

Republicanism in the History of Political Philosophy and Today

3rd Biennial *Ideas in Politics* Conference

Prague: November 3rd-4th, 2017

Panel 4.2 Abstracts

B. Constant and the Ideas of Republicanism

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As for other thinkers of his generation, the revolution of 1789 was for Benjamin Constant (1767-1830) the key political experience not only from the practical but also from the theoretical point of view. Constant was clearly aware of the necessity to rethink the key concepts of political theory as the upcoming era had in many aspects nothing to do with what men were accustomed to till then. One of the most significant evidence was the nature of sovereignty. As Constant states there are only two kinds of political authority, political authority expressing the general will, which is legitimate, and the authority based on force, which is an oppression. Nevertheless the outcome of the revolution of 1789, proclaiming general suffrage, resulted in the cruelest tyranny ever imagined. In his famous speech "The Liberty of the Ancients compared with that of the Moderns" Constant shows that Jacobin government failed because it had forced people to live the antique form of liberty, regarded as collective participation in political decision which needed to be sustained by high civic virtues while modern citizens understood liberty as absence of any constraint leaving them to enjoy their private pleasures; according to Constant the main source of Jacobin tyranny was this misunderstanding.

It was Montesquieu who in his *Spirit of the Laws* analysed republican regime as a constitution founded on self-restraint, abnegation and patriotism, necessary virtues if a government proclaiming equality was to be maintained. As men can no more be asked to make such sacrifices of their interest for the public good, republic in this form is for Montesquieu relegated to the past. Modern way of life, characterized by self-interest and commercial activity, flourishes in England; albeit a monarchy, England is for Montesquieu a "nation where the republic hides under the form of monarchy" (EL V, 19). According to Montesquieu, England represents modern republic offering its citizens the greatest scope of liberty through the constitutional arrangement. In similar way Constant outlines in his *Principles of politics* the main characteristics of modern liberal regime: representative government based on limited sovereignty and mutual restrictions of executive and legislative power. In spite of the person of the king, this constitution can be described as "republic in disguise" (B. Fontana). In the paper we will present Constant's view on the possibilities of republican constitution in modern era, especially with regards to the creation of common interest. Constant analyses with great lucidity the need for independence, calm and private pleasures but he perceives the imminent danger of this modern conception of liberty. For Constant the solution of politics in modern times lies in the constitutional organisation enabling free development of individuals. Yet, the constitutional arrangement does not create any bond uniting them. As there is no place for virtue in modern republics, the common goal must be built upon our private interests; but is this really possible?

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Alexis de Tocqueville's Republicanism

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Alexis de Tocqueville's Republicanism While Alexis de Tocqueville has been called many names, among them 'liberal', 'communitarian' and 'conservative', I argue that he is in fact a republican, as republican political freedom has a central position in his thinking. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville's republicanism shows when he asserts that freedom has to be identified with participation in one's community. Furthermore, Tocqueville states that associations function as a way for citizens to exercise freedom. Thus, Tocqueville can certainly be grouped in the republican tradition, yet, a large amount of scholars place him in the liberal tradition. They are not mistaken, I argue, since Tocqueville must be considered to be a liberal and a republican. Yet, even though Tocqueville is in agreement with many liberal ideas, he does not share the liberal conception of freedom as a withdrawal in a private sphere where no one can interfere. This 'individualism', as Tocqueville terms it, is a vice because, he argues, liberty does not mean being left alone to do whatever one would like. To support my claim that Tocqueville is a republican, I will first explain why republican political freedom occupies a central place in Tocqueville's thought. Second, I will explore how this republican conception of freedom differs from the liberal one. According to Tocqueville, not only are liberals wrong in relating freedom to a private sphere, they are also wrong in equating independence with freedom. Tocqueville maintains that a person can enjoy independence, but without being engaged in communal matters he remains unfree. In other words, liberty is not independence; to the contrary, liberty is understood as demanding active political participation. Lastly, what we can learn from Tocqueville's unique combination of liberalism and republicanism is that republicanism does not ask for a wholesale rejection of liberalism.

