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NOTE ON THE INTENTION OF JAMES HARRINGTON'S
POLITICAL ART

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James Harrington begins his major work, *The Commonwealth of Oceana*,* by describing the natural resources of the empire of Oceana (England) as they stand in 1656. That is, Harrington describes the character of the land and of the peoples of Oceana, Marpesia (Scotland), and Panopaea (Ireland). This description is the "Introduction, or Order of the Work." The main body of the *Oceana* presents the fundamental laws for the ordering of these resources. These laws, Harrington claims, "make a perfect, and (for aught that in human prudence can be foreseen) an immortal commonwealth." Oceana's political order is perfect because by it no one having the power to subvert can have the interest and no one with the interest can have the power; thus, in Oceana no gentleman "ought to own a shame for preferring his own interest before that of a whole nation".¹ Oceana is free from the fear of internal subversion. She can only be destroyed from without, by earthquake, flood, plague or by a better armed nation. Since there would not be better armed nations in the world,² the *Oceana* ends by holding out the hope of a gloriously ordered republic which holds the whole world in her empire. Quite literally, the *Oceana* ends with praise for the sole legislator of this empire, "Who setting the Kingdomes of the *Earth* at Liberty, Tooke the Kingdome of the *Heav'ns* by Violence."³

Our author's practical intention seems clear. He writes in order to gain conviction for the view that England's old monarchic orders must be replaced with wholly new republican orders. A second and derivative practical intention becomes clear well before the end of the *Oceana*. Harrington wishes to gain conviction for the view that a republican England will conquer all the corrupt continental monarchies – and even the Asian ones. At first holding these conquests provincially, perhaps as Rome held Sicily at first, Oceana would then institute wholly republican forms in each province which could bear them.

* All references to *The Commonwealth of Oceana* are to S.B. Liljegen (ed.), *James Harrington's Oceana* (Heidelberg, 1924). All other references are to James Harrington, *Works: The Oceana and Other Works with an Account His Life by John Toland* (reprint of London, 1771 edition; Dormstadt, 1963).

¹ *Works*, p. 278.

² See *Oceana*, pp. 51-52, 193-198; *Works*, pp. 256-261, 264-269.

³ *Oceana*, p. 226. The structure of the *Oceana* may imitate that of the *Histories* of Polybius. If one does not count Harrington's introduction, the *Oceana* has two preparatory chapters, a main body divided into thirty, and a corollary.

Whom does Harrington wish to convince? Everyone. He says, "There is nothing I so much desire, next the favor of God, as to be popularly understood." But for Harrington the voice of God is the voice of the people. Harrington argues that the people is more powerful, not to say more authoritative, than God. For example, "God or Moses" proposed the "ten commandments" so that they might be "voted by the people of Israel." In the wilderness, the people passed them. In case they had not been passed, they would not be laws. Our author proposes in his *Oceana*. The orders proposed would create perfect republics. Such orders go wholly upon the interest of the whole people and are opposed to the interest and rule of any one or few or some of few. If, as Harrington claims, interest is the cause of all willing and therefore of all actions, there is good reason for him to hope that his orders will be instituted as soon as they are popularly understood.

In order to propagate his proposal for England's future, Harrington first wrote *The Commonwealth of Oceana*. All of his other works – including his most occasional tracts and leaflets and his posthumously published systematic work – are apologies for, restatements of, or elaborations on the *Oceana*. Some of these works are answers to his critics; some are commentaries on the laws for *Oceana*; there is one dialogue. We refer to his political writings, not to his writings on and translations of Vergil. As far as I can tell, Harrington never changed any of his proposals during the time he was speaking and writing about politics in public, during the Interregnum. What Harrington may have said, done, or proposed against Charles II, if indeed he did enter into a conspiracy after the Restoration, cannot be judged. As far as I can tell, all of Harrington's political writings, except perhaps the posthumously published *System of Politics, Delineated in short and easy Aphorisms*, were written during the rule of the Cromwells.

The *Oceana* is a modern utopia. Accordingly, it was written to present a perfect nation. This nation is not presented as in any way an "imagined republic." Modern utopias are meant to be effectual. The *Oceana* is meant to effect hope in every reader – and even in many non-readers – for a known (or knowable) future. In order to indicate how effectual the *Oceana* is meant to be, its author claims that it was written about 1715 or fifty years after it was published. This book is meant to appear as, not a proposal for England's future, but a history, i.e., a record, of England's future and her past insofar as it is relevant to the acceptance of the Harringtonian orders. The point of view of the *Oceana* is "looking backward;" Harrington does not wish *Oceana* to appear as a projection or prediction.⁴ Harrington's reluctance to place much hope in the future is hardly the characteristic disposition of a modern utopian. In order to understand the problem of

⁴ He thinks that republican orders of some kind are inevitable for England: *Oceana*, p. 53; *Works*, pp. 367, 439-442, 446, 461-463, 562-563, 566. Cf. *System of Politics. Works*, p. 467 (aphorism #5).

