

The Ethos of Liberal Individualism: Baudelaire, Babbitt, and Cicero on Affection for the Many

LUKE FOSTER

Hillsdale College

INTRODUCTION: THE LIBERAL EXEMPLAR

Today both defenders and critics of liberalism increasingly assume that it cannot be indifferent to culture, history, and individual character. That is, in contrast to the received interpretation of Rawls' "veil of ignorance," persons cannot abstract from all that makes them particular when they deliberate about what political institutions are just and desirable (Rawls 1969/1999, pp. 10-24). Patrick Deneen's *Why Liberalism Failed* (2018) insists on this point, holding that liberalism not only presupposes but forms a very particular psychology of transactional, fluid, mobile individuals without binding commitments or communal ties. For Deneen, this is a self-indicting feature of liberalism because such individuals will necessarily, over time, fail to make the sacrifices and cultivate the habits that foster mutual trust and make political unity possible. Alexandre Lefebvre's *Liberalism as a Way of Life* (2024) has acknowledged the force of this critique but argues that it is precisely the individualism that liberal societies both depend on and foster that is to be celebrated. It produces a personality that is self-expressive, tolerant, and open to the world—in short, "a powerful existential attitude" to be cultivated by "work[s] of self-help" like Lefebvre's (pp. 33, 129). Under an effective state that enforces the rule of law, liberalism yields peace and mutual accommodation, leaving behind the communal violence and feuding that mark traditional societies.¹ Both accounts implicitly attribute the paradigmatic individualism only to elites who have undergone a process of formation that sets them apart. For Deneen, this disposition only becomes dominant after several generations of "strip mining" and concentrating talent in major cities through meritocratic higher education (Deneen 2018, p. 132). For Lefebvre, "spiritual exercises" of the sort he undergoes and prescribes are necessary to truly develop a sense of oneself as a free, choosing agent (Lefebvre 2024, p. 145). They differ on whether this individualistic self-conception is a good thing, but both of them view it as special and difficult, necessarily more pronounced in the few than the many. Deneen and Lefebvre are right that individualism is the province of elites, but the quality of the elite and its attitude to the rest of the body politic provides criteria of judgment for how praiseworthy a liberal regime is. Popular resentment against liberalism today should therefore be understood as a call for a reformed elite.

Liberalism historically requires individualism understood as an aristocratic attitude that stands out from the crowd, upholding freedom by transcending the group's pressure to conform. This was the prevailing assumption about liberalism through the nineteenth century, especially in Britain and France.² But much depends on the relationship between the individual and the crowd, i.e., between the aristocracy and the people.³ The array of many possibilities for this relationship helps account for why the adjective "liberal" can be applied to such a bewildering array of thinkers, from François Guizot to Friedrich Hayek and from Thomas Jefferson to Michel Foucault. Liberalism is indebted, not always consciously, to the ancient mixed-regime tradition that seeks to harmonize aristocratic and democratic elements, but

the regime will look very different depending on the composition of the mixture. Two paradigm cases that illustrate divergent configurations are Charles Baudelaire and Irving Babbitt. Baudelaire prescribes an ultimately tyrannical attitude on the part of aesthetes who play on the desires of the many in order to express their superior and alienated interior lives, an ultimately manipulative and erotic view of the authority of those few distinguished by the ability to recognize the fleetingness of experience over the many who are subject to every impression. Babbitt reacted against Baudelaire to develop an account of an intellectual elite who display cold, anti-vitalist, skeptical detachment, formed by higher education to question and slow down the impulses of the demos in a representative republic. Neither offers a humane account that can heal the breach between the few and the many that characterizes our time.⁴ Learning from Cicero's ancient account of the harmony between the few and the many made possible by the rhetoric of exemplary individuals could reinvigorate the best of classical liberalism amid today's challenges.

BAUDELAIRE: AESTHETIC INDIVIDUALISM

Recent critics of liberalism have focused their fire most acutely on John Stuart Mill because of his celebration of individual self-expression as both a good in itself and conducive to progress, as "experiments in living" that at first violate the community's mores but come to show the rising generation how to innovate (Mill 1859/2008, p. 63). But Mill does not develop his implicit account of the mimetic process by which the true individuals are to model their ways for others and so reshape them. This kind of liberalism is most developed by Mill's contemporary Charles Baudelaire, a poet, aesthete, and (perhaps surprisingly) political philosopher. Baudelaire's *flâneur* or "dandy," is a libertine, but no mere hedonist (Baudelaire 1863/2024, p. 45).⁵ Like the ancient Epicureans, he pursues pleasure in the service of insight into the human condition. Unlike the Epicureans, the dandy seeks a form of rule, to guide society and even politics, alluring them into pursuing the visions he depicts through his artistic genius. He has a regime, a philosophy even, that he offers his fellow citizens: *le dandysme* (Baudelaire 1863/2024, p. 77).⁶ Baudelaire frames this as the regime for modern times, the response to the world Tocqueville described as coming into being, in which mass democracy would become the only legitimate regime type and aristocratic ways would become less and less intelligible: "Dandyism especially appears in the transitional periods when democracy is not yet almighty, when aristocracy is only partially eroded and fragile" (Baudelaire 1863/2024, p. 81).⁷ This gives it a melancholy, decadent quality:

Dandysim is a setting sun; like the waning star, it is aloof, without heat and full of melancholy. But, alas, the rising tide of democracy, which invades all and levels all, drowns day by day these last representatives of human pride and washes the last traces of these prodigious myrmidons into oblivion (Baudelaire 1863/2024, p. 82).

The reference to Achilles' myrmidons seems surprising, but Baudelaire insists that the dandy is a man of great power, even one who desires uncontested tyrannical power. "Cesar, Cataline, Alcibiades furnish us with shining examples of this," he says, praising men whom antiquity typically understood as driven by hubris to seek the destruction of their cities (Baudelaire 1863/2024, p. 77). The dandy is not actually threatened by the current of democratization; the advent of mass politics and new forms of media grants him new opportunities to rule through playing on the *demos'* perceptions and offering them vicarious experiences.

