

Contributions to Political Science

Skadi Siiri Krause  
Dirk Jörke *Editors*

# Republicanism and Democracy

Close Friends?

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# **Contributions to Political Science**

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Editors

# Republicanism and Democracy

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# Preface

In the history of ideas, liberalism and republicanism form the two major currents of thought regarding the emergence of modern democracy, with John Locke, Immanuel Kant and Benjamin Constant considered representatives of the former and Niccolo Machiavelli, James Harrington and Jean-Jacques Rousseau representatives of the latter. These currents of thought have inspired the ideal types of “liberal” and “republican democracy,” however, as is well known, these are always exaggerated and one-sided representations. “Liberal democracy” is usually defined in terms of the rule of law, according to which the state exists to protect individual rights, understood as negative rights. With their help, the individual separates himself from the state and his fellow citizens. Since before the revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries traditional and above all property rights were defended against the financial and tax policies of the crown, the owner-market society forms the basis of this understanding of the rule of law. In contrast, the model of “republican democracy” contains what the liberal constitutional state presumably lacks: solidarity, citizen participation in the community and a policy of pursuing the common good. Freedom is thought of positively here, i.e., it is not sought in demarcation from the community, but in participation in it, although models of direct democracy are not favored. According to this tradition, government in the name of the common good should remain the preserve of an elected and therefore qualified minority.

Both liberal and republican “types of democracy” have faced diverse criticism. The “republican democracy” is accused, above all by the liberal side, of too much emphasis upon virtue, too much claim to homogeneity and too little room for pluralism. According to the critics, particularly from the republican side, the shortcoming of “liberal democracy” is its lack of solidarity and a shallow concept of the common good, which allegedly only refers to the protective function of the rule of law. Accordingly, models of democracy are constantly emerging that are supposed to be able to inherit the two “types of democracy” and compensate for their shortcomings. One prominent example is Jürgen Habermas’ “deliberative democracy,” in which pluralism and interest politics should be possible, which cannot develop sufficiently in republics, and at the same time the lack of solidarity in liberalism

should be overcome through forms of communication. In other words, in Habermasian discourse theory, “deliberative democracy” presents itself as the union of the two “types of democracy.”

There is no doubt that in the history of political ideas one can distinguish between a republican and a liberal theoretical tradition both of which helped birth political modernity. And yet narrowing the field of democratic thought to “republican democracy” and “liberal democracy” is misleading. The blatant contrast between how the liberal and republican traditions have been understood, on the one hand, and the enduring inaccuracy of the concept of democracy as well as the lack of an adequate appreciation of a specifically democratic tradition of thought since the seventeenth century, on the other hand, is striking and in need of explanation, if one does not want to argue that the liberal and the republican traditions are only two sides of the same coin (i.e., the modern theory of democracy).

In this anthology, we have, therefore, endeavored to uncover the line of tradition from the middle of the seventeenth to the middle of the nineteenth century, i.e., in the age of revolutions, which has largely been ignored but is important for the theoretical development of modern democracy. In this line of tradition, democracy is not only considered as an expression of popular sovereignty, but also as the participation of citizens in government and administration in order to guarantee freedom and equality. In this sense, it differs from liberal and republican ideas, which either equated popular sovereignty with a parliamentary system and an egalitarian constitutional state, or propagated a policy of the common good. This does not mean that approaches to democracy premised upon popular sovereignty have not also overlapped with liberal or republican conceptions, as the various contributions in the volume show; but, and this is crucial to our approach, they remained distinct from classical liberal and republican thought.

Finally, we would like to thank all authors. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, we managed to meet and exchange ideas “digitally” again and again. The resulting texts are combined in this volume. Hopefully, they are the beginning of further exciting debates. We would also like to thank the staff at the chair, especially David Weiß, and the students in the department at the TU-Darmstadt, who discussed aspects of the volume with us. Without their contribution, the volume would not have come about in this way. And last but not least, we would also like to thank the German Research Foundation, which has financially supported our joint research project “A Third Model of Democracy” over the past two years.

