

## THE TOPICALITY OF POLITICAL REPUBLICANISM

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In this article I reflect upon political republicanism and its conceptual development in distinct historical periods. For this, I summarize the position of key republican authors and analyse the main concepts which have shaped this current of political thought. My objective is to present a reasoned exposition of republican political theory, inviting the reader to adapt it to our own societies and their challenges.

**Keywords:** Republicanism – Self-government – Freedom – Citizenship – Law –  
Virtue – Patriotism – Equality – Duties

### Introduction

Republicanism is an ancient model of freedom and self-government, which, according to authors such as Quentin Skinner (1992), Jean-Fabien Spitz (1995) and Philip Pettit (1997), may offer an alternative to the shortfalls of political theories like liberalism or communitarianism. These neo-republican scholars emphasise and defend concepts from the republican tradition, while re-assembling them around the notion of citizenship. The practice of citizenship – by means of participation and the fulfilment of civic duty – ensures an equitable normative system, based on respected political institutions.

Republicanism, therefore, is characterised by shared political practices within a community of free citizens who understand that freedom takes its meaning from, and is guaranteed by, the existence of political institutions. These institutions are, in turn, sustained by the public's commitment to them. This defence of institutions in themselves is a constant of republicanism, as these give shape to self-government: the political matrix where the agreements and norms governing our shared way of life are built through active participation in the public sphere.

### **Republican Freedom as Non-domination and the Public Sphere**

The most distinctive republican value is freedom, lived as non-domination that is, as an absence of servitude. This means the removal of any kind of bond which might reproduce master-slave or master-serf relations, such that at no time “the dominating party can interfere on an arbitrary basis with the choices of the dominated” (Pettit 1997, 22). However, the republican concept of freedom means much more than individual autonomy, for the former can only be guaranteed by the rule of law, which preserves the citizens from arbitrary interference and constitutes the basis of the public sphere. Republicanism, understood as political order aimed at promoting freedom, requires, to various extents, the individuals’ public participation and, hence, a self-governed community aimed, at least, to preserve the State from potential authoritarian derives which may jeopardize freedom.

Preliminarily, however, we must differentiate between domination and public interference. Pettit, for instance, departs from the liberal understanding of freedom as the mere absence of interference, underlining that domination without interference is feasible, just as interference without domination might be possible, that is: interference may not be detrimental to freedom as long as it is aimed to promote the latter. I can be dominated by another individual without this supposing any kind of interference in my choices, either due to the affable and non-interfering disposition of the dominator, or equally due to my own ability to get my way every time. But this does not mean that my freedom is guaranteed, for I am still subject to the potential rule of the dominator. Conversely, I could also experience interference without being dominated, by allowing a person or institution to interfere with me “but not on an arbitrary basis. The person envisaged relates to me, not as a master, but more in the fashion of an agent who enjoys a power of attorney in my affairs” (Pettit 1997, 23).

Hence, the republican ideal of freedom is based on non-domination, meaning opposition to the kind of servitude wherein the serf finds himself at the mercy of another’s will, terrified by his dependent condition and morally degraded. On the other hand, the absence of interference, characteristic of negative liberal freedom, does not presuppose exemption from all interference, but rather the elimination of arbitrary interference (Pettit, 1997, 24). I would like to insist in the common distinction between (neo-)republican freedom as non-domination, and liberal freedom as non-interference. Non-domination is the inability of other agents to arbitrarily interfere with my life – arbitrary interference – subjugating me to their unjustified demands. In this sense, non-arbitrary interference in terms of non-domination is as: “a sort of interference that is controlled by the interfeeree in the sense that the interferer is forced to track the avowable interests of the interfeeree: that is, the avowal-ready interests of the interfeeree” (Pettit 2006, 278 – 279). From a historical perspective, Skinner observes that

republican freedom has neo-Roman roots, albeit forgotten with the hegemony of liberal theory in contemporary political philosophy. “The assumption that individual liberty is basically a matter of non-interference is precisely what the neo-roman theory calls in doubt” (Skinner 1981, 116).