The dandy is capable of ruling because he is a rare man who can dwell outside the cave. Yet rather than gazing upon the eternal Sun like the philosopher, he can move readily between caves, and can even fabricate his own for others to dwell in. Baudelaire introduces his dandy as "by nature, a great traveller, very cosmopolitan," as "a man of the entire world, a man who understands the world and the mysterious and legitimate reasons for all its customs," and as "[a] spiritual citizen of the universe," in contrast to an artist who exhibits his technical mastery of one sole discipline (1863/2024, pp. 41-43). Baudelaire attributes

to him “a humility tinged with aristocratic modesty” when it comes to talking about himself and his technical skill (1863/2024, p. 45). “The dandy aspires to be impassive,” Baudelaire says, even though his chosen exemplar passionately loves new experiences for their novelty (invoking Augustine’s *amabam amare*, “I love to love”) (1863/2024, p. 46). He would be worthy of “the name of philosopher,” if only “his excessive love of things visible, tangible, reduced to the tactile, did not give rise to a certain repugnance among those who make up the impalpable kingdom of the metaphysician” (ibid.). Baudelaire is deliberately conflating the traditional categories derived from Plato: what can it mean to have left the Cave and seen the Sun if the philosopher is a materialist? The dandy’s domain is transcendence without the metaphysical, transcendence that must be generated from within.

Baudelaire’s dandy and philosopher-king is therefore obsessed with becoming, not Being. Change, difference, the temporal, and the novel are his passions. This draws him to the crowd, as an observer capable of going unobserved among the busy multitude. These are in the marketplace, not the forum, busy with getting and spending, not with political deliberation. “His passion and his creed is *to wed the crowd*... It is a great delight to take up residence among the mass, in what pulses, in what moves, among the fugitive and infinite” (Baudelaire 1863/2024, pp. 46-47). But this vicarious enjoyment of experience has a curiously parasitic quality; it does not imply any amicable intersubjectivity. “The observer is a prince who everywhere plays an *incognito* role,” going alone and unrecognized (Baudelaire 1863/2024, p. 47). Baudelaire accumulates visual and tactile metaphors to describe how the dandy both derives power from and diffuses power into the masses. “The lover of universal life slips into the crowd as into a great well of electricity,” becoming like “a mirror as vast as that crowd,” and in turn like “a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which, in each of its movements, portrays many-sided life and all the pulsing graces of its elements” (ibid.). The image of the mirror-kaleidoscope collapses much of the traditional epistemic trinity between the perceiver, the object perceived, and the perception. The implication seems to be that Baudelaire’s dandy is indifferent to whether the crowd’s passions are happy or sad; it is the fact of their emotion itself that entralls him. But he is not merely a passive observer; he is looking for particulars and beginning to channel and arrange them. Baudelaire stresses how sensitive his dandy is to whether “a fashion... has been subtly transformed” and to “everywhere that a passion can rest its eye, everywhere that natural and conventional man display themselves in bizarre beauty” (1863/2024, pp. 48-49). His artistic task is after darkness sets in, while others are asleep, to record and accentuate the impressions of the day, making perception even more vivid. “Things are reborn on paper, natural and more than natural, beautiful and more than beautiful, unique and imbued with a life as enthusiastic as the author’s soul... all the materials with which the memory is encumbered rank, arrange, harmonize themselves, undergoing that forced idealization that results from a *childlike* perception” (Baudelaire 1863/2024, p. 50). But this definition of the artist’s role of “idealization” does not contain drawing out what is essential, universal, or true from the flux of experience. It is rather to highlight contingency and transience, allowing others to see the beauty of the moment witnessed even more vividly than the original scene when it presented itself.

This understanding of the artist’s vocation extends even to defining an epoch: Baudelaire coins the term *modernité* to mean the time of being self-conscious about being contemporary. The artist makes this conscious for others, which he describes as “a higher goal” than “the fleeting pleasure of circumstance,” seeking “to extract from fashion what it may contain of the poetic in the historical, to draw the eternal out of the transitory” (Baudelaire 1863/2024, p. 51). Yet Baudelaire defines “the eternal” curiously, as something like “the novelty felt the first time an experience is received.” “Almost all of our originality stems from the stamp that *time* makes upon our sensations” (Baudelaire 1863/2024, p. 55). He warns the artists against studying the classics or idealizing any particular time or form of expression, because “There has been a particular modernity for every ancient painter; most of the beautiful portraits which have come down to us from former times are dressed in the costumes of their era” (Baudelaire 1863/2024, p. 52). The artist has no direct access to the ideal, so Baudelaire does not speak of any one classical period but rather of “ancient” or “earlier” times.

These are several of the defining elements of the Baudelarian dandy—a passion for passion, a keen eye to observe, record, and accentuate the novel experiences of large human groups, and a new consciousness of temporality—but they do not of themselves constitute a regime. If he is a new kind of aristocrat or even of tyrant for the new, modern age, how does the dandy rule the masses? It is by creating impressions that move others without being moved himself. This is part of the paradox that “dandyism, which is an institution outside the law, has stern laws that all its subjects are strictly subject to, however zealous or independent-minded they may be” (Baudelaire 1863/2024, pp. 77-78). Dandyism does require certainly material advantages, such as being “raised in luxury and accustomed from youth to the obedience of other men” (Baudelaire 1863/2024, p. 77). But the dandy, unlike some models of the leisured class, is not a robber baron, seeking to squeeze profit from the proletariat, nor does he seek feudal domination over the rural peasantry. Leisure and means are valuable to him because they allow “fantasy... to be translated into action” so that the inventions of the imagination can be materialized (Baudelaire 1863/2024, p. 78). The dandy’s overarching motivation is “the burning need to make himself something original, contained within the exterior limits of propriety” (Baudelaire 1863/2004, p. 79). The dandy is thus much more subtle than the Millian “experiment[er] in living,” because he outwardly conforms sufficiently to expectation to be able to reshape the conventions themselves. He is a kind of immanent prime mover, who seeks “the pleasure of surprising and the proud satisfaction of never being surprised” (Baudelaire 1863/2024, p. 79). In a particularly horrifying image, Baudelaire invokes Plutarch’s account of Spartan education: for the sake of honor, a young boy in training to be a Spartiate warrior would never admit his wrongdoing, even if he had stolen a fox. “A dandy may be a blithe man, perhaps a suffering man; but, in the latter case, he will suffer like the Lacedaemonian beneath the bite of the fox” (ibid.). In other words, the dandy is painfully aware of the despair, implicit in his materialist doctrine of sensual experience and novelty, but he continues to set the fashion, *la mode*, for his contemporaries, ginning up their hopes to pursue the next fad that will not satisfy. Thus M. G. and the dandy are outwardly indifferent but their souls are both churning with the restlessness they have seen in such depth. Dandyism, Baudelaire concludes, is truly “a kind of religion,” a “doctrine of elegance and originality” that demands a terrible sacrifice of its priests, even as the masses adore them (Baudelaire 1863/2024, p. 80). The terrible beauty and raw emotionality of Baudelaire’s poetry, and the bohemian flair of his own life, gave his ethos great attractiveness. He helped to replace the Romantic ideal of the artist who suffers to reveal a great beauty to a vulgar world with one of the artist who strips bare the horror lying beneath bourgeois complacency in the name of vigor or vitality.⁸ To intellectuals and tastemakers, Baudelaire was particularly attractive as he gave them great authority while emancipating them from inward conformity to convention. His great insight into the nature of rule is to highlight its aesthetic dimension: human beings will pursue what they deem beautiful and follow those whom they deem to understand the beautiful.