Oceana's utopian appearance, we briefly compare it with Bacon's *New Atlantis*.⁵

Although this comparison is not directly suggested by the text, nevertheless it may be warranted if only because Bacon is the founder of modern utopianism. In addition, we have the testimony of Harrington's biographer, admirer, and editor; John Toland remarks that the *Oceana*, like *New Atlantis*, was written "in imitation of Plato's *Atlantic story*." Moreover, Harrington himself seems to suggest such a comparison in his apologetic restatement of *Oceana*, *The Art of Lawgiving*.⁶ Indeed, the very titles of the two works suggest this comparison.

Both Bensalem, Bacon's utopia, and *Oceana* are islands. But to reach Bacon's feigned commonwealth a long, dangerous, or at any rate difficult voyage through as yet uncharted waters is necessary. *Oceana* is here. It is England; only the name has been changed. For *Oceana*, there is no need for a future triumph of science, like the triumph of the science of navigation necessary for return voyages to Bensalem; ". . .the growth of *Oceana* gives law to the sea."⁷ The uncertainties represented by the sea, the uncertainties of chance and nature, cannot prevent the actualization of *Oceana*. By faking the publication date, by making his book so plainly a history of England, by presenting the actual written constitution of the perfect and immortal commonwealth, and by certain other devices, Harrington indicates that the actualization of *Oceana* depends not at all on the passage of time, on the future or the further conquest of nature/chance. *Oceana* is not remote. Thus the *Oceana* is a completed work; nothing is lacking as is the case with the *New Atlantis*.

We see that in Bensalem science of technology is pervasive. The very names of things refer to the "goals and tools of scientific power."⁸ Science and scientists rule Bensalem. Inventors are the most honored men there. *New Atlantis* ends with a speech by the head scientist, the Father of Solomon's House, in which the wonders of her technology are described. Especially, the scientists may be able to overcome plagues, earthquakes, floods and such like acts of nature. Indeed it seems that men themselves have been transformed by the rule of science and scientists; in Bensalem there may be neither war nor commerce.

In *Oceana*, not science but the law is pervasive. The names here conjure up the character of those to whom they are given. The Virgin Queen now is called "Parthenia." The two universities are renamed after the muses of history and poetry. The most honored man in *Oceana* is Olphaus Megaletor who founded her republican Orders. The *Oceana* ends with an elaborate

⁵ The comparison was inspired by Howard B. White, *Peace Among the Willows: The Political Philosophy of Francis Bacon* (The Hague, 1968), pp. 93-166.

⁶ *Works*, p. 436.

⁷ *Oceana*, p. 11.

⁸ White, p. 102.

praise of him. Oceana is ruled by law, not by men or scientists. We see that men are not greatly changed; Oceana is built for war and expansion. Oceana is probably as wealthy as Bensalem, but she is not free from plague. The laws for Oceana may make men good, for "good laws make good men;" the laws do not provide for the advancement of experimental science, nor for the end to natural catastrophe.

This comparison might lead the reader to conclude that *The Commonwealth of Oceana* is not a part of the modern utopian tradition. The commonwealth presented by Harrington is not primarily the peaceful, prosperous, healthful society, nor the society made possible by technology, which is usually associated with modern utopian writings. In his *Seven Models of a Commonwealth*, Harrington argues that *Oceana* is as much one of those "chimaeras or utopias" as any description of the laws and orders of an historical nation; *Oceana* is no more an utopia than Livy's Rome. Compared to Bensalem and all other modern utopias, the proposal of the *Oceana* does indeed appear very moderate. In *Oceana* men will still work, go to war, make profits and take losses, get sick, and die. So the *Oceana* holds out the moderate (but – from the point of view of the ancient utopians – extravagant) hope for a glorious England whose empire shall have no limits and which shall exist forever.

