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NOBLE REPUBLICANISM IN
THE POLISH-LITHUANIAN COMMONWEALTH
(AN ATTEMPT AT DESCRIPTION)

I
INITIAL REMARKS

At the start of these reflections it seems appropriate to contest the chosen title of this article and pose the question as to whether the term 'noble republicanism' can be used at all, whether it is not *contradictio in adiectio*, as Machiavelli and his republican followers from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would have certainly believed it to be. This is followed by a successive reservation: whether this form of republicanism or republican thought has any place within the republican tradition in Europe, whether setting it within this tradition is not a certain appropriation, or belated pursuit of the trend of studying republican thought which took place nearly forty years ago in Anglo-Saxon countries. An essential question must be posed in connection with this: whether the theories proposed by Western researchers may be used in Polish research, and whether this is worth doing. The answer to the question is not so straightforward, because we can not definitively confirm the existence of (nor describe) a modern form of republicanism that could be defined as common to Europe.¹ Research on this topic until the 1980s focused in fact on two centres of development of republican thought – Renaissance Italy, specifically Florentine political thought, which recalled and developed the classical theory of the republic and later established

¹ This is pointed out by Helmut G. Koenigsberger, 'Republicanism, monarchism and liberty', in Robert Oresko, G.C. Gibbs, Hamish M. Scott (eds.), *Royal and Republican Sovereignty in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Memory of Ragnhild Hatton* (Cambridge, 1997), 73.

modern republicanism in the work of Machiavelli; as well as English-language discourse, primarily the shaping of republican theory during the conflicts with the Stuarts and its legacy in the American colonies fighting for their independence.

This course of study was set by the first researchers, Zera Fink and Hans Baron, who pointed to the significance of the republican trend in the history of thought about the modern state. Fink focused on English republicanism as his own presupposition, though he sought its roots in Italian theory, particularly in the work of Machiavelli.² Baron focused on civic humanism and republicanism in Florentine thought; however, it was his determinations that became the starting point for analysis of Anglo-Saxon republicanism.³ The direction Florence – England – United States dominated further research, due in large part to the classic work of John Pocock *The Machiavellian Moment*, which held as its main thesis the continuity of the republican tradition ‘from Aristotle to Jefferson’.⁴ One could say that at some point republicanism underwent an appropriation of sorts, an almost exclusive inscription of it within the Anglo-Atlantic tradition. With time, other points on the ‘republican map of Europe’ came to be noticed. The Dutch in particular laid claim to their influence on republican thought and discourse, and research projects appeared taking into account increasing numbers of countries.⁵ This does not change the fact, however, that the most important works devoted to

² Zera Fink, *The Classical Republicans: An Essay in the Recovery of a Pattern of Thought in Seventeenth-century England* (1st edn, Evanston, 1945; 2nd edn, Evanston, 1962).

³ Hans Baron, *Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton and Oxford, 1955). William J. Bouwsma wrote of Baron ideas: ‘Florentine republicanism was thus eventually crucial for modern political thought and especially for the democracies of the Atlantic seaboard’, *idem*, ‘Liberty in the Renaissance and Reformation’, in Richard W. Davis (ed.), *The Origins of Modern Freedom in the West* (Stanford, 1995), 211.

⁴ John G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975); cf. James Hankins, ‘Introduction’, in *idem* (ed.), *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections* (Cambridge and New York, 2000), 9.

⁵ The most important research project (‘Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage’) was conducted by Quentin Skinner and Martin van Gelderen; its determinations were published in a two-volume work of the same title in 2002.

the history of modern republicanism and republican theory arose within the circle of Anglo-Saxon historians of ideas as a result of their analysis of seventeenth-century English sources and Italian thought, above all, the *Discorsi* of Machiavelli. It is precisely this conception of republicanism, as an ideology ultimately shaped in political discussion during battles with the House of Stuart by a Protestant society striving to extend the social scope of 'citizenship', which has become a point of reference for researchers of republicanism in other countries. This is clearly seen in works dedicated to republicanism in the Netherlands. Eco Haitsma Mulier's reflections on Dutch republican discourse are telling. He credited 'the myth of Venice itself, Aristotelianism, and the works of Machiavelli'⁶ as indicators that it belonged to the pan-European school of republicanism (and so the same elements that Pocock highlighted in his work).

It was relatively easy to fit Dutch republicanism to the 'Atlantic' model, as it had similarly developed in the context of a bourgeois, Protestant society. But what should be done when analysing political thought that arose in an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic and noble environment? Can republicanism be spoken of here at all? The most 'orthodox' researchers such as Koenigsberger, for example, respond in the negative to this question. Taking Atlantic republicanism to be an archetypal model, they treat the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (alongside Sweden) as *republic manqué*; moreover, they transfer this ascertainment to political theory, negating the possibility that republican thought could have developed in these countries.⁷ If, however, we choose not to treat the determinations of Western researchers of republican thought as cookie-cutter schemes to which we try to force-fit the political thought of successive countries, but as one trend in research, these determinations prove to be an interesting conceptual proposal that enrich the analysis of noble ideology and political thought of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, setting them in a broader context. They allow for the demonstration of which

⁶ Eco Haitsma Mulier, 'The language of seventeenth-century republicanism in the United Provinces: Dutch or European?', in Anthony Pagden (ed.), *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-modern Europe* (Cambridge and New York, 1987), 184.

⁷ 'It proved impossible to make the vital transition from city-state republicanism to commonwealth republicanism' – Koenigsberger authored this comment in relation to the fact that burghers were not included in the *Sejm*, see Koenigsberger, 'Republicanism, monarchism', 59.

elements of thinking were distinctive, and which comprised an important and shared tradition of thought on the state and the citizen's place in it. At the same time, this commonality relates not just to the genesis of the ideology derived from the classical tradition, but also to an 'encounter' of sorts which occurred very late, in the second half of the eighteenth century, between the noble ideal of the free state and the conceptions of the leading ideologues of Enlightenment republicanism.

The discussion led by Rousseau and Mably with the Polish vision of the Commonwealth is well-known in Poland at least, thanks to the research of Jerzy Michalski, whose brilliant treatises await their English translation to this very day, unfortunately.⁸ It is Michalski who drew attention to the republican nature of Polish political thought as early as the 1970s.⁹ He also devoted much of his work to this issue, underscoring the huge significance of the republican trend in Polish discussions about the state. While he focused his study on eighteenth-century republicanism, he drew attention to its significantly earlier roots. His propositions have been confirmed by a search conducted since the 1990s by historians dealing with the culture and political thought of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; however, there continues to be a lack of systematic work focusing on this issue.

Perhaps this is so because this work requires a very broad source text review, broader than those undertaken by Western researchers of republicanism. In general, Western researchers tracked the history of the republican doctrine on the basis of works of quite a high level of theoretical reflection. While it is true that these researchers did not limit themselves to the most well-known authors and also took into account the views of *minorum gentium* authors and their politico-historical context, the texts they studied generally contained a more or less complete exposition of the political doctrine proposed or accepted by the writer. In the case of the Polish-Lithuanian Com-

⁸ Jerzy Michalski, *Rousseau i sarmacki republikanizm* (Warsaw, 1977); it is still the most important analysis of *Considerations sur le gouvernement de Pologne*; see also *idem*, *Sarmacki republikanizm w oczach Francuza. Mably i konfederaci barscy* (Wrocław, 1995).

⁹ Jerzy Michalski, 'Z problematyki republikańskiego nurtu w polskiej reformatorskiej myśli politycznej w XVIII wieku', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, xc, 2 (1983), 327–38; Emanuel Rostworowski also drew attention to it, cf. *idem*, 'Republikanizm polski i anglosaski XVIII w.', *Miesięcznik Literacki*, xi, 8 (1976), 94–102.

monwealth, such an approach would significantly distort the image of republicanism. Emphasis should be placed on an important issue here: at some point in the history of the Commonwealth, republicanism came to be a nearly universal political ideology, not just one theory of the state or one author's plan for a political system. This ideology was reflected not only in influential treatises on the theory of the state but also in political writings at a time of lively debates and political conflict, in *Sejm*, dietine and Tribunal speeches and in official legal decisions. To some extent the method of analysing the republican conceptions of individual authors proves correct in relation to the sixteenth century, when the foundations of the doctrine were formed, and at the same time when numerous works (though of greater or lesser prominence) emerged with higher theoretical ambitions. In the seventeenth century, however, when the republican ideology reached its prime, not many such works were being produced any longer, and noble republicanism developed in the process of discussion and political conflicts. Hence in order to recreate the basis of this ideology, it is necessary to reach for other sources, lay out a sort of mosaic of fragments of speech, and attempt to read into the authors' intentions, which were often so obvious for the authors themselves that they did not require broader commentary or deeper explanation. This research is difficult, always accompanied by the concern that the image attained might be an artificial creation, more the researcher's vision than the conceptions that functioned in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. In addition, the question incessantly returns as to what scope of source material should be considered sufficient to render the views of participants of the political debate of that time.

In spite of these difficulties, this research seems to be much-needed in the case of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. What is more, it should take into account the entire period of the existence of the Commonwealth, as only then can the *longue durée* of some elements of this ideology be observed, as well as changes in the ideology, and finally, the aforementioned 'encounter' of Polish republicanism with that of Enlightened philosophers during the eighteenth century, alongside the clash with new theories of the state. This is no task for any one researcher, so here I present just an attempt to sketch the most important elements of the republican ideology, based on an analysis of political literature as broadly understood, arising from the founding to the demise of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and so from the

second half of the sixteenth century practically until the 1790s. My research interests include not only important treatises of well-known authors but also the less noteworthy (though often not less lengthy) considerations of *minorum gentium* authors, alongside political commentary of the day and short-lived pamphlets, and as a complement to these, an analysis of *Sejm* addresses as well as textbooks of law, history, and rhetoric.

