Epilogue

Sixty years separated the treatises of Roger Baynes, John Barston and John Foord from Richard Brathwait's *A survey of history*. It would be wrong to deny the numerous differences between them, but it would be equally misleading to dispute their striking similarities. There is little doubt that humanism as political parlance was not completely overshadowed by other vocabularies in the mid sixteenth century. On the contrary, its central convictions were forcefully rehearsed throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The English showed complete familiarity with such deeply entrenched notions of the humanist tradition as the virtuous civic life and *vera nobilitas*. These notions enabled them to portray themselves as citizens and to characterize their life as one of participation rather than subjection. From Thomas Rogers to Richard Brathwait it was argued that, before everything else, a virtuous *negotium* made an Englishman capable of acting as a magistrate of his local community or of the community of the whole realm and of performing his duty in public assemblies whether local or national in composition. And to lead such a life guaranteed the well-being of the whole commonwealth.

As well as subscribing to the notions of the *vita activa* and *vera nobilitas* in their attempt to conceive of themselves as active citizens, early modern Englishmen many a time resorted to more openly republican themes. Ancient and contemporary republics not merely aroused curiosity and captured attention; they also commanded sincere admiration. This is not to say that those who expressed their admiration were republicans. Nevertheless, as we have seen, Englishmen were perfectly capable of employing at least three central characteristics of classical republicanism. In the first place, it was often maintained that a republican form of government implemented in a highly successful manner the idea of meritocracy. Such was the view shared by Robert Ashley, Francis Bacon, Alexander Leighton and Richard Brathwait.

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They all argued that republics had succeeded in securing the rule of the most virtuous men.

The second and more important aspect of the republican tradition to exert profound influence was the classical idea of the mixed constitution. Although historians have generally claimed that this concept played no positive role in the political debate of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, it is clear that the English never lost sight of this republican notion. It loomed large in numerous republican translations. Even more importantly, it was voiced every now and then in treatises composed by the English themselves. This happened both in the context of urban communities and in that of the situation in Ireland. But the idea of the mixed constitution was also developed in the context of English politics: together with the notion of virtuous citizenship it enabled the English to promote an image of the centrality of parliament for the English commonwealth.

Thirdly, and most importantly, some of the theorists we have examined in this study felt no qualms about employing the central notion of republicanism – that governors should be elected rather than inherited. John Foord stated succinctly that the princely office should be elective. But even more to the point of English politics in the early 1580s, he espoused the view that in the case of the sudden demise of the prince, a regent should be elected by parliament. John Barston, Richard Beacon and the author of the *Organon reipvblicae* put forward an even more genuinely republican argument. They all maintained that power and authority had the unavoidable tendency to corrupt their possessor(s). It followed that this corruption could only be held at bay by setting certain limits on those in authority. One of the most effective checks was to restrict the duration of the governor's term in office. That is to say, the republican device that governors and magistrates should continuously be rotated was taken to be the most effective solution to the looming problem of corruption.

A central aim of this study has also been to locate the uses of these arguments in their proper historical circumstances. We have seen that the humanist and republican vocabularies were used in numerous different contexts and with numerous different intentions. When humanist and republican arguments were strongly reiterated in the 1570s and 1580s, one of the aims which their proponents endeavoured to achieve was to remind the English of the importance of a virtuous *negotium* in preventing the political turmoils of the continent from reaching England. At the same time John Barston articulated the civic

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nature of local community in his *Safegarde of societie* and sought to criticize the oligarchy of Tewkesbury. Towards the end of the sixteenth century foreign republican treatises were translated with a view to suggesting that they had an important lesson to teach. The ideas of civic life and the mixed constitution were used by Jacobeans to argue for a limited kingship.

Another aim of this study has been to trace the reception of Machiavelli's republicanism in England. It first caught serious attention in England in the 1580s, when Alberico Gentili argued that the Florentine had been 'a eulogist of democracy' and when John Wolfe printed *Il principe* as well as the *Discorsi* in London and drew a similar conclusion to Gentili's from the *Discorsi*. Nevertheless, these brief remarks were a far cry from an extensive use of Machiavellian republicanism. This occurred in 1594, when Richard Beacon systematically employed Machiavelli's republican concepts in his attempt to lay new foundations for the Irish commonwealth. Some central Machiavellian notions were also embraced by Walter Ralegh and even more so by Francis Bacon. Both of them evinced a profound interest in republican and aristocratic forms of government and sometimes even showed a sincere respect for them. Likewise, they both displayed even greater enthusiasm for the distinctively Machiavellian issue of civic greatness. In particular, Bacon invoked Machiavellian notions of *grandezza* in his defence of the Anglo-Scottish union and in his attempt to demonstrate the means by which Britain would become a truly great state. Ralegh was more willing to endorse some of the doctrines of the newer theory of civic greatness put forward by Justus Lipsius and Giovanni Botero, but even he readily acknowledged (with a direct reference to Bacon) the crucial importance of civic virtue as well as 'the moderate use of sovereigne power' in the attainment of *grandezza*. The idea of the armed citizen, so central in Bacon's concept of civic greatness, was further developed by Thomas Hedley (who borrowed it from Bacon), when he argued in 1610 against the new impositions. A number of theorists also used the concept of the armed citizen in the political debates of the late 1620s and the 1630s, with similar intentions, and often invoking the authority of Bacon.

