Beyond Liberalism? Political Theories of Republicanism and Democracy

Organized by Rainer Bauböck and Matthew Hoye

Tuesday 11:00 – 13:00, Seminar room 3, Badia Fiesolana

Register online
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Today, when we think of citizenship, we think about individualism, rights, freedom as non-interference, and the state as the neutral protector of individual autonomy. That is, we think about citizenship through the prism of contemporary liberalism. These ideas were not always so widely accepted. Liberalism was once the language of radicals fighting for emancipation against entrenched power and deep-rooted philosophical and ideological systems. The genealogy of liberalism tracks a series of intellectual disputes, political crises, internal criticism, conceptual appropriations, rhetorical intensifications, problem solving, and institutional innovations. It was these battles—philosophical and political—that motivated liberalism.

Classical liberalism—say, from 1651 to 1848—did not only fight against political and religious absolutism but also against the much older republican and democratic traditions. Those latter battles were rather less pitched, and primarily about ethical priorities, the nature of freedom, social and political institutions, traditions, and ideologies. That history was one of productive mutual appropriation, inspired criticism, and ultimately of revolution and counter-revolution. The modern history of liberalism—say, from 1848 to 1989—was an existential battle between liberalism, communism, and fascism.

In the contemporary period—say, from 1989 onwards—liberalism is hegemonic. Proof of the hegemony of liberalism is evident in our seemingly acrimonious debates. These debates appear to be fought between advocates of deeply antithetical positions, but on closer analysis they often seem to be about rather small philosophical differences. This means that liberalism has become rather ecumenical, and many contemporary debates seem to unfold internally to political liberalism. These debates are interesting in an academic sense, but it is often not clear what their analytical, normative, or policy purchase is. In this sense, there is a sharp contrast between
classical and modern liberalism, both of which were motivated by deep intellectual and political engagements. They spoke clearly and persuasively to the crises of their day. Which brings us to the puzzle that this class sets out to address: liberalism may be hegemonic, but it no longer appears to motivate citizens for political action as strongly as it used to.

The point of this class is to think through the concept of citizenship again, with special emphasis on the republican and democratic traditions. That is, we will return to the founding debates and ask what was lost, what was gained, and what could be recovered.

There are at least three reasons why we should look outside of our contemporary liberal tradition in order to rethink citizenship more broadly. First, historically, citizenship was not originally a liberal construct. Liberal citizenship is presently a rather passive mode of politics. But this wasn’t always the case. Looking at the roots of the idea of citizenship outside of the constraints of modern liberal categories may tell us something about citizenship that we’ve forgotten. Second, analytically, many of the contemporary political crises are crises born of the contradictions and limitations of contemporary liberalism, and it is not apparent that they can be productively thought through by way of liberal categories alone. The democratic and republican alternatives—and the classical liberal alternatives—may afford analytical insights otherwise not available to contemporary liberalism. Third, normatively, it is possible that by excavating older theories of democracy and republicanism we could discover new ways of thinking through our present predicaments.

The class is organized as follows. Sessions 2-5 look at the shifting historical fortunes of democracy, republicanism, and liberalism by way of examining some of their signal theorists. These sessions are primarily meant to bring everyone up to speed on the canonical texts and to map out the conceptual contours of the pertinent debates. Sessions 6-10 will take up various conceptual and practical debates.

This is a seminar, so students must come prepared for every class. Discussions will be structured by these questions:

1. Who is the author?
2. What is the political and ideological context wherein the text was engaging?
3. What are the core claims? How are they logically related?
4. What sociological and philosophical assumptions are being made?
5. What is the critique of citizenship?
6. What does this mean?! If any part of the text is unclear, point to it in class. It is likely that if you don’t get it, none of us do. Come to class with questions. We’ll figure it out together.

This course is set up so as to facilitate participation by a diverse range of students with different interests and from different fields. We hope that you will incorporate your own studies into this class and we are very interested in having you contribute. There is room to modify or extend the readings. If your own research project overlaps with the topics listed in the syllabus, let us know and we will tweak a session to allow you (and the rest of us) to get the most out of it. If your topic could potentially overlap (topically, historically, methodologically) but presently doesn’t, let us know and we’ll find a way to incorporate your work.
Requirements:

Participants who take the seminar for credit are expected:

• to read all the texts marked as required reading. Generally, required readings will not exceed 150 pages per week

• to prepare a reaction paragraph (1-2 pages) on the readings for each week and send it to the research assistant by Tue 10 am

• to read all reaction paragraphs and engage actively in discussions in class

• to introduce one seminar topic to the class on the basis of additional readings

If you want to take the seminar for credit, you need to write a seminar paper of about 5000 words. Outlines of about 500 words must be sent until 5 December 2017. The full paper has to be submitted by 20 January 2018 to Monika.Rzemieniecka@eui.eu.

If you want to audit the seminar without full participation, you need to register and do the reading for the units that you want to attend.
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3 October: (1) Introduction

Each of the course instructors will give a short lecture that introduces the topic. We will then discuss course requirements and assign the task of introducing a class to participants taking the course for credit.
10 October: (2) Ancient Foundations: Contempt for democracy and elitist republicanism

The purpose of this session is to review the enduring claims made in some of the foundational texts in the tradition.

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


17 October: (3) Citizenship and Classical Liberalism

The evolution of ideas is never straightforward. Liberalism’s story is perhaps stranger than most. Despite all appearances, the founding text of liberalism is Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan*. This is strange for at least two reasons. First, Hobbes never made the claim himself. He was far more interested in undermining the democratic and republican traditions that preceded him and in establishing state power. Second, most liberals committed themselves to resisting Hobbes’s political philosophy. However, it is for these same reasons that *Leviathan* is the base stone of the tradition. Because even when attacking Hobbes, they implicitly assumed the general parameters of his thought. The purpose of this session is to trace some of the founding battles of liberalism.

