

Introduction to Political Ideologies Contexts, Ideas, and Practices
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Republicanism and Citizenship – Introduction 34:29

Well, hello everyone. We're about to start our concluding twelfth topic on this ideologies NPTEL course 2019 and '20. Our twelfth topic, our concluding one, is republicanism and citizenship, and we'll look at both they go together, we will start by introducing some of the, the main themes and ideas today. Well, republicanism as a form of political thought has very little to do with the attitudes and policies advocated by the United States Republican Party. I once mentioned republican thinking to a very senior journalist whom I knew at the time, and the reaction was puzzlement; they had no idea that I meant something different from the Republican Party.

But - republican political thought has a very ancient history. It starts with, as far as we know, the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who lived, again as far as we know, from 384 to 322 BCE, and it's been adapted for the contemporary world by several modern and contemporary thinkers. In practice, republican thought underlies, and underlies usually without recognition or acknowledgment, most contemporary democracies, even though most of those seem to embody liberal principles rather than republican ones. And it's just as important that republicanism could provide a way of preventing the occurrence of many of the main problems and incoherences of liberalism. Indeed several noted contemporary political theorists have explicitly advocated republicanism for that purpose, and in the process they've criticized liberalism severely.

We'll at some of those criticisms as we proceed. We've met some of them in the liberalism topic already. Well, the main forms of republicanism have been called classical and modern. Classical republicanism refers to forms of thought and possibly forms practice in parts of ancient Greece, most noticeably, Athens around the time of Pericles, probably about 400 BCE or thereabouts. The time is associated also with, with Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, that period.

Now modern republicanism in contrast to classical republicanism, it's usually taken to have its origins in Niccolò Machiavelli's reflections, mainly written in the Italian city-state of Florence in the fifteenth century. Now we must remember that ancient Greek thought had a number of versions of republicanism, and therefore there are problems over the arguments that Machiavelli's republicanism is a direct continuation of classical republican thought, and therefore, a direct continuation of, of the thinking which underlay the organization of Rome in its

republican period. There are a lot of arguments around those, and those kinds of arguments about the, the particular strand of republicanism which Machiavelli seems to express and its inheritance, its, its, its form, the form it took in ancient Rome. Those kinds of arguments are most commonly associated with Quentin Skinner and J. G. A. Pocock.

Machiavelli's concerns here are largely drawn from his great work *The Discourses*, *The Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy*, usually just called *The Discourses*, and that was published in 1517. Skinner, if I'm not mistaken, has broadly argued that Machiavelli has to be seen as a modern republican. Now there are disagreements about that. Machiavelli does show sharp insight into the contribution citizens can make to the quality of life in a republic. But, he does take, he does see the republic as being ruled by an oligarchy of 40 or 50 people. He says it was the tension - he calls it the tumult, or frequent tumult - between the nobles and the plebeians, which resulted in the creation of good law and our civic life largely free of serious violence, so that citizens could live freely and yet securely, it's his own phrase, I think it is, "vivere libero e sicuro". He is using, by the way, mediaeval Italian rather than classical Latin, which of course he did, he did have anyway.

So, according to Machiavelli, the very tension between the nobles and the plebeians resulted in the creation of good law and a relatively peaceful civic life, so that people could live freely and securely. But Machiavelli then has to reconcile those, if you like domestic or internal achievements, those features of the internal organization of a state, with the need for external security. We do not need to (ex) examine those particular concerns in detail.

The point for us is, the main point for us is that the organization of the state and even of who governed it and how they governed it, were matters for the whole polity to settle, even despite frequent internal discord. Now, the state conceived, thus, the state conceived in that way, is not ruled by the most powerful, or by a religious institution, or by aristocrats, aristocrats who claim divine right, or by those who inherit or claim the automatic inheritance of political position and power.

Now this amounts to the recognition of a form of secular political authority. And in Machiavelli's thinking, it pervades the whole polity. And that is perhaps the central republican principle in Machiavelli's thinking. But this form of political authority led Machiavelli to be concerned about how citizens might learn or might be taught *virtù* or good conduct in public affairs, or a capacity for good conduct in public affairs, or a disposition towards that.

Machiavelli holds that fear is a strong element in ensuring that the republic does not descend or collapse into strife and violence. And he cites the end of Tarquin's rule in, in Rome, as his example. Now, according to Machiavelli, after the end of the Tarquin dynasty, the nobles conducted themselves well for a time, but they then started, I quote, "to vent upon the plebs that poison which they had kept within their breasts" and Machiavelli adds here, "that we never act well except through necessity."

