

Summary

Machiavelli between Republicanism and Democracy **Milan Znoj and Jan Bíba et al.**

This monograph is the result of the collective effort of an international team of researchers. The essays contained herein all share the same topics – Niccolò Machiavelli and the republican impulse in contemporary political thought associated with his name. Our book follows in the footsteps of discussions regarding the extent to which Western political thought is tied to classical republicanism, as well as the depth of the loss represented by our having forgotten it. For the most part, this discussion took the shape of a kind of double debate between neo-republicans on the one hand and liberals and communitarianists on the other. Although this discussion is still ongoing, the contributions (a revision of the concept of negative liberty, the rehabilitation of the concept of civic virtue, and the non-chauvinist expression of patriotism) made by the neo-republicans – as represented primarily by authors loosely associated under the Cambridge School (Skinner, Pocock, Viroli, Pettit and others) – cannot be disputed.

Be that as it may, this book focuses on a different round of debates regarding republicanism's significance for contemporary liberal democracies, which was begun by John P. McCormick. McCormick's critical contributions are painful for neo-republicans to read, and this for two reasons. First of all, he reinterprets Machiavelli (a person much admired by the members of the Cambridge School) as a democrat and decisive critic of republicanism, and secondly he offers a different point of view on republicanism as a whole, which is in his view reduced to a conflict among elites that effectively excludes the common man. In this view, republicanism is not the cure that the members of the Cambridge School had hoped for, but a symptom of the ills

of contemporary democracy. For this reason, we have chosen to title our book *Machiavelli between Republicanism and Democracy*.

The book contains Czech translations of representative contributions to this discussion (i.e., the chapters by Quentin Skinner and John P. McCormick), as well as new essays written especially for this monograph, whose authors have decided to take a critical look at the meaning of republicanism and Machiavelli within contemporary political theory. The book is divided into three parts: the first focuses on the ideological sources of republicanism and their contributions to contemporary debate; the second part looks at various interpretations of Machiavelli's populist republicanism, including their pitfalls; and the final part is devoted to the unjustly neglected subject of republicanism within the theory of international relations.

The book opens with Milan Znoj's essay "Republicanism between Negative Liberalism and Democratic Populism", which provides an overview of what is at stake in revival of Machiavellian republicanism while outlining the contours of the aforementioned discussion. Its starting point is the debate surrounding the concept of negative liberty. He shows how communitarian and republican critics are troubled by the fact that it does not allow for a consideration of social and political conditions of personal freedom, because liberal indifference to these conditions offers a distorted view as to how easily liberty can be applied to different cultures. No matter whether it is spread by the capitalist market or by public law, we always end up being surprised by the unexpected social impacts of this universalization of liberal rights. For its part, republican critique of negative liberty is focused on the political circumstances of individual liberty, meaning that republicans view liberty in relation to the political community. In Machiavellian republicanism freedom is understood as non-domination – in other words, it is not reduced to the liberal concept of freedom from interference by other people, since political cooperation among people forms a precondition for individual liberty. Neither, however, can it be understood as positive liberty, because republican liberty has an instrumental value, and includes only an attempt at protecting individual liberty against the arbitrary power of others, i.e., it is neither a value in itself nor does it attempt to raise human existence to new

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heights. And Machiavelli's thinking is of central importance in this regard. His interpretation of the Roman model emphasizes that liberty without domination comes about in a regime capable of balancing out the political rivalry between a people that tends to resist domination and elites that are incapable of relinquishing their thirst for domination. On this theoretical foundation, Znoj offers an interpretation of the ways in which the Cambridge School's form of republicanism differs from various versions of democratic populism available for the defense of a people against its political elites. These are analyzed in more detail in the chapters by John P. McCormick and Jan Biba.

