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Edward G. Andrew, *Imperial Republics: Revolution, War, and Territorial Expansion from the English Civil War to the French Revolution*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011. xxi + 197 pp. Index. \$50.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 1442643315.

Review by John Shovlin, New York University.

Edward G. Andrew is a Canadian political theorist whose work has focused mostly on the intellectual life of early modern Europe, but usually with an eye to the relevance of historical texts and practices for contemporary public culture.[1] This work is no exception. The principal targets of Andrew's critique in *Imperial Republics* are neo-republican theorists such as Philip Pettit, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli, who discern in the "neo-Roman" tradition of European political thought, stemming from Machiavelli, valuable resources for modern democratic politics.[2] The principal thrust of the work is to reject such claims and to offer a critique of republicanism which exposes its darker side.

Andrew makes two principal claims about what early modern neo-Romanism—or republicanism—meant, and thus what its legacy entails for us. The glorification of Rome and identification with the Romans, which was a core feature of neo-Romanism, involved an attraction to, and celebration of, imperial expansion: "republican Rome was espoused, not in spite of its imperialism...but precisely because of its successful imperialism" (p. 5). Moreover, neo-Romanism was a specifically anti-democratic ideology. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century republicans, by and large, idealized patrician government and approved of the Roman Senate's violent efforts to prevent the adoption of an "agrarian law" —measures to redistribute land to veterans or poorer citizens. Thus, "contrary to present-day republican doctrine," the neo-Roman tradition was embraced "for its inequality rather than equality, for its patrician rather than plebeian character" (p. 5).

In both its imperialism and its hostility to the agrarian law, the neo-Roman tradition constituted a rejection of a different classical heritage—one associated with Athens and with Aristotle's account of the *polis*—which, Andrew implies, might offer a more appropriate foundation for modern democratic politics. Aristotle rejected imperialism: "he thought that imperial states were tyrannical . . . imperial policy distorts the internal arrangements of a state, transforming persuasive relationships between statesmen and citizens into the command relationships of a garrison state" (p. 19). Athens was an imperial power, but its colonies were self-governing communities, free of domination from the motherland. A fundamental distinction between the Aristotelian and Ciceronian traditions turned on attitudes toward private property and inequality. Unlike Cicero (an icon for neo-Romans), "Aristotle rejected the view that the end of political life was to secure private property" (p. 20). There was more scope in Aristotelian theory, and in the political practices of classical Athens, to valorize redistributive policies. Moreover, Aristotle crucially recognized in the collective judgment of the many a wisdom and integrity superior to that of the wealthy or patrician few.

Andrew argues that a major determinant of the appeal of neo-Romanism to eighteenth-century French and British commentators was its usefulness for articulating Franco-British imperial rivalry. The Punic War metaphor was often invoked by patriotic writers on both sides, with the cross-channel rival always cast in the role of Carthage. Here, as Andrew recognizes, lies a paradox. It was a virtual truism of

eighteenth-century French and British political thought that trade, not territory, was the foundation of successful empire building. The territorial empire of conquest built by the Spanish monarchy in the sixteenth century was regularly held up as the anti-model by British and French empire builders of the eighteenth. Moreover, the maritime empire of the Athenians would seem, on its face, a more appealing analogy for eighteenth-century empires of trade, especially the British dominions, which were “imagined to consist of flourishing and commercially viable colonies, populated with free British subjects, that served as bulwarks of trade, prosperity, naval strength and political virtue for the parent state.” [3]

What are we to make of this paradox? One possibility is that the appeal of the Punic War metaphor was less straightforward than Andrew allows. On one level, the attraction is obvious of “being Rome” while projecting a Carthaginian identity onto one’s enemy. But beyond this primary reflex, the metaphor implies all kinds of contradictions. To be figured as Rome would seem to undercut Britain’s principal claims about its identity in Europe in the eighteenth century—as guardian of the balance of power—and to concede to Britain’s enemies what they constantly argued, that Britain itself aspired to a kind of universal monarchy. For Britons to figure France as Carthage was to attribute to it qualities traditionally thought of as English. (Carthage was imagined in the eighteenth century as a commercial and naval power.) The Punic War metaphor was also problematic for the French. For a certain kind of old style French continentalist in the mold of Louis XIV, the Roman identification might have been an obvious and a comfortable one. But for the strain of French imperialism increasingly mainstream after 1713 and dominant by the 1760s, Roman imperialism must have seemed like a strategy destined for failure in a world where power was based on trade and colonies. Could the Punic War metaphors then have articulated—if only unconsciously—*anxiety* as much as *assertion*?