II

RZECZPOSPOLITA

In an attempt to identify the most important components of noble ideology that would qualify as republican thought, we should start with the very word *Rzeczpospolita* (Commonwealth). It has not raised much interest among Western researchers, who focused on other elements of republican discourse, such as freedom, virtue, corruption, fortune, etc. In the meantime, as has already been noted, *Rzeczpospolita* was a very important word in noble discourse, perhaps the most important,¹⁰ and its popularity testifies significantly to this. Statistical research confirms that no other political term could be compared with it.¹¹ It is true that in the Polish language, as in English, two forms of this word coexist – the Polish Latin word *republika* as well as the Polish translation of the Latin term *res publica* – commonwealth (*rzeczpospolita*) – yet in the political discourse of the early modern era through to the eighteenth century the second of these was decidedly more popular, and it had a significantly broader meaning.

The fact that *Rzeczpospolita* was the official name of the Polish-Lithuanian state undoubtedly influenced the perception of its place among European nations. As the responses of participants in political debates in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries testify, it included the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in a certain political

¹⁰ See Ewa Bem-Wiśniewska, *Funkcjonowanie nazwy Polska w języku czasów nowożytnych (1530–1795)* (Warsaw, 1998), 168, 170 f.; Dorota Pietrzyk-Reeves, 'O pojęciu Rzeczpospolita (res-publica) w polskiej myśli politycznej XVI w.', *Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne*, lxii, 1 (2010), 46.

¹¹ Ewa Bem-Wiśniewska, 'Wizja Rzeczpospolitej w epoce staropolskiej. Od historii języka do historii kultury', in Bogusław Dybaś, Paweł Janczewski and Tomasz Kempa (eds.), *Rzeczpospolita w XVI–XVIII wieku. Państwo czy wspólnota?* (Toruń, 2007), 15.

community. While some theorists of the mid-sixteenth century used the concept of *respublica* to define any state ruled by law,¹² at the same time other authors proclaimed their belief in the distinctness of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, its uniqueness compared to European monarchies that were ruled by an ever stronger hand. This view was shared not only by Stanisław Orzechowski who was quite radical in his views, but also by the significantly more reserved Andrzej Wolan. This conviction was repeated numerous times during political discussions before the first free elections in Poland. With time it became commonplace. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was termed *respublica libera* together with other republics to more clearly distinguish them from the remainder of states.¹³ In any event, the list of republics was not long. At the turn of the seventeenth century just Rome and Venice were on it; in the 1630s the Netherlands and Swiss cantons were added, and in the eighteenth century Sweden was included for a period of time, England with resistance and finally the American colonies and revolutionary France.¹⁴

However, for noble participants of political discussions, the word *Rzeczpospolita* was not just the name of their country and countries with a similar political system. An extraordinary richness of meanings were attached to this concept, and more than one study has been devoted to their ordering and explanation.¹⁵ Essentially, this name

¹² Primarily Andrzej Frycz-Modrzewski did so, see Pietrzyk-Reeves, 'O pojęciu Rzeczpospolita', 48 f.

¹³ This term was used already in 1573 in relation to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as well as to the Italian republics: 'in respublica nostra libera', see [N.N.], 'Gdyżechmy przyszli na ten nieszczęsny wiek', in Jan Czubek (ed.), *Pisma polityczne z czasów pierwszego bezkrólewia* (Cracow, 1906), 158; 'omnes respublicae Italicae liberae propter civiles factiones factae sunt alienae servae', see [N.N.], 'Rozmowa Gąski ze św. Bartłomiejem', *ibidem*, 622.

¹⁴ Anna Grzeškowiak-Krwawicz, 'Rara avis czy wolni wśród wolnych? Obraz krajów wolnych w polskiej literaturze politycznej XVIII wieku', in Łukasz Kądziela, Wojciech Kriegseisen and Zofia Zielińska (eds.), *Trudne stulecia. Studia z dziejów XVII i XVIII wieku ofiarowane profesorowi Jerzemu Michalskiemu w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin* (Warsaw, 1994), 167–83; Anna Grzeškowiak-Krwawicz, 'Admirabilis ordo. Polacy wobec mitu Wenecji XVI–XVIII w.', in Tomasz Chachulski and *eadem* (eds.), *Literatura – historia – dziedzictwo. Prace ofiarowane Teresie Kostkiewiczowej* (Warsaw, 2006), 67–77.

¹⁵ In addition to those cited above, see Edward Opaliński, *Kultura polityczna szlachty polskiej w latach 1587–1652. System parlamentarny a społeczeństwo obywatelskie* (Warsaw, 1995), 27–38; Urszula Augustyniak, 'Polska i łacińska terminologia

denoted not only a state but the community of all of its inhabitants (less often), or (more often) the community of all of its citizens, and so just the entire nobility (i.e. all noble citizens). It was used to denote the structure of the political system, three deliberative estates (the king included), and finally, it denoted just the Chamber of Deputies. One must be aware, however, that this division is an attempt at systematisation imposed by today's criteria and way of viewing the state. For the participants of the political debate from the end of the sixteenth century at least until the middle of the eighteenth century this would be something artificial, unnecessary and probably not completely understood. For these individuals, *Rzeczpospolita* held all of these meanings simultaneously, though the aspect of the term they featured depended on the context or goal of their speech. This can be seen most clearly when we try to distinguish between the application of the concept to a certain political construct or a defined territorial area versus the community created by this construct within the territorial bounds to which it applies. Researchers of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth have described and analysed the 'complete identification of citizens with the state'¹⁶ for some time and point to the fact that in Polish statements 'the distinction between the state and society disappeared, and they came to interpenetrate each other'.¹⁷ In fact, it is difficult to speak here of the disappearance of this distinction; rather, it was the invocation of a vision of the state which did not take this distinction into account at all. When embarking on an analysis of noble republicanism of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth it should be recalled that it was precisely this vision that lay at its foundation. As was the case for classical authors, the state in Polish discourse was always *civitas* – a community of citizens. The Polish-Lithuanian nobility treated the term *res publica* very literally,

ustrojowa w publicystyce politycznej epoki Wazów', in Jerzy Axer (ed.), *Łacina jako język elit* (Warsaw, 2004), 52–4; Henryk Olszewski, 'Rzeczpospolita. Przyczynek do dziejów ideologii politycznoprawnej w dawnej Polsce', in *idem*, *Sejm w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej. Ustrój i idee* (Poznań, 2002), ii, 7–16.

¹⁶ Edward Opaliński, *Sejm srebrnego wieku 1587–1652. Między głosowaniem większościowym a liberum veto* (Warsaw, 2001), 193; see also Claude Backvis, *Szkice o kulturze staropolskiej*, ed. Andrzej Biernacki, trans. Maria Daszkiewicz et al. (Warsaw, 1975), 475, 492.

¹⁷ Henryk Wisner, *Najjaśniejsza Rzeczpospolita. Szkice z dziejów Polski szlacheckiej XVI–XVII wieku* (Warsaw, 1978), 225.

and so – *rzecz publiczna* (public thing); *rzecz wspólna* (common thing). As Orzechowski wrote, clearly referring to Cicero, ‘commonwealth is the assembly of citizens in both a society of law and common welfare’.¹⁸ One can also observe this conviction in statements from political debate, very early on. An anonymous participant in the discussion preceding the first free election wrote:

this is our own *Rzeczpospolita*, complete, where *multorum concordantia vota ad unam pacem et unam salutem, ut bene beateque vivatur, universos iugo aheneo nectunt*.¹⁹

‘And whom does the *Rzeczpospolita* consist of, if it not ourselves?’ – questioned Andrzej Zamoyski nearly two hundred years later.²⁰

It is necessary to pause for a moment at this purely rhetorical question, because it signals an important issue. The ‘ourselves’ of Zamoyski’s question, similar to Orzechowski’s citizens forming the Commonwealth – were nobility, and no one else. The term ‘exclusive republicanism’ could be used here. This is a kind of paradox – at the beginning of the existence of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth the republican ideology undoubtedly had a uniting function – it linked nobility of various tongues and religions in one Commonwealth. Yet with time the recognition of the Commonwealth as a community of citizens, and only citizens, caused the majority of its inhabitants to be removed from its boundaries. In the sixteenth century this was not yet obvious. In the seventeenth century, however, the Commonwealth’s community of citizens did not so much question whether burghers and peasants were members of the community, as it stopped noticing

¹⁸ Stanisław Orzechowski, ‘Dyalog około egzekucyi’, in *idem, Wybór pism*, ed. Jerzy Starnawski (Wrocław, 1972), 313 (the definition is given in Latin and Polish, but without invoking Cicero); a similar definition was already given earlier, for instance, by Jakub Przyłuski, see Tomasz W. Gromelski, ‘The commonwealth and *monarchia mixta* in Polish and English political thought in the later sixteenth century’, in Richard Unger (ed., with the assistance of Jakub Basista), *Britain and Poland-Lithuania: Contact and Comparison from the Middle Ages to 1795* (Leiden and Boston, 2008), 169.

¹⁹ And further: ‘Tota Respublica, my, my sami’ [*Tota Respublica*, we, we ourselves], see [N.N.], ‘Kto zna, co jest R.P. zupełna i cała’, in Czubek (ed.), *Pisma polityczne z czasów pierwszego bezkrólewia*, 215.

