

Introduction

Heroes and Republicans

It is difficult to define what is meant by heroes; the word enjoys enormous elasticity. Heroes manifest in all realms of social interaction. The name attaches to men and women who accomplish extraordinary feats, who prevail in contests against the worthiest rivals, who transcend misfortune or treachery, or who prevail in prolonged quests (Klapp 1949). Heroes possess rare capabilities, such as courage, wisdom, piety, imagination, or even self-confidence. They present as the incarnation of societal values, serve as role models, exist in fulfillment of vicarious success or experience, or epitomize an ideal self-image (Sullivan and Venter 2010; Wolf and Zuckerman 2012, 644). We find heroes in mythology and spirituality, in high culture and pulp fiction, in all forms of human communication. Often, they are the stuff of folklore; often, they represent the foundation of political or spiritual authority (Klapp 1949). Heroes entertain, they teach, and they reflect the moral parameters of the good society (see Wright 2001). They are social benefactors, leaders, protectors, inspirers, avengers, and sages. They are gods and mortals, fictive or real (Raglan 1934; Ruebel 1991; Porpora 1996; Miller 2002; Allison and Goethals 2011).

The elevation of iconic heroes—divine or apothecic beings set apart and held up for admiration or reverence—is a sociological constant. It exists in legend and myth across such diverse ancient cultures as the Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, Hebrew, Hindu, Persian, Roman, Asian, African, Christian, European, and Aboriginal American, bespeaking an elemental sociopsychological imperative (Rank 1914, 1, 4–11). The *variable* is how these heroes manifest historically. The hero “bears with him the ethos of the age, the unspoken assumptions, the philosophical presuppositions in

the context of which his existence becomes meaningful” (Thorslev 1962, 19; also Plutarch 1920; Carlyle 1841; Emerson *Rep.*). From the primeval emergence of Western civilization, Homeric heroes were godlike, realizing their exaltation in posterity. Retrospectively at least, Greece made heroic figures of philosophers. In ancient Rome, heroism was manifest in acts of public virtue. Medieval Christianity reprised the supernaturalism of the Homeric hero, albeit not as god-men but *God’s* men and women (Fishwick 1969, 5). The hero of the late Middle Ages was the chivalric knight. In the Renaissance, heroism was reborn as well-roundedness and self-mastery. The Romantics grounded heroism in authenticity. In more modern times, it is the common individual who has acquired volitional heroic qualities through innate cognitive or intuitive capacities.

This book has four main purposes. First, it explores the hero’s role in the evolution of republican regimes and values, from the classical hierarchically structured form of mixed government, to the Christianized city, to modern liberal democracies. Second, it demonstrates the means by which republics have managed to protect themselves, sustain themselves, and redeem themselves through the cultivation of heroic figures, real or mythological. Informing the political values of the republic, the republican hero speaks to the values requisite to the good human life as it was understood in her time. Bringing such abstractions to life, she provides justification and legitimation—to say nothing of a *face*—to the metaphysical basis of republican social organization. Third, the book identifies and illustrates four different types of republican hero—epic, magnanimous, Romantic, and common—defined in terms of the presence or absence of the heroic currencies of greatness and goodness. Finally, the fourth mandate of the book is to rebut the premise that we live in a postheroic age. In assessing the republican hero’s political relevance, her historical manifestations, her place in the orders of nature and grace, her posterity and her evolution, the book seeks to demonstrate the republican hero’s continued existence in the modern age. Indeed, the argument here is that the modern age is not only heroic, but it is arguably the most *justly* heroic age, at least as it pertains to republican heroism.¹ In order to make the case, we will need to establish a few points. To start, we need to know what republicanism is and how it has evolved, what republican heroes do, what makes a (republican) hero, what types of republican hero exist, what others have said about heroes in a social or political context, and whether or not republican heroes still matter. These issues will occupy the rest of this chapter.

What Is Republicanism and How Has It Evolved?

John Adams reportedly lamented of republicanism, there “is not a more unintelligible word in the English language” (quoted in Rodgers 1992, 38). He had a point. Classical republicanism was sufficiently complex. Its evolution did little to simplify things.² Since “republicanism” defies universal specification, let us start by defining classical republicanism here in terms of both structure and values. Central to both is the pre-Socratic ideal of cosmic justice (e.g., Vlastos 1946; 1947; Engmann 1991). As I portray it here, such cosmic justice—natural, philosophical, spiritual, aesthetic, and institutional—is determined by three things. The first is *just balance*. The nullification of extremes, just balance represents a temperate mean. We can think of just balance in the way that dialectical forces maintain the constancy of a thing (such as the pull of gravity that keeps the earth in constant orbit). More pertinent is the mixed government that gives republicanism its defining institutional structure. Occupying a medial position between two of Aristotle’s pure forms of government—aristocracy and polity—republicanism annexes best qualities of both, each countering the excesses and supplementing the deficiencies of the other. Indeed, it is in such just balance that republicanism represents a brake on the cycle of regimes that, Aristotle famously maintains in the *Politics*, causes each pure regime type (monarchy, aristocracy, and polity) to be corrupted and subsequently displaced in its turn (Aristotle *Pol.* Bk V; also Fink 1945, ch. 1; Pocock 1975, 79).