Darmstadt, Germany  
May 2022

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Dirk Jörke

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# Republicanism and Democracy: An Introduction



Skadi Siiri Krause  and Dirk Jörke 

**Abstract** The overarching goal that unites us in our joint work is to discuss the extent to which democracy and republicanism are identical, complementary or even opposing ideals/ideas. We would like to explore whether modern democratic thought can be read simply as a continuation of republican ideas, or whether the democratic principles of liberty and equality for the design of political processes and institutions are not grounded in different traditions that go beyond republican discourse and thus represent a new understanding of the state, government and policymaking.

**Keywords** Republicanism · History of democracy political theory · Freedom · Equality · Democratic policymaking

The rediscovery of classic republicanism a few decades ago by J. G. A. Pocock (1980, 2003), Quentin Skinner (1978, 2002, 2009) and Philip Pettit (1997, 2002) have made clear how profoundly the modern notion of democracy has been shaped by the republican tradition. Today the republican prioritization of civic freedom and the common good is generally positively emphasized. But the determination of these two concepts remains difficult and the views diverge widely. In addition, there is currently a liberal interpretation of republican principles, which raises the question of the specificity of republicanism (Laborde & Maynor, 2008; Leipold et al., 2020; Niederberger & Schink, 2013).

The overarching aim of the anthology is to discuss the extent to which democracy and republicanism are identical, complementary or even contradicting ideals/ideas. We would like to investigate whether modern democratic thinking can simply be read as a continuation of republican ideas or whether the democratic principles of freedom and equality for the design of political processes and institutions are not based on

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different traditions that go beyond the republican discourse and thus represent a new understanding of state, government and policymaking.

To pose the question in this way means to doubt a widely used formula according to which modern democracy is composed of liberal principles such as individualism, the rule of law and human rights, on the one hand, and republican principles such as orientation towards the common good and popular sovereignty, on the other (Habermas, 1994). Rather, we assume that democracy and republicanism are concepts that are related to one another, but do not necessarily coincide and have been largely at odds with one another in the history of political thought. This relationship is made more complicated by the fact that there are large overlaps between the more aristocratic republicanism that emerged in the early modern period and the liberalism that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. Both share a strong emphasis on individual freedom, an orientation towards the concept of the rule of law and a “deep aversion to any form of direct or popular rule” (Ferejohn, 2013, 139). At the same time, it could be argued that it is precisely the beliefs and institutions shared by aristocratic republicanism and liberalism that have shaped the modern understanding of democracy. In short, the whole thing is a great political jumble of ideas.

In this volume, we want to address this confusion from a predominantly historical perspective, with the emphasis on the republican discourses of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in “the Age of Democratic Revolution” (Palmer, 1959). Our starting thesis is that within this time frame there has not only been a considerable transformation of republican thought, but that precisely this, together with the incorporation of liberal ideas, has not only led to new theoretical approaches but also to conceptual confusion that has shaped the political-theoretical debate to this day. With this in mind, we want to provide with this anthology a contribution to the historical understanding of the semantic transformations of both the concept of republicanism and the understanding of democracy, knowing that the authors represented here could not arrive at a consistent interpretation.

## 1 Classical Republicanism

What the Greeks developed with the city-republic was a political community in which the citizens made participation in political life a matter of course, i.e. the enactment and enforcement of laws and decision-making on relations with other communities. This also meant that the citizens had a share in the advantages as well as in the burdens of the citizenship, i.e. held public offices and participated in the tax burdens, the hardships, dangers of wars and the defence of the city. Basically, there was a public debate that should lead to a rational, understandable decision among the citizens. The Greek polis was a dynamic community, unlimited in its resolutions, which gave it the pathos of the heroic in the eyes of its defenders, but also made it unpredictable in the eyes of its critics. In particular, Plato’s fundamental criticism of the alleged irrationality of Attic institutions and practices has led to a long-standing

discrediting of ancient democracy. In addition, there was the long-held conviction that democratic institutions were bound to small-scale communities and institutions.

