the senatorial class had increased.

Machiavelli made clear the indispensable role of the senate in the context of imperial conquest.<sup>33</sup> We shall explore the connection between world conquest and the senatorial blocking of the agrarian law later; we shall just note Machiavelli's observation that "well-ordered republics have to keep the public rich and its citizens poor."<sup>34</sup> Whereas the Aristotelian self-sufficient state was based on the citizen as farmer-soldier, and the Athenian empire on the demotic oarsmen who profited by naval expansion, the Roman imperial republic was based, after the siege of Veii, on professional soldiers, with war booty going to the public treasury and to the senatorial class. Eighteenth-century republicans, while upholding equality as essential to republics, tended to side with the senatorial class and deprecate tribune efforts to implement the agrarian law.<sup>35</sup>

Why would Machiavelli, who espoused a morality of results not intention<sup>36</sup> praise the Gracchi's intentions when the result was disastrous? Machiavelli praised Tiberius Gracchus's conduct in the Punic wars for fighting "with slaves that the Romans from lack of men had armed" and making it a capital offense to insult the slaves.<sup>37</sup> Machiavelli did not connect the "lack of men" with the slaves working the large *latifundia* owned by the Senators who violated the agrarian law. However, according to Plutarch and Appian, it was the very reason for Tiberius Gracchus' attempt to enforce the agrarian laws. In his *Life of Tiberius Gracchus*, Plutarch wrote that Tiberius, when traveling through Italy found no farmers or shepherds; the laborers were all foreign slaves. His attempt to enforce the agrarian law tried to resettle soldiers on the land. Plutarch praised his means and his end: "Never did any Law appear more moderate and gentle, especially being enacted against so great an Oppression and Avarice: For they who ought have been severely punished for transgressing the former Laws, and should have lost all their Titles to

such Lands, which they had unjustly usurped; yet they were ordered notwithstanding to receive a Gratuity for quitting their unlawful Claims, and restoring their Lands to their right Owners, which stood in need thereof.”<sup>38</sup> Appian wrote that the patricians illegally acquired public lands, installed slaves who did not have military service and thus could work the land without interruption; the patricians became wealthy while the plebeians (who by law should have settled the land and paid the public treasury a tithe of their produce) diminished in numbers and oppressed by taxes, poverty and military service. Appian concluded: “For this reason [the tricks of the senators] the numbers of citizens and soldiers diminished still more, as did the returns from the public lands...”<sup>39</sup>

Monarchists, as stated above, tended to espouse Plutarch’s and Appian’s account of the struggle over the agrarian law, while republicans followed Machiavelli in crediting the senatorial accounts of Livy and Tacitus. For example, the Jacobite exile, Nathaniel Hooke wrote that the Roman plebeians “had not only a *natural* but a *positive* right to the benefit of the *Agrarian laws*.” Tiberius Gracchus, “the most accomplished patriot that ever *Rome* produced,” was no leveller but aimed “to strengthen the Republic by an increase of useful numbers, upon which he thought the safety of *Italy* depended.” Comparing the rapacious Roman senate to large Whig landowners, Hooke declaimed: “Liberty and the Republic are cant-words, where the bulk of the people have no property, nor the privilege of living by their labour. Did our laws allow of any slavery in this island, and should the landed gentlemen, the proprietors of large estates, in order to make the most of them, take them out of the hands of their tenants, and import *Negroes* to cultivate their farms; so that the British husbandmen and labourers, far from having any encouragement to marry, had no means to subsist: Would an universal practice of this sort be called particular acts of justice?”<sup>40</sup>

Eric Nelson's bold *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought* sharply distinguishes the Greek from the Roman republican traditions and portrays Machiavelli as partially captive of partisans of the Roman senate, such as Livy and Tacitus, and their view of the inviolability of property holdings, as distinct from the Greek view that redistribution is justified if it strengthens the civic body.<sup>41</sup> In Nelson's view, Machiavelli's approach to the agrarian and Licinian laws "represents a substantial shift away from the standard Roman and neo-Roman approach" without espousing the Greek approach.<sup>42</sup> Where I would differ from Nelson pertains to his view that "the Greek tradition" successfully held its own against the "Roman and neo-Roman" views of the sanctity of private property and of the authoritative role of a senatorial class throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Secondly, I would emphasize that the Roman (or at least senatorial) tradition of non-distribution was central to the imperial dynamic of republican Rome.