In this regard, excellence – arete for the Greeks and *virtus* for the Romans – has always been assigned to the public realm, the arena in which to stand out and distinguish oneself from others. As Hannah Arendt points out, “Every activity performed in public can attain an excellence never matched in privacy; for excellence, by definition, the presence of others is always required, and this presence needs the formality of the public, constituted by one's peers, it cannot be the casual, familiar presence of one's equals or inferiors” (2009, 49). Even the peculiarity of the slave's condition was that of being someone who “lost excellence because he lost admission to the public realm, where excellence can show” (Arendt 1998, 49, note 40). Presence in public space was fundamental in Greco-Roman antiquity. This was such that, as Arendt underlines, the Romans “used the words ‘to live’ and ‘to be among men’ (*inter homines esse*) or ‘to die’ and ‘to cease to be among men’ (*inter homines esse desinere*) as synonyms” (Arendt 1998, 7 – 8). However, against the “human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech” (Arendt 1998, 175) proper to the *res publica*, Christianity imposed “Goodness in an absolute sense, as distinguished from the ‘goodfor’ or the ‘excellent’ in Greek and Roman antiquity” (Arendt 1998, 73). This produced an “antagonism between early Christianity and the *res publica*, so admirably summed up in Tertullian's formula: *nec ulla magis res aliena quam publica*”<sup>1</sup> (Arendt 1998, 74).

A counterweight to this overvaluation of goodness can be found in Machiavelli. Referring to the public arena, and its required conduct, Machiavelli considers that being good does not necessarily preclude catastrophe: “he who abandons what is done for what ought to be done, will rather learn to bring about his own ruin than his preservation [...] Therefore it is necessary for a prince, who wishes to maintain himself, to learn how not to be good, and to use it and not use it according to the necessity of the case” (Machiavelli 1903, XV, 60). Christianity contrasted with Greco-Roman civilisation and its celebration of public space and political activity. With Christianity, public activity and politics instead “sank to the low level of an activity subject to necessity, destined to remedy the consequences of human sinfulness on one hand and to cater to the legitimate wants and interests of human life on the other” (Arendt 1998, 314). With the Christian worldview, any political aspirations beyond this limit “could now only be equated with vainglory” (Arendt 1998, 314).

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<sup>1</sup> “No matter is more alien to us than what matters publicly.”

Machiavelli also came to question this Christian approach, which saddled glory with vanity. For him, just as for classical antiquity, glory was the yardstick to measure political activity. The use of cruelty or wickedness [...] though it may obtain goals, impedes that they be glorious: “one may indeed gain an empire, but not glory.” (Machiavelli 1903, VIII, 33). By the same token, although wickedness destroys the common world, Machiavelli was also concerned by the permanent appeal to supposed goodness in the public arena via religious control over the secular sphere. He felt that at the same time that the new religious orders (Franciscans and Dominicans) appealed to goodness, they also fostered injustice by teaching the people not to resist evil: “they give them to understand that it is evil to say evil of evil, and that it is good to live under obedience to them and, if they make an error, to leave them for God to punish” (Machiavelli 1987, III 1, 212).<sup>2</sup> Unlike Christian goodness, republican virtues encourage public participation in support of freedom and the State. This tension between the recovery of republicanism in the Renaissance and the Christian idea of political life will be crucial to shape modern republicanism and its idea of freedom. In fact, republicanism will use a reading of Christian values for the criticism of liberalism (Black 1997).

### **Citizenship and its construction**

The aforementioned concept of freedom as non-domination guaranteed by the State; as well as the presence and prominence of individuals acting in the public arena, are the essential elements which give content to the notion of citizenship in republican thought. All citizens are equally entitled to freedom regardless of their natural differences or private inclinations. They are also equally obliged to civic duties, even if their individual capabilities are taken into account when it is time to serve the State. In this sense, republicanism emphasises the condition of citizen as opposed to liberalism’s underlining of individuality and rights. As I said above, citizenship requires both freedom and duties. This may range from the mere vigilance of potential authoritarianism to all-out involvement in politics. In any case, these are the fundamental

