

THE PROTEAN NATURE OF THE REPUBLICAN FREEDOM AND THE PROBLEM OF ITS HISTORICAL ENDURANCE

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First of all I would like to confess that my attitude to the problem of consistency of republican tradition is basically critical, but by no means skeptical. Regarding myself as an intellectual historian I experienced a great admiration when in 2004 for the first time I came across Russian translation of the book *Liberty before Liberalism*¹ by Quentin Skinner and later on read an impressive public lecture *What is the Republican Tradition?*² delivered by Oleg Kharkhordin in Moscow in 2007. I suppose it would be relevant to say that for the most Russian scholars (those who work at the European University at Saint-Petersburg enjoy the exceptional position) the discovery of the tradition of political thought and civic life, which is the rival of liberalism and has apparently nothing to do with Marxism, remains a kind of fascinating novelty that may produce a contradictory effect. It provides great inspiration for the newcomers, yet prevents them from close inspection of the conditions of possibility of their sincere fascination at the same time. To combine this fascination with the critical evaluation of its cause is a very difficult task. But it is exactly what I would like to undertake in my paper. Below I present a synopsis of my argument, which I would like to present in more detail at our Seminar.

1. During the last four decades, republicanism earned a reputation of the influential political theory, whose consistency is determined by the complex relationship to liberalism. Sometimes this relationship is regarded in terms of an opposition; sometimes it is seen as a more friendly and even complementary. But insofar as the reason for questioning their compatibility presupposes the absolute dominance of liberal ideology in the modern world, republicanism has to maintain its theoretical claim mainly with the help of history. Republicanism ought to be perceived as the *historical* alternative to liberalism. And by its very definition, such an alternative is factually lost, although its significance for our understanding of present situation might be seen as very urgent. That is why the questions of correct genealogy of the republican tradition as well as the careful search for the reasons why

¹ Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

² <http://polit.ru/article/2007/12/27/respublica/>

and how it turned out that it had been replaced by liberalism, and to what extent this replacement was inevitable, are of greatest concern for everyone who is not indifferent to the very idea of historical alternative of the kind.

2. Talking about circumstances that allow us to reconstruct the genealogy of the republican tradition, I would like to pay attention to the two conditions, which are of greatest importance. The first one is the assumption of the ancient roots of this tradition. These roots could be sought and found in classical Athens (according to J.G.A. Pocock) or in Rome of the late republican period (according to Q. Skinner). Anyway they speak not so much about the length of the tradition as about its difference from modern times. These roots are summoned up to activate everything that is responsible for the idea of otherness of ancient Greek or Roman mode of life in comparison with our own. The second assumption, (which is equally necessary for the genealogy of this tradition) has to do with those features of modernity, which are regarded indispensable and regrettable at the same time. The emergence of these features and their proliferation (like the primacy of private wealth over the good of commonwealth according to J.G.A. Pocock or the contractarian political thought and the idea of individual rights according to Q. Skinner) signal the crisis of this tradition and its subsequent downfall. Such a description of these implicit conditions is of course very formal, but I think it is pertinent to such different manners of reconstruction of the republican tradition, which we can find in the works of John Pocock, Quentin Skinner (to name the most distinguished historians of the Cambridge school) and even in the works of Paul Rahe³, their staunch opponent (with the clarification that being the follower of Leo Strauss he refuses to build the integral republican tradition, but prefers to deal with different models of republicanism, ancient and modern, giving emphasis to their incommensurability).

The conception of freedom (or liberty) that is specific for the republican tradition plays a decisive role for justification its coherence and endurance through time. All authors, who were concerned with the task of conceptualizing the republican freedom, relied on the famous distinction between positive and negative concepts of liberty made by Isaiah Berlin⁴. Until Skinner proposed his conceptualization – and this fact explains the exceptional place that his works take in this context – the republican freedom was conceived as definitely positive, while the opposing liberal freedom seemed to be the exemplary form of negative liberty. In a

³ Paul A. Rahe, 'Quentin Skinner's "Third Way",' *The Review of Politics*, 62 (2000): 395-398; Paul A. Rahe, 'Situating Machiavelli,' in *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 270-308; Paul A. Rahe, 'Antiquity Surpassed: The Repudiation of Classical Republicanism', in *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society 1649-1776*, ed. by David Wootton (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 233-69.

⁴ Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty,' in Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 166-217. I allow myself not to go into detail of the difference between these well-known concepts.

series of his essays (*The Idea of Negative Liberty: Philosophical and Historical Perspectives* (1984), *The Paradoxes of Political Liberty* (1986), and *The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty* (1990))⁵, Skinner contested the predominantly liberal character of negative liberty and insisted on the existence of another form of negative liberty, namely republican or neo-Roman form. Thus in the interpretation of Skinner, the republican freedom turned out to be opposed to its positive or so called “neo-Athenian” (communitarian, “neo-Aristotelian”) conception that had been previously elaborated by Pocock⁶ on the one hand, and to the “ordinary” liberal freedom, conceived as the absence of interference by other persons on the other hand. And while the distancing from the communitarian version of the republican freedom was achieved mainly by means of historical investigation (i.e. by means of genealogy, which allowed to trace the development of the concept of this freedom from such Roman authors as Sallust, Cicero, Titus Livius, through the Italian Humanists of the Renaissance and Machiavelli to English republicans of the XVII century), the difference from the conception of liberal freedom was established substantially by means of philosophical analysis. Having mentioned this analysis, I refer to the rapprochement Quentin Skinner with Philip Pettit’s philosophy of republicanism⁷. Both of them (slightly differently) came to an idea of “the third concept of liberty”⁸, which is neo-Roman by its historical origin and defined as “non-dependence” (by Skinner) or “non-dominance” (by Pettit) by its content. In other words, historically the republican freedom proved to be negative, but conceptually it had increasingly to refer to positive concept as well, even though this reference did not lead to its recognition as positive, but was necessary just for avoiding its association with the liberal negative pole.