Harrington seems to use the utopian form for Machiavellian reasons, for purposes of propagation. Harrington judged that his utopian form would be especially attractive to the intellectuals of his day. There is evidence that this judgment was correct.⁹ And when some complained that *Oceana* was too learned, Harrington wrote *Valerius and Publicola*. This dialogue is distinguished by its lack of learned quotations, Latin phrases, and historical examples. Rather the interlocutors mean to "begin upon some known principle," namely "All power is in the people," and to proceed to extract the perfect commonwealth "*ex puris naturalibus*." The dialogue form was selected because, if it is well managed, this form "is the clearest and most effectual for conveying a man's sense into the understanding of his reader." The *Seven Models*, which epitomizes seven or eight republics including *Oceana*, is meant to show that "the whole, and the highest mysteries" of republican government may be brought "to the lowest capacity of vulgar debate." Harrington did not think, then, that the utopian form was especially necessary to his practical plan; but the utopian form is essential to Bacon's intention because the society predicted or sought by *New Atlantis* cannot be presented – even today – as a distinct possibility. Harrington's *Oceana* is presented as a distinct present possi-

⁹ See *Works*, p. xxi; *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, ed. Oliver Lawson Dick (Ann Arbor, 1957), p. 125; David Masson, *The Life of John Milton: Narrated in Connexion with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of His Time*, Vol. V (London, 1877), pp. 484-486. For the reaction of the philosopher of his time, see *Aubrey*, p. 124.

bility. If the principles of government presented early in the *Oceana* are sound, then the civil order presented by *Oceana* may be instituted here, now, and today. No further developments of science – including political science – are necessary for the Oceanic order, nor are they encouraged by the *Oceana*.

If Harrington uses the utopian form merely as a device, if there is no necessary connection between Harrington's immediate practical proposal and its utopian expression, then whatever does our author mean by *The Commonwealth of Oceana*? That is, why "Oceana"? Why not "England," since it is obvious to every reader that Oceana is England and since the *Oceana* is nothing if it is not a proposal for England? Harrington calls our attention to these questions. On the first title page of *Oceana*, the one without Harrington's name on it and without the dedication to the Lord Protector,¹⁰ is the work's motto: "Tantalus a labris, fugientia captat Flumina: Quid rides? mutato nomine, de te Fabula narratur." Why does Harrington change names?

Name-changing is the most obvious literary device of the *Oceana*. This device is only used in *Oceana*; it is not even alluded to in his other works, save one.¹¹ In contrasting himself with his adversary, Harrington notes that he does not libel anyone in *Oceana* because he does not use names. But this remark occurs in a work which Harrington calls comic. Besides, more than the names of living men are changed. It is not the case that the changed names protect the innocent. It is manifest that "Oceana" is England. Who could be "Leviathan" but Hobbes? What better name for the king who ruled the lull before the storm of civil war than "Morpheus"? Should not the king who attempted to consolidate the monarchy be named "Panurgus" (Henry VII)? The changed names do not seem to conceal anything. On the contrary, the changed names consistently reveal something of the author's judgment on their owner's character. Yet Harrington does not change all names; some men, even some Englishmen, and some countries keep their names. Therefore, we must account for the name changes as they are. We turn now to the passage in the *Oceana* where Harrington writes of name-changing.

First, consider the context of that passage. Consider the broad outline of *Oceana*. This book consists of an introduction and four "Parts" or chapters. The passage in question occurs in the first chapter which is entitled "The Preliminaries, shewing the principles of government." Harrington explicitly divides this chapter into two sections. The first section treats the principles of government according to the ancients and the principles of

¹⁰ I believe that Harrington meant to publish *Oceana* anonymously, but Cromwell's interference with the presses caused him to decide to reveal authorship and to dedicate to Cromwell. No other works are dedicated. The motto does not appear on the second title page. See *Works*, pp. xvi-xvii, 547.

¹¹ *Works*, p. 547.

government in general or according to Harrington's "own way." The second section of the first chapter treats the late governments of Oceana and in treating them reveals the modern principles of government. Because Harrington claims to side with the ancients against the moderns, we may conclude – using Harrington's terms – that the first section of the "Preliminaries" treats "Antient Prudence" and the second "Modern Prudence."

The passage on name-changing is in the second section. At the beginning of the second section Harrington discusses the "*Rise, Progresse, and Declination of Modern Prudence.*" The beginning of modern prudence was the end of the Roman Empire. However much the "*Arms of Caesar*" may have weakened Rome by bringing on the rule of emperors, still it was the victory of the barbarians that founded modern prudence. Those "inundations of *Goths, Vandals, Huns, and Lombards*"¹² finally and totally removed ancient prudence from the world. But because "*Nemo nocetur nisi ex se,*" Harrington briefly discusses the ways in which the Empire weakened itself so that it could be so easily ruined by the vigorous, but coarse, northerners. In conquering the whole Empire, the Vandals, Huns, Saxons, Lombards, and Franks overwhelmed also "*ancient Languages, Learning, Prudence, Manners, Cities . . .*" Almost as though the barbarians were not content to wipe out the vestiges of the ancient world, Harrington adds that the conquerors also changed "the Names of Rivers, Countries, Seas, Mountains, and Men." Harrington gives an example: the names "*Camillus, Caesar, and Pompey*" came to be "*Edmund, Richard, and Geoffrey.*" This mention and example of name-changing comes immediately before the author's own practice of changing names becomes especially noticeable. What is its significance?