²⁰ Andrzej Zamoyski, *Mowa na sejmie convocationis dnia 16 maja 1764 roku w Warszawie miana* (s.l. [1764]).

them, at least in political discourse. This resulted from the socio-political situation at the time, the complete political domination of the nobility; but republican ideology fitted this reality perfectly. Western researchers often focus on Anglo-Saxon theories in which one of the aspects of republicanism was the extension of political rights to groups previously denied them. They sometimes forget that classical republicanism was an ideology with a very narrow social basis, that the word ‘the people’ for classical theorists or Italian humanists meant only a very small section of society.²¹ Noble republicans also fit this tradition well. What was peculiar was just its continuity, as it came to be polemicised with only by the end of the eighteenth century.

The broad understanding of the term *Rzeczpospolita* turned out to be quite lasting. While at the end of the eighteenth century Polish authors of political thought slowly began to apply the terminology separating the state from the community inhabiting it and the form of political system (under the influence of Western theorists), one can still observe the entire richness of this concept at the level of political discussion. An illustrative example of this is the *Zasady do poprawy formy rządu* [Principles for the improvement of the form of government] – a reform project of the Polish government proposed in the *Sejm* in the year 1789, where the word *Rzeczpospolita* appears with almost all of the meanings known since the sixteenth century (noble state, community of citizens, the *Sejm* and Chamber of Deputies). The narrowing of its meaning most often indicated polemics against the republican tradition/ideology. Its limitation in use to the official name for the state (and only twice) in the May 3rd Constitution is revealing. In any case, opponents of the Constitution noticed and severely criticized this fact.²² This should come as no surprise; for them just as 200 years

²¹ As we know, for Aristotle and Greek thinkers more broadly, the ‘people’ were free individuals, and so a minority of inhabitants of the Greek republics. Bouwsma emphasises that ‘the words *populus* or *popolo* generally referred to what was considered the politically competent minority’, and adds: ‘the idealized political discussion of Renaissance republics generally ignored the disenfranchised masses, who were regarded as dangerous to the order of the state’, see *idem*, ‘Liberty in the Renaissance’, 208; similarly Mikael Hörnquist: ‘republics, like princes, ruled over subjects who lacked the privileges and positive rights that full citizenship carried’, see *idem*, ‘The two myths of civic humanism’, in Hankins (ed.), *Renaissance Civic Humanism*, 112.

²² ‘I looked carefully for the word *Rzeczpospolita Polska* [Commonwealth of Poland], but having read through to the end, did not find it. And so I felt a new

earlier for their ancestors, *Rzeczpospolita* was something much more than the name of the country, community, or political institution; it was a word which expressed the concept of the state, the location of the citizen within it, and ultimately a vision of authority, a perspective on the world which incorporated a significant number of the political ideals of the nobility.²³ This was encapsulated by an author well-cited by Polish researchers; he wrote the declaration of the 1606 Rebellion (*Rokosz*) *Libera respublica quae sit?* Responding to the title question, he described a community whose foundations were formed by *monarchia mixta*, the rule of law, self-determination of citizens, and obviously, freedom.²⁴ It is fair to say that these are the basic ingredients of the vision of the state formed by noble republicanism.

III MONARCHIA MIXTA

Polish theorists of the state, just as republican theorists in all of Europe recognised *monarchia mixta* or *mixtum imperium*, as it was defined at the turn of the seventeenth century as the best political solution. Undoubtedly, the origin of these views can be found to a certain degree in the Aristotelian view of the state well-known to fifteenth and sixteenth century writers.²⁵ To a greater extent,

kind of fear again ...', see [N.N.], 'Myśl obywatela o nowej Konstytucji [1791]', in Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz (ed.), *Za czy przeciw Ustawie Rządowej. Walka publicystyczna o Konstytucję 3 Maja. Antologia* (Warsaw, 1992), 35; 'The editor of even the conspiratorial Constitution felt [that a monarchy had been already introduced], because in the entire work did not dare to mention the name of Commonwealth, even for appearances' sake' – Szczesny Potocki, *Uniwersał z 16 czerwca 1792*, pamphlet.

²³ 'It has rarely happened in the past that one word had such a significant, unmistakable impact on both the political consciousness of the society as well as the structure of the state' – Bem-Wiśniewska, *Funkcjonowanie nazwy*, 168; similarly Augustyniak, 'Polska i łacińska terminologia', 53.

²⁴ [N.N.], 'Libera respublica quae sit', in Jan Czubek (ed.), *Pisma polityczne z czasów rokoszu Zebrzydowskiego 1606–1608*, 3 vols. (Cracow, 1916–18), ii, 403.

²⁵ Henryk Litwin, 'W poszukiwaniu rodowodu demokracji szlacheckiej. Polska myśl polityczna w piśmiennictwie XV i początków XVI wieku', in Anna Sucheni-Grabowska and Małgorzata Żaryn (eds.), *Między monarchią a demokracją. Studia z dziejów Polski XV–XVIII wieku* (Warsaw, 1994), 13–53; Edward Opaliński, 'Civic Humanism and Republican Citizenship in the Polish Renaissance', in Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*,

however, we can probably attribute them to the ideas of Polybius, which are clearer and more easily adaptable for use in political discussions than the quite complicated ideals of Stagirite. This concept was recalled and popularised as early as the fifteenth century by Italian writers whose works were also read in Poland.²⁶ One should not forget that Cicero (well-known in Poland) was also a proponent of the mixed system. What is more important here, both authors of theoretical reflections and participants of political debates from as early as the 1560s were convinced that precisely this form of government existed in their country.²⁷ Not only did theoreticians such as Orzechowski or Goślicki describe it as such, but also unknown authors of polemical literature. It was in just this way that a proponent of the French candidacy allayed fears of a repeat of the St Bartholomew's Day massacre in Poland in 1573:

because there [sc. in France] is *alia forma RP* [of the Commonwealth] ... every man's courage is not the same as those for whom *ex benevolentia rex imperat* and where there is a *merum mixtum* empire.²⁸

A picture of the Commonwealth 'formed of three modes: *ex monarchia, aristocratia et democratia*'²⁹ was described from the sixteenth century through to the 1770s, and the term mixed government was used essentially to the end of the Commonwealth, though by the end of

i: *Republicanism and Constitutionalism in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2002), 147–66.

²⁶ Cf. Fink, *The Classical Republicans*, 18; on Polish-Italian contacts see Henryk Barycz, *Spojrzenia w przeszłość polsko-włoską* (Wrocław, 1965); Wojciech Tygielski, *Włosi w Polsce XVI–XVII wieku: utracona szansa na modernizację* (Warsaw, 2005), *passim*.

²⁷ On the functioning of the ideal of *monarchia mixta* in the Commonwealth at the turn of the seventeenth century cf. Stefania Ochmann, 'Rzeczpospolita jako "monarchia mixta" – dylematy władzy i wolności', in Andrzej Bartnicki *et al.* (eds.), *Kultura – polityka – dyplomacja. Studia ofiarowane profesorowi Jaremie Maciszewskiemu w sześćdziesiątą rocznicę jego urodzin* (Warsaw, 1990), 264–78; Opaliński, *Kultura polityczna*, 40–2; Urszula Augustyniak, *Wazowie i "królowie rodacy". Studium władzy królewskiej w Rzeczypospolitej XVII wieku* (Warsaw, 1999), 32; Janusz Ekes, *Trójpodział władzy i zgoda wszystkich. Naczelne zasady "ustroju mieszanego" w staropolskiej refleksji politycznej* (Siedlce, 2001).

²⁸ [N.N.], 'Respons na tenże skrypt', in Czubek (ed.), *Pisma polityczne z czasów pierwszego bezkrólewia*, 461.

²⁹ [N.N.], 'Libera respublica', 403.

the eighteenth century a different meaning had already come to be attributed to it.³⁰ Acceptance of precisely this model of government as ideal for the republic turned out to be significantly longer-lasting than in Western Europe. In part the reason for this was certainly the poor reception of newer theories of the state;³¹ however, probably to a greater degree it was due to the connection of the theory with actual political institutions of the Commonwealth, recognising the king as the monarchic element, the Senate as the aristocratic element, the Chamber of Deputies/nobles as the democratic one, and the sum of these parts as the Commonwealth. As the author of the *Głos Wolny* [The free voice to make freedom safe] put it: the king is the first estate

componens with the two others an *integritas indissolubilis* of the Commonwealth, which is a symbol of the Holy Trinity: three estates, and one Commonwealth, and within it there is an *individua potestas* of three estates.³²

³⁰ This particularly relates to the authors of textbooks. Teodor Waga thought that the Polish government was ‘formed from monarchic, aristocratic and democratic ones, because the king together with the Senate and knightly estates must counteract each other in ensuing national concerns’, see *idem*, *Krótkie zebranie historii i geografii polskiej* (Supraśl, 1767), 230 (while he underscored that this was ‘a republican form of government’); Wincenty Skrzetuski S.P. had an identical definition, see *idem*, *Prawo polityczne Królestwa Polskiego* (Warsaw, 1782), i, 41. The case of Michał Wielhorski is interesting – in his *Tableau*, which described the Polish government at Rousseau’s request, he still used the formula of a mixed government comprised of three elements. When writing his treatise (*O przywróceniu dawnego rządu według pierwiastkowych rzeczypospolitej ustaw* [s.l., 1775]), however, he dropped this conception precisely due to Rousseau’s criticism of it, cf. Michalski, *Rousseau*, 38, 39.