The Roman Republic was much more present in political thought than the Greek polis in the centuries that followed. This was mainly due to the rise of Rome (with the conquest of Italian peninsula up to approx. 270 BC and the subsequent establishment of the world empire until approx. 130 BC). Early on, efforts were made to find an explanation for this ascent. This included the mixed Roman constitution, in which the monarchical element, in the form of the consulate, the aristocratic element, in the form of the senate and the democratic element, in the form of the people, were combined. Above all, Polybius considered the combination of different constitutional forms to be a guarantee of order and political stability. According to Polybius' analysis, the consuls, the senate and the people's assembly formed a balance based on an institutional interplay, on mutual influence and mutual control of the institutions. However, the people's assemblies essentially only had an acclamatory function. Another motive that was to become effective in the history of republicanism was the rise of the rule of law. Together with the demand that individual action should be geared towards the common good and not towards one's own interests, the rule of the law should protect against an increase in power and corruption and thus guarantee the freedom of the community and its citizens (Viroli, 2002, 19–21).

These characteristics of the mixed Roman constitution also shaped the republics of the Renaissance and the early modern period in Europe. In contrast to the emperors, kings and princes of the time, no republican regime claimed that it was *dei gratia*, instituted and justified by the will of God. Instead, the republicans usually referred to their love of freedom and the fight against tyranny and despotism. History should teach the city-republics, however, that they were always at risk of being crushed between the territorial states and that the newly emerging great monarchies, whose dichotomies of domination and servitude as well as command and obedience embodied the opposite of basic republican principles (Koenigsberger, 1986).

But there were also internal dangers. Marsilius of Padua and Bartolus of Saxoferrato had already taught in the fourteenth century that it is not the prince but the people who are the true defenders of peace, good government and freedom (Skinner, 1978, vol. II, 60–65). In order to be able to fulfil this role, however, he had to be practised in republican virtues. The doctrine of virtues was the backbone of all republican theorists who were not yet able to invoke a constitutional state. In view of the social gradient and the associated different interests and party struggles in the city-republics, the ideal of the virtuous citizen, who placed the interests of the community above his own, threatened to erode (Bosl, 1982, 192ff.; Brucker, 1977; Rubinstein, 1966; Stephens, 1983).

In addition, the republican doctrine of virtue had its own pitfalls. The republican virtues were clearly distinguished from the virtues held up to a good vassal of the prince or a perfect courtier in a monarchical society. Loyalty, this psychologically most important of all public virtues in the Middle Ages was in the republic to the state and community, not to a lord and feudal liege lord to whom his vassals had sworn allegiance. This difference in object of allegiance was not easy for republicans, however; most people found it easier to remain loyal to one person than to an abstract

community (Koenigsberger, 1988). Significantly, when Machiavelli proclaimed a kind of Italian nationalism, he did so with a view to a hypothetical prince who would unite Italy and liberate Italy from the yoke of the barbarians, not with a view to the united people.

Justice as a virtue was also controversial in the republics. In principle there was no legal difference between the citizens, but there were definitely class differences. This had an impact on the understanding of tax burdens but also on the duty to defend the Patria. Most significant, however, was that the pursuit of personal fame and a splendid lifestyle as a personal incentive was denied to the citizens of a republic under the ideal of virtue of frugality; and that in view of the court culture that developed in Europe in the early modern period. The appeal to the political commitment of the citizens could, therefore, only convince as long as it was plausible for a majority that their public commitment was actually worthwhile—in the sense of the common good as well as individual self-realization. It is no coincidence, however, that there has been an erosion of social commitment again and again. For example, Francesco Guicciardini expressed the view that the citizens' property and security are best secured if the degree of politicization in society is not so high and only a few, about whose origin and motivation he made little statements, the political fortunes of the community are reliable and about steer longer periods of time (Guicciardini, undated, 48).