BABBITT: SELF-POSSESSION AND SELF-GOVERNMENT

Irving Babbitt’s entire oeuvre can be read as a protest against what he saw as the dominance among his own peers of a Baudelairean aesthetization of the individual and of politics. Babbitt perceived that by the early twentieth century in America, Baudelaire’s teaching had helped give rise to a particularly perverse relationship between the elite, especially in marketing and in entertainment, and the people. But Babbitt sought against the pragmatist philosophy dominant in his day to salvage what he viewed as true and healthy individualism, claiming the mantle of the liberal legacy for his own. He thus offers a starkly contrasting possibility for what liberal individualism might mean: a critical, detached individualism that is as skeptical of its own impulses as it is of the whims of the many.⁹

Babbitt repeatedly described an antithesis and perverse synthesis between the Baconian pursuit of power and the Rousseauian commitment to inward freedom that he saw as structuring modernity and especially modern education. Although a professor of French literature at Harvard, Babbitt was not invested in strict periodization of different literary eras. In the terminology of *Literature and the*

American College (1908), Bacon's "naturalism" and Rousseau's "sentimentalism" both tended toward "humanitarianism," the project of eliminating human suffering. Bacon's ambition for this is evident, whereas Rousseau's is subtler: he strives to make virtue easy by spontaneously drawing out the goodness of our nature to express itself without any painful work. Babbitt characterizes the Rousseauian teaching as: "Virtue is no longer to be the veto power of the personality, a bit and a bridle to be applied to one's impulses, and so imposing a difficult struggle" (Babbitt 1908, p. 50). The result would be that the student's desires, unchecked and unevaluated, would manifest in the pursuit of the means to acquire whatever seems most advantageous to him in the moment. The immediate target of Babbitt's polemic was the introduction of the elective system to Harvard under President Charles Eliot: "Having bestowed upon the student the full liberty of Rousseau, it is evident that President Eliot would have him use this liberty in a Baconian spirit" (Babbitt 1908, p. 52). To this perverse humanitarian hybrid, Babbitt opposed his own preferred vision, which he traced to classical and especially Platonic philosophy, but also to Confucian and Buddhist wisdom. "Sympathy" for the human default, on the assumption of general benevolence, is the affect characteristic of humanitarianism, whereas "judgment," the insistence on recognizing and distinguishing qualitative differences, stems from humanism. "The humanist is interested in the perfecting of the individual rather than in schemes for the elevation of mankind as a whole; and although he allows largely for sympathy, he insists that it be disciplined and tempered by judgment" (Babbitt 1908, p. 8).¹⁰ The task of training that judgment and bringing it to maturity, both in practical experience and in formal instruction, is to learn to interpret the particularity of one's individual life in light of what is most essential in human experience. Babbitt therefore takes up the Platonic understanding of oneness: "If man's nobility lies in his kinship to the One, he is at the same time a phenomenon among other phenomena and only at his risk and peril neglects his phenomenal self" (Babbitt 1908, p. 28).¹¹ To situate this phenomenal self in space and time, Babbitt recommends the close study of history to gain vicarious experience. His suspicion that the dominance of humanitarianism was in the process of unleashing great power on the world exercised without prudence or even self-knowledge of the motivations behind the act led him to emphasize restraint to the point of passivity: "What is important to man in the eyes of the humanist is not his power to act on the world, but his power to act upon himself" (Babbitt 1908, p. 56). Babbitt repeatedly described this power to act upon oneself, to perform true work, as an "inner check," or a "higher will."¹²

Babbitt extends his criticism of Rousseau to a whole lineage of his intellectual heirs in his 1919 *Rousseau and Romanticism*, making clear that he saw Baudelaire's decadence as romantic in the relevant sense.¹³ The genealogy has proceeded in multiple steps but the line of filiation is unmistakable, Babbitt holds, because "the partisans of expression as opposed to form in the eighteenth century led to the fanatics of expression in the nineteenth century and these have led to the maniacs of expression of the twentieth" (Babbitt 1919/1957, p. 63). "Through Baudelaire's rendering of Poe," French aesthetics came to believe that "the stranger one became the nearer one was getting to perfect beauty" (Babbitt 1919/1957, p. 63). This analysis almost underplays the shock that Baudelaire seeks to provoke with his stress on the horror of transgression, such as his adulation of "*Lady Macbeth, âme puissante au crime*" in "*L'idéal*" (Baudelaire 1857/1996, pp. 52-53). His lyrics often combine a verbal praise of transgression with an exquisitely arranged, regular form—violated at some point. Babbitt picks up on this element—that for Baudelaire a prohibition, especially from divine law, must be present, in order for the transgression to be properly freighted with significance. His poetry is thus not nihilistic in the sense of being truly "beyond good and evil" as in Nietzsche's redrawing of the horizons (Gioia 2021, p. 68).¹⁴ Yet Babbitt insists that this proximity to religious impulses is only parodic: "Baudelaire hopes to escape from ennui by dreaming of the superlative emotional adventure, by indulging in infinite, indeterminate desire, and becomes more and more restless in his quest for a something that at the end always eludes him. This infinite of nostalgia has nothing in common with the infinite of religion" (Babbitt 1919/1957, p. 251). Babbitt does not consider that had Baudelaire not heard of the infinite consolation religion purported to offer, he might not have gone looking for his infinitude of inconsolability.