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**Discussion topics:**

What happens to democracy under Hobbes’s watch? In some sense, he seems to be a radical democrat, as all legitimacy stems from the people no matter the regime type. Clearly, however “no matter the regime type” signals an essential neutering of democracy. What are Locke’s signal criticisms of Hobbes? Where does Wollstonecraft stand in the genealogy of liberalism, democracy, and republicanism? What is the problem of the tyranny of the majority in Mill? What is (are?) the theories of freedom in Mill? Explain Mill’s apparent endorsement of despotism. What is Bentham’s critique? And what is Utilitarianism?
24 October: (4) Republics, Democracies, and Revolutions

Plato was hostile towards democracy and Aristotle advocated a mixed regime because he was wary about the rule of the poor. For the Romans, the question of republican foundations was steeped in mythology and tradition, while day-to-day republican politics was a rather elite affair. Machiavelli put both radical democratic and elitist republican politics back on the agenda, but it would be left to the Dutch, English, American, and French revolutionaries to do the hard work of founding a new regime. We have seen how Hobbes responded to the first failed attempts at founding an English republic. We turn now to the two subsequent and successful revolutionary moments.

**Required Readings:**

Thomas Jefferson, *Political Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 42-4; 107-9; 225-6; 382-8; 593-8; 598-604; 606-9 [Madison to Jefferson].
31 October: (5) Contemporary Liberalism

The single most important work in contemporary liberal political philosophy is John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls resets the philosophical foundations of liberalism shifting it towards systemic and institutionalised conceptions of justice as fairness. In doing so, Rawls hoped to establish strong and universally acceptable foundations for the liberal tradition. Where liberalism had previously presupposed modes of republican and democratic legitimacy, Rawls allowed liberalism to stand autonomously, by showing how liberalism could produce its own foundational normative claims. Nozick stakes out the antithetical position starting from a rather ahistorical interpretation of Locke. In doing so, Nozick also exemplifies the extent to which the liberal tradition had unhitched itself from the democratic and republican traditions. It is at this juncture that the split between liberalism and libertarianism emerges.

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**

N.B. There is an endless secondary literature on these topics. However, participants would be better served by reading ahead and considering some of the applied liberal/libertarian critiques of migration ethics or global justice. That will give you a more practical understanding of these ideas.
7 November: (6) Freedom and Citizenship: Berlin, Arendt, Skinner and Pettit

There is no better example of the hegemony of liberalism than the widespread presupposition freedom means not being interfered with. The striking feature of this claim is how functionally anti-democratic and anti-republican it is. Democracies are vessels of collective action, republics are vessels of collective law-making, both necessitate interference in the lives of individuals. The point of this session is to critically evaluate the meaning of freedom.

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


**14 November: (7) The Paradox of Non-Domination: Republican institutions or radical democracy?**

The core neorepublican claim is that freedom is neither simply non-interference, nor self-mastery and self-perfection. Instead, freedom is a question of non-domination, and thus a function of institutions. Although neorepublicans don’t completely agree with Mill’s claim that the worst form of tyranny is the tyranny of the majority, they certainly are concerned with the problem. Their solution has been to set up institutional checks which track the will of the people but dissuade the direct or unmediated influence of the people on government. By contrast, radical democratic theorists claim that institutions are always a source of unfreedom and, conversely, that democracy is a mode of political surplus which overwhelms institutions. For them, democracy starts where institutions end. However, both neo-republicans and radical democrats claim that the theory of freedom which they are defending is freedom as non-domination.

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


21 November: (8) New Critiques of Privacy

The early-modern republicans emphasised the pragmatic core of republicanism. Today, neorepublicans assert that they are engaged in public political philosophy which overcomes the limitations of liberalism. Privacy offers a rather interesting test for neorepublicanism for various reasons. First, privacy is a quintessentially liberal phenomenon. It emerged in the 20th century as a topic of concern that was forged in the language of liberalism. Second, the privacy-invasive powers which define our contemporary privacy concerns are unlike the forms of domination which have informed republicanism. Indeed, republicans have usually been far more concerned with securing publicity than in securing privacy. Nevertheless, it appears as though the idea of non-domination should be a powerful analytical category for thinking about privacy. The question for this class is: how?

The readings for this class do not provide republican or democratic accounts of privacy. Instead, they are scattered texts which allow us to set up our discussions in class. Treat this as a synthetic class where everything we’ve read thus far will be brought to bear on the contemporary problem of privacy.

**Required Readings:**


28 November: (9) Global Justice without (Rawlsian) Banisters

The global justice debate today is palpably Rawlsian. Can the idea of global justice be approached by way of non-domination? Or, deliberative democracy? This is an appropriate topic because it is perhaps the question whereby liberalism is at its strongest. Can democratic or republican ideas address this crucial question by offering analytical or normative insights beyond those on offer in liberal theory? If democratic or republican ideas can contribute meaningfully to this debate, then it passes an important test. Beyond this general debate, there is a more specific one regarding who the agents of global justice are (or should be). This is also a question that the more general critiques of global justice must be able to answer.

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


5 December: (10) Citizenship, Denizenship and Alienage: Beyond liberal migration ethics?

Migration presents a test whether republicanism of democratic critiques can afford analytical and normative insights beyond mainstream liberalism. The test is not easy to pass since liberalism, for all its flaws, has provided a powerful language for thinking about migration.

**Required Readings:**


**Secondary Readings:**


