‘Nature is of God’: Land, Money, Empire and Extraction in James Harrington’s Legal Thought, 1656–60

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1 Nature, Extractivism, Pamphlets

In 1659, the English radical republican theorist James Harrington published one of his last works: a 10-page pamphlet of 76 aphorisms. The 22nd and shortest stated plainly ‘Nature is of God’. Unpacking this otherwise enigmatic line, this article examines Harrington’s changing uses of nature in connection to law, land, money and empire to uncover early forms of extractivism in Harrington’s thought.

Within a rather short publishing career in the late 1650s, Harrington wrote several works that had influence well beyond the religious and civil war tumults that serve as their main contexts - and which ended his intellectual life after he was driven mad by imprisonment by the royalists following the restoration of Charles II (Hammersley 2019). Harrington’s *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656) and broader work had a wide and occasionally profound influence. Among American imperialists, Jefferson used Harrington to articulate his agrarian imperialism built on the dispossession of Indigenous nations from the lands and expanding American agricultural and industrial power through transatlantic slavery, while John Adams used Harrington’s

account of empire to critique the imbalances of Britain's empire in the late 1780s to justify the American Revolution (Teng 2019). Among scholars, Harrington gained the attention of various thinkers from British empire analyst JA Froude (Teng 2019), to Marxists like Eduard Bernstein, who recognised the economic emphasis in Harrington's political theology and his analysis of class society in the English revolutions that connected Harrington's accounts to Marx's view of the 1848 revolutions, with Judith Shklar going so far as to suggest we might see him as a 'Marx for the Gentry' (Shklar 1959: 668–9). In JGA Pocock's account, what distinguishes Harrington from his contemporaries and largely accounts for his influence well beyond his time is his attention to class, his connections between economic and political power, and his insistence on a commonwealth's imperial mission (1977a). These are often presented in a rudimentary or not-always-conscious way, amidst Harrington's more immediate concerns of the English civil war's aftermath: Cromwell's repressions, royalist resurgences, myriad religious and political debates, using history to explain why England's monarchy had been toppled and why it must be replaced with a true Commonwealth (1977a: 46), and justifications of English imperial projects in Ireland, Scotland and beyond (Somos 2017). In examining this pressing situation and articulating his ideal republican plans, Harrington used various conceptions of land, money, law and empire to interrogate the 'justice' of forms of government, and lay out the imperial duties of a rightly ordered commonwealth.

Although the term 'extractivism' would not emerge for some three and a half centuries following Harrington's death, his fixation on land and legal power and the contexts of the early decades of English land theft and extraction in Ireland and North America make him a useful frame for exploring one early form of extractivism and its connections to law, nature, and empire. To take but one prominent example, Dayna Scott has conceptualised contemporary extractivism as much more than just the concrete activity of removing raw minerals for processing elsewhere, but rather also a relation, a logic, and a kind of political economy that reveals its 'essential features', namely as a 'mode of accumulation that necessitates both *high pace* and a *large scale* of taking'

and a 'certain intensity or recklessness in terms of concentrated impacts' which Scott sees in its Latin (American) genealogy of *extraher* as 'to pluck with violence' (Pasternak et al. 2023: 6 (emphasis in original) and see Riofrancos 2020, Chagnon et al. 2022). Elsewhere, Scott has emphasised that this is also a spatial relation where distance is crucial: extraction's taking must also be an action that 'generates benefits for distant capital without generating benefits for local people', relying on a particular '*way* of relating to nature' that is non-reciprocal and short term (2021: 124 (emphasis in original)).

This article explores Harrington's uses of 'nature' to investigate one site of early British imperial politico-legal thought and suggest some deeper genealogies of contemporary ideas of extractivism in the radical projects of the mid-seventeenth century. That is not to suggest they overlap entirely (or even mostly), or to reduce what is distinctive about contemporary global extractivism, but instead to deepen and reinforce the profound entrenchment of the extractivist frame and suggest some longer resonances it has in the history of legal thought. The major Harringtonian themes of a fixation on land, radical reorganisation of ownership, attention to space and taking, and the use of property and limited sovereignty to articulate a just system that should spread itself through the world, are each clear connections with contemporary thinking on extractivism.