One of the most common ways in which humanist and republican notions were articulated was to show how a decayed commonwealth could be reformed. This line of argument is clearly discernible in the writings of the 1570s and 1580s and becomes more prominent in John Barston's analysis and especially in Richard Beacon's reform pro-

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gramme for the Irish commonwealth. But the most forceful use of the humanist and republican vocabularies against corruption emerges in Thomas Scott's pamphlet campaign in the early 1620s. A distinctively classical republican argument runs through his whole attempt to stave off any corruption – be it internal or external – of the English commonwealth.

Although classical humanist and republican arguments were voiced throughout the period from the 1570s to the 1630s, there is little doubt that, with the passage of time, the tradition lost some of its force. The first signs of exhaustion could perhaps be discerned already at the turn of the century, as neostoic and Tacitean ideas made their appearance, although this did not mean, as some scholars have claimed, that Ciceronian humanism was totally displaced. These signs of erosion of the humanist tradition became somewhat clearer during the 1620s and 1630s, but some of the foremost values of the tradition were still repeated in the 1630s when Machiavelli's *Discorsi* was published in English for the first time.

At about the time the classical humanist tradition was drawing to a close, England faced a crisis of unprecedented seriousness. Although it took a decade before republican concepts were stated afresh, it was above all the Civil War and its aftermath which prompted this revival of classical republicanism. It is essential to an understanding of the classical republicanism of the 1650s, however, to recognize that John Milton, James Harrington, Algernon Sidney and their *epigoni* did not invent the republican tradition completely anew. There are of course marked dissimilarities between their arguments and those of the late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century exponents of classical humanism and republicanism. But it would be strange indeed if there had been none after the upheavals of the 1640s. Nonetheless, these differences should not completely overshadow the fact that Harrington, Milton and Sidney were, to some extent, direct followers of the earlier generations of humanist and republican writers. George Wither and Thomas May, who had used humanist parlance and demonstrated a keen interest in republican issues, became avowed republicans during the Civil War and form thus a direct link between our period and the mid-century.[1] It is a well-known fact that James Harrington cited Francis Bacon's *Essays* several times in his *Oceana*, but the striking similarities between Bacon and Harrington have not been adequately

[1] Worden 1981, pp. 191–2.

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appreciated. They both agreed with Machiavelli that the pursuit of civic greatness was a principal duty of every state.[2] And they claimed that the greatness of a state depended on its military strength, which in turn hinged on the people's virtuous character rather than on the treasure of the state.[3] Furthermore, both contended that the Roman method of establishing colonies and of forming 'unequal leagues', as Harrington put it, should be imitated. And they also agreed that the new inhabitants acquired by these Roman methods should be naturalized.[4] It is of course true that, whereas Harrington was an avowed republican, Bacon's respect for the republican form of government was much more restricted. Nevertheless, they both insisted that democracies were 'lesse subject to sedition', as Bacon put it.[5] Most importantly, Harrington grounded the social analysis of his republican theory on Bacon's account of the social conditions of a great state,[6] and Bacon's 'Of the true greatnesse of kingdomes and estates' provided together with Machiavelli the whole point of departure of his book. It is thus arguable that the commonwealth of Oceana was Bacon's Great Britain writ large. The unearthing of the predecessors of the mid-century classical republicans helps us understand both how the English articulated their civic nature before the Civil War and why the classical republicans of the 1650s could expect that their arguments would be understood as well as adopted.

2 James Harrington, *The common-wealth of Oceana* (London, 1656), p. 266.
3 Ibid., pp. 81, 308, 44.
4 Ibid., *Oceana*, pp. 261–2.
5 Bacon, 'Of nobility', in *Essays*, p. 41; Harrington, *Oceana*, pp. 21–2.
6 Harrington, *Oceana*, sig. B1^{r-v}, pp. 39–40.

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