Harringtonian Republicanism, Democracy and the French Revolution

Rachel Hammersley

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/lrf/1047>

DOI: 10.4000/lrf.1047

ISSN: 2105-2557

Publisher

IHMC - Institut d'histoire moderne et contemporaine (UMR 8066)

Electronic reference

Rachel Hammersley, « Harringtonian Republicanism, Democracy and the French Revolution », *La Révolution française* [Online], 5 | 2013, Online since 31 December 2013, connection on 01 May 2019.

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/lrf/1047> ; DOI : 10.4000/lrf.1047

This text was automatically generated on 1 May 2019.

© La Révolution française

Harringtonian Republicanism, Democracy and the French Revolution

Rachel Hammersley

Introduction

- 1 In his revolutionary pamphlet *La France Libre*, which appeared in July 1789, the young Camille Desmoulins explicitly expressed his belief in democratic government, describing popular government as ‘le seul qui conviène à des hommes, et encore le seul sage’ and stating boldly: ‘Je me déclare donc hautement pour la démocratie’¹.
- 2 Modern democracy is generally seen as an invention of the late eighteenth century, and particularly of the American and French Revolutions. This idea was epitomised in the title of R. R. Palmer’s famous two-volume epic *The Age of the Democratic Revolution* and has been widely accepted in surveys of the history of democracy². There is some justification for this view. The American Revolution, as Carl Becker famously acknowledged, was not just about ‘home rule’, but also about ‘who should rule at home’, and contemporaries commented on the fact that after 1776 a new class of political leaders emerged, many of whom were of a lower social status than had traditionally been the case³. Moreover, anti-federalists pushed democratic ideas, such as the importance of citizens participating in politics and watching over those who ruled them, and the term ‘democrat’ began to be used in America during the 1790s⁴. In the case of France, the elections to the Convention, which took place in the summer of 1792, were the first ever to be conducted on the basis of universal manhood suffrage, a principle that was also enshrined in the Constitution of 1793. Moreover, while Desmoulins was undoubtedly one of the first, he was by no means the only French revolutionary explicitly to declare his faith in democracy.
- 3 Yet, the American and French revolutionaries were not the first to discuss and experiment with implementing popular government in a large nation state, nor were

they even pioneers in viewing ‘democracy’ in positive terms. In both respects they had been preceded by English revolutionaries of the mid-seventeenth century, and in particular by the republican James Harrington. In focusing on this issue, this essay explores a neglected area within the field of republicanism. The first half will offer an analysis of Harrington’s ideas on democracy, and argue that he was a pioneer both in his positive understanding of the term and in his attempt to render democratic government applicable to a large state like England. The second half of the paper will then focus on the influence Harrington’s democratic ideas exerted on French revolutionaries - and especially those associated with the Cordeliers Club. It will be suggested that, unlike Harrington’s English disciples, those in France were not only conscious of his views on democracy but were drawn to him precisely on account of his thinking on this subject.

Democracy and the English Revolution

- 4 Despite the emphasis that has been placed on the late eighteenth century as a time when modern democracy was born, the significance of English events of the mid-seventeenth century to the history of democracy has sometimes been noted. Yet, the focus has tended to be, almost exclusively, on the Leveller movement⁵. The Levellers’ ‘democratic’ credentials were emphasised in the early twentieth century, particularly by American liberals who saw their ideas as anticipating those of the American revolutionaries⁶. While the Levellers’ commitment to what we might think of as democratic principles - including a written constitution, popular sovereignty, the extension of the franchise, and freedom of speech and religious belief - are clearly enshrined in documents such as *The Agreement of the People*, the Leveller leaders continued to view the term ‘democracy’ negatively. For example, in *The Legall Fundamentall Liberties of the People of England Revived, Asserted and Vindicated*, John Lilburne linked ‘Democracy’ with ‘Parity’, ‘Anarchy’ and ‘levelling of all degrees & conditions’, deriding them all⁷.
- 5 Lilburne was far from alone among advocates of popular government at this time in rejecting the term ‘democracy’. Marchamont Nedham, the author of both *The Case of the Common-wealth of England Stated* and *The Excellencie of a Free State* also maintained the traditional negative view, echoing Aristotle’s assertion that ‘meer Democracy (or liberty) is extreme Tyranny’⁸. However, this attitude was not shared by everyone in seventeenth-century England. In particular, Harrington and other members of his circle began to speak of ‘democracy’ in positive terms during the late 1650s and went some way towards demonstrating what a modern, democratic republic would look like⁹.