This article unpacks that connection by a close analysis of Harrington's works that tracks his uses of the concept of 'nature'. Part 2 examines the early, secular account in Harrington's most well-known work, *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656). This utopian republican constitution rested on land tenure reorganisation where the justice of empire depended on the control over land and law: provincial colonial outposts held complete proprietorship without sovereignty or law, while the 'domestic empire' required equal distributions of land and legal power. Oceana's messianic mission to spread its laws and constitution through the world was founded on the control and assimilation of territory, and from there the extraction of its resources. Part 3 considers the turn from secular to religious and mystical accounts of this duty and

the importance of 'nature' in Harrington's later agitational pamphlet recapitulations of Oceana's main themes and response to critics. These late 1650s works offer more systematic accounts of the connection of nature, empire and law that rested on a deeper engagement with divine and natural law; where 'Nature is of God'. Part 4 turns to Harrington's final unpublished work, *The Mechanics of Nature* (1660), which briefly sketched an account of 'animal spirits' and the common order of nature and humanity. Beginning with the declaration 'Nature is the fiat', *Mechanics* provides a final evocative account of the themes of nature, sovereign declaratory power, and circulation and redistribution that link to forms of extractivism nascent in Harrington's earlier works.

2 'If a Man Thus Feed an Whole People, They are under His Empire': Nature, Protection and Imperial Expansion in Oceana

Harrington's various works in the late 1650s attempted to articulate an ideal system of land tenure reorganisation that would be the necessary basis for an ideal commonwealth. *Oceana* (1656), a republican constitutional plan based on a thinly veiled British Isles, was the most extensive of these texts. It contains an early secular form of Harrington's views on nature and extraction, providing a strong thematic foundation in its connection of property possession and empire for ideas that become more complex in his later works. In *Oceana*, Harrington used images of protection, botanical increase, animals and land to form a constitutional plan that rearranged property relations as the basis of a mission to spread this redistribution into new territory, across the entire world.

Harrington begins the text with a panegyric that lists Oceana's natural bounties and resources:

> Oceana is saluted by the panegyrist after this manner:
>
> O the most blessed and fortunate of all countries Oceana! How deservedly hath Nature with the bounties of heaven and earth endowed thee, the ever fruitful womb not closed with ice, … Thy woods are not the harbour of devouring beasts, nor thy Continual verdure the

> ambush of serpents, but the food of innumerable herds and flocks, presenting thee their shepherdess with distended dugs or golden fleeces. … (Harrington 1993: 3).

Plentiful resources from a fertile, diverse landscape and its docile beasts are offered up for distribution among the people for their just usage. This is fitting for the plan that will follow. Foundational to Oceana was the interaction of land ownership and legal power, and its messianic mission was to reorder the territorial control of the world. 'Empire' for Harrington and many of his English contemporaries meant, firstly, something akin to 'lawful authority', and secondly, an imperial state. This imperial territorial state was founded on solid claims to control territory, which Harrington contrasted against those states that sought imperial power but lacked land (Venice, Genoa) and thus instead looked to seafaring, trade and the control of money as their imperial tools. Harrington's revolutionary plan – in the sense of both resting on the movement and rotation of political offices as well as radically reorganising property rights – involved accounts of the redistribution, circulation and balance of property and money. These were foundational to splitting his account of empire into a 'foreign' and 'domestic' binary:

> To begin with riches, in regard that men are hung upon these, not of choice as upon the other, but of necessity and by the teeth: for as much as he who wanteth bread is his servant that will feed him, if a man thus feed an whole people, they are under his empire (Harrington 1993: 11).

Harrington's imagery here links protection, sovereignty, empire and consumption; the act of providing food demands allegiance, the sovereign is the servant and feeder of the people, and Harrington's account of material motivations is not one of choice ('not of choice') but because of the need to consume in general, with food as the most obvious example – 'of necessity and by the teeth'. Lawful protection rests on the provision of the necessities of life, which in turn requires a just distribution of the ability to extract those necessities from the land.

Consequently, Harrington's account of commonwealth and empire rests on the control of property. Harrington continues immediately from consumption to the division of domestic and foreign empire, turning

upon control of property and lawful power:

> Empire is of two kinds, domestic and national, or foreign and provincial.
>
> Domestic empire is founded upon dominion.
>
> Dominion is property real or personal; that is to say in lands, or in money and goods.
>
> Lands, or the parts and parcels of a territory, are held by the proprietor or proprietors, lord or lords of it, in some proportion; and such (except it be in a city that hath little or no land, and whose revenue is in trade) as is the proportion or balance of dominion or property in land, such is the nature of the empire (Harrington 1993: 11).