Even if monarchy was taken for granted in modern Europe, even within the great kingdoms there were repeated efforts by citizens to seize the city government in order, as it were, to break out of monarchical control. But these efforts and their at least partial successes must not be equated with democratic achievements. Most of them were much more aristocratic than the independence movement in the Netherlands at the same time, and their leaders were not infrequently staunch royalists. What they defended were old privileges that threatened to lapse with the rise of administrative centralism. Genuine republican demands only came into play when other methods of limiting princely power failed or when they proved ineffective in the course of political events. Many of these cities also formed alliances to defend their specific interests and privileges.

Nevertheless, the image of the republic was further developed, not least through the example of the United Provinces of the Netherlands in the seventeenth century, the economically and culturally most prosperous state in the heart of Europe, and at the same time becoming a theoretical counter-model to monarchy. The United Provinces taught that if the balance between the monarch and representative assembly was shifted in favour of the latter, perhaps even to the point of sovereignty of the cities and estates, then political freedom could be effectively protected against a tyrannical king. Both in the Netherlands and shortly afterwards in England, this step was taken with a great deal of hesitation. Once they had instituted a republic, the Dutch held onto it for two hundred years before the monarchy was re-established; during this long period, they had a sort of surrogate monarchy in the princes of the House of Nassau-Orange, who served as chief commanders of the army and governors of most of the provinces. After a very short and not very successful experiment with a republican form of government (1649–1660), the English reinstated their king, but were careful not to give up again the constitutional freedoms they had won in the civil

wars, especially legislative powers of Parliament. When the paradigmatic republics, Venice and the United Provinces of the Netherlands, were in decline in the nineteenth century, Great Britain eventually became the prototype of a constitutional order in which the power of the monarch was bound by both common law and the division of powers within the king in parliament principle.

What characterized republicanism as a whole in the early modern period was an aristocratic worldview. In addition to class awareness, many republicans embodied the certainty that even a small elite of virtuous citizens were able to conduct political affairs for the common good. As a result, early modern republicanism remained ambiguous. For the educated European elite, its reference to the Roman Republic made it somewhat attractive. For the patrician authorities of the cities, it was the last political option against the demands of the absolutist monarchies and against the interests of the militarized landed gentry. However, the early modern city-republics usually remained on the defensive against such powerful enemies, despite military victories on the part of Switzerland and the Netherlands in the sixteenth century.

Nonetheless, republicans developed momentous criticism of the emerging absolutism, which they countered with models of the mixed constitution. Equally important to them was the objection that the increasingly centralized monarchies dampened the development of virtue or the bourgeois spirit by restricting citizens to private activities and restricting their public engagement to a non-reductionist conception of the common good. The warning against absolute rule as well as against an administration devoid of control is thus part of the syntax of early modern republicanism (see John P. McCormick in this book).

## 2 Republicanism and Democracy

The reception of classical republicanism changed, however, with the revolutions of the seventeenth century, which were not only characterized by the fact that they mobilized a large number of citizens (who now also demanded a public say in representative bodies), but who wanted to see these rights secured in a constitution that bound the executive and legislative branches alike. In addition, a new understanding of representation developed that continues to this day. In this respect, this time is particularly interesting for the further development of republicanism, but above all for the development of democratic thought (this is what the texts by Skadi Krause, Rachel Foxley and Thomas Ashby stand for in this book).

This is already true of the English civil wars of the 1640s, in which republican arguments became key elements of an eventual constitutional revolution. This was not least due to the New Model Army, which had been founded as a citizen army during the civil war and which quickly established itself as the “third political power” alongside parliament and the king. Its leadership expressly pointed out that it was not a mercenary army, but consisted of citizens who fought for the rights and freedoms of the English (Woodhouse, 1951). It demanded that the parliament and its organs should be a “real actor for justice and freedom” of the people ([Overton] 1647 [17.07.1647],

12). Instead of equating the people and the House of Commons, as the argumentation of traditional republicans in parliament like Parker suggested, the army leadership demanded an accountability of the representatives, especially at the end of the first civil war, to secure the new political balance.