³¹ In the sixteenth century Polish theorists of the state and even participants of the political discussions displayed a knowledge of operating theories of the state that was sometimes surprisingly proficient. Yet from the 1620s onward this familiarity waned; the influence of Lipsius can still be seen (particularly in Łukasz Opaliński), but it is difficult to find some more evident traces of the writings of Bodin, or later for example Hobbes and Grotius. Nevertheless, we cannot rule out that the most prominent authors of political treatises were familiar with them, such as Opaliński or Andrzej Maksymilian Fredro. In any case, this is an issue that remains poorly studied. One could presume that the concepts of the state proposed by Western supporters of the monarchy would be difficult for noble republicans to accept. At the same time, publications of English supporters of the republic from the mid-eighteenth century were too distant and did not reach the Commonwealth.

³² [Stanisław Leszczyński], *Głos wolny króla Stanisława Leszczyńskiego*, ed. Alexander Rembowski (Warsaw, 1903), 24.

While it is included in the common republican tradition, the invoked ideal of mixed government had certain features of its own that were characteristic of noble republicanism. The consistent application of the theoretical model to the concrete elements comprising the Commonwealth caused the recognition of all three as necessary to maintain equilibrium and in consequence freedom. As one of these elements was the king, he also turned out to be indispensable. As a sixteenth century author wrote:

Quae salus publica sine libertate, quae libertas nostra sine auctoritate senatus, quae auctoritas senatus sine dignitate regis?³³

At least from the time of the Zebrzydowski Rebellion (1606–9), Polish noble citizens expressed the conviction that kings endangered freedom, which was common for proponents of republican political solutions throughout Europe. The opinion of an anonymous rebel that

the nature of *regum* is: when at war, to plan how to seize others' possessions, and when idle, to desire *absolute* power over their nation³⁴

was repeated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The opinion that 'monarchs are the foes of the freedom, privileges and happiness of their subjects from birth'³⁵ while not always so pointedly expressed, was an important element of the political ideology and generally-accepted conviction of noble citizens from the seventeenth century onward. This was an exceptionally long-lived conviction, and the fear of *absolutum dominium* is one of the most often invoked phobias of noble society. This was not anything unusual; caution with respect to authority and the fear of absolutist coups d'état is one of the basic features of the republican doctrine, not only the Polish variety.³⁶

³³ [N.N.], 'Rozsądek o warszawskich sprawach na elekcyey do koronacyey należący', in Czubek (ed.), *Pisma polityczne z czasów pierwszego bezkrólewia*, 586.

³⁴ [N.N.], 'Fundament rokoszu', in Czubek (ed.), *Pisma polityczne z czasów rokoszu*, iii, 347; por. Edward Opaliński, 'Postawa szlachty polskiej wobec osoby królewskiej jako instytucji 1587–1648. Próba postawienia problematyki', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, xc, 4 (1983), 800; Augustyniak, *Wazowie*, 35.

³⁵ [N.N.], *Bezstronne zastanowienie się nad proponowaną ustawą następstwa tronu w Polsce* (s.l. [1789]), 54.

³⁶ '... arbitrariness as a central republican anathema', see Bill Brugger, *Republican Theory in Political Thought: Virtuous or Virtual?* (New York, 1999), 27; Quentin

Similar fears of giving monarchs too much power were held by Polish and, for example, English republicans, particularly with regard to the command of a standing army.³⁷ Despite this, no voices appeared in Polish responses that questioned royal authority as such, even in those announced or published at moments of sharp conflict with the ruler, in contrast to those promulgated by French Monarchomachs, Dutch opponents of Philip II or English republicans from Cromwell's time.³⁸ Neither in theoretical reflections nor the fervour of the existing discussion did anyone propose introducing a republic without a king. The first such proposition appeared in 1763³⁹ and had no followers until the 1790s. Not insignificant was certainly the fact that the issue of the right of rebellion, understood as a natural right, was a completely abstract issue in the Commonwealth. Yet more important was the fact that independent of however poorly they assessed the existing monarch, noble citizens recognised him as a *necessary* component of the Commonwealth.⁴⁰

Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998), 65; cf. also James T. Boulton, *Arbitrary Power: An Eighteenth-century Obsession* (Nottingham, 1967).

³⁷ By no means were these particularly Polish fears; the downright obsessive terror of the 'standing army' as a tool of royal absolutism, or excessive financial potency of the king were one of the most characteristic features of English political discussion from the middle of the seventeenth century through the entire eighteenth century, cf. Lance Banning, 'The Republican Interpretation: Retrospect and Prospect', in Milton M. Klein, Richard D. Brown and John B. Hench (eds.), *The Republican Synthesis Revisited: Essays in Honor of George Athan Billias* (Worcester, 1992), 95; Harry T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Methuen, 1979), 184–6 and *passim*; Maurice M. Goldsmith, 'Liberty Virtue and the Rule of Law, 1689–1770', in David Wootton (ed.), *Republicanism, Liberty and Commercial Society, 1649–1776* (Stanford, 1994), 206.

³⁸ Wyger R. E. Velema, "'That a Republic is Better than a Monarchy": Anti-monarchism in Early Modern Dutch Political Thought', in van Gelderen and Skinner (eds.), *Republicanism*, i, 9–25; Martin Dzelzainis, 'Anti-monarchism in English Republicanism', *ibidem*, 27–41.

³⁹ [J.N. Poniński], *Projekt uszczęśliwienia ojczyzny*, Cracow, Biblioteka Czartoryskich, MS 2619; cf. Emanuel Rostworowski, 'Jan Nepomucen Poniński autorem republikańskiej "Moralizacji"', *Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny. Sobótka*, xxxvii, 3–4 (1982), 233–40.

⁴⁰ For more on this topic, see Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, 'Anti-monarchism in Polish Republicanism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in van Gelderen and Skinner (eds.), *Republicanism*, i, 43–59.

IV SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLE

Yet *necessary* does not mean just as important. While each of the three estates had its place in the construction of the mixed political system, the concept of the mixed system came to be accompanied relatively quickly by the conviction that sovereign authority should belong to a democratic agent, and so to the (of course noble) 'People' or 'Nation.' The authority of the nation was realised in the principle *nic o nas bez nas* (nothing about us, without us). As early as the 1560s Andrzej Wolan wrote:

Regarding the chief needs of the Commonwealth, without permission of the nobility the Lord [sc. the ruler] has no authority to be able to determine anything.⁴¹

Even before him, Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski so characterised the authority of Polish kings:

it ill befitt them to rule at their arbitrary will, either by establishing laws or imposing taxes on subjects as well as establishing anything for eternity. Because they do everything either according to the permission of all estates, or according to the intent of laws...⁴²

While in the sixteenth century talk was rather about the share of the noble nation in power, at the time of the Zebrzydowski Rebellion opinions emerged that *summa potestas regni* lies in the estate of nobles.⁴³ Over time this belief became widespread. The Polish transferred the concept of sovereignty from an institution (monarchy, par-

⁴¹ Andrzej Wolan, *De libertate politica sive civili. O wolności Rzeczypospolitej albo słacheckiej*, ed. Maciej Eder and Roman Mazurkiewicz, trans. Stanisław Dubingowicz (Humanizm Polski, Inedita, Warsaw, 2010), 143.

⁴² Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski, *O poprawie Rzeczypospolitej księgi czwore* [trans. Cyprian Bazylík, 1577], ed. Mirosław Korolko (Warsaw, 2003), 71.

⁴³ [N.N.] 'Libera respublica', 404; noteworthy is the argument of Mikołaj Zebrzydowski, who, coming from the concept of mixed government structure comprised of three estates, proved that the *szlachta* (Polish nobility) is 'potissima huius regio portio' and 'primas partes habet in regno hoc', citing the privileges of Sigismund the Old and Sigismund Augustus, from which he drew the conclusion that *absoluta potestas* is in the hands of this estate, see Mikołaj Zebrzydowski, 'Apologia', in Czubek (ed.), *Pisma polityczne z czasów rokoszu*, iii, 233 f.

liament) to the nation (albeit noble) significantly earlier than the inhabitants of other countries.⁴⁴ As Leszczyński wrote:

absoluta potestas having properly been transferred *ad corpus individuum* of the entire Commonwealth, which Commonwealth – being free over itself – should rule itself, and in it and through it we all who *comprimus* the Commonwealth.⁴⁵

What Western theorists of the state had worked out in the second half of the seventeenth century and in the eighteenth century was already present in Polish practice – as well as in theory – at the beginning of the seventeenth century.⁴⁶ In the development of this conception considerable significance can be attributed to the fact that it was precisely the nation that decided who the monarch would be. This fact signaled that the nation, and not the king, was the rightful possessor and ruler of their country, that the nation was sovereign, and not the king. As early as the first free election voices appeared that all citizens were ‘kings’.⁴⁷ ‘Each of us is heir to the kingdom for which we choose the king’, said Mikołaj Kazimierski at the *Sejm*

⁴⁴ The distinctness of Polish opinions can be seen clearly in the context of English theories. In the first half of the eighteenth century the belief (having its origins in the seventeenth century) that parliament had taken over the function and prerogatives of a single sovereign entity from the monarch was generally widespread in England; only with time, and not without resistance, did this opinion evolve in the direction of recognising the full sovereignty of the nation, which had long not raised anyone’s doubts in the Commonwealth of the eighteenth century; cf. i.a. Michael Mendle, ‘Parliamentary Sovereignty: A Very English Absolutism’, in Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain* (Ideas in Context, 24, Cambridge, 1993), 97–119; Harry T. Dickson, ‘The Eighteenth-century Debate on the Sovereignty of Parliament’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, xxvi (1976), 189–210; John A. W. Gunn, *Beyond Liberty and Property: The Process of Self-Recognition in Eighteenth-century Political Thought* (Kingston and Montreal, 1983), 73–88; Paul Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman 1689–1798* (Oxford, 1991), 151–6.