Admiration for Rome as an oligarchic republic was frequently tied to a critique of democratic Athens. James Harrington appeared neutral in contrasting Athens and Rome: "the people [ate] the nobility in Athens, and the nobility the people in Rome." But Rome was his model republic because "Athens. . . was plainly lost through the want of a good aristocracy."<sup>43</sup> Rome's senate prevented the democratic anarchy of Athens. Trenchard and Gordon, as we saw, agreed with Harrington that Athens degenerated after Pericles "broke the power of the Areopagus, the senate of Athens." Montesquieu, after comparing Athens with England as commercial empires and rulers of the waves, asserted that in Athens, "the common people distributed the public revenues to themselves while the rich were oppressed." Like Machiavelli, Montesquieu seemed to think the people should remain poor and the public rich. The great champion of commerce praised the non-commercial Romans for carving out "the most durable empire in the world" founded on virtue rather than trade.<sup>44</sup> Montesquieu championed the Roman



senate in the construction of empire; democratic Athens did not merely choose magistrates but took part in public discussions and set public policy: “The people are not at all appropriate for such discussions; this forms one of the great drawbacks of democracy.”<sup>45</sup> Rousseau followed Harrington and Montesquieu in advocating aristocratic government and popular sovereignty; the people need a wise senate to propose laws for the people to accept or reject without deliberating; the power of the people to propose new laws “finally ruined Athens.”<sup>46</sup> In advocating an aristocratic senate to govern the sovereign people<sup>47</sup>, Rousseau was, in this respect, in tune with his time. Moreover, he was faithful to the Machiavellians heritage when he wrote: “The Romans saw the necessity of agrarian laws when it was no longer time to establish them.” The Gracchi wanted to deprive the patricians of lands but “it would have been necessary to prevent them from acquiring them.”<sup>48</sup>

Alexander Hamilton thought Sparta and Rome had forms of representative republics in that they elected ephors and tribunes as popular representatives to oversee their senates, kings and consuls, rather than having the people deliberate on public policy as in Athens. Hamilton wrote: “The ancient republics [Sparta and Rome exempted], in which the people themselves deliberated, never possessed one feature of good government. Their very character was tyranny; their figure deformity: when they assembled, the field of debate presented an ungovernable mob, not only incapable of deliberation, but prepared for every enormity.”<sup>49</sup> For this reason, Hamilton and Madison insisted that the United States was a republic, with a system of representatives like Sparta or Rome, rather than a democracy, like Athens where the people directly decided on legislation and public policy. The pithiest statement of the constitutional deficiency of Athens, inverting Aristotle’s view of the collective judgment of the many poor, is James Madison’s statement in *Federalist 55*: “Had every Athenian citizen been a Socrates; every Athenian

assembly would still have been a mob.” If Hamilton looked to Rome for a model of effective bicameral legislatures<sup>50</sup>, he and Madison insist that no stable republic can do without a strong senate.<sup>51</sup> Improving on the representative institutions of Sparta and Rome, the American government is based in “*the total exclusion of the people in their collective capacity from any share*” in legislation, policy formation or governmental administration.<sup>52</sup> Daniel Shays was perceived by the Federalists in much the same way as Roman senators saw Tiberius Gracchus, and thus, as Madison put it, constitutional arrangements would prevent “a rage for paper money, for an abolition of debts, for an equal division of property, or for any other improper and wicked project.”<sup>53</sup> Edmund Burke, as much a friend of the American Revolution as he later became an enemy of the French Revolution, thought the French unicameral National Assembly resembled Athens once the aristocratic council of the Areopagus had been replaced by a democratic council that prepared business to be discussed and decided at the popular assembly. Burke wrote: “the court and senate of Areopagus” had served in Athens “as one of the balances and correctives to the evils of a light and unjust democracy.”<sup>54</sup> Burke, to be sure, was Ciceronian in thinking the main function of government is the protection of unequal amounts of private property. However, my point in this section is that even those favorable to the Roman agrarian laws supported the Roman senate that violated the laws, rather than the magistrates and people who upheld the law.

### **Aristotelian Anti-Imperialism and Machiavellian Imperialism**

Aristotle thought that imperial states were tyrannical and maintained that a civic life is only possible in a self-sufficient state, one that lives off its own economic, military and cultural resources.<sup>55</sup> Imperial states not only are unjust to those they conquer but also imperial policy distorts the internal arrangements of a state, transforming persuasive relationships between statesmen and citizens into a garrison state organized by military principles of command (*Pol*,