The Harringtonians and the Invention of Modern Democracy

- 6 In the ‘Preliminaries’ to *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, Harrington presented democracy in classical terms as one of the three components of mixed government. However, later in the work he hinted at an alternative understanding of ‘democracy’ as essentially a synonym for the kind of commonwealth that he himself favoured. In his discussion of the Lacedaemonian system, Harrington claimed to have hit upon a ‘riddle, which I have heretofore found troublesome to unfold’, namely, ‘why, Athens and Lacedaemon consisting each of the senate and the people, the one should be held a democracy and the

other an aristocracy¹⁰. The main difference between them, as Harrington noted, was that in the former the people could both debate and vote on legislation whereas in the latter they could not debate, but could simply accept or reject legislative proposals introduced by the Senate. Harrington went on:

But for my part, where the people have the election of the senate, not bound unto a distinct order, and the result, which is the sovereign power, I hold them to have that share in the government (the senate being not for life) whereof, with the safety of the commonwealth, they are capable in nature, and such a government for that cause to be democracy¹¹.

- 7 Harrington explored this understanding of the term more fully in *The Prerogative of Popular Government*, which he published in 1658, and he used it definitively in a series of pamphlets that appeared between July and December 1659¹². For example, in *Aphorisms Political* he stated: 'That democracy, or equal government by the people, consist[ing] of an assembly of the people and a senate, is that whereby art is altogether directed, limited and necessitated by the nature of her materials'¹³. Nor was Harrington alone in 1659 in his new use of the term 'democracy' as a synonym for 'commonwealth'. It was also used in the title of *A Proposition in Order to the Proposing of a Commonwealth or Democracy*, of June 1659, which emerged from Harrington's circle, and in that of one of the Harringtonian pamphlets of this period, *A Model of a Democratically Government*¹⁴. Moreover, the fact that the nature and value of democracy were discussed in Harringtonian circles during this period, and that the ideas explored there influenced even those who were less inclined to accept Harrington's own views, is reflected in a manuscript written by Sir William Petty, a member of Harrington's Rota Club, in which he challenged Hobbes's arguments for favouring monarchy over democracy¹⁵.
- 8 The motivation behind this shift in terminology was partly polemical. Harrington and his associates were engaged throughout 1659 in a fierce pamphlet war with a group of religious republicans led by Sir Henry Vane. The nature and significance of this debate has traditionally been obscured by the focus on their shared republicanism¹⁶, but it is clear that during 1659 Harrington believed Vane and his associates to pose a greater threat to the polity than the royalists¹⁷. Harrington was critical of a number of their proposals, but he was particularly concerned about their desire to secure 'virtuous' rulers, which led them to call for restricted elections (excluding former royalists and others from the franchise) and to oppose his own proposal for regular rotation of office for members of both legislative bodies and almost all office-holders. Harrington explicitly accused these so-called 'godly republicans' of favouring oligarchy, and presented himself and his followers as advocates of 'democracy' in order to distinguish his position from theirs¹⁸.
- 9 As this debate would suggest, Harrington's adoption of the label was not mere rhetoric, but signalled a more substantive commitment to what he understood democracy to be. Historians have missed Harrington's innovation on this point, in part because they have tended to view English republicanism in general, and Harrington's republicanism more particularly, as aristocratic, elitist and hierarchical. It certainly cannot be denied that Harrington expressed a belief in the existence of a 'natural aristocracy' whose members should be given greater powers to rule than their fellow citizens, or that he placed particular emphasis on land ownership and wealth as an important basis for rule¹⁹. Yet the fact that the members of his senate were elected and subject to rotation of office, rather than serving for life, served to mitigate some of the exclusivity. In addition,

through his agrarian law, which limited the amount of property an individual could possess, Harrington sought to maintain, and even widen, the distribution of land within the nation, which would exercise a direct effect on the numbers able to participate in politics at the higher level. Moreover, in various ways, Harrington's proposals, as stated in *Oceana* and developed in his later works, embodied a number of fundamental democratic principles and offered a means by which such principles (originally developed in the city-states of antiquity) might be put into practice within the context of a large nation state.