Part of this debate, which ultimately turned to developing a legal framework and mechanisms that would bind parliamentarians to their constituents, also became the increasingly radial circles of London's citizenship, including the Levellers (Foxley, 2013). In a series of petitions, they reminded parliamentarians that their power was secondary because they were only "agents" of the citizens. The power of parliament was derived in two ways from the "trust" of the people and their "choice" ([Lilburne] 1647 [06.01.1647], 99; [Overton] 2014 [1646], 3).

In order to bind parliament, the Levellers and the leadership circles of the New Model Army developed arguments and concrete proposals from 1647 on how to shape the relationship between the representative assembly and popular sovereignty, which until then had been arguments and concrete proposals. The central document of the debate became the *Agreement of the People*. The first version was read out to the General Council of the Army on October 28, 1647 (Ashley, 1947, 30; Vernon & Baker, 2010). The underlying idea of the document was a written agreement between the people and their representatives, in which the powers of parliament and the state organs as well as the fundamental and inviolable freedoms of the English were laid down. The demand for such an agreement had become necessary from the point of view of the Levellers and parts of the army in order to define the rights and freedoms of the English in such a way that the people were protected from corrupt parliamentary majorities as well as from a monarch who claimed to stand above the law (see also [Overton] 2014 [1646], 13).

All of this had nothing to do with the more aristocratic demands that determined early modern republicanism. Leading Republicans criticized the project of a "popular or democratic government" (Worden, 2001, 281). It has been argued that whenever the volatile, ignorant, irrational and rampant crowd hold power in their hands, it creates violent and unpredictable tyranny ([Nedham] 1650, ch. IV; see also Scott, 1993).

But as convincing as this argument may have sounded to contemporaries, the writings of the Levellers are particularly stimulating for modern democratic theory because, firstly, the "people" consisted of a multitude of individuals, heterogeneous communities and political collectives and, secondly, the sovereignty of the People could not be reduced to the act of electing a representative body, but all representative forms themselves had to be constantly tied back to the citizens through procedures (Loughlin, 2007, 2014). In this respect, it was important for them, on the one hand, to enable diverse forms of self-organization and self-administration and, on the other, to diversify the area of political influence. The Levellers were pioneers in the introduction of participatory practices, as their focus was not only on parliament, but also included extra-parliamentary forms of co-determination in municipal administrations, jury courts and self-organization of the parishes. That is why they repeatedly defended the right to freedom of conscience, freedom of opinion and freedom of

association as necessary prerequisites for collective action, as the sovereign people were not only comprehensible to the Levellers in parliament.

Even if the revolutionary phases of the Civil War and the Commonwealth in England were extremely short historically, they shaped further debates in England up to the 1688 Revolution and had a decisive influence on the American Revolution (see Skadi Krause, Philip Dingeldey and Dirk Jörke in this book). The new republic was shaped by the confrontation, but also the mutual enrichment, of republican and democratic thinking, as it was reflected, for example, in the clashes between federalists and anti-federalists (Glover, 2016; Nelson, 2016). Nonetheless, it can be shown that the republicans' scepticism towards egalitarian and participatory aspirations remained of the times. Above all, they reacted negatively to the newly emerging political societies, clubs and organizations. Even President Washington condemned them, especially after the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794. His argument was that the clubs were created by "clever members" to sow the "seeds of jealousy and distrust" among the people and to destroy trust in the administration of the country (letter from George Washington to Henry Lee of August 26, 1794 [Sparks, 1830, 428ff.]). The republican asserted that he had given his opinion early on that if these societies are not confronted, they will "shake" or even "destroy" the "best human government" and "the happiness of an entire nation" (Sparks, 1830, 429f.).

It is noteworthy that Washington saw the emergence of political associations and societies as conclusive "evidence" of the first "excesses" of a "democratic" society and at the same time admitted that he did not expect it to happen "so soon", although he never had a "doubt" about it. He warned urgently against the associations that form a "permanent censor" and criticize the work of the Congress "in the shadow of the night", which is carried out by the "elected representatives" of the people. Although he asserted that everyone has the right to petition the government, he argued that societies are "unconstitutional" because they are guided by selfish interests that have nothing to do with the common good. Their will is to destroy "all trust" in the administration without knowing the "real facts" and without having that "information" at their disposal that requires reasonable government action (letter from George Washington to Burges Ball of September 25, 1794 [Sparks, 1830, 437–438]). However, this borrowed greatly from the liberal thinking of the time, which emphasized that citizens in the modern constitutional state have for the first time the opportunity to withdraw into the private sphere without falling victim to arbitrary rule, because their freedoms are guaranteed by rule of law and corresponding fundamental rights.