1333a-1334a). As distinct from Cicero<sup>56</sup>, Aristotle (*Pol*, 1280a) rejected the view that securing private property was the end of political life, and hence the share of political offices and honors, should be proportionate to their share of property. J.G.A. Pocock stated that, for Aristotle, “the *polis* was a kind of ongoing potlach in which citizens emancipated themselves from their possessions in order to meet face-to-face in a political life that was an end in itself.”<sup>57</sup> Aristotle (*Pol*, 1293b-1296b) favored mixed constitutions where the rich should serve in individual magistracies (because rich individuals are more likely to be loyal to the existing regime in which they have prospered, more likely to be educated or qualified for public life, and less likely to be tempted to abuse office by accepting bribes) and the poor serve in collective bodies (the council, the assembly and the juries). The collective prudence and integrity of the many poor exceeds that of the few rich and thus it is just and fitting that those who are individually superior in virtue should be subject to the sovereign assembly composed of individuals who are individually inferior but collectively superior to the wealthy few. Since revolutions usually turn on the question of property, Aristotle recommended redistribution of land to create a class of farmers who would be too busy for frequent attendance at popular assemblies, rather than monetary relief (*Pol*, 1318b-1320b). The farmer-soldier was the backbone of the stablest regime, the middle-class democracy or polity. The outdoor life of the farmer provided a good preparation for the defense of the *polis*. To oversimplify, eighteenth-century monarchists thought tribunal efforts in the 350 years from Spurius Cassius to Tiberius Gracchus were attempts to create a stable republic based on the farmer-soldier.

Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* frequently mention Athens but Athens is not included in the fundamental dichotomy between imperial republics, such as Rome, and conservative republics, such as Sparta and Venice (*DL*, 17-23). In Machiavelli's view, Athens' greatness was

short-lived (*DL*, 13, 129) relative to Rome, Sparta and Venice; Athens was prey to tyranny as Rome was not (*DL*, 13, 64-66, 118, 230, 233); Athens military relied on money and fortifications as Sparta did not (*DL*, 149, 189); Sparta and Athens established independent colonies or subjected other states to them, an unsuccessful policy compared to the imperial Romans who created dependent allies (*DL*, 136-37) and who encouraged conquered peoples to settle in Rome, thus swelling the martial power of Rome relative to Greek cities (*DL*, 134); and the Athenian *demos* was imprudent in its foreign policy compared to the Roman senate (*DL*, 107, 255), even choosing justice and honor over the state's interest (*DL*, 120-21). Machiavelli only referred to Aristotle in passing, and did not comment on Aristotle's view of the farmer-soldier as the basis of an anti-imperial republic. Machiavelli presented Sparta and Venice as exemplars of anti-imperial republics but they might be better described as unsuccessfully imperial republics. Rather than citizens combining agriculture and defense, Spartan citizens were exempted from agriculture, which was the task of the enslaved Helots, to devote themselves full-time to warfare. Whereas, for Aristotle, Sparta was an imperial state, Machiavelli (*DL*, 134) indicated that Sparta could only put 20,000 citizens in battle because of Lycurgus' prohibition of foreigners, whereas Rome could arm 280,000 men. Imperial republics arm the plebeians, unlike the conservative republics of Sparta and Venice. Machiavelli began his contrast between Rome and conservative republics by saying that, if one wants to create an empire (*DL*, 18), indeed "a great empire" [*un grande imperio*] (*DL*, 21), imitate Rome and arm the plebeians, and if one wishes simply to maintain the state, arm the nobles as Sparta and Venice did. Then he indicated that republics either expand or decline, and so the conservative policy is impractical. Therefore, Machiavelli (*DL*, 23) concluded: "I believe that it is necessary to follow the Roman order and not that of the other republics. . .and to tolerate the enmities that arise between people and the Senate, taking

them as an inconvenience necessary to arrive at Roman greatness.” In contrast to Aristotle’s aim of class harmony, Machiavelli emphasizes the positive features of class conflict. It is in the context of this difference that we may assess Machiavelli’s ambiguous account of the Roman agrarian laws.

Machiavelli (*DL*, 8) began the *Discourses* (I.1) by asserting that a great nation must be settled in a sufficiently fertile place to support a large population but the laws should make it seem sterile so that men are forced to avoid idleness and be industrious: “As to the idleness that the site may bring, the laws should be ordered to constrain it by imposing such necessities as the site does not provide.” Machiavelli never discussed the Aristotelian view (1958, 1333a-1334a) that leisure is the condition of both philosophy and citizenship, and that peace and leisure are the chief goals to be secured by statesmen. Since, according to Machiavelli (*DL*, 15), “hunger and poverty make men industrious,” the enforcement of an agrarian law would diminish soldiers’ desire to live by plunder and thus the imperial character of the Roman republic. Thus Machiavelli (*DL*, 78) supported senatorial strategies to block agrarian laws by making war whenever plebeian agitation for land arose, for bribing tribunes to block the efforts of their colleagues, or for establishing colonies far from Rome, such as Anzio, while violently opposing plebeian demands to be settled in Veii, on fertile land close to Rome. On the senate’s success in blocking plebeian settlements in Veii, Machiavelli (*DL*, 105-06) wrote: “This thing appeared to the Senate and the wisest Romans so useless that they freely said they would suffer death than consent to such a decision.” Machiavelli (*DL*, 210, 237) supported the senate’s murdering of Spurius Cassius and Manlius Capitolinus for attempting to ease the lives of the plebeians. The early expansion of Rome was fueled by soldiers’ desire for war booty, but as wars moved farther from Rome, soldiers received pay instead of booty, which went to the public treasury and relieved the rich