- 10 As Harrington's own justification for adopting the term 'democracy' makes clear, he was firmly committed to the fundamental democratic principle that government is enacted both for and by the people, and therefore believed that as many citizens as possible should have an opportunity to participate directly in politics. Thus, despite the dominance attributed to the wealthier men within the nation, those worth less than £100 per year in land, goods or money were not simply restricted to electing their superiors, but were also entitled to sit in the popular assembly (as long as they were married), to hold certain offices and even to initiate legislation through the Academy of Provosts²⁰. Moreover, Harrington's commitment to a system of rotation (whereby membership of both the popular assembly and most offices within the state was for a limited term and re-election only possible after a period out of office) helped to maximise the number of citizens who would hold office at some point during their lives. One of the central aims of *Oceana* was to demonstrate that through these measures, popular government was a genuine practical possibility in the large nation states of the early modern world; and Harrington took great care over the division of the citizen body into manageable units in order to make this possible.
- 11 Not only was Harrington committed to ensuring direct political involvement on the part of as large a number of citizens as possible, but he was also committed to an extremely inclusive understanding of citizenship itself. Though it has been little commented on by historians, the franchise proposed by Harrington in *Oceana* was extensive by the standards of the time. In the first few orders of his constitutional model Harrington set out the conditions for citizenship. Those who were entitled (and indeed required) to participate in government included all men over the age of 30 who were not servants but 'live of themselves' (those under 30 were to exercise their citizenship militarily rather than politically)²¹. Of course, as the historiographical controversy surrounding the discussion of the franchise at the Putney Debates made clear, 'servants' is an ambiguous and potentially elastic category²². However, Harrington was effectively proposing manhood suffrage, and therefore a franchise that was more extensive than that which was in operation in England at the time. Thus it would seem that a relatively wide franchise was a fundamental principle of Harrington's political theory. Indeed, unlike his fellow republicans in 1659, Harrington was not willing to exclude individuals from the franchise solely on account of their political beliefs, arguing strongly in works like *A Discourse upon this Saying...* and *A Discourse Shewing...* for free and open elections in which even royalists would be allowed to participate²³.
- 12 The reason Harrington could advocate both genuine popular involvement in government and an extensive franchise was his commitment to a third democratic principle: constitutionalism. The importance of a written constitution is often highlighted in modern accounts of democracy, since a constitution helps to ensure that the system of rule and the laws that govern the state are clearly stated and accessible to all. For this

reason the process of constitution building lay at the heart of the 'democratic' revolutions in both America and France. As Jonathan Scott has noted, Harrington was unusual among his English republican contemporaries in emphasising constitutionalism and calling explicitly for a written constitution²⁴. From the beginning of *Oceana* Harrington declared his preference for the 'empire of laws' over that of men, and he went on in that work to set out his own detailed constitutional model for *Oceana*. Constitutionalism and a commitment to the rule of law remained a constant theme throughout his writings and were at the forefront of his debates with the godly republicans in 1659. Against their assertion that successful republican government could best be secured by ensuring that those holding office were part of a virtuous elite, Harrington argued that it was more appropriate to develop a robust constitutional structure that would produce a virtuous whole out of the self-interested behaviour of individual citizens. This was the idea that Harrington had famously illustrated in *Oceana* by means of the analogy of two girls sharing a cake, but by 1659 he was also applying the idea more generally. In *A Discourse Upon This Saying...* he declared: 'They who dare trust men do not understand men; and they that dare not trust laws or orders do not understand a commonwealth'²⁵. In order to demonstrate what he meant, he used the analogy of a carnival pageant that he had seen whilst in Rome:

I saw one which represented a kitchen, with all the proper utensils in use and action. The cooks were all cats and kitlings, set in such frames, so tied and so ordered, that the poor creatures could make no motion to get loose, but the same caused one to turn the spit, another to baste the meat, a third to skim the pot and a fourth to make green sauce. If the frame of your commonwealth be not such as causeth everyone to perform his certain function as necessarily as this did the cat to make green sauce, it is not right²⁶.