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<sup>2</sup> The paradigm shift produced by Christianity was absolute, formulating a new concept of community and of its integral members. As Arendt indicates, “The unpolitical, non-public character of the Christian community was early defined in the demand that it should form a *corpus*, a ‘body’, whose members were to be related to each other like brothers of the same family” (Arendt 1998, 53). On the other hand, in the case of the individual as a constituent element of the collective, “It is precisely individual life which now came to occupy the position once held by the ‘life’ of the body politic. [...] It is as though the early Christians consciously shaped their concept of immortality after the Roman model, substituting individual life for the political life of the body politic” (Arendt 1998, 314 – 315). After the decline of Rome, the Church “offered men a substitute for the citizenship which had formerly been the prerogative of municipal government” (Arendt 1998, 34). This was to be the prevailing model throughout the Middle Ages, with essentially communitarian overtones.

elements upon which its conception of politics and the community is structured: “in the republican view, citizenship has its point of reference in the problem of the legal community’s self-organization, whereas its core consists in the rights of political participation and communication” (Habermas 1996, 497).

Although it does not form part of the republican tradition,<sup>3</sup> some neo-republican authors deem it essential to “republican democracy” that the citizenry exercise the widest and most direct participation possible in the political organisation of society, describing democracy itself as a way of life that requires the complete involvement of citizens (Ovejero et al 2004, 73). In this interpretation of citizenship, individuals are not external to the State, and do not behave simply as self-interested subjects contributing to its reproduction only insofar as it yields them particular individual benefits. Rather, they conceive of themselves as citizens who “are integrated into the political community like the parts of a whole, in such a way that they can develop their personal and social identity only within the horizon of shared traditions and recognized political institutions” (Habermas 1996, 498). Further, “citizenship is actualized solely in the collective practice of self-determination” (Habermas 1998, 498). And this experience is embodied by the art of politics, which “teaches men how to bring forth what is great and radiant” (Arendt 1998, 206).

Republicanism, therefore, conceives of citizenship as political practice of active participation in public affairs. It is not based upon the ontological primacy of the individual, nor upon the defence of one’s individual rights, but upon a shared way of life. In fact, from the republican perspective it would be inappropriate to refer to “natural rights.” Instead, we would need to refer exclusively to citizenship rights, that is, to those rights derived from accords, norms, and conventions. In short, as Javier Peña writes, rights are not pre-existing, but the result of a political process, “of citizens’ political deliberation and co-decision” (Peña 2000, 192).

As opposed to the naturalness of liberal rights, or the value which communitarianism places on tradition, republican values are artificial, rational constructs. For example, this is discernible in the revolutionary conception of the nation from the French First Republic (1792), as this was built upon a contractual tie and from an effort of will. There, nationality was reabsorbed into citizenship, which entailed obligations and commitments regarding the defence of the ideas which give shape to a Republic of equals. Likewise, we must take note of a whole vein of republicanism which posed its main arguments in opposition to the value of traditions. This was the case with Thomas Paine, who wrote a sizeable portion of his works in opposition to Edmund Burke and the conservative thought which defended “good English traditions”.

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<sup>3</sup> See for instance John Rawls (1993) as an example of liberal author with strong republican allegiances.

A strain of republicanism tended to see the veneration of traditions as contrary to the ideal of self-government, inasmuch as these could constitute an obstacle to the materialisation of that ideal.<sup>4</sup>

### **Republican law and civic virtue**

Republican idea of constructed citizenship presupposes the interdependence of good institutions and Law and good mores. “For laws, public authorities, and social relations to be in keeping with the republican perspective, citizens must come to their aid and develop certain capacities for surveillance, contestation, and mutual respect” (Duhamel 2015, 29). What matters is the cause of self-government, and, to this end, the law is republicanism’s greatest ally and guarantor. The law equals to non-arbitrary interference to protect freedom from arbitrariness. It is the indispensable instrument “to escape from the system of precarity and servitude regarding whoever has the power to interfere arbitrarily in our existence” (Peña 2000, 189 – 190). The law guarantees our liberty and defends us from domination. It furnishes us “with a legal and institutional system that protects the activity of the citizens, conferring upon them rights through laws and sanctions” (Peña 2000, 190). The republican conception thus “interprets liberty, not as a fact of nature, but as the status of a citizen in an appropriate legal order, and this implies that the law is analytically tied to the concept of liberty, rather than being subordinated to it as an external and contingent instrument” (Spitz, 1995, 208 – 209).