The second determining element is *just condition*, or the fidelity of a thing to the purpose for which it was created. The underlying assumption here is that the universe did not unfold as a series of random events, but rather according to some sort of discernable rational pattern, with every element of the cosmos having its own proper function. In consequence, everything—humans and animals, natural phenomena and social constructs included—can be thought to exist in just or unjust condition. To take an example from the Greek poet-statesman Solon, the sea is just in condition when, placid and navigable, it is in harmony with its proper function (2008, fr. W12; Vlastos 1946). By contrast, it is unjust, when, roiled by wind and storm, it works against its cosmic purpose. What is true of the sea is true of the republic, the purpose of which, classical and modern republicans tell us alike, is to aid citizens in fulfillment of a fully human life—one that realizes the *human* condition of which we will have more to say in a moment.

The final determining element of cosmic justice is *just agency*, or acting justly. Foundational to republican values, just agency is a means to just balance and just condition. For Aristotle, just agency manifests as temperance, or habitually selecting the medial position between excess and deficiency of a quality within the context in which that quality is operative (*N.E.* 1106b, 36—1107a, 26). The just agent is courageous in battle, for example, when she chooses the mean between recklessness and cowardice. More profoundly, it is the relationship between just agency on the one hand, and just balance and condition on the other, that Socrates is at pains to illustrate in the *Republic*. Socrates conceives just agency as action reflecting the supremacy of reason over appetite. The seat of just agency is the soul. Where the soul is governed by its appetites—whether for material goods, power, or honor—Socrates conceives the soul as more bestial than human. Single-minded in its quest for appetitive gratification, the host can never be sated. Its desires constitute the metaphorical leaky jar that can never be filled. Because there will never be *enough* wealth or power or glory, the host becomes ever more extreme—unjust—in seeking fulfillment (Plato *Gorg.*, esp. 493a–d). By contrast, where reason prevails, the appetites will be more temperate—more balanced. Moreover, it finds fulfillment in realization of the human condition, the cosmic purpose for which humanity exists.

Another way of looking at Socrates’s primacy of reason is agency governed by the imperative for what republicans call *virtue*—another conceptually ambitious term. Distinct from discrete virtues (or excellences), let us think of *virtue* itself as a tripartite obligation to self (to live a life just in balance and condition), society (to share in the stewardship of the just republic), and cosmological design (to live in accordance with the objective moral principles that we will continue to call *the good*). These obligations are indivisible; fulfillment of one is fulfillment of all. Even so, in order to illustrate a fairly nuanced point, let us talk about each obligation individually as a means of getting a better sense of the obligations that govern just agency.

As noted, obligation to the self is to fulfill the human condition. Unlike plants and animals, humans do not naturally realize just condition. Instead, as we have already seen with Socrates, human beings have a natural inclination to be governed by their appetites. Just condition therefore demands transcendence of the slavery to the appetites, or overcoming what Charles Taylor calls the *ordinary life* of production and reproduction (1989, 211). (Henceforth we will contrast this ordinary life to the transcendent

life—a balanced life, governed by just agency in realization of just [or the human] condition.)

Classical republicans start from the premise that humans are incapable of self-transcendence. Rather, they must be socialized—educated and habituated—into lives just in condition. Indeed, it is only when one is taught to be reflexive in her justice—preferring the just over the pleasurable as *second* nature—that one can be said to fulfill her obligation to herself (e.g., Aristotle *N.E.* 1102a, 14–1104b, 4). The mandate for socializing individuals to live transcendent lives falls to the just republic. Because the *res publica* (public thing) exists for the good of all, implicit is a corporate responsibility to aid others in fulfillment of such just condition.

As such, the second—*social*—obligation inherent in republican virtue demands that each citizen do her share to contribute to the effective functioning of the just republic. Such civic virtue, as it is also known, attaches most readily to military or public service. It might extend to production of goods and services—an economic contribution to the common weal. It is manifest in social benevolence, the creation of knowledge, and even the arts. Most fundamentally for most republicans, though, social obligation is civic contribution to the quality of laws. Ideally, each citizen will bring her talents to bear in the construction of just laws. Inherent is virtuous recursivity: just laws make just people, and just people make just laws.

The idea of just laws leads us to the third obligation constitutive of virtue, obligation to cosmological design. We can think of this third component as obligation to the way things were meant to be. Albeit conceived in manifold ways, classical republicans conceived this third obligation as fidelity to an inductively discernable entity that we have already called the good. There are two relevant elements—*knowledge* of the good and action in *accordance* with the good. Classically, both were governed intellectually. For Socrates, knowledge of the good is the province of the philosopher. Manifesting as wisdom, it entails understanding the first principles of goodness through an ontological process of inquiry and contemplation (e.g., Plato *Rep.*, 590c–590d; *Meno*, 87a–89c). Action in *accordance* with the good, by contrast, is governed intellectually by prudence, or good judgment in the conduct of life. In keeping with the prevailing duality, the two elements of goodness conform to two elements central to the making of law in a republic: the sagacity inherent in the proposition of good law and the mechanics inherent in deliberation or ratification. In the classical republican division of labor, proposition of good laws falls to sagacious knowers of the good. Ratification is the prerogative of the

good citizen.³ This differentiation between knowing and acting endowed classical republicanism with its institutional logic, classical republicanism representing balance between the expertise implicit in the wisdom of the best (*aristoi*) and the contextual practical judgment that derives from the aggregated virtues of the masses (*demos*).