- 13 For Harrington, then, the endorsement of democracy went hand in hand with a rather pessimistic view of human nature and the consequent reliance on laws rather than men. It was because human beings could not be trusted to be genuinely virtuous that it was necessary to construct a constitutional system that would produce virtuous behaviour by exploiting self-interested motives. However, having put such a system in place, it was then possible to allow a much wider proportion of the population to participate directly in the legislative process because their self-interest posed no threat to the system, but could be channelled to positive ends.
- 14 Clearly, Harrington was a pioneer in terms of democratic thinking. Not only was he one of the first to use the term 'democracy' in a positive sense, but he also endorsed several fundamental democratic principles - including genuine participation in government (as electors, members of the popular assembly, and officeholders) even for poorer citizens, an inclusive understanding of citizenship, and (underpinning it all) a commitment to the rule of law and the establishment of a written constitution. Moreover, he was also pioneering in directly addressing the question of how a system of government that had been devised to suit the small city-states of antiquity could be made workable in a large nation state such as England.
- 15 The neglect by historians of Harrington's democratic credentials and innovations is, in part, due to the fact that his disciples tended to adapt his ideas to suit the more monarchical and aristocratic conditions of their own times. Thus, although Henry Neville, who was close to Harrington in 1659, explicitly acknowledged Harrington's commitment to democracy, he sought to apply the same principles in support of monarchical government²⁷. Moreover, one of the leading Harringtonians of the early eighteenth

century was the Tory viscount Bolingbroke who firmly believed that the aristocracy should play a central role in government and used Harrington's ideas to support his view. However, while Harrington's English followers may have been more conservative than their master, his French disciples drew on his ideas precisely because of his commitment to democracy.

Harringtonian Democracy and the French Revolution²⁸

- 16 The democratic aspects of Harrington's thought were highlighted by his French followers even before the outbreak of the Revolution. Jean-Jacques Rutledge first referred to Harrington and his works in an issue of his periodical *Calypso, ou les Babillards* which appeared in April 1785. Rutledge was discussing the Abbé Mably's *Observations sur le gouvernement et les loix des États-Unis d'Amérique* which, as Kent Wright has explained, explored the democratic nature of the American state constitutions and argued the case for the bicameral system of Massachusetts over the unicameral constitution established in Pennsylvania.²⁹ Rutledge claimed that Mably had been strongly influenced by Harrington's works and that they offered excellent guidance on how to establish equal and stable democratic government:

M. Mably est fait pour la bien sentir & pour reconnoître que le génie de l'infortuné Harrington a bâti d'une main intrépide, & offert la base, sur laquelle tout Législateur Philosophe, de quelque Gouvernement que ce soit, peut solidement poser & élever l'Edifice de la constitution démocratique la plus égale & la plus durable³⁰.

- 17 Rutledge retained both his preference for democratic government and his interest in Harrington after the outbreak of Revolution in 1789. Moreover, he continued to yoke the two together. For example, in his revolutionary periodical *Le Creuset*, he used the term 'democracy' positively in his discussion of the Venetian constitution, his understanding of which was derived directly from Harrington.
- 18 Harrington had been particularly impressed by the Venetian constitution, and in *Oceana* he had challenged the conventional view of it as aristocratic:

for Venice, though she do not take in the people, never excluded them. This commonwealth, the orders whereof are the most democratical or popular of all others, in regard of the exquisite rotation of the senate, at the first institution took in the whole people; they that now live under the government without participation of it are such as have since either voluntarily chosen so to do, or were subdued by arms³¹.

- 19 Rutledge shared Harrington's view insisting that with regard to the descendants of its original citizens, the Venetian constitution offered the best political model in either ancient or modern experience³². Moreover, in March 1791 Rutledge devoted three issues of his periodical to discussing the Venetian constitution in a section that was headed 'DE VENISE; Et de ses formes vraiment démocratiques'³³. This section was thoroughly Harringtonian in its principles and presentation, endorsing not only Harrington's commitment to democracy and the kinds of constitutional mechanisms that he used to make such a system workable, but also his negative moral philosophy that underpinned them. Rutledge endorsed Harrington's key principle about separating the discussion and proposal of legislation (which would be carried out by the senate) from the acceptance or rejection of those proposals (which in Venice was the task of the Grand Council). Such a system, Rutledge argued, allowed for the popular participation that was essential to a

democratic state, but without the danger of anarchy that was associated with popular debate. At the same time, though the senate alone had the right of political debate they were restrained from simply pursuing their own personal interests by the knowledge that their proposals had to be accepted by the masses in order to be passed into law. Rutledge also shared Harrington's interest in and respect for the Venetian ballot. This system was designed to overcome the dangers of corruption inherent in conventional voting systems. It was a complex process involving elements of lot and election as well as a secret ballot in order to ensure that individual passions and self-interest could not skew the outcome of the vote. As Rutledge explained:

Mais le moyen certain & unique de prévenir parmi les hommes les délits & les fautes qui deviennent les conséquences d'une partialité dont leur passions sont la source, c'est d'apporter, dans les institutions politiques, des combinaisons de rapports, tels, qu'ils soient toujours placés dans une véritable impuissance morale & matérielle d'en écouter les suggestions, leur intention fut-elle même de ne point y résister.