According to Harrington, those who put an end to ancient prudence also ended ancient names. The new names are a sign of a new prudence. Yet we still know some of the ancient names. Harrington uses them. In fact, we note that Harrington does not change any ancient names. For example, he discusses the rise, progress, and destruction of the governments of Oceana by considering the changes brought about by the various conquests of the Romans, the "Teutons" (Saxons), the "Scandians" (Danes), and the "Neustrians" (Normans). Harrington changes the names of the modern conquerors only. The Romans keep their name. The case is the same in other matters. Hobbes, called a modern by Harrington, has his name altered. But Machiavelli, not called a modern, keeps his name. So do Aristotle, Plato, Xenophon, Cicero, and all other ancient writers. Bacon's name is only partially changed – we might say "ancientized" – to "Verula-

¹² *Oceana*, p. 42. In the same context, our author remarks that the reordering of the Empire's arms during the rule of Constantine was decisive. This reordering took place when the well-armed and dangerous Praetorians were removed from their "strong Garrison" in Rome "and distributed into divers *Provinces*" which they held hereditarily. These guards were, so to speak, replaced by barbarians.

mius." All the rulers of England mentioned in the *Oceana*, save only Ethelred who lived in "ancient times,"¹³ have their names changed. Only when Harrington cites a modern or contemporary author in support of his position (for examples, Selden, Hooker, Bracton, Coke) does he leave the name the same, except in the case of Bacon. Harrington does refer to Hobbes once by name, but this is in the margin and also in support of the position of *Oceana*.¹⁴ From this pattern of name-changing we conclude that Harrington with his major work aims to do something like what the barbarians did. But what did they do?

The barbarians ended the Roman Empire and at the same time ended the already weakened ancient prudence. They did not simply and by themselves destroy Rome and ancient prudence. Republican Rome, that "Paragon" of ancient prudence, had been greatly weakened long before the barbarian flood. But above all, the Caesars – especially Julius, Augustus, and Constantine – "interposed" "something of necessity" so that, even though "there is no appearance in the bulk or constitution of *Moderne Prudence*, that she should ever have been able to come up and Grapple with the *Ancient*," still the barbarians were able to strike the death blow. Ancient prudence did not show itself in the world for over a thousand years thereafter, so powerful was that necessity.

Harrington imitates the barbarians. He is the vigorous opponent of modern prudence, which he says has already been greatly weakened by Henry VII and Henry VIII and Richelieu. But the full imitation of the barbarians requires also the giving of new names; this Harrington does also. Can it be, then, that Harrington means to restore ancient prudence? Yet ancient prudence has been utterly wrecked, hardly a vestige remains. What the arms of Caesar and the barbarians have ruined can James Harrington, armed only with a pen, restore? If both ancient and modern prudence have been erased, what will be the character of politics? Our author means to eradicate modern prudence from the face of the earth as the barbarians did to ancient prudence. But the giving of new names suggests some further politically theoretic intention. Reflection on a single literary device would suggest that Harrington intends either to restore ancient prudence, or to establish some new non-ancient, non-modern prudence, or to put forth some non-prudential understanding of politics. Restored prudence, new prudence, no prudence, whatever fulfills Harrington's politically theoretic intention, that intention must be consistent with his more practical intention to establish the Oceanic order in England. A sign of this consistency is, then, that Harrington changes only modern *English* names.¹⁵

¹³ *Oceana*, p. 42.

¹⁴ *Oceana*, p. 207.

¹⁵ But consider *Oceana*, p. 197. Here it is threatened that if the orders are not adopted quickly some other nation, probably France, will do so first. Whichever nation adopts first holds the world in its empire.

A perfect and immortal commonwealth cannot be established by modern prudence.

To expose Harrington's politically theoretic intention, we must begin by explaining what he means by prudence, ancient and modern.