Laws constitute republican “civility” (Pettit 1997), and must be complemented by norms: “If the state is to be able to find a place in the hearts of the people, and if the laws of the state are to be truly effective, those laws will have to work in synergy with norms that are established [...] in the realm of civil society” (Pettit 1997, 242). This need for republican laws and norms to go hand in hand is recalled by many exponents of the republican tradition. Machiavelli, for example, left it clear that “For as good customs have need of laws to maintain themselves, so laws have need of good customs so as to be observed” (Machiavelli 1987, I 18, 49). In this sense, republican history reminds us that “let the laws conflict with such norms, let the laws fail to be actively supported by such norms, and the chances of realizing the ideal republic that we are after must be radically diminished” (Pettit 1997, 245).

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<sup>4</sup> However, republicans were pluralistic on this question, and the republican rejection of traditions was not indiscriminate. Just as Paine could invoke egalitarian “genuine” English traditions; Machiavelli or Robespierre invoked the anti-tyranny vein of classical thought embodied by Roman republican authors. In any case, the defence of traditions was always instrumental to the cause of self-government.

This republican aptitude for linking with and building on civil society norms has been expressed many times under the general guise of civic virtue. Thinkers have formulated this as “the disposition to commit oneself and act in service to the public good” (Peña 2000, 196), the establishment of “habits of civility [...]”. One of the recurrent themes in the tradition is that the republic requires a basis in widespread civility; it cannot live by law alone” (Pettit 1997, 245), or “the willingness to participate [...] to decide, in the best way possible, how to live collectively. This [...] presents part of the challenge of living in public activity, [...] ensures the possibility of governing their destinies [...] (and) has the possibility [...] of experiencing politics as fulfilment” (Ovejero 2008, 233). All of these definitions demonstrate the importance of the public sphere and the citizen’s conviction – and his conduct in accordance with that conviction – that “his liberty depends on the maintenance of the independence and prosperity of the city” (Peña 2000, 196). However, such conduct on the part of the citizens surely cannot be acquired without the aid of education. Montesquieu observed this well:

“It is in a republican government that the whole power of education is required [...] but virtue is a self-renunciation, which is ever arduous and painful. This virtue may be defined the love of the laws; and of our country. As such love requires a constant preference of public to private interest, it is the source of all private virtues; for they are nothing more than this very preference itself” (Montesquieu 1777, IV, V, 43).

This tendency to stress the public interest was accentuated still further by Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès when he marked a qualitative distinction between private and public interest. For Sieyès, appealing to equality among citizens, individual interest can be submitted to the primacy of the civic or general interest. This places the citizen above the individual or private man: “The advantages by which citizens are differentiated among themselves are situated beyond the character of citizen. Inequalities of property and ingenuity are like those of age, sex, height, etc. They do not modify the equality of citizenship” (Sièyes 1888, 113). The activity of the legislator, therefore, must be guided by equality, that is: the legal recognition that everyone is equally entitled to freedom regardless of individual particularities, and no one may be dominated by others. This drive to freedom conforms the general interest which, as the case may be, can interfere with individual freedom, but solely to the necessary extent to secure common interest in terms of the widest possible freedom for everyone: “Undoubtedly, these individual advantages are under the protection of the law; but the legislator need not create them, nor grant privileges to some and reject them for others. The law does not settle anything; it protects that which exists, until the point when that begins to prejudice the common interest. These are the only limits of individual liberty” (Sieyès 1888, 113).

Freedom requires equal public assurances of non-interference for all. That is: republican institutions guarantee freedom as long as they presuppose equality. Although there is a difference between equality and freedom, nobody is free if some people are freer than the others. This would mean either having more rights, or being in a better condition than others to violate the law. However, at times, the radicalization of egalitarian discourse produced a shift from the individual citizen to the people as the holder of the right to freedom, ending up in the total equation of the citizen with the collective. Equality as the core of republicanism could become identified with Rousseau's egalitarianism, whose writings preceded the French Revolution and supplied concepts and discourses which would play a most prominent role in its decisive moments.