Babbitt goes on to identify Baudelaire not just with transgression but with individualism, describing him as the sort of man who is always alone even when amid the crowd, dramatizing his own isolation faced with the incomprehension of his fellow man. “Baudelaire, it has been said, displayed his moral gangrene as a warrior might display honorable wounds... The poet feels so exquisitely that he is at once odious and unintelligible to the ordinary human pachyderm” (Babbitt 1919/1957, p. 319). For Babbitt, this shamelessness about “moral gangrene” is the opposite of a natural, healthy desire for a good reputation: seeking to be known for being of ill-repute. But at the same time, this kind of artistic individual takes the fact of his rejection by society as itself an indictment of society’s moral standards. The implication of Babbitt’s sardonic jab is that for the post-romantic poet, the ordinary human mass finds him as incomprehensible as the beasts must be baffled by man. Lest it seem like Babbitt is hyperbolizing to accuse Baudelaire of misanthropy, he quotes him describing the reign of public opinion or the common man in America: “The impious love of liberty has given birth to a new tyranny, the tyranny of the beasts, a zoöcracy” (Babbitt 1919/1957, p. 321). But what is the unique capacity that the poet possesses that so sets him apart from the common lot? Rousseau’s psychology allows the poet to claim a new kind of contact with the unique motions of his inward self. “The Rousseauist, as indeed the modern man in general, is more preoccupied with his separate and private self than the classicist. Modern melancholy has practically always this touch of isolation... because of the undermining of the traditional communions by critical analysis” (Babbitt 1919/1957, p. 323). The contrast with the “classicist” that Babbitt draws—the very term that Baudelaire abandons is a term of praise for Babbitt—presumes that the poet whether ancient or modern, has always claimed a knowledge or vision higher than the ordinary person. Homer and Vergil invoked the muses to reveal divine truths to them. But they understood their knowledge as being for the sake of revealing the most universal things that were potentially shared by all human beings. Thus, the ancient poets, while certainly not egalitarians, also avoided contempt for their hearers: “It is hardly necessary to say that great poets of the past have not been at war with their public in this way [of Baudelaire]. The reason is that they were less taken up with the uttering of their own uniqueness; they were, without ceasing to be themselves, servants of the general sense” (Babbitt 1919/1957, pp. 319-320). The phrase “general sense” evokes the entire tradition, elaborated especially by Cicero, of *sensus communis*. This tradition assumes that, since human beings possess an inherent faculty that tracks right reason, the insights of the wise can be understood by the humble and the experience of ordinary life can inform the philosophers.

Sensus communis is therefore a fundamental prerequisite of a mixed regime that can unite aristocratic and democratic elements in a common good. Babbitt begins to draw out the political implications of his critique of Baudelaire’s poetics in *Rousseau and Romanticism*, even if he leaves working it out fully to other texts. He insists that the neglected path of the classical poets remains open to modern ones, and that it would be profoundly beneficial to the larger culture and republic to pursue it. That path involves gaining knowledge not of one’s default or everyday self but of the higher self that is achieved through a process of discipline and restraint that aims at what is most essential and noblest in man. “Only by cultivating his human self and by the unceasing effort that this cultivation involves does a man escape from his nightmare of separateness and so move in some measure towards happiness” (Babbitt 1919/1957, p. 332). Paradoxically, to overcome the “nightmare of separateness” and move toward happiness—and, presumably, bonds of friendship with others—requires the work of self-knowledge to become more than simply a blank slate for the prejudices *du jour*. But this means that the poet cannot approach his fellow citizens only or primarily in the spirit of “critical analysis,” looking to debunk *nomos* by an appeal to *physis*. Rather, he must look for the ways that *nomos* reflects or aspires toward *physis*, however dimly and imperfectly.

This political task of articulating and refining the common mind appears already in Babbitt’s discussion of leisure and canonicity in *Literature and the American College*. Without any countervailing force, the economic and political forms of the United States would exclude all real leisure: “The tendency of an industrial democracy that took joy in work alone would be to live in a perpetual devil’s sabbath of whirling machinery, and call it progress” (Babbitt 1908, p. 262). Education is meant to cultivate this taste

for leisure and this disposition to seek what is essential beneath the flux of getting and spending, what Babbitt dubs “humaneness” as opposed to “humanitarianism.” The student needs to learn to distinguish between his actual and higher selves, and good books may help him find “a humane standard to which he may defer . . . that will help him to discriminate between what is truly original and what is merely freakish and abnormal in himself and others” (Babbitt 1908, pp. 243-244). The student can internalize this standard more readily through the vicarious experience of literature than through Socratic dialectic, although Babbitt thinks both are in principle viable paths. The more widely shared that canon of literary experience can be, the more the political community can be knit together with a *sensus communis*: “Education should represent the conservative and unifying element in our national life” (Babbitt 1908, p. 240). Even if not all read the texts with the same depth of training and insight, both the learned and the ordinary benefit from having shared reference points.

A humane relationship between the few and the many becomes the core goal of *Democracy and Leadership*.¹⁵ Babbitt wishes for the few to be truly enlightened and therefore truly individuals, possessing an enduring knowledge of themselves and of the permanent things so that they are neither merely manipulating public opinion by ginning up new tastes (like Baudelaire’s dandy) nor are they merely setting their priorities by popularity. “Genuine leaders, good or bad, there will always be . . . democracy becomes a menace to civilization when it seeks to evade this truth” (Babbitt 1924/1979, p. 38). Therefore, “in the long run democracy will be judged, no less than other forms of government, by the quality of its leaders, a quality that will depend in turn on the quality of their vision” (ibid.). It is in fact this vision that makes the leaders true individuals and to the extent that they really are the ones who lead, makes the regime truly liberal, in the sense of worthy of human freedom. “The significant struggle seems to me to be . . . that between the sound and the unsound individualist. To be a sound individualist, one needs, as I take it, to retain one’s hold on the truths of the inner life” (Babbitt 1924/1979, p. 30). To maintain this ethos requires constant and diligent labor to retain the excellence of the vision. Babbitt recognizes that this will only be convincing insofar as the leading few make their excellences apparent to the many: “An aristocratic or leading class, however the aristocratic principle is conceived, must, if it hopes in the long run to preserve its property and privileges, be in some degree exemplary” (Babbitt 1924/1979, p. 228).

Babbitt draws on Burke for this account of aristocracy, one based on exemplarity and imitation. “A man’s first need is to look up to a sound model and imitate it. He may thus become exemplary in his turn. The principle of homage and service to what is above one has its culmination and final justification in fealty to God, the true sovereign and supreme exemplar” (Babbitt 1924/1979, p. 125). Under twentieth century conditions, and especially in America, Babbitt perceives that the *aristoi* cannot be formed by the inheritance of great estates. “The ascent of rare merit from the lower to the higher levels of society should, however, always be left open, even though this merit be required to pass through a severe probation” (Babbitt 1924/1979, p. 129). But the desideratum of learning to humble oneself to conform to a great exemplar remains the same: “A man needs to look, not down, but up to standards set so much above his ordinary self as to make him feel that he is himself spiritually the underdog. The man who thus looks up is becoming worthy to be looked up to in turn, and, to this extent, qualifying for leadership” (Babbitt 1924/1979, p. 283). Paradoxically, only those who are conscious that their good qualities do not equal the humane standard but simply reflect it are worthy to become the exemplar for others in turn. Education can instill this disposition, since it is after all something that the old aristocracy had to learn in each generation, not their innate possession.

