

# Republicanism in the History of Political Philosophy and Today

3rd Biennial *Ideas in Politics* Conference

Prague: November 3rd-4th, 2017

## Panel 1.1 Abstracts

### *Hegel's Critique of Republicanism*

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One of the main theses of a republican political theory is that a well developed, flourishing individual freedom cannot stand in opposition to the law. The social body as a whole, or the state, do not by definition diminish individual freedom. On the contrary, an individual can only enjoy his or her freedom under the law. Lawful state policy is a *conditio sine qua non* of individual freedom. Law enables the individual to be counted as free, because the law counts. Despite this, many honest liberal guardians of individual freedom as non-interference may justly ask how it is possible to understand the entire social substance as free or as fulfilling individual freedom. How can a substance be free and recognized as free? One must be cautious with regard to the republican equation, or, more precisely, with regard to the complementarity between individual freedom and freedom of the state or a social body. This republican equation is unconvincing, especially in the eyes of the liberal camp.

My point is that it is not only unconvincing for liberals, but it would be unconvincing for Hegel as well. Nonetheless, in contrast to liberal fighters for freedom, Hegel would agree with the republicans that law as such does not constitute an impediment to individual freedom, nor to the very sphere of freedom. In opposition to the republicans, Hegel's metaphysics induces the individual to understand the law of the state as an expression of individual freedom. Therefore, only through Hegel can we understand the entire social substance as living and organic and thus as a "home" of individual freedom.

The aim of my paper is to show that Hegel's theory of state is the necessary condition for understanding the law as free or as a manifestation of freedom and on that account one should not seek protection against the law as such because this would actually mean seeking protection against one's freedom. Freedom, in Hegel's eyes, does not mean possessing something that exists before practice but rather that freedom is the very result of practice. Thus, Hegel is needed if republicans wish to strengthen their thesis that individual freedom flourishes only under free law. Without Hegel, it is difficult to understand the law as free.

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### ***Learning from the Present? Understanding Hegel's Vorrede to the Philosophy of Right***

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A common, philosophical approach to history can be illustrated by way of the following question: what can any given philosopher, or philosophical work, teach us about our world today? This sort of approach assumes that philosophical problems arise across different historical and political realities, so that past solutions to those problems can be transposed to the issues we face today (although it is normally acknowledged that such transposition requires a certain degree of sensitivity for the changes in historical and political circumstance). In my paper, I will ask whether a reversal of that intellectual move cannot be made as well, that is, whether the present can help us understand texts (as well as realities) of the past. For that purpose, I will revisit one of the texts most closely associated with its time, namely Hegel's "Outlines of the Philosophy of Right", to see whether an appreciation of some of the issues our democratic culture faces today can help us appreciate the notorious Vorrede. The perspective from which I want to implicate the present is indeed that of the very democratic "crisis" the conference synopsis refers to, that is the rise of populism and authoritarian sympathies which are calling into question the legitimacy of liberal democratic institutions. I will argue that in writing the Vorrede in 1820, Hegel was writing within a similarly unstable climate, that is one where the legitimacy of the state was being called into question from forces whose intentions were either dubious to Hegel, or objectively unforeseeable. (It should also be remembered that a) the French Revolution had a positive impact, however limited, on the political reality of Prussia, and that b) the Revolution itself will have seemed much more problematic to its contemporaries than it does today – even if we are theoretically aware of its dramatic consequences.) Against this background of uncertainty and rebellion, Hegel's drive to "reconcile" the reader with the rationality of the existing state seems much more justified than it does if we seek out the text trying to legitimize our reformist ambitions (it is also one of the central Republican features of Hegel's approach, as I will argue). I will close the text with a question and with a suggestion. I will ask whether and to what degree that reading nevertheless makes Hegel's Philosophy of Right compatible with a reformist or even revolutionary approach to political reality. Finally, I will return to the philosophical approach I superficially contrasted mine with at the outset to see whether this ultimately provides a lesson for today, namely whether philosophy can and should provide reconciliation with political reality in times when the existence and legitimacy of liberal democracy is at stake. My hope is that philosophy could thus contribute to the development of a proto-Republican civic spirit of the sort Hegel wants to conjure.

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### ***The Mexican Adventure of Maximilian I and its Influence on Czech Republicanism***

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After the French emperor Napoleon III invaded Mexico in 1861 he realized that the initial support from other European powers vanished. In order to justify his gains, he offered the throne, alongside the Mexican conservative nobility and clergy, to Maximilian Habsburg the younger brother of the Austrian emperor. After assurances that the people of the country indeed wanted the return of monarchy he sailed for Veracruz in 1864. This started the infamous episode of Maximilian's adventure in Latin America that ended with his death three years later.