The second chapter presents Quentin Skinner's "The Idea of Negative Liberty: Machiavellian and Modern Perspectives". Here, the reader will find the main thoughts of the Cambridge School presented in a clear and comprehensible manner. Skinner takes the liberal view and places it in contrast to the neo-roman tradition, which – as presented in a detailed analysis of Machiavelli's *Discourses* – is capable of understanding negative liberty not only as freedom from interference by other people, but addresses the concept of freedom in relation to citizens' public obligations. Skinner's argument is historical: whereas we (influenced by the liberalism that rules our political thinking) are incapable of associating the idea of liberty with the obligation to perform acts of public service, Renaissance republicanism and Machiavelli in particular prove that a coherent political theory of liberty suggesting such a connection is thinkable. Machiavelli asks what it means to live *vivere libero*. He finds his answer in the political system represented by the Roman model, in which *the grandi's ambition to rule* and *the people's desire not to be ruled* stand in opposition to one another. Ambitions as such are damaging to freedom because they are associated with a desire to dominate and to impose one's will onto others. Both nobles (*grandi*) of all kinds as well as the people can seize power. Skinner shows that freedom is threatened by internal as well as external ambitions. Internal ambitions are represented in particular by the *grandi* – in this case, the solution is the Roman model, which is capable of reigning in the *grandi's* ambitions and redirecting them towards the common good. External ambitions may be international in nature: there are always plenty of powers desiring to rule over a republic. In

this case, the solution is an imperial republic that gives republican citizenship a military character while at the same time redirecting the ambitions of the *grandi* towards republican values.

The next chapter, John McCormick's "Machiavelli against Republicanism. On the Cambridge School's 'Guicciardinian Moments'", further develops the motif of democracy found in Machiavelli's republicanism. For his part, McCormick takes a critical view of the Cambridge School's interpretation of the Roman model and the imperial republic. He believes that, in this view, republicanism resembles contemporary theories of an elitist and minimalist democracy that limits government of the people to free competition among political elites – meaning that it is actually a representative democracy in which the people are excluded from government. According to McCormick, the Cambridge School continues to think in terms of balance of political power while underestimating economic and social power. McCormick, on the other hand, emphasizes that Machiavelli considered the possibility of the people engaging in a fierce confrontation with the ruling elites in order to resist their thirst for social as well as political domination. For this reason he emphasizes tools for the popular control of elites, such as tribunes and public accusations, that indisputably go beyond our ideas of representative democracy but that according to McCormick ensure the people's real participation in power. When it comes to Machiavelli's republicanism, McCormick appreciates the fact that, instead of vague considerations for participation, he proposes practical ways for how regular people can use institutionalized conflict in order to force elites of all kinds to be responsible and responsive towards them. In McCormick's opinion, the Cambridge School artificially likens Machiavelli's republicanism to conventional practices of representative democracy. For this reason, McCormick claims that republicanism as understood by the Cambridge School is closer to Guicciardini than Machiavelli.

Jan Biba follows up on McCormick's critique of the Cambridge School's republicanism in "The Venetian Myth of Liberal Democracy: Guicciardini and the Birth of Democratic Elitism". Biba's main thesis is that there exists a kinship between elitist republicanism and "democratic elitism." Referring to the points of reference used by elitist

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and populist republicans regarding the best system for Florence in the early 16th century, he argues that elite republicanism and democratic elitism share a common “Venetian myth” (the elitists looked to Venice, the populists to Rome). The essence of this myth is the idea that freedom and stability – two key political values – are essentially incompatible, and that the only way of reconciling them is by limiting the regular population’s opportunities for participating in politics. Biba – who here follows in the footsteps of C. B. Macpherson’s critique of democratic elitism – examines and compares the theories of Francesco Guicciardini and Joseph Schumpeter, whom he considers the main theoreticians of these two philosophies. An important factor in Biba’s argumentation is his identification of a deeper similarity between the two, which can be seen in the two theoreticians’ attitude to previous democratic theories: Guicciardini rejected civic humanism, while Schumpeter rejected the “classical doctrine” of democracy. According to Biba, this similarity is no coincidence; it testifies to a strange transformation of both theoreticians’ political language. The essence of this transformation rests in the gradual infiltration of argumentation strategies that have more to do with economics than with politics and the replacement of arguments that appeal to civic virtues with arguments related to calculation, effectiveness, and efficiency.