Mimicking the Aristotelian division of government, Harrington then links sovereignty and control of property: a single landowner in a territory is an empire of absolute monarchy; nobility landowners are 'mixed monarchy', and 'if the whole people be landlords', or if they divide the land among them without any person or group overbalancing the others, then 'the empire (without the interposition of force) is a commonwealth' (Harrington 1993: 11–12). The 'balance' of 'domestic empire' is in dominion: the distribution of property in land (Harrington 1993: 16). But the 'balance' of 'foreign or provincial' empire is the opposite: property-holders in the provinces cannot exercise lawful authority, because that would turn the 'provincial and dependent' into the 'national and independent' (Harrington 1993: 16).

Property, class and nature are then used to explain these limits on lawful authority abroad, with a series of botanical metaphors articulating the 'planting' of colonies. The 'richest' landowners domestically 'share more of the power at home', while the 'richest' colonial landowners are 'least admitted to government abroad': they are 'native subjects or citizens that have been transplanted … for men, like flowers or roots, being transplanted take after the soil wherein they grow' (Harrington 1993: 16). Provincial soil is incapable of allowing lawful authority, and instead it must be exercised from the metropole. Harrington uses this language to illustrate his point in relation to Rome: 'the best way of

propagating herself and naturalising the country' was to plant citizens throughout Italy, and if Rome had gone beyond those bounds, 'it would have aliened the citizens and given root to liberty abroad, that might have sprung up foreign or savage and hostile to her' (Harrington 1993: 16–17). Harrington then considers the comparisons of territories within an empire or between two nations as another balance. Just as a country's internal authority is a function of its property distribution, different countries are in balance internationally depending on their various advantages, 'so one country overbalanceth another by advantages of divers kinds' (Harrington 1993: 18). Harrington ends this section with an analogy to the Indies drawing on a maternal metaphor:

> For the colonies in the Indies, they are yet babes that cannot live without sucking the breasts of their mother-cities, but such as I mistake, if when they come of age they do not wean themselves; which causeth me to wonder at princes that delight to be exhausted in that way (Harrington 1993: 18).

This is an early form of the late eighteenth-century critiques of British imperial holdings that perceived the colonies as dependent and problematic for metropolitan rulers and 'mother country', costing more than they were worth, and who then permitted independence or relinquished control only when they were no longer able to extract economic value from them, or local resistance proved too strong.

In the remainder of *Oceana*, Harrington articulates a strong, messianic mission for the rightly-ordered commonwealth to expand its territorial control and spread its system of laws. This duty of expansion is a corollary of it being ordered 'unto reason', and individual–state analogies to natural reason are central here. Harrington presents a tripartite view of reason from person to polity to humanity. Reason 'is nothing but interest', but there are various interests and thus various kinds or reason: first, the interests/reason of 'private man'; second the 'reason of state' or interests of a prince, nobility or people; and third, the 'reason which is the interest of mankind or of the whole … a common right, law of nature, or interest of the whole, which is more excellent, and so acknowledged to be by the agents themselves,

than the right or interest of the parts only' (Harrington 1993: 21, quoting Hooker 1989 and Grotius 1925). The interest of a popular government is 'nearest' to the 'interest of mankind', likewise popular government's reason is 'nearest' to 'right reason' (Harrington 1993: 22); so the commonwealth is the domestic instantiation of humanity-wide rationality, and for this reason it has a duty to expand. Avoiding any overbalance and entrenching the right reason of the commonwealth depended on an equal agrarian law, 'a perpetual law establishing and preserving the balance of dominion, by such a distribution that no one man or number of men within the compass of the few or aristocracy can come to overpower the whole people by their possessions in lands' (Harrington 1993: 33) As the commonwealth expands it must either re-divide its territory or plant citizens newly into colonies, which Rome failed to do (Harrington 1993: 43–4).

In the final section before sketching Oceana's constitutional plan, Harrington explains the model for imperial expansion using further analogies to botany and nature. Harrington's fictitious legislator, the Archon, says the commonwealth 'is a commonwealth for increase' (imperial expansion) rather than 'preservation' (non-expansive), and compares both as plants and flowers:

> Of those [commonwealths] for preservation, the inconveniences and frailties have been shown; their roots are narrow, such as do not run, have no fivers [fibres], their tops weak and dangerously exposed unto the weather; except you chance to find one (as Venice) planted in a flowerpot, and if she grow, she grows top-heavy and falls too. But you cannot plant an oak in a flowerpot; she must have earth for her root, and heaven for her branches (Harrington 1993: 217).