But Babbitt sees that education can be said in many ways, and not all educated intellectuals are going to have the landed interest’s inclinations toward restraint and continuity. Writing in 1924, he is aware of many tyrannical types of new elites, and he anticipates other, more unprecedented, manifestations of oppressive hierarchy in the future:

One cannot grant that an aristocracy of scientific intellectuals or indeed any aristocracy of intellect is what we need. This would mean practically to encourage the *libido sciendi* and so to put

pride in the place of humility. Still less acceptable would be an aristocracy of artists; as the word art has come to be understood in recent times, this would mean an aristocracy of aesthetes who would attempt to base their selection on the *libido sentiendi*. The Nietzschean attempt, again, to found the aristocratic and selective principle on the sheer expansion of the will to power (*libido dominandi*) would lead in practice to horrible violence and finally to the death of civilization (Babbitt 1924/1979, pp. 285-286).

The “scientific intellectuals” are Baconian humanitarians, whom Babbitt saw represented in his day principally by Charles Eliot. But this is not narrowly a point against technocracy; Babbitt condemns any “aristocracy of intellect” motivated by the “lust of knowing” and pride. Mere intelligence, he assumes, is a far cry from wisdom and can even inhibit its development. The second possibility is most germane for our purposes: Babbitt distinguishes “an aristocracy of artists” (which could in principle be desirable, given his praise of the classical poets) from “an aristocracy of aesthetes,” which reflects the changed meaning of art due to the influence of Baudelaire and others of the post-Rousseauian tradition, whom Babbitt characterizes as directed by a *libido sentiendi*, a “lust of feeling.” To lust for feeling, or to desire to desire, echoes Baudelaire’s own use of the Augustinian phrase *amabam amare*, with all the self-absorption and self-satisfaction it implies. The third principle, an aristocracy of the will to power, Babbitt attributes to Nietzsche and indicates with his use of the conditional (“would lead in practice”) that it has not yet been seen in the world. It is however a prescient diagnosis of Nazism and other totalitarian movements.

Having made it clear that all three of these forms of neo-aristocracy through education are to be avoided, Babbitt cautiously sketches the kind of educated elite he has in mind. It is not distinguished by any particular *libido*; it is in fact based on the restraint and even negation of desire. Babbitt dubs it the “Socratic remnant” because “under existing conditions we must get our standards and our leadership along Socratic rather than traditional lines” (Babbitt 1924/1979, p. 307).¹⁶ Despite *Rousseau and Romanticism*’s resistance to reducing the intellectual’s relationship to the community to “criticism,” the conclusion of *Democracy and Leadership* prescribes just such a negative task: “The sophist and the demagogue flourish in an atmosphere of vague and inaccurate definition. With the aid of the Socratic critic, on the other hand, Demos might have some chance of distinguishing between its friends and its flatterers” (ibid.). While the Socratic gadfly no doubt is a true friend of democracy in the sense of intending its good, he is not *friendly* with democracy; he does not enjoy participating in the life of the city. This lonely philosopher, who nonetheless can claim to be a kind of statesman does not even share in the religion of most of his compatriots.¹⁷ Christian piety as it manifests in America in his time—Babbitt has in mind the Social Gospel movement—cannot instill the “inner check” necessary to cultivate a higher sense of self. Babbitt thus seeks “to bring Socrates to the support of Christ” (Babbitt 1924/1979, p. 310). The religion most capable of succeeding at the psychological task is Buddhism, because of its subordination of the intellect to the realm of fluctuation and becoming. The Buddha locates the “principle of unity in things with which to measure the manifoldness and change” “not in intellect, but in will,” “a higher will to which man must submit his natural self” (Babbitt 1924/1979, p. 193-195). Thus, Babbittian individualism, while noble and no doubt of benefit to democratic politics in a sense, as Socrates was, proves to be cold and aloof, as Socrates also was. The “Socratic remnant” is not moved by affection for its fellow citizens to try to improve civic life, only by a sense of personal duty. In responding to the defective forms of individualism he attributes to Baudelaire and others, Babbitt has reproduced the central problem with their account, likely nullifying much of the benefit the interventions of his desired elite in politics might promise.

CICERO: THE PATRIOTIC PHILOSOPHER

Although Cicero precedes Baudelaire and Babbitt by nineteen centuries, his account of the individual continues to offer resources for navigating the antithesis between liberalism and democracy today. Several recent studies have shown that Cicero anticipates or even establishes many of the key principles

of the classical liberal tradition: limited government, the rule of law, and the centrality of property rights.¹⁸ But less well understood is Cicero's insistence on the importance of both the individual and the political community, and the abundant resources he offers for thinking about how to hold them in right relationship.¹⁹ Ciceronian individualism is potentially a property of all, but it is most pronounced in the great, in keeping with the priority that the liberal tradition tends to place on individualism within the elite. But since for Cicero these elite individuals (*principes*, "princes," or *liberi*, "free men," "gentlemen"), are also supposed to develop their capacities precisely to provide exemplary, attractive, and persuasive leadership to their fellow citizens, this individualism is both aristocratic and democratic in character.²⁰ Cicero articulates the foundations of these principles in *On Duties*, his extended letter of counsel to his son Marcus—the son of a great consul whom Cicero hopes is himself destined for high rank. While *On Duties* opens with a praise of the *honestum*—the morally noble which is also the honorable, connecting the good deed with the duty to make it known to be good in the eyes of others—as superior to but inseparable from the *utile* or expedient, Cicero is conscious that virtue will not always be praised or rewarded.

Cicero's initial exhortation to virtue proclaims that justice, courage, and temperance all aim at "providing and maintaining those things on which the practical business of life depends," which sounds like a claim that virtue simply brings prosperity (Cicero 1913, I.17). But he immediately adds that this "practical business of life" is to be conducted "so that the relationship of man to man in human society may be conserved, and that largeness and nobility of soul (*animi excellentia magnitudoque*) may be revealed not only in increasing one's resources (*opibus*) and acquiring advantages (*utilitatibusque*) for oneself and one's family but far more in rising superior to these very things (*tum multo magis in his ipsis despiciendis eluceat*)" (Cicero 1913, I.17). *Dispiciendis* could be rendered not just "rising superior to" but even as "despising," having contempt for worldly goods as something base. So the first ingredient in Ciceronian individualism is freedom from concern about the success or failure of one's actions as regards oneself. Cicero goes on to use the same word in the context of his exposition of magnanimity, *magnitudo animi*, the key virtue initially only mentioned. This indifference to suffering is particularly the quality of those who occupy an *officium* of high dignity. Evoking the Socratic gadfly, but subordinating it to the active life, he writes,

Statesmen, too, no less than philosophers, no less than philosophers—perhaps more so—should carry with them that greatness of spirit (*magnificentia*) and indifference to outward circumstances (*despicientia rerum humanarum*) to which I so often refer, together with that calm of spirit and freedom from care (*tranquilitas animi atque securitas*), if they are to free from worries and lead a dignified and self-consistent life (*cum gravitate constantiaque victuri*) (Cicero 1913, I.72).