Nonetheless, there were guardians of the new democracy. James Madison defended public policy debate, which he believed was vital to the Republic's survival. "That right of freely examining public characters and measures, and of free communication, was the only effectual guardian of every other right". For him, the inclusion of an express provision to protect the freedom of the press should already dispel all concerns during the constitutional debate. Madison's invocation of public opinion as the supreme guardian of popular liberty also shaped his Report of 1800. Madison here reiterated Publius' assurances more than a decade earlier. He noted that at the time of ratification, federalists had claimed that the states would continue to play a critical role because they were there to "sound the alarm to the public". But his

reasoning now went beyond that, returning to a theme that had dominated much of his thinking in the post-ratification period. For Madison, the survival of the constitution and government depended on an “enlightened public” that would recognize that the republic could only be sustained by keeping “the different governments and departments within their respective limits”. To secure this goal, the independence and vitality of the public had to be protected and promoted (Madison, 1800).

In France, too, the Republicans found it difficult to cope with the new democratic aspirations. In the debates on the constitution of year III, for example, classic republican topics were in the foreground and replaced the more democratic ideals of year II, such as those found in Condorcet’s draft constitution. Instead, public instruction was called for to teach the children “republican morals”. And although there was an official division between church and state, the centre promoted public festivals and a theistic religion that emphasized morality, simplicity and the public good. But republicanism itself remained aristocratic in France. The constitution of year VIII, the work of Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyes and Pierre-Louis Roederer, massively restricted political freedom. It introduced a complex electoral process aimed at creating an elite of notables and assigned superior power to the first consul.

It was only during the restoration period that democratic approaches emerged, which can be found primarily in the writings of liberal political journalists and thinkers such as P. C. F. Danou, Jean-Denis Lanjuinais and Benjamin Constant. But it was only in Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* that there was a clear commitment to modern democracy (Krause, 2017).

### 3 Republicanism Versus Democracy?

Many current republican approaches refer to ancient and early modern authors such as Cicero, Guicciardini and Machiavelli, less often to the Commonwealthmen or the American Founding Fathers. But the republican tradition is only effective today if it also provides answers to current questions of modernity (as understood by Nadia Urbinati, Richard Bellamy and Albert Weale in this book). It is, therefore, no coincidence that research on republicanism has expanded significantly during the last decades (see Sullivan, 1992; Scott, 1993; Wootton, 1994), concentrating on aspects that were previously neglected. These include the different national contexts, especially the different theories of Dutch republicanism (Blom, 1995; Kossmann/Kossmann-Putto, 1995, 2000; Mijnhardt, 2003; Secretan, 1990; van Gelderen, 1992) as well as theological and political conceptualizations of Genevan republicanism (Kirk, 1994; Rosenblatt, 1997; Silvestrini, 2010), which together with Swiss perspectives (Campi, 2002; Holenstein, Maissen & Prak, 2008; Maissen, 2006) also provide an important background for Rousseau’s political thinking. Two anthologies with the programmatic title *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage* (van Gelderen & Skinner, 2002) have shown the diversity of the republican discourse in the early modern period in various European contexts from Spain to Poland and from Scotland to Italy.

Because of these studies, an interpretive scenario took shape that was much more diverse than expected. Indeed, observance of individual historical configurations of the republican tradition has brought to light the existence of a multitude of possible interpretations. Above all, however, it became clear that one can only speak of different republicanismisms and not of republicanism in the singular (Castiglione, 2005; Mijnhardt, 2006; Zagorin, 2003).