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REPUBLICAN CIVILITY BEYOND THE OLD REGIME: the cases of Sophie de Grouchy and Germaine de Staël

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It comes at no surprise that the compatibility of courtly politeness with republican ethos are widely discussed in early modern political science the main issue debated being the possibility of dissociation of manners from status. During European enlightenment, courtly politeness was rarely vindicated but acknowledged as important operator of social regulation in monarchies while the lack of strong aristocratic element in republics explained their unrefined manners. In post- French revolution context, once courtly politeness has been definitely rebutted, the question remains: is it possible to radically disconnect manners from status? Despite his sardonic critique of courtly manners Adam Smith acknowledges that an aristocratic behaviour within proper social class bounds is tolerable for a moderate social hierarchy to be respected.

In the "Lettres sur la sympathie" (1798), Sophie de Grouchy, the French translator of Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments, widow of the Marquis de Condorcet and a key figure of the late French Enlightenment, challenges Adam Smith's narrative echoing a reformist plan of educating feelings of sympathy in the post-French revolution citizenry. Sophie de Grouchy's project can be described as one of turning Adam Smith into a sentimentalist, moderate republican. The movement of natural sympathy will bring forward a more compassionate thus authentically civilised civil society insofar as social institutions, practices and laws will canalise unreflective, natural sympathetic tendencies towards socio-economic equality. Therefore citizens should be educated in order to feel their shared humanity instead of the socio-psychological distance instilled by Ancient regime institutions within which humanity was divided into radically different classes. In the post revolutionary era the extension of natural sympathetic sentiments should mark a transition: adulation of the aristocrat as well as contempt to the poor will respectively give way to an un-deferential attitude towards moderate wealth and a compassionate stance towards human misery.

For a society based on equality, promoting excellence and merit is far more important than for a traditional society of ranks. Yet democratisation and meritocracy come at a price. Unless exacting novel standards of civility a democratic regime would see the triumph of banality and vulgarity. A new republican government in France requires high standards of style therefore a need to invent a republican civility. If mere popularity becomes the only criterion of distinction, then vulgarity would become the prevailing feature. In the preface of the second edition of her book "De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales" (1800), Germaine de Staël introduces the term vulgarity (*vulgarité*) in the French language and points to the threat of a celebritocracy. In the chapter I.ii "Du goût, de l'urbanité des mœurs, et de leur influence littéraire et politique", the danger of republican incivility looms large. The remedy suggested is a creation of a post-revolutionary civility proper to the new regime. Urbanity will supposedly constitute a 'civility without court' that is a republican civility free from old regime's frivolity and unprecedented republican vulgarity.

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Radical Republicanism in the Early French Revolution, 1789-91

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The republicanism of the French revolutionaries came in all shapes and sizes; from the proto-liberal republicanism of the Directorate to the natural rights republicanism of the Jacobins, the moderate or 'political economic' republicanism of Étienne Clavière, Condorcet and the Girondins, the radical republicanism of the enragés, the 'English' republicanism of the Cordeliers and, what will be the focus of this paper, the early radical republicanism in Paris. While the different currents of republicanism had somewhat different sources of inspiration, their differences mainly arose from how they responded to the political conjunctures and crises of the French Revolution and from what political and social position they analyzed these conjunctures from. In order to understand the different forms of republicanism of the French revolutionaries it is therefore necessary to situate them within the concrete events and movements of the French Revolution; that is, within what we might call a social and political rather than (mainly) discursive context.

In this paper, I use this approach to discuss the early radical republicanism in Paris by focusing on such writers as Camille Desmoulins, François Robert, Louise de Kéralio, Théophile Mandar, Louis de Lavicomterie and Jean-Paul Marat. While these young writers became known during the early revolution as pamphleteers, orators and journalists, they were not distant observers. Rather they participated in the early revolutionary milieu in the gardens of the Palais Royal, in the meetings of the Club des Cordeliers and in demonstrations and riots. The paper begins with the beginning of French revolutionary radical republicanism in the Palais Royal movement in the summer of 1789 and ends with its culmination in the public presentation of the petition calling for a republic suppressed by government forces in what became known as the Champ de Mars Massacre.

Before the outbreak of the French Revolution, republicanism had mainly offered a vocabulary for criticizing existing political system. Now, republican concepts became means for constructing a new and even democratic order. In this process, however, republican concepts were redefined in order to solve the problems faced by the radical French revolutionaries. Within the context of the early revolution, this paper focuses on what I identify to be the three main problems discussed by this early current of radical republicans: 1. What are the conditions needed for a popular government? 2. What is the role of insurrections? 3. How to create a system of surveillance to keep rulers on the track of virtue? It is furthermore argued that these ideas became influential in later parts of the revolution and that they remain relevant until this very day.