With his ideas, implemented by his disciple Robespierre, Rousseau expected that citizens educated in integrity and aversion to corruption would build a civil association of equals administered by the general will. This form of association, furthermore, "will imply the total alienation of each associate, together with all of their rights, to the whole community" [...]. "With regard to the associates, they collectively take up the name of people, and more concretely are called Citizens, inasmuch as they are participants in the sovereign authority, and Subjects, inasmuch as they are submitted to the laws of State" (Rousseau 1964, I 6, 360). Accordingly, the Jacobin "Republic of Virtue" sought to build citizens who, as a logical and inexorable consequence of their process of liberation, could and would exercise equality. Robespierre had no doubt about Rousseau's role as inspiration for the liberating process of the human race initiated by this revolution: "he attacked tyranny with frankness, [...] his energetic and upright eloquence described with ardour the charms of virtue [...]. Ah, if only he had witnessed this Revolution of which he was the forefather and which has carried him to the Panthéon! Who could doubt that his generous soul would have embraced with enthusiasm the cause of justice and equality?" (Robespierre 1866, 325 – 326)

Freedom was often present in the speeches of the Jacobins: "You, to whom the French people have restored your power, and to whom in turn you give a nation and good customs, you, O august Liberty!" (Robespierre 1866, 331) However, as, Rousseau noted, "the people always want the good, but they do not always see it. The general will is always right, but the judgement that guides it is not always enlightened" (Rousseau 1964, II 6, 380). This makes it essential to mentor the disoriented people: "It is necessary to make them see things such as they are, and sometimes such as they should appear; to show them the good path that they seek, free them from individual seductions [...]. Everyone needs guides. It is necessary to oblige some to make their wills conform to their reason, and to teach others to know what they want" (Rousseau 1964, II 6, 380). To this end, Rousseau invoked the crucial presence of an educator,



a tutor who is capable of stimulating the political conscience which resides in human reason. Indeed, this appeal to conscience forms part of Rousseau's autobiography.<sup>5</sup> Persecuted, defamed, humiliated, ostracised, he suffered condemnation in life. Nonetheless, following his conscience, he expressed himself with authenticity, and proposed a model of political community governed by virtue, which definitively delivers the oppressed from their affliction. And, at times, it might seem that his speech contained a plea for direct democracy: "sovereignty cannot be represented, for the same reason it is inalienable; it consists essentially of the general will and the will is not to be represented: it is one or the other; there is no middle ground" (Rousseau 1964, III 15, 429). In fact, though, he absolutely distrusted this form of government: "true democracy has never existed, and it never will. [...] If there were a nation of gods, it would govern itself democratically. A government so perfect does not suit men" (Rousseau 1964, III 4, 404 – 406).

Given the impossibility of a full democracy due to human limitations, the maximalist Jacobin-Rousseauian "Republic of Virtue" and its conception of freedom and self-government would be difficult to fit into the republican model that we have hitherto described. Taking the "Republic of Virtue" to an extreme, the citizen as individual becomes somehow dissolved in the community and it is free only as long as it pertains to it. All of which does not mean to say that it is not a practicable and even successful project. In fact, the Revolution and the Jacobins soon understood the potentiality of the Rousseauian proposal, seated upon two pillars. On the one hand, the guide of the conscience, which can be judged only by itself.<sup>6</sup> On the other, the civil association of equals presided over by the general will upholds that "the social contract not be a hollow formula, (which) means [...] that whoever declines to obey the general will shall be compelled by the whole body: which can only mean that they will be forced to be free" (Rousseau 1964, I 7, 380).

Evidently, Montesquieu did not go this far: his reference to the public (or general) interest comes after the resolution to achieve republican virtue. The latter is a kind of cluster of all the individual virtues, such as patriotism, honesty, austerity, integrity etc. On the other hand, its opposite, corruption, adopts vices like selfishness, pride, cowardice, avarice, or ambition, to name a few. Ultimately, Montesquieu set out to foment love of public affairs. In contrast with Rousseau, he understood that "this love is peculiar to democracies. In these alone the government is entrusted to private

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<sup>5</sup> "Conscience! Conscience! Divine instinct, immortal and heavenly voice; safe guide of a being who is ignorant and limited, but intelligent and free; [...] it is you who makes the excellence of his nature and the morality of his actions" (Rousseau 1978, 26). His final books (*Confessions*, *Dialogues: Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques*, or *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*), published after his death, mark this self-justifying path.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Robespierre (1866, 341).

citizens. Now, government is like everything else: to preserve it, we must love it” (Montesquieu 1777, IV, V, 43).