THE CHANGING FACE OF REPUBLICANISM

Starting roughly with the late Italian Renaissance, the face of republicanism began to change (esp. Pocock 1975). Two fundamental differences, both relating to just agency, are noteworthy. The first is the debunking of the mythical exclusivity of moral sagacity; the second is movement away from the primacy of cognition in the conceptualization of just agency. As to the first, one of the great effects of the Enlightenment was the conviction that humans enjoy innate capacity to comprehend the first principles of goodness requisite to realization of the human condition. The attendant dispensation of the distinction between the knower and the actor was no small shift in perspective. If comprehension of first moral principles was no longer the exclusive preserve of the philosopher, the aristocrat, the divine, or her immanent analogue, then the social stratification of ancient republics was unjustifiable. The upshot of this transformative assumption is that while modern republics retain the institutional balance that attaches to mixed government, they reject the political division of labor that once stratified the great and the many. In this more egalitarian guise, modern republicanism is far more *liberal*. It places greater emphasis on (negative) liberty—the imperative for morally self-sufficient individuals to be free from unreasonable external constraint in the conduct of their lives. This fundamentally alters the nature of obligation to self. If humans are indeed self-sufficient in the capacity to live fully human lives, then the function of the good republic shifts from compulsion (to coerce individuals to live justly), to support (provision of requisite social resources for individuals to pursue their own best lives).

The second fundamental shift that distinguishes modern republicanism from its classical counterpart was away from the supremacy of cognition. Inherent in the Scottish Enlightenment and the later Idealist, *Sturm und Drang*, and Romantic movements, was a greater emphasis on affect, or sentiment, as the basis of endogenous moral capacity. Certainly, it is true that ancient philosophers appreciated the complementarity of aesthetics to ethics, but it was cognition rather than affect that enjoyed

pride-of-place as the driver of the just agency. Later on, as we shall see in examining the American transcendentalist movement of the mid-nineteenth century, mystical moral intuition—staking a liminal position between cognition and affect—also assumed importance as source of the innate capacity for what we will call *moral agency* (which is a handier way of saying self-sufficiency in the just agency requisite to realization of the human condition). The evolutionary understanding of moral agency, and the concomitant change in the makeup of the republican hero, is a central theme in the chapters to follow.

What Do Republican Heroes Do?

Republican heroes, individual or archetypal, are emissaries of virtue. They promote and protect environments conducive to human transcendence of the ordinary life. Their political impact is institutional or cultural. Institutionally, republican heroes are integral to the context—the good republic—in which human transcendence occurs. Practically, they fulfill this by protection, preservation, or reparation of the good republic. In the language employed in this book, they are *defenders*, *stewards*, or *redeemers* of republics. Culturally, republican heroes reflect the values and ambitions of their times. Helping to craft good citizens, they are civic *exemplars*, inspirational and aspirational. They are also *nation builders*, articulators of social identity, archetypes of usness, symbols of what it means to be “people like us.”

Some general rules and qualifications apply. Typically, institutional impact is direct, the prerogative of real-life heroes. The more diffuse cultural impact, on the other hand, is relatively insensitive to whether or not a hero is real or fictional. There are manifest perils, of course, in drawing too sharp a distinction between the institutional and cultural and between the real and the fictional. A hero may directly affect the fate of the republic in her time, and culturally affect posterity. Moreover, the just noted roles of republican heroes are often complementary and not always easy to differentiate (as with stewardship and redemption, for example). Heroes may perform multiple roles simultaneously, or may perform different roles at different times. However, collectively, these functions speak to the political impact of republican heroes as discussed in this book. Finally, whether fictional or real, a reality-distorting mythology tends to attach to heroism. Even if a hero herself once lived and breathed, heroic

acts are often embellished or exaggerated to the point where the heroic impact itself is more creditable to fiction than reality.

THE INSTITUTIONAL IMPACT OF HEROES

Prototypical republican heroes are extraordinary *defenders*, apothecic warriors, protectors of the realm, risking their lives in pursuit of worthy objectives. Physically heroic, their martial skills and courage exceed the ordinary. The role is atavistic. In tracing the etiology of heroism, Smirnov and his colleagues (2007) find that martial heroism was requisite to the primitive bands, tribes, chiefdoms, and other clan-based entities of the distant past that found themselves frequently at war for their very survival.⁴ Speaking purely in evolutionary terms, martial capacity, including the sacrifices often inherent in military heroism, was central to group survival (Smirnov et al. 2007). For this reason, ancient societies tended to attach tangible rewards to military heroism. Often, this was as simple as permitting warriors to retain their plunder, although frequently rewards extended to the privilege of exercising political power. Indeed, as we will see in chapter 1, in the Homeric Dark Ages, absent formal structures of government, tribal chieftains earned their legitimating status as great warrior-defenders (see Finley 1954, esp. 128–133; Donlan 1982, 140; Whitley 1991, 349–51; Trepavlov 1995, 41–42; Kelly and Dunbar 2001, 90; Mitchell 2013, 36). By the same token, qualification for Roman heroism (chapter 3) typically demanded proficiency in the manly arts (*virilis virtus*) of horsemanship and warfare, both in aid of defending Rome and consolidating the ever-expanding republican empire.⁵ In a spiritual context, heroic defenders of the faith were fundamental to the preservation of visible institutions (chapter 4). Physical defense also occurs within republics, and explains the heroism of what we will later call common heroes, as crime-fighting upholders of civility and justice (chapter 7).