The statesman's life is more exposed to "the assaults of fortune" than that of the retiring, apolitical philosopher, and so it demands greater magnanimity (Cicero 1913, I.73). Since the chief cause of these assaults is the bad behavior of one's fellow citizens, ranging from ingratitude to calumny, one must have a higher standard of action that simply what elicits the masses' immediate praise. Cicero calls this capacity to endure political setbacks "civic courage (*domestica fortitudo*)" and says it stems from "great intellectual ability" (Cicero 1913, I.78, 81). Much like Babbitt, Cicero holds that this higher intellectual vantage point of the true individual stems from a deep formation in the liberal arts. But characteristically, Cicero's prescription is also sociable: the training to have this character is to be honed not purely in personal reflection but also in friendship. "The greater our prosperity... the more should we seek the counsel of friends, and the greater the heed that should be given to their advice" (Cicero 1913, I.91). No one can become an individual alone.

Individualism for Cicero is not merely a necessary strategy—that the man who would be great must learn to be content within his own mind because of the vicissitudes of political fortune—but also a positive virtue linked to temperance known as *decorum*.²¹ "*Decorum* is that which harmonizes with man's superiority in those respects in which his nature differs from the rest of the animal creation" (Cicero 1913, I.96). Like his predecessors Plato and Aristotle, Cicero has much to say about the conduct that is

worthy of human nature in general, but he also adds a more particular and inarticulable element that will pertain to each person distinctly. His allusion to “a certain deportment such as becomes a gentleman” (*specie [decorum] quadam liberali*) could also be rendered a *je ne sais quoi*; the exact duties that decorum entails are difficult to spell out explicitly (Cicero 1913, I.96). The larger principle is that “we are invested by Nature with two characters (*personis*),” like masks worn by the dramatic actors in an ancient play; if the first belongs to man in general, the second belongs to “individuals in particular (*proprie singulis est tributa*)” (Cicero 1913, I.107). Physical endowments vary greatly; so does temperament (I.107-8). It is better to play one’s own part rather than try to be someone one is not. “Everybody... must resolutely hold on to his own peculiar gifts, in so far as they are peculiar (*propria*) only and not vicious” (Cicero 1913, I.110). The paraplegic should not try to be Usain Bolt, nor should the giant try to look shorter in a photograph. One ought not to ape or copy others, such as by sprinkling one’s speech with foreign words (Cicero alludes to the sophisticated Roman affectation of speaking Greek), nor should we “introduce anything foreign into our actions or our life in general” (Cicero 1913, I.111). Lest it seem like Cicero is lowering the ethical standard or calling for relativism, he warns that decorum “can be nothing more than uniform consistency in the course of our life as a whole and all its individual actions,” so that our actions clearly flow from our established character and do not ring false like an actor’s lines in a bad script (Cicero 1913, I.111). But this requires a high degree of self-knowledge; it cannot be achieved merely through the perceptions of others. Making the image of acting explicit, Cicero enjoins, “Everyone, therefore, should make a proper estimate of his own natural ability and show himself a critical judge of his own merits and defects” (Cicero 1913, I.114). Thus Cicero adds consciousness of one’s own particularity to the ability to hold opinions distinct from the crowd, two essential and complementary aspects of an individualism for *principes*.

Although both Babbitt and Baudelaire could endorse both of these principles of individualism in some form, Cicero refrains from prescribing either Babbitt’s neo-Socratic attitude toward the city or Baudelaire’s fluctuating incitement of the people to pursue passionate and novel experiences because he always connects individualism to the common good. Cicero does not only rank the active life above the contemplative, so that indifference to fortune and opinion that he calls for is actually intended to equip one to pursue the active life well, but he also develops an account of exemplarity. The need to discern what is decorous for the persona one plays in life implies that one’s moral duties vary according to the office one occupies. The greater and higher that office, the more stringent the duties. Human beings are attracted to virtue not just because they are persuaded of its necessity, but also because of the sheen of its beauty, especially when seen embodied in persons whom they are already disposed to admire and have affection for. So part of the duty of exemplarity is to make one’s good qualities radiant so as to be apparent to others. And these good qualities can never be separated from intellectual excellence, since knowledge of and pursuit of the truth is the first of the cardinal virtues. In *De Re Publica*, Cicero articulates this principle. At first the image is a visual one:

[The statesman] should have virtually no duty [apart from this, for it embraces all the rest—namely that he should never cease inspecting and examining himself, challenging others to imitate him, and by the splendor of his mind and conduct offering himself as a mirror for his fellow-citizens (Cicero 1998, II.69).

The fellow-citizens should gaze upon the statesman and see a better version of themselves in him, which they then strive to live up to. The visual is a dyad between the seer (the citizen) and the seen (the statesman). But Cicero immediately adds an aural image, and this one is multilateral:

Just as with string instruments or pipes or in singer’s voices a certain harmony of different sounds must be maintained... so a state, by adjusting the proportions between the highest, lowest, and intermediate classes, achieves harmony [*consensus*]. What, in the case of singing, musicians call

harmony [*harmonia*] is, in the state, concord [*concordia*]; it constitutes the tightest and most effective bond of security; and such concord cannot exist at all without justice” (Cicero 1998, II.69).

The statesmen’s modeling of unity among the parts of his soul toward the common activity of a virtuous life now becomes the type of the necessary unity among the different classes of the city, whose offices and power are proportioned to create the mixed regime.

The reason why concord is like harmony is that it necessarily depends upon the interaction of multiple, differentiated elements; many homogenous elements cannot produce it. This concord among difference in turn presupposes justice, which in giving each his due acknowledges both the equality of nature among human beings and a hierarchy of quality. We might think that Cicero means for the exemplarity of statesmen as the guarantor of justice and therefore concord to matter primarily when the constitution is under threat (such as his own suppression of the Catalinian Conspiracy) or when major legislation is being considered (such as the agrarian law proposed by the Gracchi). But he also applies it to matters that in contemporary terms would be categorized as private life, even as matters of taste. In *De Legibus*, though his character Marcus, Cicero argues, “Just as the whole State is apt to be infected by the vicious desires of its leaders, so it is healed and set right by their restraint... The vices of the leading citizens are not so serious an evil (though in themselves they *are* a serious evil) as the fact that these men beget a host of imitators... It is plain that the state has taken its character from that of its leading men” (Cicero 1998, III.30). His primary example is greed, the desire to have glamorous “houses crammed with statues and pictures,” even if some of the artworks are really “public property and others are of a sacred and holy kind” (Cicero 1998, III.31). Marcus rebukes his interlocutor with, “They would not have been permitted such indulgence if you hadn’t gone in for it yourself” (Cicero 1998, III.30). For Cicero, the distinction between private and public corruption is notional. The duty of exemplarity is stringent and applies to the whole of life.