⁴⁵ [Leszczyński], *Głos wolny*, 64.

⁴⁶ Opaliński, *Kultura polityczna*, 38; Adam Lityński, ‘Problem szlacheckiego prawa zgromadzeń ziemskich w Polsce w XVII i XVIII wieku’, *Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne*, xxvi, 1 (1974), 182; Józef A. Gierowski, ‘Konfederacje a postawa polityczna szlachty’, in *idem* (ed.), *Dzieje kultury politycznej w Polsce* (Warsaw, 1977), 95.

⁴⁷ ‘... together all of us in such a wealthy and rich Crown are ourselves kings’, see [N.N.], ‘Gdyżechmy przyszli’, 147.

of 1592,⁴⁸ and this opinion was repeated until the end of the eighteenth century:

When a nation may choose whichever king it wants, from wherever, that in itself is proof of the fact that the country belongs to the nation and is the heritage of the nation,⁴⁹

proudly wrote an anonymous republican in 1790, though at that time he could have already found other theoretical bases for the belief in the sovereignty of the nation.

While the conviction that the nation was sovereign became widespread very early, the question that was being asked (not only by republicans) throughout Europe as to how and by whom the people/nation were to realise their power did not receive an ultimate response until almost the end of the existence of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was generally no doubt that the noble nation, by choosing their deputies and giving them instructions, transferred their power to them in some way, although this was not considered in terms of the delegation of power or representation. The *Sejm* was rather an emanation or embodiment of the Commonwealth. Characteristic is the popularity of the use of the term *Rzeczpospolita* (Commonwealth) in relation to the entire *Sejm* or, what is even more important here, to just the representatives of knighthood estate – the Chamber of Deputies. As early as the seventeenth century, however, voices were raised that sovereignty not only belonged to the nation, but that it was precisely the nation that should continually exercise it. Deputies were not representatives of the nation but proxies bound by directions, passive pieces of paper on which dietine instructions were written. This idea appeared at the time of the Zebrzydowski Rebellion and was the basis for confederations. It was not the dominating opinion for long, and it never was the only one. Even in the first half of the eighteenth century and so during the period of the deepest crisis of noble parliament, the most prominent authors such as Leszczyński or Konarski called for a delegation of power (although they did not use

⁴⁸ Cit. from Backvis, *Szkice o kulturze*, 492; cf. Opaliński, *Kultura polityczna*, 53 and *passim*.

⁴⁹ [N.N.], *Mysł względem poprawy formy rządu* (Warsaw, 1790), 67.

that term). More prevalent at the time, however, was the view that this was a dangerous solution: ‘the power of the deputy who is not limited by his instructions will make him a tyrant of his fellows’ – went the running opinion of an anonymous author from the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁵⁰ It is interesting to note that while rooted in both the political reality of the Commonwealth as well as in Polish thinking about the state, the final dimension of the idea of direct democracy was only achieved as late as the 1770s under the influence of Rousseau’s *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne*. It is precisely at that time that the concept of a legislative nation, the belief in the inalienability of its power and even the power of the individual citizen briefly dominated Polish political discussion. It was not until the disputes of the Four-Year *Sejm* (1788–92) that it become possible, perhaps not so much to introduce a modern theory of representation, as to return to the earlier belief, adorned in Enlightenment phraseology that ‘all authority in human society has its origin in the will of the nation’ (art. 5, The Constitution of May 3rd, 1791), yet is realised in the assembled estates. Noble citizens could say of themselves: ‘we are the nation’ and indeed they spoke and thought that way. Therefore, they wanted to make the nation, and so themselves, their rights and privileges dependent not on a foreign caprice, but on their own will, which is one of the foundations of the republican vision of the state and republican liberty.

V FREEDOM

Freedom was a key element of the political ideology of the nobility. It was precisely freedom that was supposed to be guaranteed by the mixed structure of government; freedom was the most precious gift that the Commonwealth bestowed on its citizens, and at the same time its foundation and hallmark. Freedom was the sister of the Commonwealth, the heart of the nation, the jewel in its crown, the apple of its eye. As Jan Zamoyski said in 1605: ‘Fundamentum nostrae republicae libertas est.’ ‘*Libertas* is its *modum naturae*’ – wrote Walenty

⁵⁰ [N.N.], *Objaśnienie nieszczęśliwych skutków z tyłu zerwanych sejmów wynikających*, cit. from Henryk Olszewski, *Sejm Rzeczypospolitej epoki oligarchii 1652–1763* (Poznań, 1966), 112.

Pęski of his country one hundred years later.⁵¹ ‘My freedom is my life’ – these words were placed in the mouth of the Commonwealth in a piece of writing from 1697.⁵² The vision of freedom that can be recreated on the basis of analysis of the remaining theories of the Commonwealth as well as the statements made in political discussions of the time fits perfectly well with the conception that Anglo-Saxon researchers named republican freedom. This freedom was only possible in a free republic, where the people/nation (however understood) had their share of power, and citizens decided about their affairs for themselves, not being subject to the arbitrary will of a ruler.

In their pronouncements, theorists of the state as well as noble politicians stressed the interdependence between the liberties of individual citizens and the possession of rights to take part in lawmaking and deciding about matters of the state. It was repeatedly pointed out that Polish freedom was freedom ‘under the law’, but that the law that was self-determined. The deep belief that the foundation of freedom was self-determination was widespread and reached as far back as the second half of the sixteenth century. The free person decided by himself (*sam*), for himself (*sobie*). *Sam* and *sobie* are probably the most commonly-used pronouns in Polish statements about freedom. The actions of free citizens were subordinated only to the dictates of the law, established, of course, by themselves. As early as 1573 an anonymous statesman wrote:

So great is the common freedom that it is no lord who rules over me at his desire or whim, nor any light individual, but my brother ... and it is more pleasant for me to endure as a free man what I *myself* and my brother exalted by me permit,⁵³

and thirty years later an anonymous rebel explained that the law governing the republic is called ‘common law’

⁵¹ [Walenty Pęski], *Domina Palatii regina libertas*, in Jan Dębiński, *Różne mowy publiczne, sejmikowe i sejmowe...* ([Częstochowa], 1727), 122.

⁵² *Respons Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej na uniwersał i manifest księżęcia Imci Franciszka Ludwika de Borbon de Conti* (s.l. [1697]) (1 fol.).

⁵³ [N.N.], *Naprawa Rzeczypospolitej koronnej do elekcyey nowego króla*, in Czubek (ed.), *Pisma polityczne z czasów pierwszego bezkrólewia*, 202 – the author was thinking not about the Chamber of Deputies as one might think, but the Senate.

because everyone voluntarily determines it for everyone *ratione*, so that the law would not be harsh for the one who determines it for *himself*.⁵⁴

The belief that freedom primarily meant the self-determination of citizens lasted until the end of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. 'It is principally here where the entire freedom [of the citizen] hung, when he *himself* can freely deliberate regarding himself', wrote Stanisław Leszczyński.⁵⁵ The free citizen

himself determines the laws which he must execute for himself, he *himself* metes out the burden that he should carry, he *himself* chooses the rulers to whom he will show obedience and defends his freedoms himself,⁵⁶

repeated the defenders of the ancient regime to the end of the eighteenth century; but its critics also echoed:

There cannot be anything more holy on this earth than to determine freedom that has been given by nature by *oneself*, prescribe rules for *oneself*, and finally put on *oneself* the political yoke so as to experience power and authority founded on the law of one's equals sitting at the helm of the government,⁵⁷

wrote in 1789 Ignacy Łoborzewski, a Polish student of Montesquieu. In keeping with the republican conception participants in the Polish discussion on freedom believed that personal freedom, understood as the free pursuit of fulfillment of individual goals and needs, is only possible where citizens have the freedom to participate in public life, in wielding power, and so according to today's understanding, where they have positive freedom. These liberties were not differentiated at the time; they were seen as various aspects or areas of realisation of the one and same freedom. With very few exceptions, this belief was proclaimed for more than two hundred years by almost all participants of political discussion, regardless of how they assessed the Polish reality or what proposals they had for their fellow countryman. Inter-

⁵⁴ [N.N.], '*Libera respublica*', 403.

⁵⁵ [Leszczyński], *Głos wolny*, 40.

⁵⁶ [N.N.], *Bezstronne zastanowienie*, 42.

⁵⁷ Ignacy Łada Łoborzewski, *Zaszczyt wolności polskiej angielskiej wyrównywiający: Z uwagami do tego stosownemi i opisaniem rządu angielskiego* (Lwów, 1789), 15, similarly Stanisław Konarski, *O skutecznym rad sposobie, albo o utrzymywaniu ordynaryjnych sejmów*, ii (Warsaw, 1761), 129.

estingly, the Polish concept of freedom that originated in republican thought was to be very lasting and surprisingly flexible. In the second half of the eighteenth century this concept appropriated certain solutions from new concepts about freedom – freedom as natural law and the division of freedom into political and civil forms. At least some authors (Kołłątaj, Staszic) began to extend its societal scope. But it never stopped being a republican concept, making individual freedom dependent on the form of government and emphasising the need for active citizenship.⁵⁸ Even authors who based their ideas on Western theories tried to adapt them to republican ideals and their own traditions. They proposed a modern political system with delegation of authority, separation of powers, etc. for the Commonwealth. But as it had for their predecessors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, freedom meant not only the pursuit of one's own objectives without interference from the government and fellow citizens, but also self-determination. Characteristically, among the Western theorists of the state undoubtedly Montesquieu and Rousseau were the most popular in Poland – those writers closest to the republican tradition. At the same time, the belief that the Polish political system was the realisation of the ideal of the free state (though highly deformed or even degenerated) was so strong, that while even decided critics of Polish freedom such as Staszic or Kołłątaj were convinced that they were proposing a completely new, 'true' freedom to their fellow countrymen, they still sensed a continuity with the earlier tradition of Polish freedom. Moreover, they believed that precisely thanks to this freedom, Poland had remained nearly the last island in a sea of despotism.

