

Republicanism in the History of Political Philosophy and Today

3rd Biennial *Ideas in Politics* Conference

Prague: November 3rd-4th, 2017

Panel 2.1 Abstracts

A Hermeneutic Method for Developing Republican Political Theory

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My paper aims to develop the Cambridge School method for the intellectual history of politics. In particular, I will provide a method for interpreting classical texts that is more constructive than Quentin Skinner's method. Skinner's analysis of history of political thought is limited to providing alternatives to liberal democratic political theory. Many scholars have criticised him in that he views history purely out of an antiquarian interest, as a series of disconnected intellectual events, and accordingly, demonstrates only the historic relativity of past thoughts, not their relevance to current problems. However, Skinner recognises the relevance and significance of classical texts for our contemporary debates. He argues that his method enables us to historicise our system of beliefs and to examine them self-critically, thereby, expanding our horizons instead of strengthening our prejudices.

I will develop this line of hermeneutic method further. In the hermeneutic view, although it is inevitable that we first interpret classical texts through our prejudices, subsequent readings enable us to reinterpret our conceptual framework through the unfamiliar terms. We need to examine our conceptual language against the language of the texts, and be conscious of how our conceptual framework has been shaped by our historical context. Thus, it seems to me that contemporary normative political theory can benefit from the intellectual history of politics, as contemporary normative concepts can be clarified not only through conceptual analysis, but also, and more fully, through an account of the historical processes that have shaped those concepts. For example, Montesquieu's theory of separation of powers can be interpreted not only through a liberal democratic framework to protect individual rights against the tyrannical use of political power, but also through a republican framework to support the idea of the mixed constitution, i.e. making excellent governance compatible with democratic sovereignty. In order to assert a normative judgement on any issue in political philosophy, one has to understand the historical context that shaped the current system. While Skinner's method stresses a synchronic analysis of classical texts in their context, my method highlights the role of diachronic analysis in clarifying the implications and qualifications of past thoughts.

In this paper, I will demonstrate how this approach ensures us to have a better understanding of current constitutional arrangements, and to shed light on the significance of republican political theory. Using the example of the difference between the republican and liberal interpretation of the principle of 'separation of powers', I will argue that this form of historical thinking can address contemporary debates relating to constitutional arrangements more adequately than analytical political philosophy.

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Republicanism as an Aristocratic Mythomoteur: Common Discourse of Polish Early-Modern Thinkers

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If one analyses the complex of Polish early-modern political culture in a traditional way, there are at least three distinct levels (political system, political thought and collective identity) that have been treated mostly separately so far. In that case, the Polish political structure has been ordinarily labelled as an utterly unique category assessed either as a proto-modern island of democracy or as an oligarchical and dysfunctional hell. Similarly, the efforts of Polish political thinkers of that time used to be described as peculiar reflections focused mainly on particular issues. And last, but not least, also the question of Polish pre-modern identity has often piqued one's curiosity just for its assumed extraordinary Sarmatian essence without any important connection to the general European context.

However, if one rejects this traditional and "separatist" approach, it is necessary to admit that all aforementioned levels (i.e. politics, ideas and identity) were shaped by a common and overarching discourse which linked together various thinkers despite their contradictory doctrines and also fitted into the broader framework of European early-modern politics. Hence, one of the essential aims of this paper is to verify whether one is able to identify this keystone of Polish pre-modern political discourse with republicanism based both on early-modern concepts as well as on modern theoretical schemes of Bruggen, Pettit and Skinner.

Furthermore, as this study struggles to prove, the republican character of Polish early-modern society should be read not only as a way of political thought, but as a common principle of noble identity that helped to strengthen the existing social structure. In this regard, one can consider the Polish republican thought as a kind of premodern mythomoteur according to the theory of Smith evincing the traits of aristocratic and political subtype. As it has been suggested, this republican myth could have been formulated and maintained by political and ideological elites who promoted the uniqueness of Polish nobility both at theoretical level and in political practice causing that republican ideas reflected not only universal principles but current political issues as well.