The final key element in Cicero that links individuality to the common good, keeping it from decaying into the “individualism” decried both by Tocqueville in 1840 and by liberalism’s critics today, is oratory.²² The *liber*, Cicero’s free man or “gentleman,” who can think his way out of the crowd and put up with its vicissitudes because of his strong character, self-knowledge, and commitment to truth, must also be an eloquent speaker. According to Cicero no good thing remains alone and unfruitful, least of all man’s godlike reason. *Ratio* must issue in *oratio*, golden words that are to make the truth attractive for all those around. This is a natural law, he claims in *On Duties*: “By the power of reason (*vi rationis*) [nature] associates man with man in the common bonds of speech (*orationis*) and life” (Cicero 1913, I.11). Our ability to reason moves us to want to communicate our ideas to others, so that speech becomes the foundation of the political bond. Men without speeches are dangerous to themselves and to one another, unable to cooperate or coordinate their acts. In his opening speech for *De Oratore*, Crassus asks, “What other force [than oratory] could have gathered the scattered members of the human race into one place, or could have led them away from a savage existence in the wildness to this truly human, communal way of life, or, once communities had been founded, could have established laws, judicial procedures, and legal arrangements?” (Cicero 2001, I.33). Here laws appear to be engraved speeches, which have the power not only to effect human cooperation in a given moment but through time and even through epochs. Through Romulus’ inspiration, and especially through Numa’s institutions, a band of brigands became the seeds of the Roman people.

Cicero insists that to become a *liber* requires well-arranged true knowledge in all of the domains pertinent to human affairs, in order to both move the hearts of others and move them to good ends. “It is essential to possess a certain esprit and humor, the culture that befits a gentleman [*liber*], and an ability to be quick and concise in rebuttal as well as attack, combined with refinement, grace, and urbanity” (Cicero 2001, I.17).²³ Such a man is deeply self-possessed, knowing what he thinks and why and not dependent on the opinion of others, but unlike Diogenes the Cynic he always knows how to present his view without giving offense, so that his ideas can do the most good. The reason why these apparently superficial aes-

thetic requirements are combined with deep philosophical knowledge of man's place in the universe is that Cicero assumes that the substance and the appearance of things are profoundly linked. He has Crassus, at the climax of *De Oratore's* dialogue, give a statement of faith in *kosmos*, the principle that there is a beautiful, well-ordered and harmonious arrangement not just of the city but also of the entire universe, such that beauty reflects truth.

For since all discourse is made up of content [*res*] and words [*verba*], the words cannot have any basis if you withdraw the content, and the content will remain in the dark if you remove the words... All the universe above and below us is a unity and is bound together by a single, natural force and harmony. For there is nothing in the world, of whatever sort, that can exist on its own if it is severed from all other things, or that can be dispensed with by the other things if they are to preserve their own force and eternal existence (Cicero 2001, III.19-21).²⁴

The content and the words are like the light and the object it shines on, which makes apparent the light in its turn. Just as the things discussed and the words used to discuss them need each other, so too do the gentleman's virtue and his eloquence. This view makes any definition of the individual that sets him entirely apart from or against the community seem as unintelligible as a shadow without an object.

CONCLUSION

Both liberalism and individualism can mean many things. If liberalism entails treating all human societies as interchangeable canvases for the expression of human desire, it is not only self-undermining but inhuman. If individualism entails the emancipation of the wealthy and powerful to treat ordinary people with contempt, it is pusillanimity in the guise of pride. A wider set of sources in the history of Western political thought can make possible a richer genealogy of individualism in order to discern its healthiest from its unhealthiest species. The moral capacity and claim of the individual, as distinct from subsumption into the collective consciousness of the tribe or even into that of the city, is a civilizational touchstone stemming from such fundamental sources as Socratic philosophy and biblical religion. But those seeking to defend a noble version of individualism would do well to acknowledge the real possibility of its going awry. This paper has sought to contribute to the classical-liberal tradition by examining a powerful post-romantic strand of aesthetic individualism stemming from Baudelaire and a strand of neo-Socratic individualism stemming from Babbitt. Both currents are recognizably with us today, helping to explain the widespread mutual resentments between elites and people, even as the thinkers themselves are neglected. But Cicero offers a framework that incorporates the greatest insights of each modern, one capable of bringing together Baudelaire's emphasis on exemplarity and mimesis with Babbitt's insistence on the stringent moral, literary, and historical education elites must undergo to learn self-restraint. Most importantly, Cicero teaches a dynamic, loquacious, and affectionate posture that equips elites to serve the people well, fortifying the institutions that make freedom possible.