VI THE LAW

The Polish nobility agreed with Cicero, who wrote that *libertas consistit in legibus*. Long before Locke, Andrzej Wolan stated unequivocally: 'And so where there are no rights, there is no

⁵⁸ For more on this topic, see Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, 'Liberté polonaise – privilège nobiliaire ou idée universelle?', in Jarosław Dumanowski and Michel Figeac (eds.), *Noblesse française et noblesse polonaise. Mémoire, identité, culture XVIe–XXe siècles* (Pessac, 2006), 299–311; *eadem*, *Regina libertas. Wolność w polskiej myśli politycznej XVIII wieku* (Gdańsk, 2006).

freedom'.⁵⁹ It is precisely the law that was yet another important element of the nobility's political ideology.⁶⁰ The role attributed to the law was very complex and, it seems, would not have completely corresponded with those features which at least some researchers have considered to be characteristic of republican ideology or discourse. According to the conceptualisation of the Pocock school, it was not the law that was a constitutive element of republican ideology, as republicans thought of politics 'not in terms of the rights of individuals in Lockean terms, but in terms of the collective agency of citizens, in "civic humanist" terms'.⁶¹ Indeed in the texts of Italian humanists, and particularly Machiavelli, little space was devoted to the prerogatives of the individual. The law, if it was mentioned at all, was to protect collective freedom, construct a free republic, and finally, shape the attitudes of citizens. The political role of the rights/privileges guaranteeing individual freedoms highlighted in Polish political discussion does not fit the republican paradigm, understood as such. However, the firm distinction introduced by Pocock between the language of *iurisconsulti* wielding legal arguments and the republican language of virtue seems to be too radical. It should not be forgotten that an author of theoretical reflections on the state will formulate their thoughts differently than an active participant in political life. For the former, more important may be a general concept of the state and role of the law; for the latter no less important will be concrete guarantees of freedom. Skinner drew attention to this in relation to seventeenth-century English republicans, and Pettit captured this more generally in relation to early modern republicans. It was Pettit who noticed the importance to these republicans of the sense of freedom arising 'from the visible presence of

⁵⁹ Wolan, *De libertate*, 89.

⁶⁰ It has been repeatedly pointed out that the cult of law and legalism is one of the most pronounced indicators of noble culture, see Janusz Tazbir, *Kultura szlachecka w Polsce. Rozkwit – upadek – relikt* (Warsaw, 1979), 58, 71; *idem*, 'Wzorce osobowe szlachty polskiej w XVII wieku', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, lxxxiii, 4 (1976), 791; Jarema Maciszewski, *Szlachta polska i jej państwo* (Warsaw, 1969), 160; Opaliński, *Kultura polityczna*, 96–7; Stefania Ochmann-Staniszevska, 'Od stabilizacji do kryzysu władzy królewskiej. Państwo Wazów', in Sucheni-Grabowska and Żaryn (eds.), *Między monarchią*, 232 f.

⁶¹ David Wootton, "'Ulysses Bound"? Venice and the Idea of Liberty from Howell to Hume', in *idem* (ed.), *Republicanism, Liberty*, 11.

guarantees'.⁶² It was these legal rights that were such guarantees for the citizens of free republics, and therefore for the Commonwealth nobility. It was these rights that guaranteed the nobility a share in power and protected them from ruler's attempts on their security and property, as well as from the designs of their fellow citizens.

But rights and privileges were just components of a broader vision of the law which was sovereign in the Commonwealth, being its foundation, the guarantor of its political system, and finally, a beacon for citizen conduct. Researchers point out that since the sixteenth century the Commonwealth was viewed by noble citizens as a state in which the law, and not the king, was sovereign.⁶³ Injunctions of the law bound not only citizens, but also rulers of the state, and foremost the monarch: 'the king under one law with us' wrote Stanisław Sarnicki in 1594,⁶⁴ which statement was repeated to the end of the existence of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Statements such as 'lex est rex in Polonia et in Lithuania'⁶⁵ are strewn throughout Polish commentary from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, so that in the second half of the eighteenth century they could be harmoniously incorporated into the modern conception of the state of law proposed by Western European theorists. The deep belief in the sovereign role of law in relation to the king acted as a theoretical basis of sorts for the recognition of concrete rights and privileges as the chief protector of freedom.⁶⁶

⁶² Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1999), 36; cf. also Bruger, *Republican Theory*, 42.

⁶³ 'In this Commonwealth the law is king, the law is senator, and the law is noble, whom all are obliged to obey ... and this is what we call freedom', see [N.N.], *Libera respublica*, 403; Opaliński, *Kultura polityczna*, 107; see also Wisner, *Najjaśniejsza Rzeczpospolita, passim*; Anna Sucheni-Grabowska, 'Obowiązki i prawa królów polskich w opiniach pisarzy odrodzenia', in *eadem* and Żaryn (eds.), *Między monarchą*, 57, 73; Ochmann-Staniszevska, 'Od stabilizacji', 234.

⁶⁴ Cit. from Sucheni-Grabowska, 'Obowiązki', 73.

⁶⁵ In 'free countries ... the gravity of the majesty is either equal to or less than *authoritas legum*', see Łukasz Opaliński, 'Rozmowa plebana z ziemianinem', in *idem*, *Pisma polskie*, ed. Ludwik Kamykowski (Warsaw, 1938), 28; in Poland there is not 'rex supra leges, but [there are] leges supra regem' – [Pęski], *Domina palatii*, 82; 'The Commonwealth prevails over its monarchs with '*authoritas* of laws'.

⁶⁶ In this interpretation laws acted as a kind of guard or keeper of monarchs ('laws are the watchmen of the ruler', explained Łukasz Opaliński in the mid-seventeenth century), see *idem*, 'Obrona Polski przeciw Janowi Barklayowi', in *idem*, *Wybór pism*, ed. Stanisław Grzeszczuk (Wrocław, 1959), 199.

The law was also supposed to protect the freedom and security of the individual in a horizontal direction, so not only from ruling authority but from fellow citizens, although this role of law was less featured. Górnicki's opinion in reference to Aristotle, that

the law contained freedom within certain boundaries ... so that you would lavish your freedom for others to make use of as well, and your freedom not place someone else in bondage,⁶⁷

was a commonly-held view. The singularity of Górnicki lay in the fact that he limited himself to this interpretation, while for his noble readers this was just one of the functions of the law. Indeed, it was a very important function – Polish theory of the state highlighted it since the turn of the seventeenth century,⁶⁸ and participants in political battles also recognised it.⁶⁹

As noble politicians and virtually the entire nobility understood, however, rights not only acted as a direct protection of individual freedoms but also, and perhaps foremost, had to protect the structure that guaranteed freedom – the Commonwealth. They not only protected the Commonwealth, but created it, imbued it with life, and acted as its soul. It was for this reason, among others, that the nobility dreaded the breaching of 'the good old laws' – as the entire edifice of the Commonwealth was based on them, every breaching or violation as well as act of disobedience with regard to them by both the ruler as well the citizens could shake its foundations. This was not an exclusively Polish peculiarity. Citizens of 'free states' were skeptical in general toward changes in the laws 'of old', as it was they that guaranteed their freedom.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Łukasz Górnicki, 'Rozmowa Polaka z Włochem o wolnościach i prawach polskich [1616], in *idem*, *Pisma*, ed. Roman Polak, 2 vols. (Warsaw, 1961), ii, 356.

⁶⁸ Andrzej Wolan developed this issue particularly broadly, in parallel with the constraint of the rights of rulers (*idem*, *De libertate*, 89 f., 167, 169); however, he strongly emphasised that law in Poland only guaranteed freedom of the nobility, and other groups suffered bondage to a greater or lesser degree precisely because they were not covered by the law (*ibidem*, 107, 109).

⁶⁹ [N.N.], *Libera respublica*, 407.

⁷⁰ As I.J.H. Worst believes: 'Generally, this conservatism and intense fear of change is considered highly typical of the political thought in the Dutch Republic during a large part of the eighteenth century', see *idem*, 'Constitution, History, and Natural Law: An Eighteenth-century Political Debate in the Dutch Republic', in Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand N. Mijnhardt (eds.), *The Dutch Republic in the*

Preservation of the Commonwealth was also based on the shaping of the attitudes of its citizens. The citizen should not only not do what the law prohibits, but should also do what the law requires. Poles clearly alluded here to the Roman republican tradition with the conviction that it was precisely in the republic that the law was to shape citizens' attitudes to be beneficial to the state. As Łukasz Opaliński wrote: 'Free states have no other way to improve bad habits than by making strict and severe laws...'.⁷¹ It is true that Machiavelli's 'coercion to virtue' was never accepted in Poland; nevertheless, the educative role of the law has been noted by theorists of republicanism from classical times to Rousseau, and has also occupied much space in Polish statements. As Andrzej Wolan wrote in the sixteenth century, 'after all, there are laws, within which the teaching of all honest duties should be contained'.⁷² This conviction lasted practically to the end of the Commonwealth, and was shared by people of very diverse political opinions.⁷³ In the eighteenth century the ideas of the nobility met with the vision of Rousseau, whose counsel for the Commonwealth was enthusiastically received and expanded by noble republicans.⁷⁴

VII CIVIC VIRTUE

The educational role of the law was even the more essential as beyond it, no external power in the Commonwealth existed that could force its citizens to conduct any given activity or abstain from it. The lack of coercion, the sovereignty of decision-making and action of the

Eighteenth Century: Decline, Enlightenment, and Revolution (Ithaca and London, 1992), 151.