A commonwealth that is rightly ordered and planted aims at immortality: 'whatever in nature is not sensible of decay by the course of a thousand years is capable of the whole age of nature … a commonwealth rightly ordered may for any internal causes be as immortal, or long-lived, as the world' (Harrington 1993: 218). The 'natural' death of commonwealths happens by either contradiction or inequality, with Lacedaemon an example of contradiction in being

made for war but not 'for increase', meaning that it did not plant colonies correctly or re-order property distribution in the territories it conquered (Harrington 1993: 218–19).

This expansion may happen in three ways: conquest, alliances, and colonies. Each is explained using analogies to nature and agrarian practices. The first is by 'imposing the yoke', or simply conquering them, common to monarchies, and occurring by border frictions: 'governments, be they of what kind soever, if they be planted too close, are like trees that, impatient in their growth to have it hindered, eat out one another', but bringing them under bondage 'infects' the body politic and will kill it (Harrington 1993: 221–2). The second enlargement is by 'equal leagues', or constitutional-treaties like the Swiss and Dutch federations. Harrington sees these as 'useless' because they are not properly connected and are thus exploitative – 'the Hollander, though he sweat more gold than the Spaniard digs, lets him languish in debt, for she herself lives upon charity' – and 'dangerous' to the metropole because they 'do not command but beg their bread from province to province' (1993: 222–3, and discussing Roman and Greek league expansion from 223–6). The third and final is by an 'unequal league' on the model of Rome: planting colonies where property is retained and redistributed among the provincials, but lawmaking power is retained by the imperial metropole (Harrington 1993: 226–27).

This final form is the model for Oceana's messianic imperial mission to spread its lawful order through force: conquering new lands, reorganising their property holdings as new provinces, distributing that land to keep it balanced and in the hands of the many, but not allowing the provinces any lawful authority within them. Oceana's duty is to 'aspire unto the empire of the world' and 'to put the world in a better condition than it was before' (Harrington 1993: 227). Harrington ends here on a relatively contemporary note, citing Columbus, the corruption and illness of empires framed for riches alone, and one major episode in the beginning of extraction of the resources of the 'new world':

> Columbus offered gold unto one of your kings, through whose happy incredulity another prince hath drunk the poison, even unto the

> consumption of his people; but I do not offer you a nerve of war that is made of purse-strings, such an one as hath drawn the face of the earth into convulsions, but such an one as is natural unto her health and beauty. Look you to it, where there is tumbling and tossing upon the bed of sickness, it must end in death or recovery (Harrington 1993: 232).

Empire and the wars and resource extraction it entails cannot be for the private accumulation of wealth. Harrington urges that 'recovery' from this illness is possible only through 'ancient prudence': 'The first of these nations … that recovers the health of ancient prudence shall assuredly govern the world' (1993: 232–3). Prudence here is joined to law: redistributing property rights within the Commonwealth as a means for acquiring new territory to the ends of the earth, and ultimately placing the world into the proper 'balance' of natural reason.

Harrington's extractivist themes most clearly emerge in his concluding articulation of Oceana's imperial mission, as a messianic duty to use legal power to redistribute land and property throughout the global that rests on images of nature, botany and agrarian practice. This is an empire that will reorder property for the territorial control of the world, where the correct use of the earth forms the basis of Harrington's intuitions about the justice of this ordering. But here Harrington has some interesting connections and divergences from contemporary ideas of extractivism, particularly around distance, non-reciprocity and exploitation and commodification. On the one hand, he sees the justice of this empire as founded precisely on the inequality of legal power between province and metropole (contra the 'equal leagues' of Switzerland and Holland, and for the Roman 'ancient prudence' colonial model), which we can recognise as endorsing non-reciprocal legal authority. On the other he also rails against Columbus's 'poison' of 'gold', seeming to reject pure exploitation and the conversion of nature into riches, while also clearly viewing land and property as demanding reorganisation for improvement and thus extraction of their potential riches.

Some of the vagaries and potential contradictions in this outline

can perhaps be explained by Harrington's rather crude theorisations of property and ownership, as foundational as those concepts are for his utopian plan. In Shklar's view, for all his attention to the economic basis of political and legal power, Harrington's *Oceana* has no real concept of 'economic life', does not address rent, sale or profit, and he seems to see questions of the improvement or development of land as largely just following from reordering ownership (1959: 37). Nor does he seem to have much concept of market or the wage relationship as the basis of social personhood or class relations (Pocock 1977a: 60). What Harrington does emphasise is the 'universal need to eat' (Shklar 1959: 37), and property control functions generically and without further explanation to satisfy that need and improve the ability to consume. When this focus on land control is combined with the messianic imperial mission, Harrington's initial emphasis on bread and protection as central to imperial legal authority ('If a man thus feed an whole people, they are under his empire': 1993: 11) becomes a duty to increase the productive capacity of the land, to be consumed by an expanded population.