Somewhere between defense and redemption, *stewardship* manifests in perpetuation of the republic through promotion of virtue at the expense of corruption, becoming heroic by dint of extraordinary dedication to that end. Stewards occupy the center of what Porpora calls the world of moral space—a place of sacred/civil order distinct from the profane environment that surrounds it (1996, 210–11). Equally, heroic stewards are trustees of the monomyth, as Campbell (2004) calls it, that constitutes the social bedrock of shared history and tradition. Manifesting as public servants, stewards privilege the common weal ahead of personal interests that conflict with the greater good. As such, we find stewardship associated with good or

magnanimous leadership. Heroic stewardship does not necessarily rely on the formal power of the state, however, as can be seen in such archetypal figures as chivalric knights and (at least in the American context) Puritan saints dedicated to the synthesis of gospel and law (chapter 4). We even find heroic stewardship in common citizens—ordinary individuals made extraordinary in their public service through nothing more than volitional employment of innate human moral agency (chapters 6 and 7).

The relevance of stewardship is most observable in the breach, in the breakdown of magnanimous leadership, where leaders place their private interests (what Cicero calls *utile*) ahead of their public responsibilities (*honestum*). We see this, for example, in the clientelism that augured the demise of the Roman Republic (chapter 3). Failure of moral leadership destabilizes regimes, inviting the prospect of rebellion or revolution. Indeed, we can understand the Puritan Revolution—and the roles of country gentlemen and Puritan visible saints—in terms of the failed stewardship of king and bishop (chapter 4). To the Romantics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (chapter 5), the French Revolution also had its genesis in failed stewardship.

In cases of failed stewardship, the erstwhile good republic finds itself in need of social *redemption*. The conceptual distinction between heroic stewards perfecting the moral order and heroic redeemers is more continuum than dichotomy. Here I operationalize redemption as fundamentally altering regime trajectory through reformation of the relationship between government and civil society. Emerging in response to social or institutional pathologies that threaten the goodness of the republic, redemptive heroes are proxies for the Eleatic Stranger's divine pilot, their mandate to rescue civil societies from the rot of corruption that has insinuated itself into the institutional structure and common mores of society as a whole.⁶ Inherent is the re-establishment of a (cosmically) just order. William and Mary—symbols of the Glorious Revolution, for example—were integral to the settlement of the monarchy question in seventeenth-century England that had driven that country to civil war. An analogous case can be made for Abraham Lincoln's (partial) settlement of the racial question in America. Catherine the Great's revitalization of the laws, economy and culture of the Russian Empire is another prime example of heroic redemption (Van der Leeuw 1938, 571, 651; O'Connell 1962, 67; Barnes 1978; Johnson 1992; Ramati 2001; Broder 2008).

Redemptive heroes, and sometimes the absence of them, are important players in this book. Solon's heroic redemption of Athens from the violent class conflict that threatened to tear it apart (chapter 1) became

the institutional template for republican mixed government. The fall of the Roman Republic (chapter 3) speaks to the counterfactual, the absence of redemptive heroes (as well as the peril of reliance upon them as an alternative to strong republican institutions). Spiritual and social redemption is a persistent theme in chapter 4. In this context, we identify English country gentlemen and Puritan saints as redemptive archetypes. The aforementioned Romantic hero also plays a redemptive role through aesthetic reimagination of the good republic. Such Romantic reimagination covers a broad range of heroes, including Prometheus, Satan, Byron's Manfred, Frankenstein's monster, and even civil rights leaders such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King and feminist leaders like Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem (chapter 5). Less aesthetically, hard-boiled detectives and superheroes play a redemptive role in seeking to rescue America's foundational values—such staples of human dignity as liberty, equality and civic responsibility—from the evil designs of the criminal and corrupt (chapter 7).

THE CULTURAL IMPACT OF HEROES

In a more diffuse sense, we can think of heroic function in terms of the cultural manifestation of heroic defenders, stewards or redeemers, heroes serving to inspire superior civic values and practices. A central question is one of causality: whether heroes impact cultures or exist merely in reflection of extant mores and values. Certainly the latter must be true; to become culturally relevant is to strike a chord, to be an iconic symbol with which people can identify. There also has to be a degree of recursivity. Even if heroes emerge as reflections of extant cultural values, they tend to survive their generations. That is, they persist in maintaining an inter-generational cultural affinity that reinforces bonds of community.

Whether metaphorical chicken or egg, heroes persist as *exemplars*, didactic role models, serving as the incarnate representation of the principles for which the good republic and its citizens stand, or should stand. Heroic exemplars represent what Marcus (1961, 237) calls the “fulcrum of the value system for [their] followers,” reflecting the moral values of a religion—spiritual or civil—such that a people comes to understand those values as not just definitional, but aspirational. As exemplars, heroes are most likely to be represented as archetypes. Actual or fictional, their exploits find voice through artistic celebration. Going all the way back to ancient Greece, we see this in Homeric warriors (chapter 1) and in Greek tragedy (chapter 2). We find it in chivalric knights (chapter 4) and any number of

Romantic figures portrayed in exhortation of aesthetic moral agency (Prometheus, Satan, Rameau's Nephew, Werther, Manfred and even the leaders of new social movements noted earlier) (chapter 5). Self-reliant American archetypes representing heroic idealization of rugged individualism and self-reliance include self-made men of industry, yeoman farmers, backwoodsmen, gunslinging plainsmen and even superheroes, their anonymity in deference to the latent potential of the everyman (chapter 7).