3. Now I would like to name some recent historical studies that problematize two assumptions, which I mentioned above as necessary for the reconstruction of the republican tradition. Firstly as to the assumption, which presupposes that the ancient mode of political and social life is radically different from that of modern times. It is the assumption that generates the idea of two opposite concepts of liberty, positive (ancient) and negative

⁵ Quentin Skinner, ‘The Idea of Negative Liberty: Philosophical and Historical Perspectives’, in R. Rorty et al., *Philosophy in History* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 193–221; Quentin Skinner, ‘The Paradoxes of Political Liberty’, in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* 7 (1986), pp. 225–50; Quentin Skinner, ‘The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty’, in Bock et al., *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 293–309.

⁶ John G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). John G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). See especially pp. 39–41.

⁷ Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford : Clarendon Press ; New York : Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁸ See Quentin Skinner, ‘A Third Concept of Liberty’. *Proceedings of the British Academy* 117 (2002), pp. 237–268. In his *Republicanism* Pettit also states that the Republican liberty has negative and positive elements and can be conceptualized as an “intermediate possibility,” as “third alternative that is intermediate between the ideals of non-interference and self-mastery”. See Pettit, *Republicanism*, 51, 21, 27.

(modern). In this connection I would like to refer to the works by Kurt A. Raaflaub⁹, which create an opportunity for another view on Greek democracy that allows us to dissociate it from the concept of positive liberty and promotes the idea that personal independence and autonomy were as much valuable political principles for the ancient Greeks as they were for the republican Romans. Relying on Raaflaub's works, Geoff Kennedy¹⁰ tries to overcome the facile claim that the Athenian tradition is incompatible with modernity in general and with the republican "neo-Roman" tradition in particular. Graham Maddox in his essay on the problem of neo-Roman liberty also contends that "there is reason to believe that there was a stronger culture of rights in Athens than is usually supposed by the followers of Fustel and Constant"¹¹.

Secondly with regard to the assumption that the emergence of liberalism in early modernity marks the end of republicanism and that these doctrines exclude each other by their very nature, one should take into account the work by Andreas Kalyvas and Ira Katznelson¹², where contrary to Skinner they state that "modern liberalism was deeply influenced by republicanism. As republican philosophers sought to renovate the ancient republic for contemporary conditions, and as they struggled to modernize it, they invented ideas and institutions that transformed classical republicanism into what we know as liberalism". The complementarity of republican and liberal thought also works as a basic presupposition in the study conducted by Vickie B. Sullivan¹³.

Finally I would like to conclude my proposal with the assertion that, in my opinion, the idea of distinctiveness of republican freedom is based on the fuzzy concept of positive liberty, which is becoming very contestable from the historical point of view (let alone its analytical fragility proved long ago by Gerald McCallum¹⁴). Without calling into question the political critique of modernity that has been made under the aegis of republicanism, nay, wholly sharing this critique, I am inclined to agree with Eric Nelson¹⁵ who insists on the sufficiency of negative concept of liberty for understanding the republican mode of thinking. I

⁹ Kurt Raaflaub, *The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Kurt A. Raaflaub and Robert W. Wallace, 'People's Power and Egalitarian Trends in Archaic Greece,' in Kurt A. Raaflaub, Josiah Ober and Robert W. Wallace, eds., *Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

¹⁰ See Geoff Kennedy, 'Senatus Populusque Romanus against the Demos: Roman Republicanism versus Athenian Democracy' http://www.psa.ac.uk/journals/pdf/5/2012/797_419.pdf. This paper has been delivered at the conference *Athenian Legacies: Debates on European Citizenship*. Athens, Greece, 2012.

¹¹ Graham Maddox, 'The limits of neo-Roman liberty', *History of Political Thought* 23 (2002): 418-431, at p. 427.

¹² Andreas Kalyvas and Ira Katznelson, *Liberal beginnings: Making a Republic for the Moderns* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.10.

¹³ Vickie B. Sullivan, *Machiavelli, Hobbes, and the Formation of a Liberal Republicanism in England* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁴ Gerald C. McCallum Jr., 'Negative and Positive Freedom', *Philosophical Review* 76 (1967): 312-34.

¹⁵ Eric Nelson, 'Liberty: One Concept Too Many?', *Political Theory*, 33 (2005): 58-78.

agree also with Melvin L. Rogers'¹⁶ idea that we should not try to find the sharp difference between liberals and republicans along the lines of freedom. But where and how should we look for this difference? Should not we say that contemporary historical studies on republican tradition can provide us mainly with so called "instrumental"¹⁷ critique of liberalism? Or quite to the contrary, cannot we say that the fusion of boundaries between republican and liberal concepts of liberty may enrich our vision of the political life up to the point where civic virtues and individual rights and freedoms become completely inseparable? So far I leave this questions without answer hoping for getting a better understanding to answer them in a course of our Seminar.

¹⁶ Melvin L. Rogers, 'Republican confusion and liberal clarification', *Philosophy Social Criticism* 34 (2008): 799–824.

¹⁷ The notion 'instrumental republicanism' was coined by Alan Patten. See Alan Patten, 'The Republican Critique of Liberalism', *British Journal of Political Science* 26 (1996), pp. 25–44, at p. 26.