from taxation (*DL*, 141-42). Republican Rome was the model imperialist: “For if there has never been a republic that has made the profits [fatti i profitti] that Rome did, this arose from there never having been a republic that has been organized so as to acquire as did Rome.” (*DL*, 126). As we have seen, Machiavelli thought citizens must remain poor and the public treasury rich; wealth corrupts the possessor and enables him to corrupt others (*DL*, 255). He did not indicate that it was precisely the failure to implement the agrarian and Licinian laws that enabled great and polarized wealth. Machiavelli celebrated the virtue of the poor patrician Cincinnatus, coming from the plough and returning to it after saving Rome, with the message of “the honor that was paid in Rome to poverty” (*DL*, 270-71). Machiavelli did not mention that Cincinnatus’ reduction to working a few acres with a few slaves was the result of paying a heavy fine for the violent and ambitious conduct of his son; as Harvey Mansfield noted,<sup>58</sup> Cincinnatus was hardly a model of the voluntary poverty and the senate’s comportment with respect to the agrarian law casts doubt on Machiavelli’s ideal of honorable poverty.

Machiavelli (*DL*, 269) wrote “that two things were the cause of the dissolution of that republic: one was the contentions that arose from the Agrarian law; the other, the prolongation of commands.” Harrington and Montesquieu followed Machiavelli in assigning these two causes to the fall of the Roman republic but none of them saw senatorial intransigence on the agrarian law to be the reason for the professionization of the military, the longer commands and the loyalty of soldiers to their commanders, rather than to the republic. Machiavelli seemed to think the fall of the republic was the necessary price to pay for its glorious rise; “contention over the Agrarian law took three hundred years to make Rome servile” (*DL*, 80) and its greedy senators led its armies to their glorious empire.

### **Empires and Republics: Machiavelli and Montesquieu**

In referring to Rome as Machiavelli's model of an imperial republic, I am perhaps collapsing the difference between empires and republics, which are often understood as antithetical. Indeed, when Rome was ruled by emperors, it was no longer a republic. Machiavelli wrote about Rome under the emperors in both *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy* and indeed, despite his pronounced republicanism in the *Discourses*, he praised non-tyrannical emperors, such as Titus, Nervus, Trajan, Hadrian, Antonius, and Marcus (*DL*, 32). Machiavelli never went as far as Montesquieu in praising Trajan as "the most accomplished prince in the annals of history. It was a blessing to be born in his reign; nothing was so fortunate or so glorious for the great Roman people."<sup>59</sup> Edward Gibbon referred to the emperors Machiavelli praised as follows: "If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world, during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus."<sup>60</sup> Machiavelli was too attached to republican liberty to espouse the positions of the Enlightenment thinkers.

Machiavelli certainly did not believe Montesquieu's view, albeit limited to the context of federations: "The spirit of monarchy is war and expansion; the spirit of republics is peace and moderation."<sup>61</sup> Nor, as a general statement detached from the context of the prudence of republics allying with monarchies, did Montesquieu. Montesquieu wrote of the Roman republic: "Since Rome was a city without commerce, and almost without arts, pillage was the only means individuals had of enriching themselves."<sup>62</sup> Montesquieu suggested that a less harsh imperialism would be possible if Roman patricians engaged in commerce and, unlike Machiavelli, distinguished empires of trade and empires of conquest.<sup>63</sup> Machiavelli (*DL*, 129-33) insisted that the Romans destroyed all civil life and liberty in Italy during the course of republican expansion and concluded that "of all hard servitudes, that is hardest that submits you to a republic."

Montesquieu, like Machiavelli, attributed Rome's successful expansion to the profundity of its senate.<sup>64</sup> Machiavelli (*DL*, 133-38) went on to say that the greatness of Rome was attributable to its ability to assimilate peoples it conquered, making them dependent allies, as distinct from the Greek practice of establishing independent colonies or subjecting conquered cities to the imperial city. Machiavelli (*DL*, 155-56) stated that the Roman practice of creating allies was in fact deceptive, for the allies were in fact slaves of Rome, although the servitude was bearable under the name of equal allies. However, Machiavelli (*DL*, 177) also asserted that Rome allowed conquered cities to live under their own laws, and provided magistrates to govern them only when asked to do so by the citizens of the subject cities. Montesquieu highlighted the assimilationist character of Roman imperialism<sup>65</sup>:

Thus Rome was really neither a monarchy nor a republic, but the head of a body formed by all the peoples of the world.