The escapade was observed closely not only by the Czech society home but also abroad in the United States where a significant compatriot colony lived. The main reason was the participation of approximately 1 000 soldiers proceeding from Bohemia and Moravia in the Austrian volunteer corps. They played a role of a personal guard of the Emperor and potential colonists after the pacification of Mexico would be finished. On the other hand, very closely were perceived also political aspects of the intervention. First of all the figure of the monarch well known to the Czech liberal circles for his progressive thinking that was invited to Latin America by conservative groups. Another often mentioned figure was the former President of Mexico Benito Juarez and his followers identified from the very beginning as Republicans. Lastly, it was the French Emperor Napoleon III who was recognized as an important actor. The authors were fascinated especially by his interesting and inconstant trajectory from the revolutionary youth in Italy to the presidency of the French Second Republic and the establishment of the Second Empire there.

Czech intellectual elites were puzzled by the whole adventure and its principal characters, especially by the variable ideological background and therefore tried to redefine the philosophies of conservatism, liberalism, and republicanism in our society. In their writings, we can also see how they tried to criticize the traditionalist Austrian monarchy by using the examples from the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Therefore, the main objective of this proposal is to analyze Czech printed material (newspapers, magazines, books or marketplace songs) in Bohemia, Moravia but also in the United States and present an answer how this conflict influenced the perception of different ideologies in the Czech society in the second half of the 19th century. Especially how Maximilian's adventure, or to put it another way, his failure influenced republicanism among the Czechs around the World.

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### ***Scholastic republicanism: A paradoxical episode in the history of political thought***

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When we think of republicanism in early modern Europe, we think of particular styles of thought. We find it in the civic humanism of the Renaissance, or the more daring champions of the 'English Revolution'. Among those who never come to mind are the scholastic authors, followers of Aquinas, who replenished Catholic theology in the service of the Counter-Reformation. My paper would suggest this is an oversight. These authors, most of all Cajetan and Suárez, entertain quintessentially republican propositions and push them to extremes. Between them, they claim that every legitimate civil commonwealth is a democracy, that in such commonwealths all the people govern themselves, and that this is the only means of avoiding domination. They claim further that self-government makes everyone free, and only such government is distinctively civil and public, instead of an enlargement of domestic relations.

I would excavate this buried republican seam, and make sense of its peculiarities. When historians have cleared a space for scholastic republicanism, they have associated it with those who set the Church above the pope and the community above its rulers, like Almain or Marsilius. Cajetan, Suárez and their colleagues are different. They argue for papal supremacy, and sometimes for absolute monarchy in the secular sphere. (They do so in academic commentaries on the Summa, but also in pamphlets that shaped a series of Europe-wide controversies from the eve of the Reformation to the Gunpowder Plot.) They use republican premises and chains of reasoning to promote ends that seem not to fit. Cajetan sets his democratic commonwealth against papal lordship over a 'servile' Church, and suggests the latter is nobler. Suárez sketches a picture of free self-government, and says political life originally resembled it, but insists communities surrendered their power to masterly kings. Always, the republican side of the contrast is indispensable, and made stark so as to drive the reader towards the absolutist pole.

All this says something about republicanism at large. Republicans now cultivate a historical sense, and 'realism' about problems they admit to be perennial. In each mode they are resolutely secular. The republicanism of the scholastics is the opposite. They seek moral principles that undergird power considered in the abstract. Their search has a theological bent: they align the freedom of self-government with the freedom which prevailed in the state of innocence. It is for these reasons the scholastic account of the republic is so radical. That only a democracy can be free is, for them, an abstract moral imperative regardless of facts on the ground.

Republicanism is aligned now with popular sovereignty, a newly important concept in the work of Richard Tuck and others: if the people hold ultimate power, they can keep themselves from being dominated. My authors insist this is not enough. Unless the citizens control of apparatus of government, its day-to-day operations, they will be subject to those who do. The essence of power lies in its institutional instantiation, and a lurking, underlying supremacy is no supremacy at all. This is why the theologians' republicanism and their absolutism go together. One can have a popular government, or a monarch superior to his subjects, but not the compromise of a sovereign people which leases power to someone else. On this view, republicanism becomes hard to manage and perhaps too extreme to be desirable; but that is a prospect worth reflecting on.

That the theologians mistrust the republic they describe prompts another question. What if republicanism were not just a political programme, but also a set of neutral tools with which politics could be analysed, for contrary political purposes? We already understand contract theory this way, not least thanks to Hobbes's perversion of it; why not also this great alternative to it, and him?