In Montesquieu we also find a contrast with the passion and primacy which the Jacobin-Rousseauian project gave to equality. He clearly signalled the ranking of his republican affections, saying -by this order- “A love of the republic, in a democracy, is a love of the democracy; as the latter is that of equality” (Montesquieu 1777, V, III, 41). From this it can be deduced that equality is a consequence, but never the origin, of the republican order, which is based on the defence of individual freedom. Thus, Montesquieu concedes, “Everything, therefore, depends on establishing this love in a republic; and to inspire it ought to be the principal business of education” (Montesquieu 1777, IV, V, 43). He ended with a final judgement, appealing to the responsibility of progenitors: “but the surest way of instilling it into children is for parents to set them an example” (Montesquieu 1777, IV, V, 44).

Even so, Montesquieu already cautioned, as Maurizio Viroli recalls, that, although political virtue is the sentiment which must predominate among citizens in order for the republic to be preserved and prosper, it was extremely difficult to instil in the citizens’ hearts (Viroli 2002). This was because its practice demanded “self-renunciation” (Montesquieu 1777, IV, V, 43), for “the less we are able to satisfy our private passions, the more we abandon ourselves to those; of a general nature” (Montesquieu 1777, V, II, 52). Significant is the comparison that Montesquieu makes between the love that monks profess towards their order and that which should be cultivated towards the republic: “How comes it that monks are so fond of their order? It is owing to the very cause that renders the order insupportable [...] the more austere it is, that is, the more it curbs their inclinations, the more force it gives to the only passion left them” (Montesquieu 1777, V, II, 52). Just as sobriety makes a religious order stronger and more cherished, the more that private impulses are subdued, and a more austere and frugal way of life is established, the more united and loved will be the republic.

For Montesquieu, “virtue in a republic is a most simple thing; it is a love of the republic; it is a sensation, and not a consequence of acquired knowledge; a sensation that may be felt by the meanest as well as by the highest person in the state” (Montesquieu 1777, V, II, 52). This means tying our destiny to its general wellbeing: “They cannot all render her equal services, but they all ought. to serve her with equal alacrity (Montesquieu 1777, V, III, 53). There must be a banishing, therefore, of any selfish impulse to “think that he may be happy and glorious by oppressing his fellow-citizens” (Montesquieu 1777, VIII, XVI, 158), because this might bring us to the aberration of “raise himself to grandeur on the ruins of his country” (Montesquieu 1777, VIII, XVI, 158).

However, the civic virtue of the Florentine republicans of the fifteenth century, to put forward an example, was not so demanding, and in no way implied sacrificing private life. Only those who assumed the leadership of public affairs would need to be prepared to confront and endure the enmity of bad citizens, to the point of even employing severe measures against them. This humanist interpretation of civic virtue is expressed with clarity in Machiavelli, for whom, in Viroli's opinion, virtuous citizens were not those who neutralise their passions with reason, but those who, promoting civil charity, seek a balance between private life and civic virtue and service to the republic (Viroli 2002).

We have already indicated that the stoic pretension to virtuous self-sufficiency, which has no need of many material goods, is prominent in Montesquieu. Both the enthusiasm for sobriety – “it is the fame with respect: to frugality. To love it, we must practice and enjoy it” (Montesquieu 1777, V, IV, 54) – and the demand for moderation in wealth – “it is not sufficient, in a well-regulated democracy, that the divisions of land be equal; they ought also to be small,” (Montesquieu 1777, V, VI, 58) – were equally tautological ingredients of his republicanism. By contrast, for the Florentine republicans, civic virtue was entirely compatible with wealth, which was not to be recriminated as long as it did not harm anyone. Moreover, wealth could offer useful virtues for the republic, such as magnanimity and liberality (Viroli 2002). Equally Machiavelli, putting forward the ancient Romans as an example of virtue, described them as lovers of liberty and prosperity: “it is seen through experience that cities have never expanded either in dominion or in riches If they have not been in freedom” (Machiavelli 1987, II 2, 129). This did not diminish their being enemies of tyranny: “But above all it is very marvelous to consider how much greatness Rome arrived at after it was freed from its kings” (Machiavelli 1987, II 2, 129).