Finally, we can see the links between Harrington's nascent extractivism in *Oceana*'s imperial expansive mission and his selective consideration of actual imperial missions, mentioning Ireland and largely ignoring the Americas. Harrington's own contribution to theorising and defending the Irish conquest emerges in *Oceana*, and he uses it as an example of imperial improvement of land. He describes Oceana's fictional conquered neighbour Panopea (Ireland) in the introduction as ethnically cleansed for its rebellion, 'replanted' with colonists, and as having great potential in its soil and ports: it is 'the soft mother of a slothful and pusillanimous people, anciently subjected by the arms of Oceana; since almost depopulated for shaking the yoke, and at length replanted with a new race. But (through what virtues of the soil, or vice of the air soever it be) they come still to degenerate' (Harrington 1993: 6). Ireland's vices are from its environment, though it holds great potential: it remains 'rich in the nature of the soil and full of commodious ports for trade', which, if it were 'well peopled would be worth a matter of four millions dry rents'. Harrington writes

he would have suggested populating it with a Jewish colony had he been asked at the time (Harrington 1993: 6). Against Shklar's point above on Harrington's rudimentary account of economic life and rents, Harrington here considers rent potential and land/population improvement in relation to Panopea/Ireland, with an eye to its trade and industrial potential as Oceana's colonial possession. Harrington's account here can be contrasted with the approach of contemporaries like William Petty, who, as Brenna Bhandar has demonstrated, paid careful attention to population in his 1650s surveys of Ireland's terrain, using (like Harrington) medical languages of anatomy and sickness in analysing its population to calculate the potential 'improvement' value for both the population and the land alike and thus the 'national wealth', all of which was the basis for identifying land titles, breaking up clan tenures, and transferring the land to Cromwell's conquering private armies after the 1648 defeat of the Irish (2018: 39–41). Yet despite the centrality of colonies and Harrington's attention to real world nations amidst the imagined Oceana, he deals only fleetingly with some real world examples, and omits others. The first American colony in Jamestown had been well-established by 1656, yet there is no mention of the American colonies, either directly or as a fiction, in *Oceana*. Harrington's later works, however, deal briefly yet revealingly with the land thefts in the Americas. They move beyond Oceana's secular imagery to include more religious and mystical passages that are used to construct a more systematic connection between nature and legal power. These works are considered in the next section.

3 'Nature is of God': Religious Mysticism and Extraction in Harrington's Late Systematic Works

Harrington's post-*Oceana* works are more systematic restatements of commonwealth principles, without the elaborate story-façade. These works responded to critics, and attempted a more forceful advancement of his convictions about the directions that the Commonwealth, following Oliver Cromwell's death in September 1658, needed to take to avoid disaster. Those disasters were not averted. Oliver's son

and successor Richard proved extremely inept and unable to control parliament or the army, and resigned in May 1659, with parliament establishing a committee of public safety to replace the single 'Protector' and restoring Charles II to the monarchy in May 1660 (Hammersley, 2019: 229–48). These tumultuous years provide one major context for Harrington's repeated restatements of his views on law, government and land holdings. The other reason for the restatements were published criticisms levelled against *Oceana* to which Harrington replied. In these works, Harrington grapples more directly with mystical and religiously inflected governmental principles to explain his positions and ground improvement and increase in divine injunctions. Importantly, however, these are not models of divine government to guide human affairs, but instead function more as analogies or guides to building human government that might imitate nature or the divine (Davis 1981: 691–2). In addition to an appeal to religious passages, a clearer set of connections between land and labour, and between property and money, begin to deepen Harrington's extractivist themes.

In the *Prerogative of Popular Government*, published in June 1658, Harrington provided a much clearer statement of his political theology, and began to articulate the agrarian balance as a religious/ecclesiastical principle connected to God's donation of the earth and its resources to humanity (Pocock 1977b: 96). As Hammersley notes, this emphasis on land and political power led to an 'ambivalent note' regarding specific forms of government, where the actual balance, rather than an ideal form like popular government, was an indication of the type of government to be adopted in any given state (2019: 84). This is reflected in the starting emphasis on the connection of prudence to observation to God. In its dedicatory epistle, Harrington writes: 'Policy is an art. Art is the observation or imitation of nature. Nature is the providence of God in the government of the world' (Harrington 1977c: 390). Having urged the importance of government arranged according to true principles and the 'true God' (Harrington 1977c: 390), Harrington then links possession, force, the improvement of land, reason and permanency: 'A man may be possessed of a piece of ground by force, but to make use or profit of it, he must build upon it and till it