As exemplars, heroes also emphasize the nobility of particular principles or callings. They provide a schematic sense of what it means to be something. For example, the saint as exemplary hero embodies what it means to be a good Christian (chapter 4), the cowboy an embodiment of the good plainsman, and the superhero as theatrical exaggeration of the moral mandate of the good citizen (chapter 7). Exemplars represent the ideals that individuals internalize and strive to realize or imitate; they are the inspiration that informs or refines that which we imagine our best selves to be (Sullivan and Venter 2005, esp. 106–107; Schlenker, Weigold and Schlenker 2008, 326–29; Allison and Goethals 2011, 59).

If exemplary heroes speak to the values of the good citizen, as *nation builders* heroes help inform a common cultural identification, a sense of the social solidarity requisite to political stability (see Carlyle 1841, 1; Annus 2000, 121). Often they prevail in justification of the extant regime. As with Aeneas to Augustinian Rome, or King Arthur to early Norman England, or even Princess Diana in the late twentieth century, they are legitimators of political power and authority, clarifying the rules of the game, reinforcing the idea that beyond self-interest and personal preference, the republic stands as something greater than oneself (Grebe 2004). As such, heroic nation builders also represent templates for prevailing social norms and customs; as heuristics for virtuous governance and citizenship. Most prominently, they stand as iconic symbols of a civil religion and the principles by which a people defines itself. Like Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, whose knights embody the discrete virtues constitutive of Protestant England's utopian singularity,⁷ nation builders inform a distinctive sense of usness thereby contributing to what modern political scientists call social capital.

Heroic nation builders appear in numerous places in this book. We find, them, albeit indirectly, in the guise of Archaic Greek aristocratic legatees of the Homeric tradition (chapter 1). They are manifest in the mythology (if not always the reality) of the Roman *boni*, trustees of the meta norms and values undergirding the ancient republican constitution

of Rome (chapter 3). The self-sufficient common citizen, forged through two spiritual awakenings in America, helped define the nascent America (chapter 6). Chapter 7, meanwhile, represents a case study in heroic nation building, as illustrated by the archetypal common heroes discussed above.

If heroes impact the culture of their times, it is equally the case that heroes—or at least the heroism that attaches to them—are often cultural constructions, heroic not necessarily for what they have done as much as what myth-makers and hagiographers might wish them to have done. Such mythologization need not reflect out and out fabrication. Generally, heroic mythology represents hyperbolic cultural construction. The question is, does this cultural construction, reflecting the ascendent values of the day, permit us to evaluate the quality of these values? Or does it simply suggest that certain values lend themselves more readily to cultural hyperbole? As discussed in the conclusion, the issue of whether or not we live in a postheroic age turns largely on these issues.

What Makes a Hero?

Whatever political role heroes perform, we require an operational definition of what makes someone a hero. This will not be as precise as some might like, but given that we all have our own heroes, there is an unavoidable subjectivity. This book defines heroes in terms of two necessary attributes (capacity and estimability), and one necessary condition (vulnerability). Capacity is technically a gateway, limiting access to any claims to heroism. Understood in terms of greatness or goodness, *capacity* is conceived more restrictively by some than others. An obvious heroic requirement, *estimability* distinguishes heroes from villains. A function of character, deed and ratification, estimability demands just agency. Finally, *vulnerability* is circumstantial. It is what gives context to heroic behavior.

CAPACITY

Heroic capacity is what makes heroes extraordinary in the literal sense of transcending the ordinary. It speaks to the talents and skills requisite to such transcendence. Most basically, these are acquired through nature, such that some are gifted at birth with natural talents that manifest as extraordinary task-competence. Relatedly, heroic capacity may be the product of

supernatural intervention, such as the divine powers and counsel which abet Achilles, King Arthur and Wonder Woman, among others; or the grace that imbues saints with thaumatological powers. Finally, capacity can be volitional, in the sense that one cultivates latent talents through training, character and commitment.

Heroic capacity manifests in two ways: physically or metaphysically. Physically, heroes are notable by extraordinary task-competence (see Klapp 1954, 57). We conceive physical capacity in interpersonal terms, measuring it against the actions of others and affirming it through deviation from the mean. The extent to which one exceeds the ordinary in this physical sense is the degree to which we assign *greatness* to a person. By contrast, we think of metaphysical heroic capacity in terms of *goodness*. (Heroic goodness cannot be exclusively metaphysical, of course. For it to gain heroic purchase it must present on the surface, as action and interaction. Nor does goodness preclude greatness. One can be greatly good.)⁸ Insensitive to interpersonal comparison, goodness presents as internal development. Extraordinariness in this context is quite literal, as in transcending the ordinary life of production and reproduction. It is in this transcendence, inherent in realization of the human condition, that we make sense of Roger Rollin's injunction that "[m]ankind endures as animal, but prevails as hero" (1983, 38), and Earnest Becker's that "our main task on this planet, is the heroic" (1973, 1).