Ancient prudence is not prudence as understood by the ancients. That is, Harrington does not wish to restore the understanding of prudence presented by the tradition of classical political philosophy. He does not long for the prudent man described by Aristotle.¹⁶ Harrington defines prudence in the second section of the first chapter. Having recounted the political history of England up to the time of *Oceana*, Harrington says that the nation is ready for a republican government; a republic is "already in the nature of the [population]." All that is lacking to bring about a republic (the author uses "republic" and "commonwealth" interchangeably) is either "time (which is slow and dangerous) or art (which would be more quick and secure)." Art is to be preferred. "But . . . this *Art is Prudence*; and that part of *Prudence*, which regards the present work [scil. the founding of a commonwealth], is nothing else but the skill of raising" the institutions natural to the character of the population. The character of the population can be known with almost mathematical precision. Prudence is an art, a skill, part of which produces the proper form of government for a nation. The other parts are the skill of leading armies and the skill in conducting the day-to-day affairs of civil government. "Time" may also produce governments, even as it produced a population naturally fit for a republic in England.

Now not Aristotle, nor the tradition of classical political philosophy, taught that prudence was art. The ancients sharply distinguished prudence from art, because the prudent man (including the founder), but not necessarily the artist, is also the morally virtuous man. But the traditional classic position also identified prudence and art insofar as both were concerned with contingencies. Harrington understands prudence to be an art; it does not presuppose moral virtue. Thus Harrington says that the prudent man "contemplates" moral virtue and that good laws are not necessarily the product of good men, in fact, "*Give us good men, and they will make us good laws*, is the maxim of a demagog." Nor does the art of prudence deal with contingencies. It is not an excellence of deliberation. Harrington shows his reader all too clearly how little contingency concerns the prudent by showing how a decision to wage aggressive war is taken under the Orders of *Oceana*:

About the one and fortieth year of the Commonwealth, the Censors according to their Annuall Customs, reported the Pillar of Nilus [the census count], by which it was found that the People increased very near one third. Whereupon the Council of War was appointed by the Senate to bring in a State of War . . .

¹⁶ For purposes of this paper, I have identified Aristotle's classic defense of prudence with the position of the tradition of classical political philosophy.

Harrington's political art does not presuppose moral virtue and it does not deal with contingencies. Rather, it proceeds according to principles as certain as those of any science. Prudence is called an art to indicate that it is a *practical* science, but it is demonstrable "as if it were mathematical."¹⁷ Thus, "... he that demonstrates by this art, demonstrates by nature, and is not to be contradicted by fancy, but by demonstration out of nature."¹⁸

Harrington's understanding of prudence appears very much like that of Machiavelli. (It is good to remember at this point that our author calls the Florentine an ancient.) From Machiavelli's point of view, "Aristotle did not see that the relation of the founder to his human matter is not fundamentally different from the relation of the smith to his iron or his inanimate matter: Aristotle did not realize to what extent man is malleable, and in particular malleable by man."¹⁹ Harrington would agree with this ancient criticism of an ancient, this Machiavellian criticism of Aristotle. He follows the ancients, but he also goes his own way.²⁰ Harrington follows Machiavelli, but at the same time he goes beyond him. From Harrington's point of view, not even Machiavelli understood the extent to which man is malleable by man. Machiavelli did not realize how much more unchanging is the animate matter of the founder than the inanimate matter of the smith: Iron rusts; men reproduce.²¹

What is ancient prudence and modern prudence? Harrington does not define and distinguish these terms in his *Oceana*. We only assert in this paper that he avoids such definition in his major work because he wishes to make use of the ordinary understanding of the ancient as the authoritatively traditional. In his most important apologetic work, *The Prerogative of Popular Government*, he flatly declares his definition:

By antient prudence I understand the policy of a commonwealth, and by modern prudence that of king, lords, and commons, which was introduced by the Goths and Vandals upon the ruin of the *Roman* empire, and has since reign'd in these western countries²²

Ancient prudence is republican prudence, skill in founding and governing republics and leading their armies. Modern prudence in monarchic prudence, skill in founding and maintaining monarchies, and especially mixed or "regulated" monarchies. In order that a reader have no doubts about his definition, Harrington explains that the government established by Joseph in ancient Egypt was of the same form as that preferred by modern prudence.²³

¹⁷ *Works*, p. 559.

¹⁸ *Works*, p. 560.

¹⁹ Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe, Ill., 1958), p. 253.

²⁰ *Oceana*, p. 14.

²¹ Consider *Oceana*, pp. 64, 53, 133-139; *Works*, pp. 466-470.

²² *Works*, p. 221.

²³ *Works*, p. 253.