by reason; whatever is not founded upon reason cannot be permanent' (1977c: 391). Going beyond *Oceana*'s fixation on possession as the main marker of the crucial balance of property, now improvement and profit of the land here becomes a new additional foundation of government, along with force, possession and reason. Harrington then links both government and land use to the 'two parts' of reason: 'invention and judgment'. Judgment requires diversity in counsel, and thus a popular assembly, reflecting and improving upon nature itself: 'there is not that order in art of nature that can compare with a popular assembly. The voice of the people is the voice of God' (1977c: 391). Invention prevents confusion in these voices, with Harrington raising medical and then agrarian illustrations: the doctor who discovered circulation did not 'invent' it, but the theory was invented and then endorsed by doctors as a whole; the 'plough and wheels' were invented by 'some rare artists' but are now thoroughly entrenched in society, and 'who or what shall ever be able to tear the use of them from the people?' (1977c: 391).

In the remainder of the first book of the *Prerogative*, which replied to twelve lines of criticism and clarification, Harrington revisited his earlier arguments on land and imperial acquisition. He now connects land to money more clearly, partly in response to his critics' use of money-focused objections. Harrington begins this section by emphasising the flexibility of money, contrasted with the rootedness of property, and noting that money is the basis of keeping servants and soldiers, and thus of aristocratic authority, contrasted against banks as repositories of capital: 'Whence a bank never paid an army or, paying an army, soon became no bank. But where a prince or a nobility hath an estate in land, the revenue whereof will defray this charge, there their men are planted, have toes that are roots, and arms that bring forth what fruit you please.' (1977c: 406). Harrington then argues in favour of prohibiting usury, and potentially even money entirely, because money can be used to disrupt the balance of property holdings. He notes that this is a greater risk in small states, but practically difficult in larger ones like Spain or England because the vastness of land holdings would require a great deal of concentrated wealth to purchase and control (1977c: 407).

Harrington's connection of money, empire and land reinforces his insistence that land holdings are necessary for imperial projects and a new suggestively sustainable extractive vision in the *Prerogative*. Responding to a critic who argued that regardless of its source in rent, land, profit or taxes, money maintains force and lawful authority ('does equally conduce to empire'), Harrington insists that the balance of empire 'consists in land and not in money' (Harrington 1977c: 408–9). Power from banking, trading and spending might be built on financial instruments ('letters of exchange' in Genoa) or commodities ('herrings' in Holland), but the influx of money from colonies (since the 'silver of Potosi sailed up the Guadalquivir') depends on control of that land alone (Harrington 1977c: 408). Harrington then turns to this connection of land and extraction. Rents, he emphasises, and profits of a land, come from violent force or by incorporating land into the commonwealth and extracting its value 'by virtue of the law' (1977c: 409). But he cautions that using force alone is unlikely to lead to sustainable extraction. Maintaining ongoing extraction instead requires a link between peoples and the earth achieved by imperial reordering: 'The earth yieldeth her natural increase without losing her heart; but if you come once to force her, look your force continue, or she yields you nothing; and the balance of empire, consisting of earth, is of the nature of her element.' (1977c: 409–10). The *Prerogative*, then, makes intriguing and new connections between land, value extraction and now earth through deeper uses of both religious rhetoric and political economy examples that are absent or merely incipient in *Oceana*. This text builds on Harrington's suspicion of extraction fixed merely on increased sovereign wealth (Columbus's poison), and moves towards a less-intensive, sustained extractive project to increase the yields of the earth.

The early 1659 *Art of Lawgiving in Three Books* further reinforced the religious basis of Harrington's thinking on land use and extraction. Using Psalms 115:16 as both epigraph for the whole book and at the beginning of chapter one – 'The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's; but the earth hath he given unto the sons of men' – Harrington interprets this divine donation as the basis of property, then government,

then extraction, presented here as divinely-sanctioned rational industry:

> The donation of the earth by God unto man cometh unto a kind of selling it for industry, a treasure which seemeth to purchase of God; from the different kinds and successes of this industry, whether in arms or in other exercise of the mind or body, deriveth the natural equity of dominion or property; and from the legal establishment or distribution of this property (be it more or less approaching towards the natural equity of the same) deriveth all government (Harrington 1977b: 604).