In Machiavelli's opinion, virtuous citizens did not relinquish that which was exclusive to them, “for each willingly multiplies that thing and seeks to acquire those goods he believes he can enjoy once acquired” (Machiavelli 1987, II 2, 190). This remained compatible with a concern for public interest: “From which It arises that men in rivalry think of private and public advantages” (Machiavelli 1987, II 2, 190). This was because thereby “both the one and the other come to grow marvelously. The contrary of all these things occurs in those countries that live servilely;” (Machiavelli 1987, II 2, 132).

The sociologist Salvador Giner emphasises that, in contrast with certain aforementioned versions of republicanism, “civic virtue is a democratic political virtue whose pretensions are modest in regard to morality. It does not demand saintliness” (Giner 1998, 7). The key to exercising this republican virtue, according to Giner, would be in seeing as one's own, and taking an interest in, what happens and is

decided in the shared sphere. In fact, “it only asks for a modest measure of good public conduct, of obedience to legitimate laws, and above all a minimum capacity for active participation, however difficult it may be” (Giner 1998, 7). In other terms, republicanism demands responsibility from citizens, its viability being contingent on this condition. In this sense, the practice of civic virtue is fundamental to maintaining a vigilant attitude towards corruption and the transgression of the laws and norms that we have given ourselves. This is essential in order to live together and to sustain the shared realm with which we have furnished ourselves. Giner defines and describes it thusly: “Essentially, republican virtue is composed of tolerance, public spirit, demand for information; which means to say, a certain thirst for knowing what is happening in the public sphere. It is composed, also, of a measure of trust in the ability of oneself and of the citizenry to intervene and amend – even marginally – in order to improve the conditions of shared life” (Giner 1998, 7).

### **Republican patriotism**

The love for country connects the individual to the political order that secures his freedom. Just as Montesquieu prompted that the entry for “Patrie” in the *Encyclopédie* define political virtue as the “love of the fatherland”, republican theorists also “as love of country understood [...] as love of common liberty and the institutions that sustain it” (Viroli 1998, 12). The republic is a political unit which does not require cultural or moral homogeneity. Consequently, to love the fatherland means to love the republic as a political community based on the principle of common liberty, with its own culture and way of life. In line with this historical coordinate, Viroli calls for decoupling the term “patriotism” from the property “nationalism”. To this effect, he advocates for the historical recovery or – to put it better – for the reinvention of republican patriotism. Viroli recalls that while “the language of nationalism was forged in late eighteenth-century Europe to defend or reinforce the cultural, linguistic, and ethnic oneness and homogeneity of a people” (Viroli 1998, 1), patriotism always maintained the appeal to common liberty. Likewise, “whereas the enemies of republican patriotism are tyranny, despotism, oppression, and corruption, the enemies of nationalism are cultural contamination, heterogeneity, racial impurity, and social, political, and intellectual disunion” (Viroli 1998, 2). The difference between both idioms would be a question of emphasis: for patriots, the principal value is the republic and the way of life that this allows. By contrast, nationalists’ primordial focus is the spiritual and cultural unity of the nation.

If nationalism is forged around the idea of a historical and homogeneous nation, patriotism depends of a system of institutions which had to be built. It is the emotive and rational allegiance to a political system, which cannot be interpreted as the

creation of national genius, but rather as the product of the consensus of the community. This has further implications. Both idioms being essentially rhetorical, republican patriotism judges that, as it competes with nationalism on the same terrain of passions and peculiarity and uses rhetorical rather than purely rational arguments, “patriotism is a formidable opponent for nationalism” (Viroli 1998, 8). The language of republican patriotism could serve as “a powerful antidote” against nationalism and its pernicious effects. Accordingly, Viroli proposes to working “on bonds of solidarity and fellowship [...] to transmute them into forces that sustain liberty instead of fomenting exclusion or aggression” (Viroli 1998, 8).

