

English republicanism and neo-republicanism: a critical approach

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The intention is to present:

- I. Some results of my previous research on English republicanism
- II. The initial hypothesis of my current research on neo-republicanism

I. English Republicanism

- Studies on English republicanism have taken an important place in the republican revival of the last decades. This revival in political theory aims to present republicanism as a valuable alternative to the different forms of liberalism

I. English Republicanism

John Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: florentine political thought and the atlantic republican tradition* (1975)

- English republicanism as an expression of Machiavelli's ideas

Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before liberalism* (1998)

Jonathan Scott, *Commonwealth Principles: Republican Writing of the English Revolution* (2004)

Vickie Sullivan, *Machiavelli, Hobbes, and the Formation of a Liberal Republicanism* (2004)

I. English Republicanism

Among the products of my research:

- *Republicanism Inglês: uma teoria da liberdade* (2015)
- *Ensaio sobre o Republicanismo Inglês* (2017)
- *Republicanism Inglês: Sidney e a Semântica da Liberdade* (2018)
- The acceptance of Machiavelli's republicanism by 17th century British authors was only partial, limited to its statements and without its assumptions

I. English Republicanism

A key example: the relationship between liberty and civil conflicts

For Machiavelli:

- the political body is intrinsically divided, marked by the opposition of asymmetrical desires
- the antagonism of these desires results in civil conflicts that are inexorable and insurmountable
- it is necessary to provide institutional mechanisms and public spaces within which these conflicts can play out

I. English Republicanism

- the republic is the most appropriate political regime because it has a dynamic structure capable of expressing them
- The best example was the ancient Republic of Rome

While classical republicanism asserted that, in order to enjoy civil liberty, it was necessary to establish harmony and unity in the political body, Machiavelli emphasized the need for learning how to preserve liberty within conflicts

I. English Republicanism

- The 17th century British republicans – **John Milton** (1608-74), **Marchamont Nedham** (1620-78), **James Harrington** (1611-77), **Algernon Sidney** (1623-83) – did not take this fundamental Machiavellian idea
- They completely rejected Machiavelli's positive view of the outcomes of civil conflicts

I. English Republicanism

- While these British authors used Machiavelli's arguments to praise the Commonwealth (1649-60), they didn't embrace fundamental principles of his republicanism
- There was only a partial and selective adoption of Machiavellian ideas
- English republicanism was more a synthesis of classical republicanism with Common law principles in a modern political language of interests than the expression of Machiavelli's republicanism

I. English Republicanism

The relevance of the result of my research

The most renowned exponents of the so-called neo-republicanism – **Quentin Skinner** and **Philip Pettit** – took English republicanism as a main reference to deal with contemporary political problems

Thus, to argue that English republicanism was only a very particular expression of republican thought draws attention to the limits of neo-republicanism itself

II. Neo-republicanism

Skinner and Pettit have presented the republican conception of liberty as an option to overcome the dichotomy between negative and positive liberty

Isaiah Berlin's essay "Two concepts of liberty"
(1958)

- negative liberty as the absence of obstacles or constraints in the exercise of the will
- positive liberty as the autonomy and self-realization

II. Neo-republicanism

The debate between liberals and communitarians

- Communitarians: an individual is free only if his choices and actions express his true and authentic being that is constituted by the values and goals of his community. Civil liberty depends on political participation and the fulfilment of civic duties
- Liberals: an individual is free if he does not suffer unjustifiable intervention or coercion. Civil liberty depends on non-interference

II. Neo-republicanism

Skinner's essays:

“The Paradoxes of Political Liberty” (1984)

“The republican ideal of political liberty” (1990)

“A Third Concept of Liberty” (2002)

“Freedom as the Absence of Arbitrary Power” (2008)

- positive liberty is inappropriate
- negative liberty is too restrictive

There is a third approach of liberty, rooted in republican tradition, which respect value pluralism and embrace civic virtue

II. Neo-republicanism

In the republican tradition

- civic participation is a means for citizens to pursue their chosen ends
- citizens need to live in a Free State to be free
- a Free State depends on the civic virtue of its citizens
- as civic virtue is not natural, legal constraint is necessary to force citizens to fulfil their civic duties
- civil liberty depends on civic virtue and law

II. Neo-republicanism

- an individual subject to an arbitrary power is not a free person, even though he does not suffer actual interference in his choices and actions
- he may be a free person even with interferences, as long as he gives his permission and they benefit him
- in the republican thought, liberty is the absence of arbitrary interference

II. Neo-republicanism

Pettit's essays:

“The Freedom of the City: a republican ideal” (1989)

“Negative Liberty, Liberal and Republican (1993)

“Freedom as Antipower” (1996)

“Republican Liberty and its Constitutional Significance” (2000)

“Republican Liberty: Three Axioms, Four Theorems”. (2008)

Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government (1997)

II. Neo-republicanism

In his first essays, following Skinner's historical interpretation, Pettit argues that the Berlin dichotomy overlooks two versions of negative liberty

Liberal version:

- non-interference is enough
- emphasizes the degree of non-interference

Republican version:

- institutional protections are necessary against arbitrary intervention
- the kind of intervention

II. Neo-republicanism

In his later works, republican conception as a third ideal: the absence of domination

- different from positive liberty: non-domination does not imply or even guarantee self-determination
- distinct from negative liberty:
 - different affronts to liberty
 - domination without interference
 - interference without domination
 - non-interference depends on contingency, while non-domination avoids this condition and ensures resilient franchise

II. Neo-republicanism

Pettit's project was well received by some scholars: **Viroli, Maynor, Bellamy, Lovett, Laborde**

It was criticized by others who have challenged the distinction between liberal and republican conceptions

- similar in purpose and effect: **Larmore, Rogers, Ratnapala, Langlois, Ghosh, Vinx, Lang**
- liberal conception accommodates not only the interference, but also the domination: **Carter, Goodin, Kramer, Bruin, Shnayderman**
- limits, vagueness and indeterminacy of the notion of non-domination: **Maddox, Nadeau, McMahon, Harbour**

II. Neo-republicanism

Objections also came from the republican scholars

- secondary and limited use of the language of rights: **Hamel, Sptiz, Bourdeau**
- his closeness to the liberal perspective: **Goldsmith, Arnott, Weithman, Markell, Krause, Thompson**

II. Neo-republicanism

Hypothesis:

- The definition of liberty as non-domination does not correspond to the meaning given by the republican tradition. It is coming from a partial and problematic historical interpretation of republican thought
- Neo-republicanism expresses only the perspective of English republicanism, distancing itself from important sources of modern republicanism such as the political thought of Machiavelli and Rousseau.

THANK YOU

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