C'est à Venise que ce secrete existe; & qu'il est journellement mis en pratique³⁴.

- 20 As well as drawing on Harrington's interpretation and insights on this matter, Rutledge even copied into his periodical the illustration of the Venetian Ballot that had appeared in John Toland's 1700 edition of *The Oceana* of James Harrington, and his other works. Rutledge's 'Assemblée de la république de Venise', is an exact mirror image of 'The manner and life of the ballot' from Toland's edition³⁵.
- 21 Moreover, by the 1790s Rutledge was no longer alone in his endorsement of Harringtonian-style democracy. Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès was, of course, one revolutionary who picked up on Harrington's ideas³⁶, but it was Rutledge's fellow Cordeliers who really developed their democratic implications. Desmoulins's early espousal of democracy was demonstrated in the opening paragraph, and it is no doubt significant that he was a close personal friend of Rutledge. Another club member, Louis de la Vicomterie, writing in 1790, insisted that those who declared democracy to be the worst form of government had not properly understood it, and Théophile Mandar asserted his preference for democratic government, again in 1790, in his translation of Nedham's *The Excellencie of a Free State*³⁷.
- 22 These Cordeliers not only embraced the term and defended the idea of democracy, but they (like Harrington) also sought means of putting a system of democratic government into practice in the large nation states of the modern world. While they accepted the need for some form of representation, they advocated the use of measures - such as short terms of office, binding mandates and the popular ratification of laws - which could be used to ensure that the decisions and actions taken by representatives (or deputies as they preferred to call them) remained firmly under the control of their constituents.
- 23 Moreover, once again we can see that this belief in the theory and practice of democracy was underpinned by a Harringtonian-style moral philosophy which remained sceptical about the possibility of genuine virtue on the part of the citizen-body, and sought instead to engineer virtuous behaviour out of self-interested motives. As Desmoulins explained in *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*:

Nos législateurs ne doivent donc pas compter sur l'esprit public, et sur une moralité qui n'existe point. Mais je ne désespérerois point pour cela de la constitution, parce que je ne saurois être de l'avis de ceux qui pensent qu'il faut que les bonnes moeurs préparent les bonnes lois, sans quoi une bonne constitution n'est bâtie que sur le sable. Il me semble au contraire, que c'est aux lois à créer les moeurs, et que les

bonnes lois sont le frein des mauvaises moeurs; que c'est en cela que consiste l'art du législateur; car, quel besoin y auroit-il des lois, s'il y avoit des moeurs? et que'est-ce que les lois, sinon le remède de la corruption?³⁸

- 24 Significantly, this view, which Desmoulins maintained right up to his final publication *Le Vieux Cordelier*, set him firmly at odds with his former friend and political associate Robespierre, and with the Jacobin establishment more generally, whose faith in virtue was the bedrock of their political system.
- 25 There is clear evidence, then, that a number of members of the Cordeliers Club, including Rutledge and Desmoulins, shared Harrington's belief in the theory and practice of democratic government, as well as the distinctive moral philosophy that underpinned Harrington's position. Moreover, in the case of Rutledge, in particular, there is evidence that these ideas were drawn directly from Harrington. But there is one further step to make in this argument, because the Cordeliers not only drew on the democratic ideas of Harrington, they also extended them so as to make them more democratic than Harrington himself had ever intended.
- 26 Perhaps the best illustration of this is to be found in the draft constitution that Rutledge produced after the fall of the monarchy, which was submitted to the Convention in the autumn of 1792 by his close friend Théodore LeSueur. As Sten Bodvar Liljegren noted back in 1932, this constitution was modelled directly on Harrington's *Oceana*³⁹. However, Rutledge's draft constitution departed from Harrington's model on a number of key points. In the first place, Rutledge made more extensive use of lot as a means of choosing representatives than Harrington's original - for example using it to determine the deputies at the level of the district⁴⁰. Secondly, where Harrington had designed his system to ensure that the wealthier citizens would completely control the senate as well as enjoying a sizeable minority within the popular assembly, Rutledge determined the opposite. He again divided the citizens on account of their wealth, but he then used this to weight power in favour of the less well off, who would dominate the Grand National Legislative Council by 3-1 and would also completely control the Grand National Executive Council.⁴¹ Finally, while Rutledge again adopted Harrington's principle of separating the discussion of legislation from its acceptance or rejection, the way in which he incorporated this principle within his system was much more democratic than Harrington's original. Where Harrington had charged the senate with debating and proposing legislation, and the popular assembly with accepting or rejecting the proposals made, in Rutledge's model it was the Grand National Legislative Council that would debate and propose legislation, but those propositions would then be accepted or rejected by the citizen body as a whole gathered in their various primary assemblies:

Ratification ou sanction définitive de la loi, proposée d'abord, ensuite discutée et puis présenté par le grand Conseil national législatif, appartient exclusivement à la nation représentée légalement: 1. dans ses centurries civiques; 2. dans ses tribus politiques; 3. dans ses assemblées de cercles, où cette sanction doit être exprimée, sur la présentation des lois discutées, par oui pour l'affirmative, et par non, pour la négative⁴².

Conclusion

- 27 The discussion offered here reinforces Jonathan Scott's recent assertion regarding Harrington's distinctiveness as a republican thinker⁴³, but it also goes beyond Scott in demonstrating that Harrington provided the seeds both for modern republican

government, and also for modern democracy. Far from being an invention of the late eighteenth century, democratic thinking had begun to emerge as early as the mid-seventeenth century and ideas developed at that time exercised a direct influence on some of the strongest advocates of democratic government during the French Revolution. While the Cordeliers were not very successful at exercising a direct and positive influence on the course of the Revolution, we should not underestimate the more subtle influence they exercised on other groups - not least on the Jacobins. Moreover, this discussion reveals that traditional accounts of the history of democracy have only offered a partial view, in their focus on the Levellers and the Jacobins at the expense of equally important groups such as the Harringtonian republicans and the Cordeliers. It would seem that the path to modern democracy was both longer and more complicated than R. R. Palmer's epithet 'the Age of the Democratic Revolution' would suggest.

NOTES

1. C. DESMOULINS, *La France Libre*, Paris, 1789, p. 46.
2. R. R. PALMER, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: a political history of Europe and America, 1760-1800*, 2 volumes, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1959-64; R. L. HANSON, 'Democracy', in T. BALL, J. FARR, R. L. HANSON (eds), *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 68-89; B. CRICK, *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, especially p. 3; A. ARBLASTER, *Democracy*, third edition, Buckingham, Open University Press, 2002, especially p. 26-36. In the case of both the American and French Revolutions, historians and political philosophers have also explored this idea in greater detail. One thinks here, in particular, of the work of Gordon WOOD on America and of François FURET and Pierre ROSANVALLON on France.
3. C. L. BECKER, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760-1776*, Madison, University of Wisconsin, 1909, p. 22, see also p. 5 and 21. This was the thinking behind James Otis's famous comment that 'when the pot boils, the scum rises to the top'. J. ADAMS, *The Works of John Adams*, 10 volumes, ed. C. F. ADAMS, Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1856, III, p. 199.
4. S. CORNELL, *The other founders: anti federalism and the dissenting tradition in America, 1788-1828*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
5. See, for example, HANSON, 'Democracy', *op. cit.*, p. 72-74; ARBLASTER, *Democracy*, *op. cit.*, p. 26-36 and D. WOOTTON, 'The Levellers' in J. DUNN, *Democracy: The Unfinished Journey, 508BC to AD 1993*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992. WOOTTON does touch on Harrington's contribution to the history of democracy both here (p. 73) and in his *Divine Right and Democracy: An Anthology of Political Writing in Stuart England*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986, p. 39-40, but he does not develop his observations. Historians have also noted the significance of events in seventeenth-century Colonial America to the history of democracy. See, in particular, J. S. MALOY, *The Colonial American Origins of Modern Democratic Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008.
6. On this see B. WORDEN, *Roundhead Reputations: The English Civil Wars and the Passions of Posterity*, London, Allen Lane, 2001, p. 334-7.
7. J. LILBURNE, *The Legall Fundamentall Liberties of the People of England Revived, Asserted, and Vindicated*, London, 1649, p. 3.