Taking all these considerations into account, this study is designed to analyse the political discourse of two fundamental characters of Polish 16th century political thought – Stanisław Orzechowski and Andrzej Frycz-Modrzewski. They both have been traditionally considered as basic contraries whose different concepts were established as two distinct traditions of local political thought such as pragmatism vs. idealism, traditionalism vs. progressivism, realism vs. utopianism etc. Contrary to this scheme, this paper aims to prove that despite their ideological differences, the political thought of both authors fitted into the common framework of republican discourse. To verify this assumption, it is necessary to analyse key terms of their doctrines discursively, which requires to interpret especially the concepts of republic, liberty, equality or common good. Only on the basis of this analysis, one is supposed to determine the relationship between individual and public level of Polish noble citizenship as well as its coherence with broader European pre-modern republicanism.

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Republican Monarchy: The neo-Roman concept of Liberty and the Norwegian Constitution of 1814

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The Norwegian Constitution of 1814 was the last in a series of European constitutions inspired by the American and French examples, between 1776—1814, of which the American and the Norwegian are the only two left. This paper revisits the debates preceding the Norwegian 17 May 1814 Constitution and argues that the republican ideas of liberty as independence from arbitrary power formed the intellectual background and context of the debates. This breaks with standard narratives in Norwegian history where the constitution is described as an early example of liberalism. The recovery of the republican or neo-Roman concept of liberty in intellectual history forces us to revise the conventional reading of the founding of the Norwegian nation state. It may further provide us with new keys to interpret the intellectual roots of the 'Nordic model'. Indeed, the author suggests that the emphasis on equality, egalitarianism and trust in the Scandinavian countries may have its intellectual origins in a 'Scandinavian republicanism', inspired from the example of the American republicans in the late 18th century.

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A Conceptual History of Republicanism in Turkey

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This paper examines the slow but insistent evolution of the concept of republicanism (cumhuriyetçilik) in Turkey from its origins in the early Ottoman Empire to its representation in the early formation of the Turkish Republic. The great body of research on republicanism has focused on Western political thought and the Anglophone political experience. This paper will broaden the scope of intellectual history by scrutinising the historical transformation of the concept of republicanism elsewhere, and encourage us to think of alternative meanings of republicanism. This paper challenges the predominant scholarly view that the Turkish Republic and its founding ideology, Kemalism – characterised by the principles of nationalism, secularism, populism, statism, and westernisation – emerged abruptly with the proclamation of the Republic in 1923 without a substantial intellectual foundation. This will be achieved by uncovering two other complex republican traditions: the Islamic and the liberal. The story of the term “republic” (cumhuriyet) began in the early modern Ottoman Empire. It appeared as a word in Ottoman political writings, but little attention was paid to republic as a type of government until the late eighteenth century. With the French Revolution fresh ideas migrated from Europe to the Empire, and the term “republic” began to appear widely in political writings, but a republic was still not seen as an alternative to the Ottoman monarchy. In the 1860s, the word “republic” suddenly became a political value and a badge of political honour, lending credibility to the idea of transforming human collective life. A vibrant debate emerged between three distinct positions of republicanism: the Islamic, the liberal, and the radical. In the 1890s, the Young Turks, inspired by French positivists, valued republicanism for the ideas which inspired it, rather than for the institutions it embodied. The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 introduced positivist universal republican principles to the Empire and laid the most salient intellectual and institutional foundations for the Turkish Republic. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of the First World War reinforced the republic as a political, and republicanism as an ideological option. In the Turkish Republic’s formative period (1922-24), three rival conceptions of republicanism, Islamic, liberal, and radical, competed once again for political dominance, which ended with the triumph of the latter. Mustafa Kemal and his military, political, and intellectual elite preserved radical republicanism and named it “Kemalism” which became the dominant ideology of the state and disregarded opposing views. The roots of today’s political crisis between the Kemalists and the Islamists lie in the unresolved ideological tension present from the foundation of the Republic.