Does Harrington wish to restore prudence? He does not wish to restore the ancient understanding of politics or ancient politics as understood by the ancients. He does wish to restore the form of government which dominated the ancient period of history in its vigorous youth and in its maturity, as opposed to its infancy and old age. He wishes to restore republican government. Harrington's intention is identical with Machiavelli's in this respect. He regrets the fact that the West, which has "ever had such a Relish of liberty," has continued in the grips of "Gothic" monarchy for over a thousand years. The publication and propagation of *Oceana* and the establishment of its orders will end forever modern prudence and its characteristic policies. But to attempt to end forever any order and to establish another which will last forever – free from all internal tumult, no less – would be a laughable or unsuccessful project from Machiavelli's point of view. Still Harrington hopes to bring forth an immortal commonwealth, a republic free from all "intestine disorder," because he believes that he has discovered the true principles of government. More precisely, Harrington means to teach an exact, non-controversial practical science of politics. In this respect, his intention is the same as Hobbes's. Yet Hobbes's exact, non-controversial science of politics culminated in the demand for monarchy, certainly not for a republic ruled "by laws, not men." Harrington's theoretical-political intention seems clear: the propagation of an exact, non-controversial art of politics capable of effecting the reintroduction of the whole world eternally to the republican form of government. But this intention presupposes the fulfillment of still another. The *Oceana* is meant to overcome, to improve upon the doctrines of Harrington's two great teachers, Hobbes and Machiavelli.

Harrington's admiration for Machiavelli can hardly go unnoticed. Machiavelli is called "the Prince of Politicians," "the greatest Artist in the modern World," "the onely Polititian of later Ages," the "incomparable Patron of the People." Harrington appears to have known very well the *Prince*, the *Discourses* (admiring the second book more than anything he had studied), the *Art of War*, and the *Florentine Histories*. In the *Oceana*, Machiavelli is mentioned by name more often than any man or author. As I count, Machiavelli is quoted more often in that book also. It is difficult to know whether or not Harrington was aware of Machiavelli's rhetoric.²⁴ In the *Oceana*, Machiavelli is presented as a sober republican, a devoted student of the political practice of the ancient world, a ponderer of old books; Harrington barely reminds the reader of "all those black maxims set down by som politicians, particularly *Machiavel* in his *prince*."²⁵ The ap-

²⁴ But see *Oceana*, p. 53. For the same meaning, consider *Oceana*, p. 139. See the remark about Livy's art of writing (*Oceana*, p. 216), about Machiavelli's interpretation of Livy (*Oceana*, p. 223), and about Machiavelli's "handsome Caveat" (*Oceana*, p. 212). See also the remark about Cicero (*Oceana*, p. 38). Cf. Strauss, p. 153.

²⁵ *Works*, p. 482.

pearance of Hobbes in *Oceana* is quite different from that of Machiavelli. If Machiavelli is the hero of *Oceana*, if he is ancient prudence incarnate, then Hobbes is the villain. Hobbes “goes about to destroy” ancient prudence by justifying monarchy. Hobbes is mentioned relatively few times in the body of the *Oceana* and these mentions are in the first chapter. Every mention appears to be polemical. But are not appearances sometimes deceiving? The last mention of Hobbes in *Oceana* is toward its end in the margin, where Harrington does not change his name. After the whole of the Orders for *Oceana* have been set down, Harrington allows the reader to conclude that the order which those fundamental laws brought out of the chaos of civil war would be judged “beautiful” from the point of view of Thomas Hobbes and God as described by Plato. Harrington’s opposition to Hobbes is not simple. This is how he explains it:

I have opposed the politics of Mr. Hobbes, to show him what he taught me, . . . for his treatises of human nature, and of liberty and necessity, they are the greatest of new lights, and those which I have follow’d, and shall follow.²⁶

The appearance of Machiavelli is likewise deceiving. Well before *Oceana* ends, Harrington has disputed – perhaps disproved – Machiavelli’s analysis of the many and the few, his doctrine that solid civil orders have criminal beginnings, his representations of Sparta, Rome, Athens, and other historical regimes, his teaching that a defensive foreign policy is the result of “imagination” and many other Machiavellian essentials. A consideration of these disputes would involve us too deeply in Harrington’s teaching, as opposed to his intention.

From the point of view of the *Oceana*, Machiavelli is the peak of ancient prudence; Harrington admires him because he made republican government again a choiceworthy form. Thus our author says that Machiavelli “has gon about to retrieve” ancient prudence. Hobbes represents the peak of modern prudence; he presents the best defense of monarchy. In fact, Hobbes is the only writer, as opposed to ruler, whom Harrington calls a modern.

It is especially Hobbes’s “politics” that Harrington opposes. In order to explain this opposition we must mention a certain Harringtonian teaching. Imitating Machiavelli, our author teaches and shows that all states are either monarchic or republican. In teaching this, Harrington shows that the few cannot possibly rule in their own right or by themselves, but always set up a (regulated) king.²⁷ These monarchies by nobles, as Harrington calls them, are inherently unstable; they tend to become either wars among the nobles or absolute monarchies. But, according to Harrington, the creation of a third estate – the landed clergy or lords spiritual – has

²⁶ *Works*, p. 241.