The book’s second half takes a more detailed look at the democratic interpretation of Machiavelli’s republicanism, including related points of dispute. In “The Oppressive Appetite of Young Grandi and the Case for Popular Republics” John P. McCormick offers a detailed analysis of the first six chapters of Machiavelli’s main republican work, *Discourses*, and suggests that it be read from a democratic standpoint with a view towards populism, which understands politics in terms of conflict. McCormick interprets the *Discourses* from the perspective of the young *grandi* to whom it was dedicated. Machiavelli claims to want to convince these young *grandi* that they should adopt the Roman model, i.e., that they should limit their ambitions and allow the people to participate in government. According to McCormick, Machiavelli takes quite a calculating approach to this objective: first he uncompromisingly tells the *grandi* that it is in their nature to oppress and that they desire only to keep the people down. At the same

time, however, he reminds them of the greatness and fame of Rome, and suggests that they give preference to Roman greatness before the aristocratic rigidity of Sparta or the limited aristocratism of Venice. In exchange, however, they will have to allow the people to participate in government. Only in this way will the people adopt the idea of a republic as their own and be willing to engage in the territorial expansion in order to satisfy the ambitions of the *grandi*. In conclusion, McCormick reveals that he feels a closer affinity not to the neo-roman tradition of republicanism but to the neo-Athenian interpretation of democracy – except that his conception of democracy is not participatory, but is based on the conflict-laden nature of politics. McCormick believes that Machiavelli’s imperial republic, which is supported by the *grandi*’s ambition to conquer, is not an adequate democratic solution to Machiavelli’s problem. This is because Athens is an example of a regime that entrusted the defense of liberty entirely into the hands of the people. As McCormick emphasizes, Athens was a populist republic that matched Rome in greatness while managing to avoid the disadvantages of external expansion.

In “Machiavelli’s Populist Republicanism and the Perversion of Democracy”, Jan Biba offers another perspective on Machiavelli’s populist republicanism. While McCormick understands Machiavelli’s populism primarily through his emphasis on citizen participation, Biba looks to the work of Margaret Canovan in an attempt at conceiving of Machiavelli’s populism as a political style. Biba’s argumentation is based on the claim that this form of populism is not encumbered by the unconscious notion of the people’s perversion found in the main schools of contemporary democratic theory that calls into doubt the people’s intelligence and capacity for participating in democracy. In other words, Biba’s Machiavelli is a kind of organic intellectual who helps to articulate the people’s political program, which is a program based on non-domination. In the voices of the excluded and rejected, this populist Machiavelli uncovers a specific, fully-fledged political logic. In the second part of his essay, Biba supports his interpretation by demonstrating the difficult birth of the ideals of non-domination and equality using Machiavelli’s interpretation of the revolution of Florence’s urban poor, the “Revolt of the Ciompi”.

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The next author also takes a look at the relationships between the people and political elites within a republican system. In “Lies in Politics, and Machiavelli’s Romantic Republicanism”, Evžen Martínek analyses the phenomenon of lies within politics, which he understands within the broader sense not only as utterances by political leaders that are consciously limited to the presentation of untruths and various ways of manipulating the facts, but also include other forms of speech such as public slander or the failure to observe political agreements and promises. Martínek analyses Machiavelli’s opinions on this issue and uncovers Machiavelli’s specific view of republican leadership. As opposed to Bība, according to whom a democratic leader articulates the will of the people, in Martínek’s version of romantic republicanism we learn more about the dilemmas faced by political leaders when, guided by republican values, they are faced with the random nature of the outside world and must contend with the fallibility of the people, who in this regard remain unpredictable.