### **Republican equality and the question of duties**

A community of non-dominated citizens feeling united in their homeland cannot be alien to equality. In Peña’s words, “the laws created by republican political institutions guarantee freedom insofar as they incorporate the presumption of equality” (Peña 2000, 191). Namely, “one person’s freedom is as much contingent on the power of others as it is on their own power” (Peña 2000, 191). Nobody is free if their area of liberty is smaller than that of others, because this means either that they lack rights which others possess, or that there are others who are in better conditions to violate the law. Without equality, therefore, it is not possible to possess the maximum span of guaranteed liberty: “in order for a citizen to be free it is necessary that they have the same faculties and constraints as the rest, since otherwise their vulnerability to arbitrariness and abuse will be greater” (Peña 2000, 191). Ultimately, in order for a political community to be strictly republican, in addition to basing itself upon a normative order created in conditions of reciprocity and equality, freedom must be safeguarded with equal guarantees of non-interference by others (legal equality), as well as public recognition of its members as citizens.

The member of the republican community, the citizen, is conceived and perceives himself as someone defined by their tie to their city, to their homeland, or to their community. In other words, as a committed political subject who infers that the guarantee of their liberty stems from obligation to republican institutions and from observance of their duties towards the community. Consequently, republican freedom is only possible in a community not subordinate to any external power: a sovereign power subject to its own self-government. That equality and the rights protected by law must be based on self-government means that the active participation of the political community is essential. From this perspective, even more than on rights, republican citizenship would be based on duties,<sup>7</sup> which would be the basis of rights. Since freedom

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<sup>7</sup> Skinner (1984) considers that individual freedom cannot be perceived without a motion towards the common good, which is ensured in a free community and which can only be achieved through

depends on common action, citizens have the duty to dedicate themselves to the public, as well as to respect the sphere of free activity that legitimately belongs to their co-citizens. This duty is inculcated by education, but also by the citizen's need to defend his freedom from potential tyranny in certain historical moments. In summary, as Spitz indicates, in the republican tradition a citizen is only free if he has possession "regarding all his co-citizens, of the same range of freedom and the same legal guarantee of non-interference; [...] in short, that all his co-citizens recognise explicitly that he is equal, meaning that he benefits from this status to equal degree and in the same proportion as they do" (Spitz 1995, 203).

### **Conclusion**

Republicanism is not a stable, systematic theory. It is rather a perspective of political thinking, rooted in a long tradition, that focus on freedom, participation, engagement, public institutions, law, etc. I would argue that the topicality of republicanism emerges whenever these categories become the subject of political debates. Of course, they are not exclusive of republicanism. Indeed, the republican theoretical matrix is permeated by a wide range of political doctrines from liberalism to communitarism. However, the different republican perspectives I have examined in this paper share at least the conviction that citizens' participation aimed at freedom is the core of politics, and that freedom is defended by common political institutions.

Regarding the latter point, Republicans argue that political authority is not necessarily despotic, in so far it is aimed at promoting freedom. However, when coercion becomes the only way of mandating that the citizens fulfil their duties, freedom disappears and the citizens have no legitimate duties to fulfil, apart from the will to restore his freedom, which in turn becomes a duty. In fact, for that matter, a structure of duties supplies the base of a participatory form of citizenship; one in which it is possible to collectively decide upon our subjective rights.

Indeed, only by carrying out our duties as citizens, can we have rights. If citizens are distanced or decoupled from public affairs, laws and institutions will end up subject to the influence of the powerful, who will exploit them to perpetuate their domination. If this circumstance comes to pass, the vice of corruption – the use of the public for the benefit of private interests – will have been consummated. Republicanism has

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active and civic participation in the community's political life. For Skinner (1992) values embodied in republican virtue originate in Roman moral philosophy (Cicero, Livy, or Sallust, in that order); their testimony was recognised in the Italian city-states and particularly by Machiavelli; being later reclaimed by Harrington, Milton and other seventeenth century English republicans, subsequently to be activated in the eighteenth century within the opposition to the French absolute monarchy, Montesquieu in particular.

always warned of the lethal effects of that scourge, and if republican democracy can be developed and avoid degeneration, it can only do so by combatting this evil.

Finally, the republican model of citizenship reminds us that public protected freedom is worth only what citizens accustomed to political freedom and settled in the perspective of common, active self-determination makes of them. Here, it is clear that it is in the context of such a political culture that republican freedom makes sense, expressed in a model of citizenship where personal development is bound to the general interest of the community. But it should be noted that this rehabilitation of civic duties does not mean that the community is a higher instance than the individual, rather that it conditions and becomes conditioned by the individual in a bidirectional way.

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