²⁷ This is most clearly seen by *Works*, pp. 467, 481.

made possible a regulated monarchy which is relatively stable. The third estate is the result of the "something of necessity" introduced and fostered by the Caesars (see above). The barbarians' creation of the third estate, which stands somehow between the many and the few or between the subjects and the lords temporal, ensures the continued existence of the naturally unstable regulated monarchy. Such monarchies, called "Gothic" by Harrington, are the worst possible form of government because they depend more than any other form on the fear of death for their stability.²⁸ But as the authority of the Church has declined so has the authority and power of the third estate; this is especially true in England since Henry VII and in France since Richelieu. Without the third estate, no monarchy by nobles can stand long. Therefore, the end of modern prudence would come of its own accord were it not for the fact that "certain expedients and intrusions" were discovered which made regulated monarchy "to appear or be call'd absolute." Certain politicians, including Hobbes, have discovered means to maintain the regulated monarchy even without the landed clergy.²⁹ So Hobbes and the Hobbesians may make the claim that the traditional modern monarchy can be the most stable, the most commodious, of all governments, even more stable than the monarchy of the Turk. An important part of Harrington's teaching is meant to show that no monarchy can be as stable as a well-ordered republic.

In order to show this, Harrington must oppose Machiavelli, who did not praise republics for their lack of tumults but rather taught that republican commotions were a sign of political health. As the *Oceana* puts it, Machiavelli "makes us believe, that the people in [republics] are so enraged against them, that where they meet a Gentleman they kill him." Now Harrington begins at the same point that Machiavelli did in his consideration of republics:

There is not a more noble, or usefull question in the Politics, then that which is started by *Machiavil*, Whether means were to be found whereby the Enmity that was between the Senate and the people of Rome, might have been removed.³⁰

Harrington's answer may be said to be much more useful than Machiavelli's, even if it is not so noble. The enmity could have been ended; what is more, it could have been ended with republican forms or without resorting to a defensive foreign policy with its characteristically oppressive domestic policy. Nevertheless Machiavelli's greatness is secure. He *started* this question: Not that Machiavelli was the first to wonder at the commotions in Rome, rather Machiavelli was the first to undertake a class analysis of (Roman)

²⁸ The subjects fear death not only at the hands of the king, but also at the hands of the lords temporal and by the authority of the lords spiritual.

²⁹ See *Works*, pp. 472 and especially 481. See also *Works*, pp. 248-264. Harrington himself develops some "expedients" and is thanked for it by Hobbesians.

³⁰ *Oceana*, p. 133.

politics in preference to a regime analysis.³¹ Harrington accepts the class analysis. The regime analysis of the classics barely appears as a rejected alternative in his works.³² But having accepted the Machiavellian starting point – to accept the regime analysis would be ineffectual because that analysis necessarily comes to an end in the presentation of an imagined republic or principality – Harrington draws very different conclusions from it. By showing that the dispute between the many and the few could be ended, or (using Harrington's expression) by showing that the few can be included in the many, Harrington is able to show that a republic is at least as stable a form as a monarchy.

We have now come altogether too close to Harrington's teaching. But we may say that Harrington is able to resolve the many-few class conflict by showing that the difference between princes and peoples is not natural, even as Machiavelli had suggested that the differences between princes, between the one and the few, were not natural or qualitative. Instead Harrington traces the difference to a quantitative difference among men in the ability to, and success at acquiring land or servants. The doctrine for which Harrington is best known, the doctrine of the balance of domestic empire, teaches that the form of government naturally follows or is determined by the proportion of land (or servants) held among the one, the few, and the people. The one and the few are the "gentlemen" who having acquired more servants live off the sweat of others' brows. The people live off the sweat of their own.

In coming to a conclusion, we may say that our author begins with Machiavelli's understanding. That is, he accepts Machiavelli's typology of governments, the analysis of the many and the few presupposed by that typology, and especially the resulting definition of republican government – "so ordered that rule should not fall into the hands of a prince or a small number of nobles." On the basis of the Machiavellian evidence alone, we suggest, Harrington would have proposed a republic for England, so much did he admire republican Rome and detest the Christian monarchy.³³ But Machiavelli's was not the only evidence. Hobbes raised especially two objections against the republicans of Harrington's day.