If the Spaniards had followed this system after the conquest of Mexico and Peru, they would not have been forced to destroy everything in order to preserve everything.

It is the folly of conquerors to want to give their laws and customs to all peoples. This serves no purpose, for people are capable of obeying in any form of government.

But since Rome imposed no general laws, the various peoples had no dangerous ties among themselves. They constituted a body only by virtue of a common obedience, and without being compatriots, they were all Romans.

Some questions arise from Machiavelli's and Montesquieu's ambiguous statements about Roman



imperialism. Is expansion into contiguous areas imperialism or, following Polybius, would we date Rome's imperialism with its overseas contestation with Carthage in Sicily? Montesquieu asserted that when Roman expansion was limited to Italy, the republic was secure "but when the legions crossed the Alps and the sea", the republican spirit of the soldiers was lost.<sup>66</sup> Another question: Is expansion imperialist if the conquered people consent to, or are assimilated into the ways of, the dominant power? Perhaps imperialism is experienced as such when subject peoples have not internalized the dominant political culture. To adapt Machiavelli's dictum in chapter three of *The Prince*; namely, that imperialism is praiseworthy if successful and blameworthy if unsuccessful, we might say that imperialism is not completely successful if it is regarded as imperialism, that is, if conquered peoples are not fully assimilated into the ways of the dominant power. The ambiguity in Machiavelli's and Montesquieu's account of Roman imperialism is an ambiguity in the notion of imperialism, namely, that military might alone is never sufficient to conquer another people, although imperialism is normally understood in terms of military domination. Coercion and consent are components of all political relationships. Imperialism may manifest itself most clearly through anti-imperialism, or contestations with the dominant power, although resistance to, or extension of, the imperial power are not mutually exclusive options. Nations in the Americas simultaneously resisted and extended Portuguese, Spanish, French and English empires.

However, the concept of imperialism, as the military domination of one people over another, is unsatisfactory since the conquerors or the conquered are neither homogeneous units. Machiavelli's and Montesquieu's Romans seemed to be united only when at war, often the product of a senatorial strategy to divert attention from distribution of lands. Nor would the strategy of divide and conquer be successful if there were not fault lines in the conquered

peoples. Nor do conquering and conquered peoples have stable identities over time, whatever Machiavelli (*DL*, 302-3) appears to have thought. What was imperialism could become nation-building or continental expansion.

Machiavelli's eighteenth-century followers softened his analysis of imperialism by distinguishing empires of trade (British and French naval empires) from empires of conquest (Roman, Spanish and Portuguese). Montesquieu wrote: "At first the Spaniards considered the discovered lands as objects of conquest; peoples more refined than they saw them as objects of commerce."<sup>67</sup> Diderot and Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*, wrongly taken to be anti-imperialist because it opposed empires of conquest,<sup>68</sup> aimed at a French empire of trade; they recognized that Britain ruled the waves but they wanted France to build up its navy and contest the domination of the open seas with the Carthaginians/English.<sup>69</sup> Raynal provided his compatriots with good advice; namely, not to look to short term imperial rivalry and win American independence for the British colonies because the Americans would be more effective in prosecuting the imperial interests of the English-speaking peoples vis-a vis the French and Spaniards than the British would be.<sup>70</sup>

The idea behind the distinction of empires of trade and of conquest is that the former are maritime empires; they had the advantages over older empires of conquest in that they were cheaper to sustain, since sailors were hired or impressed by merchants rather than being paid by governments, and were much less likely to oppress compatriots than soldiers in land-based empires. The merchant-sailor played the role in empires of trade that the farmer-soldier played in Aristotle's self-sufficient *polis*. One might think Athens might have been a model for maritime empires. However, as noted above, Montesquieu, after comparing England and Athens as leading maritime empires, stated that in Athens, the rich were oppressed. The impressed sailors who

enabled Britain to rule the waves were more like the slaves working in Roman galleys than the citizen oarsmen who were the sovereign power of Athens' empire.

