



***Re-thinking the political:
Political theory and the pursuit of stability
(A liberal republican perspective)***

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the role of “stability” in political theory, from the perspective of liberal-republican debates. The thesis is structured in three different parts. Part I is a systematic reconstruction of historical sources of virtue ethics and republicanism. The analytical focus is placed on Aristotle’s and Machiavelli’s conceptions of stability (i.e. the avoidance of stasis), and their relevance for thinking on political issues. This investigation into the legacies of republican theory aims to show the multiple faces of republican “stability” by stressing the differences between the Aristotelian and the Machiavellian projects. Part II studies the contemporary controversies between republican and liberal understandings of political theory. Instead of approaching the subject in adversarial terms, I try to reconcile one perspective and the other by focusing the attention on methodological issues rather than on ideological disagreements. In order to shed light into these theoretical interconnections between liberal and republican standpoints, I explore the republican strands in one of the most paradigmatic examples of liberal thought: the philosophical work of John Rawls (especially in the third part of *A Theory of Justice and Political Liberalism*). Part III is entirely devoted to the analysis of “stability” with regard to two particular and contentious issues which have been recently very present in the Spanish political debate – one concerned with political education and the other with national pluralism. This dissertation offers a number of different perspectives, which may paradoxically connote the idea of “stability” with a sense of untidiness, precariousness and fragmentation. Far from being inconclusive, however, it represents an invitation to consider and balance judiciously different views and perspectives. This is why the concept of stability has been associated with the idea of “pursuit”, as it helps to understand its ongoing, plural and incomplete character. After all, stability is not to be found definitively but to be continuously made, and has not one univocal understanding, but a plurality of them.



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Bio

Joan Balcells has a degree in Political Science and Administration from Pompeu Fabra University (2003) and a degree in Humanities from the Open University of Catalonia (2005). In 2005 he won an essay award for a philosophical dissertation on Friedrich Nietzsche. After two years of working experience in public administration, he started the PhD program at the European University Institute, where he obtained a Master of Research in Social and Political Sciences (2006). His academic interests include contemporary political theory and philosophy, history of political thought, citizenship and democracy. He is now teaching Political Science at the Open University of Catalonia in Barcelona.