First, the republican preference is not scientific. That is, the exact, non-controversial political science justified monarchy, even Christian monarchy. According to Hobbes, the republican preference was dictated by prudence; prudence compared to science is little better than superstition or raw animal cunning. Prudence is only experience, and "we are not to account as any part [of true knowledge] . . . that original knowledge called

³¹ I wish to thank Professor Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. for teaching me this.

³² *Works*, p. 286 suggests that he did consider the classical alternative when it is compared with other passages on the same subject.

³³ See *Oceana*, p. 139. In addition, Harrington prefers even oriental despotism to Gothic monarchy.

experience, in which consisteth prudence: because it is not attained by reasoning."³⁴ And further, the experience of the English republicans is very defective. They are

an exceeding great number of men of the better sort, that had been so educated, as that in their youth having read books written by famous men of the ancient Grecian and Roman commonwealths concerning their polity and great actions; in which books the popular government was extolled by that glorious name liberty, and monarchy disgraced by the name tyranny [and even though "no tyrant was ever so cruel as a popular assembly"] . . . became thereby in love with their form of government.³⁵

Second, Hobbes objected that republics are inherently unstable. He thought that no bearer of sovereignty could be expected to prefer the public interest to his own interest or that of his family. He concluded that one man rule could best unify public and private interest. But in republics every citizen has some part of sovereignty; this part is invariably given over so that republics are always led by one or a few demagogues; even as Machiavelli confessed, republics are constantly plagued by the factious spirit and threatened by civil war.

Harrington presents his teaching against these two objections. He argues that prudence, the practical science or art of politics, is demonstrable. That is, Harrington attempts to show that demonstration from experience – concluding from what is or was to what ought to be – is possible. Such a demonstration requires an *hoti* and a *dioti*, a "that" and a "for the reason that." Harrington reasons as follows: What has been so and not otherwise and is so and not otherwise will be so and not otherwise, "except a man can give a reason why it may be otherwise."³⁶ The *Oceana* presents an unexampled example, a perfectly stable republic free of the factious spirit.³⁷ The presentation of Harrington's general teaching in the "Preliminaries" is, therefore, a presentation of reasons why republics may be other than they have always been.

Harrington's doctrines are meant to show that the fault with all previous republics (including the "Commonwealth of Israel" founded by "Moses or God") has been with man as he is the maker of them, rather than the matter. But the fault with monarchies is inherent, in its very matter, for the balance – the proportion of land or servants held by lords as against the people – of monarchy is defective. The balance is the matter, the foundation, of all governments.³⁸ By erecting proper republican orders on a republican foundation, the few may be permanently dissolved into the

³⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Michael Oakeshott (Oxford, 1955), pp. 435-436.

³⁵ Compounded from Hobbes, *Behemoth*, ed. Wm. Molesworth (New York, 1963), pp. 6, 31. Harrington knew of similar passages in earlier works. See especially *Works*, p. 223.

³⁶ *Works*, p. 559.

many. What Harrington had shown against Machiavelli allows him to confidently assert the quiet of republics against Hobbes. If the few (including the one) all come to have precisely the same interest as the people, and if interest is the cause of all willing, then how can anyone have the interest or the power (if some deviant happens to have the interest) to overthrow the government of the people?

Harrington's practical intention, his desire for a republican England and for an end to the type of politics that had dominated the West for a millennium, led him to study and then to oppose the teachings of Hobbes and Machiavelli. From Harrington's point of view, both Hobbes and Machiavelli, both ancients and moderns, have this in common: Both think that in every nation one part necessarily rules some other part. That is, both think that in every nation one, few, or some of few necessarily prevail over the others. Harrington, on the other hand, claims to ally himself with the position of the tradition of classical political philosophy: Harrington teaches that the law, not men, rules in the best ordered nations. But for Machiavelli, no less than Hobbes or even the classics,³⁹ the question is, What part of the population makes the law? The Orders of Oceana are designed to prevent the interest or will of any part – one, few, some of few, or many – from making law. In Oceana, no one, no few, no many rule. No part of the nation works its will on any other part. True enough, the spirit of the people dominates the whole of Oceana, but the spirit of the people considered in itself may be said to be, "What care I for him? I can live without him."⁴⁰

Certain difficulties remain for my interpretation. Nevertheless, I believe that James Harrington's political art aims to put an end to rule.

³⁷ *Oceana*, p. 33. This is, then, another reason for the book's utopian character.

³⁸ *Works*, pp. 466-467.

³⁹ We abstract here from the question of whether will, not reason, is the source of law.

⁴⁰ *Works*, p. 580. Cf. *Oceana*, pp. 154-158, 128-129, 141; *Works*, pp. 271, 247.