Despite the ideal of empires of trade or empires of liberty, in practice, the British and French had to colonize the Americas and the Indies, not merely establish trading posts, to sustain profitable enterprises just as the Spanish and Portuguese had in central and south America. However, the anti-imperial rhetoric of the eighteenth century depended on the efficacy of the distinction between empires of trade and empires of conquest. Diderot's *Supplement au Voyage de Bougainville* dreamed of sexual commerce without the sword to compel or the cross to justify Europe's penetration of Tahiti. But no one ever explained how shipping lanes or trading routes can be kept free of pirates or foreign rivals without a navy or army. As John H. Eliot indicated, Europeans "proved incapable of observing or preserving a distinction between the pursuit of trading relationships and the exercise of power."<sup>71</sup> The entry *colonie* in Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* distinguished various kinds of colonies; the fifth are commercial colonies "which enrich the metropole." From the fact that colonies serve to enrich the metropole, it follows that commerce must be exclusive and the metropole must provide military protection to sustain its monopoly of trade in the colony. Moreover, with the discovery of America, "it was necessary to conquer lands, and to chase the original inhabitants from them, in order to transport new colonists there."<sup>72</sup>

That Machiavelli did not make a distinction between empires of trade and empires of conquest is perhaps not so much a deficiency in his thought as freedom from the illusion that world commerce does not have to be enforced. Rome was a model on both sides of the Atlantic, for both eighteenth-century republicans and monarchists, because of its superiority at empire-building. Edmund Burke wrote that French republican politicians had the

taste for that sort of over-ruling influence which prepared empire or supplied the place of it. They had continually in their hands the observations of *Machiavel* on *Livy*. They had *Montesquieu's Grandeur et Décadence des Romains* as a manual; and they compared with mortification the systematic proceedings of a Roman senate with the fluctuations of a Monarchy. They observed the very small additions of territory which all the powers of France, actuated by all the ambition of France, had acquired in two centuries. The Romans had frequently acquired more in a year.<sup>73</sup>

Certainly the French republic was not unique in its imperial policy; the English Commonwealth pursued a more martial foreign policy than the Stuart monarchy had. The Navigation Act of 1651 and the Anglo-Dutch War made the English rulers of the waves. When Charles II was restored to power, he had ten times as many ships in England's navy than his father had twenty years before.<sup>74</sup> The conquest of Scotland and Ireland by parliamentary armies began to turn England into Great Britain. During the Rump Parliament and Cromwell's Protectorate, Britain acquired the Channel Islands, the Scillies, and the Isle of Man, acquired Acadia from the French, secured Rula Run, an island at the centre of the East Indian trade, formerly in the hands of the Dutch after they had supplanted the Portugese, and made inroads into Spanish America with the acquisition of the Barbadoes, St. Christopher's, and Jamaica. The overtly imperialist character of Harrington's *Oceana* reflected the pride many Englishmen took in Cromwell's accomplishments. Montesquieu recognized that republicans make the most formidable imperialists. In his account of the grandeur of republican Rome, Montesquieu noted: "England was never so respected as under Cromwell, after the wars of the Long Parliament."<sup>75</sup> The American Revolution was more expansionary than colonial America, as Raynal had foretold and began with an invasion to liberate Quebec from the English; Raynal thought that an independent America would shortly

devour France's and Spain's colonial possessions. In a letter of April 27, 1809, Thomas Jefferson advised James Madison to annex Cuba and Canada to create "an empire for liberty": "I am persuaded no constitution was ever before so well calculated as ours for extensive empire and self-government."<sup>76</sup> Madison failed to annex the latter in the war of 1812-14. To Thomas Short on August 4, 1820, Jefferson wrote: "The day is not distant, when we may formally require a meridian of partition through the ocean, on the hither side of which no European gun shall ever be heard, nor an American on the other." Anticipating the Monroe Doctrine, Jefferson continued: "I hope no American patriot will ever lose sight of the essential policy of interdicting the seas and territories of both Americas, the ferocious and sanguinary contests of Europe."<sup>77</sup> While David Armitage is to be admired for bringing republicanism into conjunction with imperialism, his view that they are at odds with one another<sup>78</sup> does not accord with the practice, and the reflections upon it, of the English Civil War, of the imperial rivalries of the eighteenth century and of the republican revolutions of 1776 and 1789.

1. J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975); Quentin Skinner, *The foundations of modern political thought* (Cambridge, 1978); Harvey Mansfield Jr., *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders: A Study of the Discourses on Livy* (Ithaca, 1979); Mark Hulliung, *Citizen Machiavelli* (Princeton, 1983); Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli, eds., *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge, 1990); Maurezio Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford, 1998); J. Patrick Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans: Liberty and Greatness in the Discourses on Livy* (Lanham, 1999); Benedetto Fontana, 'Sallust and the Politics of Machiavelli,' *History of Political Thought*, 24 (2003), pp. 86-108; Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli: a very short introduction* (Oxford, 2004); for an interesting critique

of the neo-Roman republicanism of Pocock, Skinner and Viroli, see Mark Jurdjevic, 'Machiavelli's Hybrid Republicanism,' *The English Historical Review*, 122 (2007), pp. 1228-57.