ESTIMABILITY

Heroic estimability connotes a sense of going above and beyond. We can think of estimability in terms of character, achievement and recognition. Character is central to the ideation of heroism. Conducting a modest study of seventy-five college students, Allison and Goethals (2011, 61–62) asked respondents to list the defining traits of heroism. They found that character traits such as modesty, selflessness, altruism, empathy, honesty and reliability are more likely to conform to heroic schemas than are the opposite (see also Harvey, Erdos and Turnbull 2007, 1608; Schlenker, Weigold and Schlenker 2008). In a republican context, heroic character conforms to virtue. Intersubjective—having some sort of positive impact on others—heroic character speaks most readily to social obligation. Such intersubjectivity might be relatively modest, as in the case of serving as exemplar encouraging emulation by others. Or it may be more magnanimous, as with Socrates' claim in the *Meno*, that good men "will be

beneficent when they give us correct guidance in our affairs” (Plato *Meno*, 96e; see also Blau 1977; Cmiel 1990, 24; McWilliams 2011; Jayawickreme and Di Stefano 2012).

Heroic achievement is extraordinary contribution to the public good. People tend to appraise estimable action from the standpoint of deviation from what they themselves would be able or willing to do in like circumstances (Markovitz 2012, 297; also Olsthoorn 2005; Blomberg, Hess and Raviv 2009). Pragmatically, heroic achievement attaches most readily to social utility. Successful endeavor is not a requirement for heroic estimability; but it does aid in the cause. The conquering hero tends to present as more heroic than the valiant but vanquished. Typically a supplement to heroic character, achievement can also serve to cover a shortfall. Indeed, so long as no significant moral principles are breached, people seem willing to substitute achievement for character (Shaffer 1987, 26; Becker and Eagly 2004, 164). Achilles more than compensates for questionable character by presenting as the best of the Achaeans. Even as he was booed in ballparks across America, the unlikable alleged drug-cheat Barry Bonds remained heroic to most fans of the San Francisco Giants for his extraordinary accomplishments at the plate.

Finally, heroic recognition is assent to a hero’s heroic qualities. It is determined by audience—ratifiers of those worthy of esteem—and measured in terms of breadth (general renown) and depth (posterity). Where audience is broad and deep, the hero assumes cultural relevance. She can be said to be a *singular* hero. Heroic singularity speaks to the spirit of an age; it is what entices us to call the age “heroic.”⁹ More nuanced is where heroic recognition lacks breadth or depth. We can consider such heroes *unsung*, although some might enjoy their proverbial fifteen minutes of broad recognition. Unsung heroes lack the cultural importance of singular heroes, but not the relevance. The direct impact of heroism upon institutions or individual lives is insensitive to singularity. Neighborhood heroes such as parish priests, favorite high school coaches or community activists can be recognized as having heroic impact on small subsets of the population. Their heroism is recognized neither broadly nor (necessarily) deeply; but is critical nonetheless in helping to mold good citizens. Heroes, then, are heroes, even when forgotten or unsung.¹⁰

VULNERABILITY

Moving beyond heroic attributes, a requisite *condition* for heroism is resistance, some countervailing force that challenges heroic capacity and

hones estimability. Absent vulnerability there is no heroism. Without it heroes would be redundant or unrelatable. The hero who rescues a child from a burning automobile would merely be a courteous bystander were the car not ablaze. As a rule, the greater the ordeal faced by a hero, the greater her heroism. Without the passion, for example, Jesus' message—however noble—loses much of its heroic and inspirational quality. Absent the vulnerability of the heel by which he was held when dipped in the River Styx, Achilles, invulnerable, would not have been so heroic a figure. Even in modern times, our comic superheroes require vulnerability to keep them heroic. Superman is susceptible to kryptonite. The Green Lantern's superpowers are nullified by the color yellow. Wonder Woman is vulnerable to bladed weapons. And Spiderman's radioactive blood (strangely, this is a positive thing) cannot protect him against teenage angst and self-doubt (see Alison and Goethals 2011, ch. 4).

Vulnerability supplies didactic relevance. Audiences can admire invulnerable greatness, but they cannot relate to it. While Achilles is less awe-inspiring, he is also more heroic than the gods, whose immortality renders them incapable of the extraordinary courage that informs Homeric estimability. Suffering from the frailties and temptations that bedevil all humanity, what sets heroes apart is their ability to overcome their imperfections. Oedipus's arrogant assertion of the worldly ahead of the spiritual, for example, leads him into a cycle of self-destruction that makes possible his heroic transcendence by the time of his death at Colonus. The sexual temptation afforded by Phaedria nearly overwhelms Sir Guyon's temperance in the *Faerie Queene*, which only heightens the triumph of his destruction of the bower of bliss. Cervantes's Don Quixote must transcend his foolish pride before he can be considered truly heroic. Byron's Manfred is compelled to do battle with the monster within before finding release from his Faustian pact. In Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Lily Briscoe transcends her self-doubt to find liberation and fulfillment in her life as an artist. In this same vein, superheroines like Captain Marvel have sought to ameliorate the imposter syndrome that has contributed to the cultural disempowerment of women.

Vulnerability is often portrayed in terms of a quest, what Joseph Campbell (1973) calls the nuclear unit of the monomyth. As with all quests, there is point of departure and return. Whatever heroic capacities the hero may (or may not) have demonstrated at the start of her journey, and whatever her reward at journey's end, the heroic element of the quest lies the intervening struggle distinguishing the heroic from the prosaic. His martial heroism notwithstanding, Odysseus is best known for the

expedition to which he lends his name. Independent of the prize associated with the Golden Fleece, it is his tribulations along that way that provide Jason with the authority to assert his claim to kingship. Only Galahad is successful in discovering the mystery of God's grace, but each of the Arthurian knights is heroic in his quest for the Holy Grail. Christian's heroism in the *Pilgrim's Progress* lies not in his arrival in the Celestial City, but in the trials of faith he encounters in his pilgrimage. In Helen Oyeyemi's *Mr. Fox*, Mary Foxe—the eponymous author's fictional muse—engages in a voyage of transformation, challenging Fox to transcend his dysfunctional relationship with women, both fictional and real.