8. M. NEDHAM, *The Case of the Common-wealth of England Stated*, London, 1650, p. 80.
9. The term 'democracy' was also used positively by Nathaniel BACON in his important and understudied work *An Historicall Discourse of the Uniformity of the Government of England*, 2 volumes, London, 1647-51, I, p. 222 and 111. I am currently working on a project on Bacon and hope to publish on this subject in the future.
10. J. HARRINGTON, *The Political Works of James Harrington*, ed. J. G. A. POCKOCK, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 263.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, p. 479, 549, 749-50, 770, 777, 787 and 808.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 777.
14. ANON. *A Proposition in Order to the Proposing of a Commonwealth or Democracy*, London, 1659; ANON. *A Model of a Democraticall Government, humbly tendered to Consideration, by a Friend and Wel-wisher to this Common-Wealth*, London, 1659. The former was supposedly the product of a forerunner of the Rota Club which met at Nonsuch Tavern in Bow Street, London. On this club see Oxford: Bodleian Library, Clarendon Manuscripts, 62, ff25-26; London: The National Archives (TNA): SP29/41 f.98 (Testimony of Joseph Bilcliff, 9 September 1661); TNA: SP29/41 f.58 (Statement relating to William Parker, 31 December 1661) and M. ASHLEY, *John Wildman: Plotter and Postmaster*, London, 1947, p. 142.
15. F. AMATI and T. ASPROMOURGOS, 'Petty Contra Hobbes: A Previously Untranslated Manuscript', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 46: 1, 1985, p. 127-32.
16. R. E. MAYERS, 1659: *The Crisis of the Commonwealth*, Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 2004; A. WOOLRYCH, 'Introduction' to *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 volumes, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1953-1982, VII, p. 1-228, especially p. 16-17, 67-9 and 101-6.
17. For a more extensive discussion of this debate see: R. HAMMERSLEY, 'Rethinking the Political Thought of James Harrington: Royalism, Republicanism and Democracy', *History of European Ideas*, 39:3, 2013, p. 354-70.
18. HARRINGTON, *Political Works*, *op. cit.*, p. 736 and 796-7.
19. For an alternative reading of Harrington's system that emphasises the exclusive aristocratic elements at the expense of the democratic ones see: J. C. DAVIS, 'Equality in an Unequal Commonwealth James Harrington's Republicanism and the Meaning of Equality', in I. GENTLES, J. MORRILL and B. WORDEN (eds), *Soldiers, Writers and Statesmen of the English Revolution*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, especially p. 230-4.
20. The academy of provosts has generally been viewed as offering the people the impression of participating rather than substantive involvement in government, but when viewed in the context of attitudes to popular government at the time the fact that Harrington was seeking to involve the poorer citizens in this way at all should not be overlooked.
21. HARRINGTON, *Political Works*, *op. cit.*, p. 212-14.
22. On the franchise debate see, in particular, K. THOMAS, 'The Levellers and the Franchise', in G. E. AYLMER, *The Interregnum: The Quest for Settlement*, London, Macmillan, 1972, p. 57-78.
23. HARRINGTON, *Political Works*, *op. cit.*, p. 736-45 and 748-53.
24. J. SCOTT, *Commonwealth Principles: Republican Writing of the English Revolution*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 131-150.
25. HARRINGTON, *Political Works*, *op. cit.*, p. 744. This phrase also appears in *A common-wealth or nothing...*, London, 1659, p. 2.
26. HARRINGTON, *Political Works*, *op. cit.*, p. 744.
27. H. NEVILLE, *Plato Redivivus: Or, A Dialogue Concerning Government, Wherein by Observations drawn from other Kingdoms and States both Ancient and Modern, an Endeavour is Used to Discover the Present Politick Distemper of our own with the Causes, and Remedies*, 3rd edn, in *The Oceana of James Harrington, Esq; and his other works ...*, Dublin, 1737, p. 551.