⁷¹ Opaliński, 'Rozmowa plebana', 19.

⁷² Wolan, *De libertate*, 89.

⁷³ One hundred and fifty years after Wolan, Szczepan Sienicki, who affirmed the Polish reality, reckoned that 'all the rights of every commonwealth are the rules of decent life for free citizens' (Szczepan Sienicki, *Sposób nowoobmyślony konkludowania obrad publicznych* [Łowicz, 1763], i, 77), and sharply critical Józef Wybicki stated that 'laws shape minds, so that they will be able to create laws. And rule hearts, so that laws will be obeyed' (Józef Wybicki, *Mysli polityczne o wolności cywilnej*, ed. Zbigniew Nowak [Wrocław, 1984], 122).

⁷⁴ Adam Wawrzyniec Rzewuski developed Rousseau's concept of education by the law most broadly, *O formie rządu republikańskiego myśli*, 2 vols. (Warsaw, 1790).

individual endowed with political rights were emphasised in the seventeenth as in the eighteenth centuries. Meanwhile, the smooth functioning and overall existence of the Commonwealth depended on the attitude of the individual, and thus the freedom which the Commonwealth endowed the individual. As Wybicki nicely captured this thought in the eighteenth century:

The fate of the kingdom of the omnipotentate depended on his way of thinking. The happiness of the Commonwealth depended on the souls of its citizens.⁷⁵

In this situation the issue of the nature and attitude of people endowed with freedom became not only a political problem but in fact a key question for discussion regarding both the functioning of the state as well as the place of the individual in a society of free people. As researchers note, ethics in the republican view of the state was connected with politics in a manner difficult to imagine today.⁷⁶ This also applies to remarks of the nobility, about which Jerzy Michalski wrote that they were characterised by a 'moralistic perspective on political issues'.⁷⁷

Poles, in keeping with the republican tradition dating back to Livy, Sallust and above all Cicero, recognised virtue as a principle of the republic. Only virtue could inhibit the selfish attitudes of citizens leading to anarchy, degeneration of the state and ultimately, the loss of freedom. A canon of civic virtues was also drawn from Roman authors and it remained binding from the Renaissance through to the end of the eighteenth century. These virtues were primarily wisdom, understood as prudence, and fortitude – the free Pole was supposed to be courageous in battle and wise in counsel, should love his homeland and care for the public good. An important qualification should be made here – never in Polish discourse was there such a pronounced secularisation of virtue as was evidenced in Machiavelli

⁷⁵ Wybicki, *Mysli*, 232; Wybicki stated elsewhere straightforwardly: 'keep in mind that your freedom is only maintained by virtue', *ibidem*, 133; similarly Hugo Kołłątaj, *Listy Anonima i Prawo polityczne narodu polskiego*, ed. Bogusław Leśnodorski and Helena Wereszycka, 2 vols. (Warsaw, 1954), ii, 19.

⁷⁶ Cf. Norman Hampson, *Will and Circumstance: Montesquieu, Rousseau and the French Revolution* (London, 1983), 13.

⁷⁷ Michalski, *Rousseau*, 108.

or later, Montesquieu. It is true that some sixteenth century authors (i.e., Wolan and Górnicki) remaining under the strong influence of the classical period and somewhat under the influence of Italian authors discussed the problem of civic attitudes, tacitly ignoring the question of Christian ethics. However, no one juxtaposed Christian virtues with civic ones. With time (in the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth century), the view rather prevailed that the former contributed to the strengthening of the latter. As the author of the *Głos Wolny* wrote, 'Holy faith and the very commandments of God should prepare us for political virtues, so necessary for the good government of the kingdom'.⁷⁸

From the sixteenth century onward, all commenting on this subject were in agreement that the political and moral imperative of the free person was to participate in public life, keep watch over the homeland, and finally, defend the homeland and freedom.

The most certain, the most glorious, and even the most useful service is above all service to the Commonwealth,

declared a participant of Zebrzydowski's Rebellion in 1606.⁷⁹ As Łukasz Opaliński reminded Poles:

the common good cannot exist without the common efforts and services of all ... that is why if no one wished to carry any such burden, the common homeland would have to deteriorate and with it, the private freedom which you adore.⁸⁰

Kołątaj shared this opinion one hundred and fifty years later, when he stated that the republican government 'in giving them [sc. citizens] freedom, places on them the yoke of work and permanent supervision'.⁸¹ Polish conceptions here formed part of a long tradition

⁷⁸ [Leszczyński], *Głos wolny*, 9; cf. Emanuel Rostworowski, 'Respublica Christiana i republikańsko-pacyfistyczna myśl oświecenia', in *idem*, *Popioły i korzenie: szkice historyczne i rodzinne* (Cracow, 1985), 44 f.

⁷⁹ [N.N.], *Pismo szlachcica jednego, w którym o rozprawie znać daje do braciej*, in Czubek (ed.), *Pisma polityczne z czasów rokoszu*, iii, 368.

⁸⁰ Opaliński, 'Rozmowa plebana', 35.

⁸¹ Kołątaj, *Listy Anonima*, ii, 20; 'The freedom promised us by a lasting commonwealth system and free government is not the false pleasure felt in repose and indolence; it is an honest delight that adds flavour to virtue and work', *ibidem*, 18.

of the model of the 'citizen' mindset, which Italians named *vita activa* and the English *active citizenship*.⁸² These conceptions also arose from the same source – classical thought – as well as political practice.⁸³

Service and concern for the homeland were to be expressed not only through participation in public life, but also in taking decisions that were favourable to the republic, though sometimes in conflict with the individual interests of citizens. *Salus reipublicae suprema lex esto* – this Roman principle was to be the beacon for the noble citizens of the Commonwealth. Although concern for the public good was often a cliché which was eagerly used to adorn public appearances and obscure quite private interests, this does not change the fact that it was also one of the foundations of the republican view of the state. As an anonymous author wrote in 1628, complaining of *universal exorbitance*, 'Love of the common good is the virtue called *pietas in patriam* by politicians'.⁸⁴ In a sense, virtue simply denoted the understanding and acceptance of the fundamental republican truth that individual freedom could only be realised in a free society, and so it was in the interest of its members to act on behalf of this community, even at the expense of their immediate interests

and if the citizen sacrifices his good for the public good, it is because the public good protects the private good of everyone.⁸⁵

⁸² Besides, this was still the Roman tradition of addressing freedom, cf. Chaim Wirszubski, *Libertas as a Political Idea at Rome during the Late Republic and Early Principate* (Cambridge, 1968), 8; Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (I have made use of the French edition: *Le moment machiavélien: la pensée politique florentine et la tradition républicaine atlantique*, trans. Luc Borot [Paris, 1997], 55–74, 96–98, 395, 410 and *passim*); Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli* (Oxford, 1981), 55–7; Karin Tilmans, 'Republican Citizenship and Civic-Humanism in the Burgundian-Habsburg Netherlands (1477–1566)', in van Gelderen and Skinner (eds.), *Republicanism*, i, 107–26.

⁸³ Researchers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries point to this last issue, see Jan Dziegielewski, 'Stan szlachecki w życiu publicznym Rzeczypospolitej w pierwszym stuleciu po Unii Lubelskiej', in Anna Sucheni-Grabowska and Alicja Dybkowska (eds.), *Tradycje polityczne dawnej Polski* (Warsaw, 1993), 77; Opaliński, *Kultura polityczna*, 117 and *passim*; *idem*, 'Civic Humanism', 160 ff.

⁸⁴ *Egzorbitancja powszechna [Universal exorbitance] która Rzeczpospolitą Królestwa Polskiego niszczy, zgubą grożąc* [Warsaw, 1628], ed. Kazimierz Józef Turowski (Cracow, 1858), 28.

⁸⁵ Adolf Kamiński, *Edukacja obywatelska* (Warsaw, 1774), 81; 'love for the homeland, that is the maxim that is needed in a free country, in order for

This understanding of virtue allowed for the response to the perpetual question of how to prevent liberty from transforming into anarchy without limiting individual freedoms. Perhaps it was for this reason that so much of the nobility's discussions on politics were occupied by their lamentation of the decline of virtue, the overgrowth of ambition, the placing of private interests before the public good. It could even be said that as much as Western theorists of republicanism concentrated on the need for virtue in the commonwealth, Polish writers devoted their comments to deploring its lack. This was possibly due to the fact that while the former were associated with theoretical questions, the latter tried to apply theory to a concrete society. The lack of virtue, at first just an element of the criticism of the political reality and attitudes of fellow citizens, in time came to be the chief explanation for the crisis of the state. It was also a kind of consolation as well as alibi for the nobility's passivity. Until the end of the eighteenth century the defenders of political solutions of old invoked this argument, suggesting that all institutions, including *liberum veto*, functioned flawlessly so long as the people using them were guided by the public, and not private, good. It was suggested that if only citizens regained the proper attitude, Polish freedom would return to its former glory. According to this approach, there was no reason to change the law or political system; it would be enough to improve the people. It could be said that from this perspective, moralism had completely come to dominate politics.