Andrew’s critique of the neo-Roman tradition is premised, in part, on what seem incontrovertible historical facts: the republican regimes founded in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe and America were aggressively expansionist in their foreign policy. Witness Oliver Cromwell’s reconquest of Ireland, or his “Western Design” against the Spanish empire in the Caribbean; Thomas Jefferson’s “empire for liberty,” which was to be carved out of the American continent at the expense of its original inhabitants; or the bloated French Republic of the Directory, with its sister republics and other satellites.

Less self-evident, perhaps, is a second implication of Andrew’s argument, that these revolutionary republics ought, at their ideological core, to be read as elitist rather than popular, protective of large scale private property rather than egalitarian, patrician rather than plebian. Andrew’s case is easy enough to make for the young American Republic, with its plantocracy and its “peculiar institution,” but it seems more doubtful for the English Commonwealth, which abolished the House of Lords, and appears positively tenuous for the French Revolution, which did away with noble privilege and confiscated the lands of the Catholic Church and many émigrés. Andrew would explain the egalitarianism of the French Revolution as a response to circumstances rather than a reflex of revolutionary republicanism, and of course there is something to this claim. But was this its only source?

Andrew’s decision to focus on rejection of the agrarian law and its historical proponents as the critical metric of attitudes toward social inequality is questionable. Republicans could and often did favor more gentle schemes of property redistribution while rejecting the agrarian law. The agrarian law always functioned, I would suggest, as a symbol of something more than greater equality, or the resentment of the poor toward the rich. It underlined a fact most eighteenth-century revolutionaries were keen to elide, that property was a social convention, the consequence of an ongoing act of political will. One could favor far greater equality in the distribution of property while evincing a powerful discomfort with the notion that property was a pure political construct.

The argument would have benefited from a fuller exploration of the relationship between republican imperialism and hostility to redistribution. For Machiavelli, Andrew suggests, “the enforcement of an agrarian law would diminish soldiers’ desire to live by plunder and thus the imperial character of the Roman republic” (p. 23). Yet, this is hardly an explanation of later hostility to the agrarian law. As Andrew shows, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century republicans appear to have viewed ancient Roman proposals for an agrarian law as impractical, imprudent, or even corrupt, but what the organic link was between this suspicion of redistribution and their embrace of imperialism is less clear.

If the principal target of *Imperial Republics* is the group of neo-republican theorists claiming a democratic utility for the early modern republican tradition, a second object of criticism is that most hypertrophic of imperial republics, the United States. The book’s brief conclusion implies that Canada has been fortunate to evade the imperial republican legacy, and that its constitutional roots—evolving from early modern monarchy, rather than through a revolutionary republican rupture—have endowed Canadians with more robust resources for sustaining democracy than their southern neighbors. There is a sense of satisfaction, too, at the end of the book at the nemesis in store for the imperial republic to the south, “palpably on the decline after besting in Afghanistan its imperial rival in the Cold War, and presenting itself on the world’s stage as the only remaining superpower” (p. 182).

NOTES

[1] Edward G. Andrew, *Shylock’s Rights: A Grammar of Lockian Claims* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); *The Genealogy of Values: The Aesthetic Economy of Nietzsche and Proust* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995); *Conscience and Its Critics: Protestant Conscience, Enlightenment Reason, and Modern Subjectivity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); and *Patrons of Enlightenment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

[2] Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Maurizio Virioli, *Republicanism*, trans. Antony Shugar (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002).

[3] Kathleen Wilson, “Empire of Virtue: The Imperial Project and Hanoverian Culture c. 1720–1785,” in *An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689 to 1815*, ed. Lawrence Stone (London: Routledge, 1993), 132.

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