REFERENCES

- Adler, Eric. 2020. *The Battle of the Classics: How a Nineteenth-Century Debate Can Help Save the Humanities Today*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 2023. On the Politics of the New Humanists. *Humanitas* 36(2):5-41.
- Babbitt, Irving. 1908. *Literature and the American College: A Defense of the Humanities*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
- _____. 1919/1957. *Rousseau and Romanticism*. Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press.
- _____. 1924/1979. *Democracy and Leadership*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.
- Barlow, J. Jackson. 2012. Cicero on Property and the State. In: Nicgorski, Walter (ed.). *Cicero's Practical Philosophy*, pp. 212-241. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Baudelaire, Charles. 1857/1996. L'idéal. In: *Les Fleurs du Mal*, pp. 52-53. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
- _____. 1863/2024. *Le Peintre de la vie modern*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
- Carrier, David. 1995. Baudelaire's Philosophical Theory of Beauty. *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 23(3/4):382-402.
- Cicero. 1913. *On Duties*. Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press.
- _____. 1998. *The Republic*. In: Rudd, Niall (tr.). *The Republic and the Laws*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 2001. *On the Ideal Orator*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Deneen, Patrick. 2018. *Why Liberalism Failed*. New Haven: Harvard University Press.
- de Dijn, Annelijn. 2008. *French Political Thought from Montesquieu to Tocqueville: Liberty in a Levelled Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- DiLorenzo, Raymond. 1978. The Critique of Socrates in Cicero's "De Oratore": Ornatus and the Nature of Wisdom. *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 11(4):247-261.
- Englert, Gianna. 2024. *Democracy Tamed: French Liberalism and the Politics of Suffrage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Foster, Luke. 2021. The Duty of the Clerics to the Nation: Why Schmitt, Strauss, and Eliot Tie Intellectuals to Liberalism. *The Political Science Reviewer* 45(2):292-318.
- _____. 2022. 'Socratic Remnant' versus 'Creative Democracy': Irving Babbitt's Anti-Deweyan Vision of Leadership. *American Political Thought* 11(4):493-524.
- Gioia, Dana. 2021. Baudelaire's Modernism. *The New Criterion*.
- Hawley, Michael. 2022. *Natural Law Republicanism: Cicero's Liberal Legacy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kahan, Alan. 2001. *Aristocratic Liberalism: The Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burckhardt, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville*. Piscataway: Transaction Publishers.
- Kapust, Daniel. 2011. Cicero on the virtue of decorum and the morality of rhetoric. *European Journal of Political Theory* 10(1):92-112.
- Leander, Folke. 1937. *Humanism and Naturalism: A Comparative Study of Ernest Sellière, Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More*. Gothenburg: Gothenburg University Press.
- Lefebvre, Alexander. 2024. *Liberalism as a Way of Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Mill, John Stuart. 2008. *On Liberty and Other Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Müller, Jan-Werner. 2016. *What Is Populism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Nelson, Eric. 2004. *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1874/1980. *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- Parent, Joseph. 2009. Duelling and the abolition of war. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 22(2):281-300
- Piketty, Thomas. 2020. *Capital and Ideology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Plato. 2010. *Gorgias*. In: Griffith, Tom (tr.) and Malcolm Schofield (ed.). *Gorgias, Menexenus, and Protagoras*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Powell, J. G. F. Cicero's De Re Publica and the Virtues of the Statesman. In: Nicgorski, Walter (ed.). *Cicero's Practical Philosophy*, pp. 14-42. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Rawls, John. 1999. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Rhodes, S. A. 1928. Baudelaire's Philosophy of Dandyism. *The Sewanee Review* 36(4):387-404.
- Ryn, Claes. 1986. *Will, Imagination, and Reason: Irving Babbitt and the Problem of Reality*. Chicago: Regnery Publishing.
- _____. 1990. *Democracy and the Ethical Life: A Philosophy of Politics and Community*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.
- de Tocqueville, Alexis. 1835/2010. *Democracy in America*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.
- Urbinati, Nadia. 2019. *Me the People: How Populism Transforms Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wood, Neal. 1991. *Cicero's Social and Political Thought*. Oakland: University of California Press.

NOTES

- 1 Parent 2009 attributes the decline of practices of private retribution like feuding to industrializing and the growth of state capacity, both historical developments that occurred in parallel with the rise of liberal theory.
- 2 See inter alia Kahan 2001, de Dijn 2008, and Englert 2024.
- 3 For a historical perspective on specifically intellectual elites and their relationship to liberalism, see Foster 2021.
- 4 Among many others, Müller 2016, Urbinati 2019, and Piketty 2020 have identified elite-popular tension as the decisive political cleavage of our era.
- 5 I follow the assumption of Carrier 1995 that *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* contains a highly ambitious aesthetic (and ethical and political) theory that close reading can draw out.
- 6 For an account of this regime as an antidote to the corruption and conformity of bourgeois life amid the pressures of early industrialization and urbanization, see Rhodes 1928.
- 7 All translations from Baudelaire's original French are mine.
- 8 On Baudelaire's intellectual and poetic legacies, see Gioia 2021.
- 9 Adler 2023 argues that while "it is no simple matter to characterize [Babbitt and Paul Elmer More's New Humanist] movement as *conservative* or *reactionary*" (p. 8), both men are always marked by "robust anti-statism and concomitant disdain for both socialism and communism" (p. 10). Aspects of Babbitt's thought, then, might best be described as liberal.
- 10 For more on Babbitt's understanding of humanism and the New Humanism he helped found, see Leander 1937.
- 11 For Babbitt's account of metaphysics, see Ryn 1986.
- 12 Eric Adler helpfully identifies the origin of the term of "inner check" in Henri Bergson's *frein vital*, arguing that Babbitt's use of it implies his acceptance of Bergson's obverse concept of *élan vital*, which is daring, asserting, and expansive. While the term inner check (confusingly) suggests pure restraint, in Babbitt's view it serves more as an ethical compass or means of calibrating moral life, with both a restraining and an affirming component" (Adler 2020, p. 181).
- 13 At the opening to *Rousseau and Romanticism*, Babbitt writes: "It is [Rousseau's] somewhat formidable privilege to represent more fully than any other one person a great international movement. To attack Rousseau or to defend him is most often only a way of attacking or defending this movement" (p. ix).
- 14 Nietzsche also speaks of a "living thing" as "drawing a horizon around itself" (Nietzsche 1874/1980, p. 10).
- 15 For Babbitt's political philosophy, see Ryn 1990.
- 16 For a fuller exposition of the political implications of this term, see Foster 2022.
- 17 Babbitt may have in mind Socrates' claim in the *Gorgias* to be the only Athenian doing politics: "In company with a few Athenians—I don't want to say I'm the only one—I am attempting the true science of politics, and I think I'm the only one practicing politics among people today" (Plato 2010, 521d).
- 18 Wood 1991 refers to Cicero as a proponent of "an enlightened economic individualism" (p. 111). According to Nelson 2004: Cicero is a major source of a republican tradition that "views property as a trump against the power of the community" (p. 17). And Barlow 2012 describes Cicero's view as "property... is to be understood not as a relationship between a human being and a material object but as a consequence of the relationships among human beings" (p. 224).
- 19 For a sustained argument that Cicero is the origin point of liberal thought for linking popular sovereignty, individual rights, and natural law, see Hawley 2022.
- 20 On Cicero's general account of the virtues of a political leader, see Powell 2012.
- 21 For an account of how Ciceronian *decorum* embraces convention but transcends it to be rooted in nature, see Kapust 2011.
- 22 For Tocqueville on individualism, see especially Tocqueville 1835/2010, II.2.2: "Individualism is a considered and peaceful sentiment that disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and to withdraw to the side with his family and his friends; so that, after thus creating a small society for his own use, he willingly abandons the large society to itself."
- 23 May and Wisse resort to the French loan word "esprit" to render *lepos*.
- 24 DiLorenzo 1978 describes this passage as reflecting Cicero's concept of *ornatus*, "the unity of interdependence among different things" (p. 252).