2. William Connell, 'Machiavelli on Growth as an End,' in *Historians and Ideologues: Essays in Honor of Donald R. Kelley*, eds. Anthony T. Grafton and J.H.M. Salmon (Rochester, 2001), pp. 259-77; Mikael Hörnqvist, *Machiavelli and Empire* (Cambridge, 2004).

3. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* and Samuel Beer, *To Make a Nation: The rediscovery of American Federalism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993) have established the importance of Harrington's thought to American republicanism. Harrington also influenced Abbé Sieyès and the French Revolution. See J.H. Clapham, *The Abbé Sieyès* (London, 1912), pp. 31-2, 109, 174, 264-5; Sven Bodvar Liljegren, *A French Draft Constitution of 1792 modelled on James Harrington's Oceana* (Lund, 1932); Thomas Hafen, *Staat, Gesellschaft und Bürger in Denken von Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès* (Bern, 1994), pp. 38, 146, 167, 197-223, 327; Alois Rifkin, *Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès und die Französische Revolution* (Bern, 2001), p. 213; Michael Sonenscher, *Sans-Culottes: An Eighteenth-Century Emblem in the French Revolution* (Princeton, 2008), pp. 43, 45, 270-73. Trenchard and Gordon, as ideological sources of American republican ideas, have been recognized by Bernard Bailyn, *The ideological origins of the American revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), p. 36 and Ronald Hamowy, introduction to *Cato's Letters: Or, Essays on Liberty, Civil, and Religious, And other Important Subjects* (Indianapolis, 1995), xxxvi. Baron D'Holbach translated Trenchard and Gordon in 1767 and Gordon's *The Works of Tacitus. With political discourses on that author* was translated by P. Daudé

in 1742 and 1751. Catherine Volpilhac-Augier, *Tacite en France de Montesquieu à Chateaubriand* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 45, 75, 415, 432-33, 469-74 indicates that Trenchard and Gordon were important intellectual sources of the French Revolution. Montesquieu's importance in marrying classical republicanism and commercial liberalism has been noted by Thomas Pangle, *Montesquieu's philosophy of liberalism: a commentary on the Spirit of the laws* (Chicago, 1973) and Paul Rahe, *Republics ancient and modern: classical republicanism and the American revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1992).

4. David Armitage, *Greater Britain, 1516-1776* (Aldershot, Hants., 2004), x.

5. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London, 1776), IV.7, Vol. 2, p. 147.

6. Voltaire, *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (London, 1733), p. 54.

7. The conjunction of Machiavelli, the political analyst, and Smith, the economist and moral philosopher, may appear unusual, but Mark Judjevic, 'Virtue, commerce and the enduring republican moment: Reintegrating Italy in the Atlantic republican debate,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 62 (2001), pp. 721-43, especially 731, 738-9 has cogently shown that Machiavelli was concerned with economics, and specifically with the economic dimension of conflict in the Roman republic.

8. James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana and A System of Politics*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 33, 37-38, 57, 61, 100-01, 161-62, 220, 228.

9. Marchamont Nedham, *The Excellencie of a Free State* [1656] (London, 1767), pp. 53, 59, 63, 99-100, 103, 126.

10. Harrington, *Oceana*, pp. 23, 25, 29.

11. *Ibid*, pp. 206-07, 217-18.

12. Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato's Letters*, p. 44.

13. Ibid, p. 253.
14. Thomas Gordon, *The Works of Tacitus. With political discourses upon that author.* (Dublin , 1777-78), 5<sup>th</sup> edition [first edition 1728-31], vol. 5, pp.168-69.
15. *Cato's Letters*, pp. 89-91, 296, 822; Thomas Gordon, *The Works of Sallust, translated into English. With political discourses on that author. To Which is added, a translation of Cicero's four orations against Cataline.* (London, 1744), p. 33 compared Spurius Melius to Cromwell and pp.76-79 added Manlius Capitolinus, Spurius Cassius, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus to the list of would-be Cromwells.
16. Thomas Gordon, *The Works of Sallust* (Glasgow, 1762), p. 167.
17. Gordon, *The Works of Sallust, translated into English*, v.
18. Ibid, pp. 79, 81, 83.
19. Ibid, p. 165.
20. *Cato's Letters*, p. 295.
21. Ibid, pp. 747-53.
22. Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller and Harold S. Stone (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 328, 391.
23. Ibid, p. 329.
24. Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu, *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and Their Decline*, ed. David Lowenthal (Indianapolis, 1999), pp. 27, 39-41.
25. Ibid, pp. 44-45, 67, 84-85, 91.
26. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, xli, p. 436.
27. Ibid, pp.12-13, 159, 182, 510.
28. Ibid, p. 363.