What Are the Types of Republican Hero?

I will use the term “republican hero” in two ways. Most immediately, I identify four heuristic categories of republican heroism. At the conclusion of the book, I distinguish these discrete types of republican heroism from what we will call “complete republican heroism.” In the discussion of capacity above, we identified two heroic currencies: (physical) greatness and (metaphysical) goodness. Treating these as binary values yields four categories. Let us introduce them as epic heroes (great not good), magnanimous heroes (great and good), Romantic heroes (neither great nor good), and common heroes (good not great). These hero types do not map to particular heroic functions in the sense of acquiring total proprietorship of the role of defender, steward, redeemer, exemplar, or nation builder, although some heroic functions attach more readily to one hero type than to others. Their greater significance is that they tend to reflect the cultural preferences of particular ages, with the great hero types more prominent prior to the Enlightenment and the not-great generally acquiring heroic purchase only in the modern age.¹¹

EPIC HEROES

Prototypical, epic heroes are what most of us think of when heroes come to mind. They are extraordinary men and women who appear larger than life, their physical greatness, or excellence, setting them apart from the ordinariness of the masses. We can think of this distinction between great and ordinary in two ways: in kind or in degree. Where excellence differs in *kind*, epic heroes transcend the natural limits that bind ordinary

mortals; they possess supernatural capabilities (Di Cesare 1982, 59). Such heroes enjoy superiority over their environments. (Achilles's or Wonder Woman's virtual invulnerability in battle is a good example, as is King Arthur's wielding of Excalibur, the prophecy of the Norse Valkyries, or Superman's ability to fly.) Hesiod conceives such hero-men as the product of union between mortals and gods.¹² In ancient times these heroes were worshipped as *daemons* whose posthumous existence was such that long-dead heroes could affect the fortunes of the living. Where the excellence of heroes differs in *degree*, the result is a slightly more expansive understanding of epic heroism. Excellence in degree need not render heroes larger than life or supernatural; it merely makes them extraordinary in the physical sense. Excellence in degree is the operational definition of epic heroism employed in this book.

Epic heroes possess the defining quality of heroic greatness—extraordinary task-competence, estimability through acquisition of sociometric recognition, and transcendence of vulnerability through individual assertion (Borgatta, Bales, and Couch 1954, 756–57). The principal problem is that the heuristic—represented by the Homeric hero discussed in the next chapter—is not a great fit with republican heroism. Self-assertive, epic heroes facially lack the metaphysical competence requisite to republican virtue. Addressing this problem requires three qualifications. First, although many scholars, cited in chapter 1, have made the case for a theory of social obligation in Homer, the argument here is that such social concern is at best secondary to Homeric heroes. Thus, while important as exemplars of the schematic ideal of the Archaic Age aristocrat, and (indirect) nation builders, Homeric heroes are not republican heroes *per se*.

Second, subsequent epic heroes have tended to deviate from the heuristic by importing the just agency requisite to republican heroism. There have been three principal mechanisms. The first is to assign to heroes coincidental qualities of goodness and greatness. Such heroes are great independent of their goodness. While they need not be great in their goodness, they must be just agents—satisfying the personal, social, and cosmic obligations requisite to republican virtue. The second mechanism is goodness of cause, such that even if goodness does not demonstrably attach to the hero herself, the cause for which she employs her talent supplies estimability. The third mechanism is that estimability through goodness of cause is often supplemented by aspirational goodness. In this sense, the epic hero is a secondary hero, not perfected in her virtue, but guided in the quest for transcendence by an already perfected primary

hero (Bond 2011). In Lucan's *Pharsalia*, for example, Cato the Younger is held up as the apotheotic pinnacle of human virtue, while Pompey represents the secondary hero, sympathetic but weak (Bond 2011, 3–17). Similarly, in Greek tragedy, the gods often assume the role of primary hero, all-too-mortal humans assuming the secondary role, albeit often with less felicitous outcomes than underscore the myriad Christian epics. In the Vulgate Cycle, Lancelot and Galahad fulfill the role of secondary and primary hero, respectively, while in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Prince Arthur assumes the role of primary hero in the other knights' epic pursuit of perfection.

The third qualification is that even if heuristic epic heroes lack the just agency requisite to republican heroism, they are an important part of the narrative. Homeric heroes represent the backdrop against which republican heroism emerged. Exemplary manifestations of Socrates's thymotic element of the soul, self-assertive Homeric warriors excelled at the manly virtues of warfare, horsemanship, and athletics. For the Greeks of the Archaic period, they represented an aristocratic ideal, a schematic sense of the qualities requisite to leadership. Even if not nation builders themselves, early epic heroes influenced the institutional structure of emergent republics through the appropriation of their legacy by the Archaic Greek aristocracy. Like Virgil's Aeneas, they also stood as symbols of nationhood, their epic qualities celebrated in proxy for the greatness of their nations. Later epic heroes were Christian martyrs of the late Roman Empire. They were defenders of the faith, takers of the Cross during the high Middle Ages. As chivalric knights, they were both defenders and stewards, their obligation to liege lords foundational to the vassalage of the feudal order.