28. This section builds on ideas explored in more detail in R. HAMMERSLEY, *French Revolutionaries and English Republicans: The Cordeliers Club, 1790-1794*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005 and R. HAMMERSLEY, *The English Republican Tradition and Eighteenth-Century France: Between the Ancients and the Moderns*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2010, p. 185-97. Many of the figures discussed here are also treated in R. MONNIER, *Républicanisme, Patriotisme et Révolution française*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2005.
29. J. K. WRIGHT, *A Classical Republican in Eighteenth-Century France: The Political Thought of Mably*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 180-2.
30. J. J. RUTLEDGE, *Calypso, ou les babillards*, Paris, 1785, III, p. 221.
31. HARRINGTON, *Political Works*, *op. cit.*, p. 168.
32. J. J. RUTLEDGE, *Le Creuset, ouvrage critique et politique*, Paris, 1791, I, p. 416-7.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 416.
34. RUTLEDGE, *Le Creuset*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 442-3.
35. For copies of these images see HAMMERSLEY, *French Revolutionaries and English Republicans*, *op. cit.*, p. 111 and 113.
36. See HAMMERSLEY, *The English Republican Tradition and Eighteenth-Century France*, *op. cit.*, p. 164-7; J. H. CLAPHAM, *The Abbé Sieyès*, Westminster, p. S. King & Son, 1912; H. F. RUSSELL SMITH, *Harrington and His Oceana: A Study of a 17th Century Utopia and its Influence in America*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1914, p. 205-15; *A French Draft Constitution of 1792 Modelled on James Harrington's Oceana*, ed. S. B. LILJEGREN, Lund, C. W. K. Gleerup, 1932, p. 44-79 and D. TREVOR, 'Some Sources of the Constitutional Theory of the abbé Sieyès: Harrington and Spinoza', *Politica*, 1935, p. 325-42.
37. L. de LA VICOMTERIE DE SAINT-SAMSON, *Du Peuple et des rois*, Paris, 1790, p. 23. T. MANDAR, *De la Souveraineté du Peuple*, Paris, 1790, II, p. 23n. Raymonde Monnier has recently produced an excellent modern scholarly edition of this work. Marchamont NEEDHAM, *De La Souveraineté du peuple et de l'excellence d'un état libre*, traduit de l'anglais et enrichi de notes par Théophile Mandar, ed. R. MONNIER, Paris, Édition du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2010.
38. C. DESMOULINS, *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, Paris, 1789-1791, VI, p. 612 (Issue no. 78).
39. *A French Draft Constitution of 1792*, ed. LILJEGREN, *op. cit.*
40. [J. J. RUTLEDGE], *Idées sur l'espèce de gouvernement populaire qui pourrait convenir à un pays de l'étendue et de la population présumée de la France*, Paris, 1792, p. 9. On the significance of the use of lot see B. MANIN, *The Principles of Representative Government*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 42-93.
41. [RUTLEDGE], *Idées sur l'espèce de gouvernement populaire*, *op. cit.*, p. 16-18 and 3.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
43. SCOTT, *Commonwealth Principles*, *op. cit.*

ABSTRACTS

It is often assumed that it was the American and French Revolutions of the late eighteenth century that revived the fortunes of democracy (which had long been viewed in negative terms) and reinvented it to fit the circumstances of the modern world. This article demonstrates that in both respects the revolutionaries of the late eighteenth century were able to draw on an earlier

model. The role of the Levellers of the English Revolution in developing proto-democratic ideas has long been acknowledged, but it was one of their contemporaries, the republican James Harrington, who explicitly adopted a positive understanding of the term 'democracy' and thought seriously about what a large modern democracy would look like. Since Harrington's place in the history of democracy has been largely neglected, this article will analyse those ideas before going on to demonstrate the influence that his ideas exerted on French revolutionaries in the Cordeliers Club, who were interested in him precisely because of his ideas about democracy.

Le plus souvent, il est accepté que ce sont les Etats-Unis et la France qui ont fait revivre la tradition démocratique (appréhendée longtemps en terme négatif) à la fin du XVIII^{ème} siècle. Cet article voudrait montrer comment les deux pays ont pu s'appuyer sur un modèle plus ancien. Le rôle des « Levellers » dans la révoltuion anglaise a consisté à développer cette proto-démocratie, longtemps méconnue, mais ce fut Harrington, leur contemporain qui définit alors, de façon positive, le terme de démocratie ; Là encore la place d'Harrington fut négligée mais les pages qui suivent ses idées et leur influence sur les révolutionnaires français, plus particulièrement au club des Cordeliers, attaché à sa pensée démocratique.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Démocratie, républicanisme, James Harrington, la révolution anglaise, la Révolution française, club des Cordeliers, Venise

Keywords: Democracy, republicanism, James Harrington, English Revolution, French Revolution, Cordeliers Club, Venice

AUTHOR

RACHEL HAMMERSLEY

University of Newcastle, UK