God sells the world to those who can use and divide it efficiently by force or reason to attain 'natural equity' – a new phrase redolent of the 'balances' of *Oceana*. As Pocock points out, there is a useful comparison to the radical digger Gerrard Winstanley's thought on property and salvation, where communal ownership of all the earth was equivalent to the second coming of Christ (Pocock 1977b: 96). For Harrington there is only a vaguer suggestion that making the agrarian balance real and then building the civil prudence of the commonwealth on top of it relates 'rather to the Father than to the Son' – that is, the commonwealth is a human project consistent with divine right reason, but not a millenarian one (Pocock 1977b: 96, and see Davis 1981). In the remainder of the *Art*, Harrington revisits the connection of empire to leagues, albeit turning now to Hebraic biblical history to argue that the biblical Commonwealth of Israel of the Elohim failed because it did not seize and redistribute land (Harrington 1977b: 637-9). The connection between ancient Israel and the Ireland and Scotland of Harrington's day seems clear: Ireland was seen as ungovernable because of clan tenure over the land, and in Scotland minor landholding lords were blockages to proper redistribution for the Commonwealth (Pocock 1977b: 98).

In his final work of the late 1650s, the *Aphorisms Political* (August/September 1659), an epigrammatic pamphlet collection of some main tenets of his thought for political agitation purposes (see Hammersley 2013), Harrington puts nature, the divine and empire together in the barest and strongest forms. The *Aphorisms* contain no reference to 'land', 'property', the 'agrarian' or any of the other botanical images that were

staples of his previous texts. Here, 'nature' seems to encompass now a very broad set of principles and possible connotations. Within these aphorisms we find the statement with which we began: 'Nature is of God'. When read in conjunction with the foundations in *Oceana* and the clarifications in the later systematic works, this provides the briefest form of the injunction to a rightly ordered commonwealth that both reflects nature and is dedicated to the extraction of nature for empire. This reading of 'Nature is of God' is reinforced by the aphorisms that surround it. In aphorism 20, Harrington wrote that 'To hold that the wisdom of man in the formation of a house, or of government, may go upon supernatural principles is inconsistent with a commonwealth' (1977a: 765). In the aphorisms following it he states '[s]ome part in every religion is natural', then '[a] universal effect demonstrateth a universal cause', and then '[a] universal cause is not so much natural as it is nature itself' (1977a: 765). The plan of the commonwealth follows from the nature of human beings, which will mirror religious principles and be consonant with them, but gains its adequacy and perfection by its ability to reflect and satisfy human needs (Aphorisms 34, 35 and 36 in Harrington 1977a: 766). Having laid out these connections of religion and government, Harrington turned to imperial expansion. Aphorisms 38 to 46 reiterated Harrington's insistence that commonwealths could spread by international-constitutional treaties ('leagues') but only properly where they spread law throughout the world by uniting it under the Commonwealth ('the commonwealth, uniting other commonwealths, retaineth unto herself the leading of the whole league, leaving unto each of the rest her own laws and her own liberty'). Harrington critiqued the union with Scotland and Ireland, and concluded that the Roman model of provinces holding the same laws without full autonomy remains the 'best way of holding a nation' (1977a: 768–9).

By the *Aphorisms*, divine donation becomes the basis for the authority to take land, reorganise its ownership into a commonwealth, and to collect its fruits and profits to benefit the people as a whole. As Hammersley notes, agrarian laws to redistribute land had many ancient, if unsuccessful precedents, but England was not one of them,

and implementing them there in the 1650s was a fairly radical proposal explored in detail in *Oceana* (2019: 105) and in the *Prerogative* and *Art*. Harrington's brief agitational sketch of these points in the *Aphorisms* epitomised in 'Nature is of God' lays out the barest principles that should guide imperial expansion in the Commonwealth, followed by the specific arrangements of assemblies, armies and its connection to the people. The more secular messianism of Oceana's mission to expand its commonwealth that turns towards the religious and mystical in *Prerogative* and *Art* is now framed as a divine connection: the Commonwealth's use and rearrangement of nature, land and property is the means for satisfying wants and spreading throughout the globe.

By the end of the 1650s, Harrington had presented a series of direct, systematic and religiously inflected accounts of his republican constitutional vision. These mixed property, labour, money and empire in an account of government that proceeded from a set of assertions about nature and the divine, but remained separate to a thoroughly worldly political project that Harrington urged his contemporaries to set about building in this image. In addition to the use of divine injunction to extract from the land, Harrington's attention to the nuances of land improvement, money and the balance of property, and his consistent advocacy of the imperial duties of the commonwealth all reflect a deepening of extractive themes in his late political thought.