29. Voltaire, *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, p. 54.
30. Nathaniel Hooke, *The Roman History, from the building of Rome to the ruin of the commonwealth* (Dublin, 1767-72), vol. 2, pp. 5-6, 13-22, 62; vol. 4, pp. 343-47, 364-69; vol. 5, p. 5.
31. Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, trans. Thomas G. Bergin and Max H. Frisch (Ithaca, 1968), pp. 24, 54-57, 216, 229, 241, 253-54.
32. Jean Louis de Lolme, *The Constitution of England*, ed. David Lieberman (Indianapolis, 2007), pp. 180-81, 232-33, 253.
33. Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago, 1996), pp. 96-98. All quotation from Machiavelli's *Discourses* are taken from Mansfield's and Tarcov's translation.
34. Ibid, p. 79.
35. Many contemporary interpretations of Machiavelli also attribute the fall of the Roman Republic to tribune ambition (Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders*, pp. 121-22, 142, 345; Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans*, p. 201) or side with the senate in the battle of the orders (Hullung, *Citizen Machiavelli*, p. 31; Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans*, p. 198).
36. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, pp. 29, 301.
37. Ibid, p. 192.
38. Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus, *Plutarch's Lives in eight volumes*, trans. M. Dacier (London, 1727), VII, pp. 89-90..
39. Appian of Alexandria, *The Civil Wars*, trans. John Carter (London, 1996), pp. 4-7, 16-7.
40. Hooke, *Roman History*, vol. 5, p. 5; vol. 4, pp. 369, 345, 364.
41. Eric Nelson, *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought* (Cambridge, 2004). For a

detailed critique of this stimulating book, see Craig B. Champion, 'Classical Republicans: Greek and Roman, Ancient and Modern,' *Polis: The Journal of Greek Political Thought*, 23 (2006), pp. 385-437.

42. Nelson, *Greek Tradition*, p. 85.

43. Harrington, *Oceana*, pp.12, 136.

44. Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, p. 325.

45. Ibid, p. 159.

46. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis, 1987), p. 28

47. Ibid, pp.181-82, 207.

48. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Constitutional Project for Corsica*, in *Collected Writings of Rousseau*, trans. and ed. Christopher Kelly, vol. 11 (Hanover, N.H., 2005), p. 153.

49. Alexander Hamilton, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett and Jacob E. Cooke (New York,1961), vol. 5, p. 39.

50. Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay, *The Federalist*, ed. Jacob E. Cooke (Cleveland, 1965), pp. 209-10.

51. Ibid, p. 426.

52. Ibid, p. 428.

53. Ibid, p. 65.

54. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London, 1791), p.304.

55. Aristotle, *The Politics*, ed. and trans. Ernest Barker (London,1958), 1324a.

56. M. Tulli Ciceronis, *De Officiis* (Amsterdam, 1966), pp. 87, 89, 92.

57. J.G.A. Pocock, "The Ideal of Citizenship Since Classical Times," in *Theorizing Citizenship*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Albany,1995), p. 35.

58. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders*, pp. 388-89.
59. Montesquieu, *Considerations*, p. 141.
60. Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1993), vol. 1, p. 90.
61. Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, p. 132.
62. Montesquieu, *Considerations*, p. 27.
63. Ibid, pp. 98-9.
64. Ibid, p. 67.
65. Ibid, p. 75.
66. Ibid, p. 91.
67. Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, p. 391.
68. See Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton, 2003).
69. Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, *A Philosophical and political history of the settlements and trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, trans. J. Justamond (London, 1776), vol. 4, p. 412; vol. 5, pp., 468, 577.
70. Ibid, vol. 5, 394-95.
71. John H. Elliot, 'The Seizure of Overseas Territories by European Powers,' in *Theories of Empire*, ed. Armitage, p.157.
72. Denis Diderot et Jean D'Alembert, *L'Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* [1751] (New York,1969), t. 3, 649-50.
73. Edmund Burke, *Thoughts on the prospect of a regicide peace, in a series of letters* (London, 1796),111-12.
74. Ronald Findlay and Kevin H. O'Rourke, *Power and Plenty: Trade, War, and the World Economy in the Second Millenium* (Princeton, 2007), 242.

75. Montesquieu, *Considerations*, 107.

76. *The Republic of Letters: The Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison 1776-1826*, ed. James Morton Smith (New York, 1995), vol. 3, 1586.

77. Thomas Jefferson, *Political Writings*, ed. Joyce Appleby and Terence Ball (Cambridge, 1999), 405.

78. Armitage, *Greater Britain*, x; David Armitage, "John Milton: poet against empire," in David Armitage, Armand Hiny and Quentin Skinner eds., *Milton and Republicanism* (Cambridge, 1995), 206-25, especially 224-25; David Armitage, 'Empire and Liberty: A Republican Dilemma,' in *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, ed. Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, 2002), vol. 1, 29.