VIII CONCLUSION

The issue of the sources of noble republican ideology continues to demand thorough research on Polish political thought and Polish discussion about the state reaching back to the fifteenth

the personal interest of the citizen to give way to the interest of the entire nation' – *Odezwa wolnego obywatela do zacnych izby prawodawczej patriotów* (s.l., [1788?]), 3; cf. also Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, 'Citizen, Fatherland, and Patriotism in the Political Discourse of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth', in Balázs Trencsényi and Márton Zászkaliczky (eds.), *Whose Love of Which Country? Composite States, National Histories and Patriotic Discourses in Early Modern East Central Europe* (Leiden and Boston, 2010), 255–84.

century.⁸⁶ We still know too little about the role of Italian thought, and particularly the writings of authors of the school known as civic humanism, as an intermediary between classical thought and the concepts that emerged in the Commonwealth in the sixteenth century. There is no doubt that classical thought, primarily the concepts of Aristotle and Cicero, and more broadly the chroniclers of republican Rome shaped the Polish vision of the state and the place of the citizen.⁸⁷ However, there are many aspects of this issue which still require thorough analysis – not least, the question of the reasons for the decided rejection of Roman law, which was not negated so radically by Western theorists.⁸⁸

This was not the only difference between the ideology that was formed among noble politicians and that which sometimes is named 'Atlantic' republicanism, and so the concepts formed in the course of English battles with the House of Stuart, and later developed by ideologues in the rebellious colonies. Certain elements considered as characteristic of republicanism did not exist in noble ideology, or were at their periphery rather than in the mainstream. Such is the impact of the works of Machiavelli. They were definitely better known in the Commonwealth than once was estimated; however, it was not they that determined the shape of noble republicanism. Similarly, the myth of Venice, though well-known and popular, was not a factor shaping republican ideas here any differently than for English or Dutch theories. As Claude Backvis rightly noticed, Venice was not a model for noble republicans, rather just a confirmation of the righteousness of the espoused path.⁸⁹ On the other hand, the example of the Roman republic was extremely popular among noble republicans; but Sparta was not in favour, nor the Greek republics at all. There is also no point in seeking anti-monarchism in their views. This is regarded as one of the very important elements of Western republicanism, and for some schools it is an absolutely constitutive

⁸⁶ Henryk Litwin pointed to the fifteenth-century sources of the execution movement ideology, see *idem*, 'W poszukiwaniu rodowodu', 46; cf. also Sucheni-Grabowska, 'Obowiązki', *passim*; *eadem*, *Wolność i prawo w staropolskiej koncepcji państwa* (Warsaw, 2009), 18 ff.

⁸⁷ Opaliński, 'Civic Humanism', *passim*.

⁸⁸ Skinner, *Liberty*, 38–41.

⁸⁹ Backvis, *Szkice o kulturze*, 728.

element.⁹⁰ Again, it must be emphasised that the dread of *absolutum dominium* was quite something else. The question of the inevitable collapse of states and ways to avoid it was given little interest beyond the work of sixteenth-century theorists, while significant attention (much more than in the West) was paid to the threat posed to the state by discord, lawlessness, and ultimately, anarchy. It is also difficult to say about noble republican discourse what David Wootton wrote about ‘true republicans’, following Pocock: ‘The commonwealthmen, it is maintained, talked in terms, not of rights, but of virtue and corruption’.⁹¹ Participants of Polish political discussion used the language of both rights (prerogatives) as well as virtues. This all makes it truly difficult to fit the noble vision of the state to the framework established by the authors: Aristotle – Machiavelli – Milton – Jefferson.⁹² But if we set the framework a bit differently as I have tried to show here, assuming the same starting point, and accepting Aristotle – Cicero – Italian humanists – Rousseau as roadmarks, noble republicanism seems to fit this ideological space quite well.

Its shape was influenced by both a certain theoretical tradition as well as the political reality of the Polish Crown, and later the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Using the heritage of classical thought recalled by humanism, both theorists as well as participants in political battles took on the burden of expressing the surrounding political reality in a certain framework of thought, creating a political language that allowed this reality to be described and explained. At the same time they tried to outline a certain ideal of the state, political system and citizen. This ideal was not detached from reality as an abstract theoretical concept but a certain proposition that could, in their opinion, be implemented. This proposition was accepted relatively quickly and almost without exception by all participants in the political life of the Commonwealth, that is, noble citizens. In this way, as I have tried to show here, an interesting and rich political ideology emerged, with a broad theoretical foundation combined with political realism. This is probably its most important distinguishing

⁹⁰ It is telling that one part of the first volume of the classic two-volume collective work on republicanism (Gelderden and Skinner, *Republicanism*) was entitled ‘The Rejection of Monarchy’.

⁹¹ Wootton, “‘Ulysses Bound’?”, 9.

⁹² And so just as in the classic work of Pocock.

characteristic in the European context. For nearly two hundred years republicanism dominated political discourse and became a widespread political ideology. With time, it did prove to be quite dangerous, because it led to the abandonment of deeper theoretical reflection on behalf of the knee-jerk acceptance of certain values and solutions considered ideal, to the virtually automatic repetition of certain clichés of thought or even some popular phrases bereft of deeper meaning, but able to meet the positive reception of participants of political life. Concepts like freedom, virtue, the public good and the law were not only fundamental terms of public discourse in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, not just zealously defended political values, but they were also the subject of serious reflections, discussions, and often in-depth theoretical analysis. Over time, and especially at the end of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century, they often appeared as empty phrases adorning presentations bereft of any deeper political content. This was connected with the lack of more serious discussion about the state and openness to new theories and ideological trends that arose beyond the borders of the Commonwealth. Worse, the republican doctrine not only ossified over time but underwent a substantial reevaluation, which can be clearly seen in discussions at the end of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries noble republicans, similar to proponents of this ideology in all of Europe, had had a profound awareness that the single guarantor of their freedom was their own, free state – the Commonwealth, and so concern for it was at the same time concern for their individual liberties. With time a very dangerous shift occurred – the issue of protecting freedom came to be more important than the issue of strengthening the state, fear for their liberties came to be more important than concern for the Commonwealth.⁹³

Another issue was that that precisely this doctrine fascinated modern republicans such as Mably or Rousseau. In particular, Rousseau shared republican discourse as well as political ideals with the Polish nobility. Sometimes this was a superficial similarity, and the same words (such as ‘nation’ and ‘people’, for instance) were

⁹³ ‘... a fundamental doctrine of republicanism: priority given to issues of securing freedom over issues of strengthening the state’ – Michalski, ‘Z problematyki’, 334.

understood differently by the enlightened philosopher as by noble republicans. This could have led to numerous misunderstandings. It is a fact, however, that just as for Rousseau, the highest political value for the nobility was freedom, and the state was a commonwealth – a community of citizens. The basis of Rousseau’s discourse were ideas that also formed the axis of political discourse of the noble citizens: the republic, freedom, virtue, the public good, the homeland and the citizen. Without this language in common, it would not have been possible to undertake dialogue with the noble political doctrine presented by Michał Wielhorski, which the philosopher did consistently throughout his entire treatise *Considérations*. How close Rousseau’s language was to the political language of the Commonwealth nobility is evidenced by the fact that quotations from his works were readily interwoven in Polish statements, and fit so well with them that from time to time, researchers are still surprised to discover that what they had recognised as a typical noble-republican conviction was a citation of Jean Jacques.⁹⁴

During the time when Rousseau entered dialogue with noble republicanism important changes were underway within the confines of this ideology. Advocates of political reform since the mid-eighteenth century (Karwicki, the author of the *Głos Wolny*, Konarski) tried to restore ‘classical’ republican ideology, returning to some degree to Renaissance concepts, and also revived it by taking into account new theories of the state. It was they who recalled, among other things, the old truth that without a free country there would not be individual freedom; it is they, and particularly Konarski who wanted to base the functioning of the Commonwealth not only on the virtue of citizens, but also on efficient institutions and effective laws. During the 1770s other concepts of the state and freedom appeared, drawn from Western authors, which by presumption emphasised not the virtue of citizens but the efficiency of political institutions. Physio-

⁹⁴ An example of such a hidden quotation could be the statement of Wincenty Skrzetuski: ‘No member of society can break away from obedience to the laws. Even they who have been set to be the guardians of the laws should themselves be the first to obey them’, sounding like a calling forth of one of the basic political truths of the noble Commonwealth, but in fact being a quote of an article by Rousseau entitled *Économie politique* located in the *Encyclopédie* (though the author did not admit to this), see Wincenty Skrzetuski, *Mowy o gówniejszych materjach politycznych* (Warsaw, 1773), 352.

cratic concepts were particularly popular in Poland; such authors as Antoni Popławski and Hieronim Stroynowski tried to familiarise their readers with them. They never dominated Polish political discourse or Polish thinking about the state; however, they provided new tools for the description of political reality. They were used at the end of the eighteenth century by authors who confronted the most serious problem of noble republicanism. Trying to give new meaning to the words 'Commonwealth' or 'nation', thinkers like Kołłątaj and Staszic tried to broaden its social foundation. Until the demise of the independent Commonwealth, however, republicanism remained the dominating ideology. Undoubtedly Jerzy Michalski was right when he stated: 'Republicanism remained ... the main ideological legacy of past thought inherited by Polish post-partition political thought'.⁹⁵

trans. Zofia Szozda

⁹⁵ Michalski, 'Z problematyki', 337.