However, it has also been shown that early modern republicanism in its various forms was anything but democratic. Quite a few authors were concerned with defending the power of the elites against the claims of the general population. The republican discourse revolved around universal notions of individual virtue and collective freedom. However, it excluded all those considered unworthy of being involved in the benefits and obligations of active citizenship (Skinner, 1998, 31–32). Only occasionally have there been attempts to achieve a more egalitarian republicanism, for example in Rousseau (1962), in the pamphlets of some anti-federalists or in some Girondins.

Nevertheless, a modern democracy was able to develop in many countries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which was not without influence on the republican discourse. As the editors of the anthology *Republicanism and Political Theory* (2008) emphasize, a “modernized” republicanism developed which, with normative individualism, social pluralism and an instrumentalist understanding of political participation, also took over central basic assumptions of liberalism, a process that was already taking place in the Age of great revolutions set in (de Dijn, 2020, 224–227; Kalyvas & Katznelson, 2008). Central to this side of the modern republican discourse is the concept of freedom. Today, Pettit is trying to prove that the rule of law, in contrast to the rule of people, is not a form of domination in the sense that restricts freedom insofar as it is not arbitrary. Just as Odysseus binds himself—and does not have the will of others imposed—so citizens can bind themselves in the form of laws that are ultimately under their own control (Pettit, 2009, 49). Since for Pettit freedom means non-domination and non-domination consists in not being subject to the arbitrariness of another, the rule of law and the protection of basic interests under fundamental rights seem to be of far greater importance in his model than a decided expansion of opportunities for participation, as they do determine democratic thinking since the seventeenth century.

Various criticisms were made of Pettit’s understanding of republicanism and the republican variant of constitutionalism he advocated, according to which a written constitution and a strong judiciary represent a necessary corrective against the abuse of power by democratically elected governments and the populist threat potential of overly committed citizens (including by McCormick, 2011, 141–169; 2013; Urbinati, 2012). According to this, the fundamental flaw of legal constitutionalism is the belief that it regards law as a fundamentally separate sphere from politics. With this argument, Richard Bellamy opposes, among other things, the misleading idea that the rule of law can replace the rule of people, as if the law were a self-applying mechanism that goes beyond real and changing life practices (Bellamy, 2007).

But as convincing as this criticism may be, the minimalist understanding of collective self-government, also represented by Bellamy, remains disappointing from the

perspective of the editors. For parliamentarism, the majority principle and party competition are not exhausted either in their existing form or in the underlying logic of the meaning of democratic self-determination. This includes at least the possibility of co-determination for those affected and the continuous expansion of active participation of the citizens in legislative and executive procedures, as already described by revolutionary authors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

With this anthology, we, therefore, want to go back to a time when the development and differentiation of republican ideas and democratic thinking were particularly tangible, namely during the English, American and French revolutions (Castiglione, 2005). The historical perspective should help to work out the main features of republican thought and to show the influence of republican authors in the “hours of birth” of the first modern democracy. The volume, therefore, tries to recall the neglected democratic and republican legacy of the English Levellers, Commonwealthmen, and the American and French revolutionaries. It should also be emphasized, however, that revolutionary thinking and heritage was not exclusively radical or democratic; conservative and indeed elitist strands can also be identified. It is all the more important to show where today’s thinking goes beyond that, where republican and democratic thinking have developed further, where they continue to complement each other and where a clear demarcation is appropriate.

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# Class Warfare in Guicciardini's *Considerations on Machiavelli*: Alibis, Evasions, and Counter-Provocations