In “Machiavelli and the Constraining of Conflict”, Juraj Laššuth returns to the main topic of Machiavellian republicanism: the regulation of political conflicts so that, instead of posing a threat, they might be beneficial to the republic. Here, Machiavelli is presented primarily as a theorist and defender of the imperial republic, whose model is ancient Rome. Laššuth points out that social conflict need not always be a pre-condition for liberty and a source of strength as it was in Rome, but that it may also lead to weakness and lack of freedom as in Florence. Laššuth’s interpretation focuses on Machiavelli’s main recommendations for preventing conflict within a town from becoming destructive. One by one, he analyses the “instruments” that Machiavelli mentions in this regard: religion, public accusation, the office of dictator, and an organized military. The text pays special attention to the question of civil religion as discussed by other republican philosophers such as Rousseau and the young Hegel. Laššuth reaches the conclusion that Machiavelli’s question as to how to keep social conflict from destroying the state and eliminating liberty continues to be an important one, but that Machiavelli’s solutions are not very convincing.

The third part of our book explores the possibilities of applying Machiavellian republicanism within the field of international rela-

tions. The imperial republic discussed by McCormick and Lašuth is thus not republicanism's final word, since the republican defense of non-domination is not very tolerant of any unilateralism, no matter whether imperial or class-based. The texts in this part of the book interpret the republican concept of non-domination within the international context. It is no surprise that, even in this area, we encounter the aforementioned democratic impulse from the discussion of Machiavellian republicanism.

In "A World State against the Republic? Dante, Machiavelli, and Wendt", Ondřej Slačálek focuses explicitly on the subject of the state as a monopoly for political coercion. He confronts Machiavellian republicanism with the concepts of the world state: First in the form of Dante Alighieri, who considered the unification of Christians within a renewed Roman empire; and then in the form of Alexander Wendt, who discusses the inevitability of a world state within the contemporary context of impending nuclear war – although this situation differs from Machiavelli's era, when it was possible to think within the spirit of imperialist republicanism. The conclusions of this reconstructed confrontation highlight problematic aspects of the world state among both authors, which can be summarized by the question: What happens when the political community steps forwards with a call for universal government, ceases to be a local power, and loses its ties to civic virtue? Nevertheless, like all three authors' political projects, even this question can be challenged by pointing to their foundation within a masculine political imagination, which Slačálek manages to do convincingly.

In "The Lost Treasure of American Federalism", Pavel Barša expands upon Daniel Deudney's thesis that the thoughts and actions of the Founding Fathers of the American republic reveal a republicanism that is different from Machiavelli's. Deudney's reconstruction of this school of thought shares with Skinner's interpretation the fact that it does not limit the republican view of liberty by placing it in opposition to the liberal concept of "negative liberty". At the same time, however, Deudney points out that Skinner's reconstruction of republicanism fails to recognize the symmetric significance that ancient and modern republicans assigned to the questions of domestic and

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international relations by considering them to be two sides of one indivisible issue. By addressing these two questions at the same time, the founders of the American Union could hold up federalist republicanism as an alternative to Machiavelli's imperialist republicanism. As Barša documents by analyzing Hannah Arendt's description of the American Revolution (in *On Revolution*), federalism can be *concurrently* understood as a principle of domestic as well as international relations. As such, it represents a radical alternative to the principle of the royal or national sovereignty that acted as a link between internal and external politics within the Westphalian system.

In the final chapter, "Globalization and the Question of Transnational Elites", Joseph Lewandowski returns to our book's democratic question, this time within an international context: Under these conditions, how can the people control the political elites that rule them? This is a particularly pressing issue in the field of international relations, since most of the popular institutions envisioned by Machiavelli as checks on the power of elites do not apply here. As Lewandowski shows on the basis of a study by Leslie Sklair, the situation is further complicated by the fact that the processes of globalization that the world is currently experiencing have given rise to a transnational, socially unbound capitalist class, while the people - in particular marginalized and excluded groups - are socially bound in time and space in a completely new manner. According to Lewandowski, the emerging imbalance of power associated with an all-pervading lack of trust between elites and the people represents an immense threat to contemporary democracy. He then analyses in detail the two main democratic proposals for facing this danger: the neo-Kantian model of public deliberation and the Machiavellian model of unbridled populism. Nevertheless, in both cases Lewandowski fails to disperse the original fears regarding the outlook for democracy within today's globalized world.