MAGNANIMOUS HEROES

Magnanimous heroes exceed others in the metaphysical capacity requisite to realization of the human condition. In ancient and medieval times, their primacy was predicated upon possession of the elusive moral competence exogenous to common men and women. Magnanimity is a social resource, harvested, refined, and disseminated by heroic social, religious, and political leaders. More than coincidentally great and good, magnanimous heroes are *greatly* good, exceeding others in the perfection of virtue and hence sufficiency to live a good human life. Unlike the self-absorption of the more timocratic Homeric hero, magnanimity demands extension of concern beyond the self and toward the welfare of others. Percy Shelley

captures the point nicely, maintaining that to be greatly good, one “must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own” (1891, 14).

To be heroic, and not just magnanimous, one must be estimable. To this end, magnanimous heroes—already perfected in their virtue—aid others in fulfillment of the higher purpose for which humanity exists (Grampp 1951, 137), relieving ordinary men and women of “the delirium of the animal spirits” (Emerson *Great Men*, 634). Defined by their extraordinary knowledge of the first principles of justice, they axiomatically fulfill the cosmic obligations requisite to republican just agency.

Magnanimity finds resistance in the relentless forces of nature. Magnanimous heroes swim against the tide of human nature, tending as it does towards gratification of the appetites. Thus, heroic magnanimity is grounded in what Carlyle characterizes as “heartfelt prostrate admiration, burning, boundless, for a noblest godlike Form of Man” (1841, 18). In a Christian context, magnanimous heroes must contend with the immediacy of the natural order in exhortation of others to privilege the greater fulfillment extant in the order of grace.¹³ In such great goodness lies the efficacy of saints and divines, to say nothing of the greatest hero of them all (whose name the florid Carlyle dares not speak).

Exceeding others in the perfection of their virtues, magnanimous heroes tend to present as stewards, redeemers, and exemplars. Prototypical are the Socratic philosopher king, Aristotle’s great-souled man, and Cicero’s virtuous office holders. The philosopher king is steward of the civic architecture, mandating a socially efficient division of labor. Analogous to the reasoning element of the balanced and harmonious soul, Socrates’s philosopher king is the law giver, exhorting others to goodness in conformity with the first principles of justice through fidelity to the aptitudes with which nature has endowed them. Such goodness manifests, says Sidney of Tasso’s Rinaldo, in one who “doth not only teach and move to a truth, but teaches and moves to the most high and excellent truth; who makes magnanimity and justice shine through all misty fearfulness and foggy desires” (1890, 30). Cicero’s virtuous magistrates, collectively the *boni*, are keepers of the *mos maiorum*—the ancient customs and mores of the Roman Republic.

The heroic role of the Roman *boni* was also redemptive, rescuing Rome from the manifold perils and crises endemic to a young republic in transition to a great imperial power. It was a failure of such heroic

redemption that Cicero laments in the dying days of the Late Republic. The failure of heroic redemption also manifests in Greek tragedy—specifically the tragic consequences of insufficient or belated magnanimity. Of course, heroic redemption is not always fruitless. We find redemptive magnanimity in Christian divines aiding and exhorting others in their spiritual pilgrimage; or Catherine the Great imposing the ideals of the Enlightenment upon Russia.

While heroic magnanimity is typically not aspirational, it *is* inspirational. The exemplary qualities of the Christ figure, for example, plays out not only in the martyrdom of saints, but also in any number of Christological figures in the arts. The Sir Galahad of the Vulgate Cycle and Edmund Spenser's Prince Arthur are but two manifestations mentioned later in the book. Aquinas finds qualified magnanimity in those who uplift the spirit of Christians, counteracting the pusillanimity attendant to postlapsarian despair and inspiring the scholastic Christian humanism characteristic of the early Renaissance (esp. 1947, II-II, Q. 110, Art. 2, ad. 3, Q. 129, Art. 6, Q. 133, Art. 2, ad. 4, Q.162, Art. 1, ad. 3). In a republican context, magnanimous heroes help provide the motive for goodness, to inspire citizens not only to transcendence of the ordinary lives, but also to be good stewards of the republic.

Manifestly, the modern age is not the heyday of the magnanimous hero. And it is the decline of magnanimity, both religious and secular, that critics of modernity respond to most intensely. Certainly, the waning influence of spirituality in many developed nations, including the staunchest Roman Catholic ones, speaks to the secular egalitarianism and moral elasticity—the *ordinariness*—that some decry as characteristic of the modern age. We can, however, be too hasty in relegating magnanimous heroism to the deep, dark past. Magnanimity remains relevant in the exemplary and redemptive senses. Winston Churchill's prudent and charismatic leadership both exhorted and exemplified a defiant national attitude, transforming Britain's darkest hour into its finest one. What many on the left see as John F. Kennedy's recasting of America as the new enlightened Camelot speaks to his magnanimous redemptive heroism; while what those on the right see as Ronald Reagan's moral reawakening in defense of America's core values could be cast in a similar light. Straddling the line between magnanimous and Romantic heroism, iconic and affective symbols of new social movements, including Simone de Beauvoir, Cesar Chavez, Betty Friedan, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Rigoberta Menchu,