John P. McCormick

**Abstract** This paper examines Francesco Guicciardini's various efforts to engage, evade, or protest Machiavelli's arguments concerning social class, the constitution of liberty, and preferable forms of tyranny in his *Considerations on Machiavelli's Discourses* (1530) (Guicciardini in *The sweetness of power: Machiavelli's discourses and Guicciardini's considerations*, Northern Illinois University Press, 2002, hereafter C) (Emendations to the translation are based on Guicciardini [Considerazioni intorno ai discorsi del Machiavelli. In Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, Einaudi, 1997]). As a prominent Florentine *ottimato* and a dutiful servant of Medici princes, Guicciardini might be fully expected to resist or refute Machiavelli's frequent endorsements of the moral, cognitive, and even pragmatic superiority of peoples over nobilities and princes. Additionally, Guicciardini's anti-popular orientation may have been inflamed at the time that he wrote the *Considerations* since he considered himself to be the potential victim of a vindictive, newly restored *governo popolare* in Florence. Aristocratic prejudices—inherent or circumstantial—aside, I hope to highlight the following: The manner in which Guicciardini disagrees with Machiavelli on class politics, republican institutions, and types of tyranny is just as illuminating as the positions he takes and the reasons he provides for doing so.

**Keywords** Republicanism · Democracy · Liberty · Class politics · Guicciardini · Machiavelli

## 1 Natural Goodness/Susceptibility to Evil

Machiavelli famously endorses a Roman model of republican politics in the *Discourses* (Machiavelli, 1997, hereafter D; see also Machiavelli, 1995, hereafter P); one in which the former secretary attributes Rome's military virtue to the civic empowerment of the Roman plebs, praises the plebeian tribunate, and recommends

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popularly judged trials of prominent citizens accused of political crimes. In his treatment of Machiavelli's endorsement of a democratized Roman Republic, Guicciardini remains noticeably silent on the fundamental premise undergirding Machiavelli's recommendations. He ignores Machiavelli's theory of the "humors," the conflicting appetites of the nobles and the common people for, respectively, oppression, and security within the politics of "all" cities and republics (D, I4–5; P, 9). Instead, in his considerations on the *Discourses'* early chapters (C, 381–400), Guicciardini brings *his own* political theory of human nature to bear on issues of social class and republican institutions. Guicciardini had already expressed and would continue to expound this view of human nature repeatedly and virtually verbatim throughout all of his political writings. It is perhaps best typified by this statement from Guicciardini's *Ricordi*:

All men are by nature inclined towards good rather than evil. Nor is there anyone who would not rather do good than evil, unless other factors induce him to the contrary. But human nature is so fragile, and temptations are so many, that men let themselves be easily deviated from the good. For that reason, wise legislators invented rewards and punishments, which amount to nothing more than using hope and fear to keep men firm in their natural inclination.

If there is someone naturally more inclined toward evil than good, you may surely say that he is not a man but a beast or a monster, for he is lacking in that inclination which is natural to all men. (C, 134–135)

This declaration on human nature and its implication for politics features two qualities that, depending on one's religious and/or analytic perspective, may be considered admirable: Firstly, it is orthodoxly Christian, fully conforming to the views of, for instance, St. Thomas and Dante; and, secondly, it is infinitely flexible—it makes natural human goodness compatible with infinite acts of reprehensible evil on the part of weak, wayward human beings. Whatever its merits, Guicciardini, in the *Considerations*, marshals this view of universal human goodness/evil in the service of a fairly local if deeply intense intellectual battle with his recently deceased "frenemy," Machiavelli. Indeed, I suggest that Guicciardini, who certainly comes to the *Considerations* with prior knowledge of Machiavelli's decided preference for *governo largo* over *governo stretto*, and his accompanying faith in the *popolo* and distrust of *ottimati*, deftly introduces his "natural goodness / susceptibility to evil" theory (in his remarks on D, I.3), in order to entirely avoid Machiavelli's expounding of his theory of the aristocratic and popular humors (in D, I.4–5).

Machiavelli remarks in D I.3 that those who establish republics always do so with the assumption that all men are evil—however, he does so only provisionally. Machiavelli subsequently qualifies this claim through his more differentiated theory of the two humors. One must suppose that all men are evil, Machiavelli certainly declares in both *The Prince* and the *Discourses*; but in both those works he also presents as fact, and not as mere assumption, that some men, or groupings of men, are more evil than others. Between the *grandi* and the *popolo*, the two conflicting parts that constitute all polities or republics, the former are driven primarily by the humor to oppress the people, while the latter are driven by the "more decent" humor to avoid oppression by the *grandi* (P, 9; D, I.4–5).