4 'Nature is the Fiat': Animal Spirits and Harrington's Extractivism

Harrington's final unfinished work, *The Mechanics of Nature*, offers a brief and evocative connection between an animalistic and universalistic vision of law and the desire to work, grow and reap nature's products. Begun in 1660, *Mechanics* was Harrington's rebuke to his own doctors' diagnoses of the illnesses that would eventually kill him. Instead, he seeks to describe and understand his own failing health, which he reported as hallucinations of flies and bees clouding around him and later entering and emerging from his body (Hammersley 2017 discussing Aubrey 2015: vol 1, 321). While Harrington's natural

philosophy has been largely ignored (Diamond 1978; Hammersley 2019: 208), and despite the difficulties of working with an incomplete and enigmatic text, we can read *Mechanics* as examining the themes of sovereign declaratory power and circulation and redistribution. This adds new extensions of the extractivist themes in Harrington's earlier, more considered treatments of land, money and empire.

In this short series of 24 aphoristic statements, Harrington sketched a theory of 'animal spirits' built on the common order of nature and humanity. Nature is personified as a woman who links God and human beings through these spirits. Harrington stated that nothing in nature is ever 'annihilated or lost', and thus 'whatever is transpire[e]d is receiv[e]d' and can be 'put to som[e] use by the spirits of the universe' (1771: xl). Nature here is both the product of divine creation, and the determinant of human behaviours: 'Nature can work no otherwise than as God taught her, nor any man than as she taught him' (1771: xl). Earlier in the manuscript, Harrington had connected this to law: 'She [Nature] is infallible: for the law of an infallible lawgiver must needs be infallible and Nature is the law as well as the art of God' (1771: xxxix).

But rather than reiterating once more the connection of art, policy, government, empire and God in *Oceana* or the late 1650s texts, Harrington instead newly describes the movement of natural laws as through the animal spirits: 'Nature is not only a spirit, but is furnish[e]d, or rather furnishes her self with innumerable ministerial spirits, by which she operates on her whole matter, as the universe; or on the separate parts, as man's body' (1771: xxxix). These animal spirits are later described as mechanical. They move in and out of bodies ('ordinarily emitted streaking themselves into various figures') by 'transpiration' and 'attenuation', doing so 'by manufacture', like industrial processes: 'for these operations are perfectly mechanical, and downright handy work as any in our shops and workhouses' (1771: xl). One outcome of this process is to link individuals with the universal, in an 'intercourse or cooperation which preserves the common order of Nature unseen' (1771: xxxix). In this way, nature is the 'Providence of God in his government of the things of this world' (1771: xxxix), and where the spirits have

some effect on particular people, nature reveals to humanity 'som[e] thing analogous to any art, tool, engin[e], or instrument which we have or use, [and] it cannot be said that Nature had these things of men, because we know that men must have these things of Nature' (1771: xl). Harrington's common order of all things, then, is for humanity to take and possess the natural world, in a symbiotic relationship, and the individual desire to labour, grow and extract from the land takes a form of divine invitation to engage in that work and 'have these things of Nature'.

These otherwise enigmatic suggestions provide a final link between Harrington's earlier treatments of land, money, empire, and extraction. Neither 'commonwealth', nor 'land' nor 'empire' appear in the *Mechanics*, and government and law are used in a broad sense. But *Mechanics* nonetheless poses the details that Harrington's systematic treatises laid out as their basic assumptions. The consumptive-protective vision of bread and empire in *Oceana* and its duty of imperial expansion was explained through images of botanical increase, animal husbandry and agrarian practice, and achieved through land reorganisation in the metropole and colony, and the unequal distribution of lawful authority. The late 1650s tracts used religious and mystical imagery and language to present models of government that would improve nature as a means of sustainable extraction. These earlier works were the revelation of tools to do the justice Harrington urged: law was the means for effecting the imperial redistribution of the earth that reason demanded. The *Mechanics* put this project in animalistic and universalist terms, linking humanity and its commonwealth and the natural world, to see a common order in humanity's extraction of nature. Harrington began the *Mechanics* with the declaration that 'Nature is the fiat, the breath, and in the whole sphere of her activity is the very word of God'; Nature is the command, authority, the way and cause of things, the so be it, and the divine command that humanity work, animalistically, to extract. This serves as a final reflection, or perhaps refraction, of the importance in Harrington's earlier works of his project of attaining his vision of justice by radically changing the way of things, where that justice is a demand and duty of imperial expansion and ultimately a duty of extraction.

Endnotes

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