I've taken the quotation from, from *The Discourses*, for it's Machiavelli's own quotation that the, the nobles then started to vent upon the plebs 'that poison which they had kept within their breasts'. Now this may well be one of the main factors or features of Machiavelli's thinking that sets him apart from a modern or more modern senses of republicanism, as well as the theory of classical republicanism. So Machiavelli does stand somewhere in between both.

Well, certain forms of (classical republican) classical republicanism draw strongly upon and amount to a significant further development of classical republicanism. And these have seen a strong revival since the early 1980s. In the next decade or so, after that in the, in the 1980s, a number of eminent philosophers and political thinkers published works which responded to problems apparently mired in, in the difficulties of liberalism, by identifying, by going back to and identifying resources in classical republican thought.

And these resources seemed to offer or seem likely to offer dissolutions of problems which liberalism itself generated - it gave rise to them and it couldn't address them. And among the works which draw upon classical republicanism and adapt it for our times, are, for example, *After Virtue*, published in 1981, written by Alasdair MacIntyre. It's gone to three editions, I think the third edition was published in 2007 if I am not mistaken. *What's the Matter with Liberalism?* by Ronald Beiner has gone to paperback, went to paperback quite quickly after it was published, it really was read very widely, and there have been plenty of others, Richard Bellamy has written critically about liberalism.

There's been a great deal more work, broadly deriving from classical republicanism and adapting it to, to our times or for our times by abandoning its, its historically contingent, its historically accidental features. Among those features would be for example, Aristotle's apparent espousal of slavery, which was a feature of his society. Aristotle himself is more complex and more egalitarian than that, and we'll probably see that as we go on. But we'll draw on, on MacIntyre and on Beiner at various points below as we proceed.

Okay, well the main republican criticisms of liberalism are what we shall start with. And they start with the key liberal principle that we must not impose any theory of the good life or impose any political or moral ideology because such attempts to do that have caused enormous amounts of slaughter and other suffering. We're only too, too familiar with the history of appalling slaughter and other forms of suffering that have been inflicted by people obsessed with imposing a particular ideology or a particular moral code or a particular religion on millions, tens of millions, hundreds of millions around the world.

Now according to liberalism, liberalism makes a serious point here, we must be free to decide our own beliefs and ways of life. And the state must, therefore, be neutral about conceptions of the good. Liberalism as you remember, does accept that we need a state, but it follows then that liberalism must be neutral about, or the state in liberalism must be neutral about conceptions or ideas of the good.

Secondly, for liberalism society is made up of individuals and their decisions must be freely made. We must, therefore, tolerate the resulting diversity of occupations, ways of life, religious and cultural preferences, and so on. And that means we have a right to choose our political representatives, our moral and aesthetic attitudes, our occupations, our sexual partners, and so on. All these follow from liberal principles. We also, therefore, have a right to freedom from interference when we vote, that is our right to vote in secret, and a right to fair trials in which we're innocent until proven guilty.

Now in liberal theory, all of these are founded on the principle of individual choice protected by rights. Liberalism as, as a whole requires that we avoid stating any substantive theory of human nature, or any such philosophical anthropology. In practice though, liberalism looks very different. We're only too familiar with radically insoluble conflicts between positions which are, which are not only diametrically opposed but have no common ground whatever. For example, in liberal forms of thinking, the rights of a foetus are counterposed to the rights of the mother, who's counterposed against them.

The right to a traditional life, in another example, is set against the right to choose another way of life, or, for example, against the right of a contractor to pursue their occupation, even if it means building over traditional habitats, or nowadays just as often even if it means building over environmentally valuable areas that need protecting if we're to have a chance of longer-term survival. Now another example of such a clash is for example, between those who hold that war

is destructive and violent, and those who hold that oppressed and colonized peoples have a right to wage war so as to achieve independence or national self-determination. We saw examples of this when we did our previous topic, nationalism.

Well, there are several other examples of such irresolvable clashes. For example, justice requires, under liberalism, justice requires that we all have an equal opportunity to develop our talents. So, it would follow then that taxation for public healthcare and education is necessary for the state to give us all that opportunity, but equally under liberalism, shouldn't we be free to incur only the obligations we want to incur. So would it then follow that taxation should be abolished and that we should be free to choose schools and doctors and so on? Now, these are, all of them issues which, clashes of rights and clashes of options and clashes of rights to choose, which occur within liberalism.

We're familiar with this, a very familiar complaint in India is, or has been until relatively recently, that (affirmation) affirmative action quotas disadvantage substantial groups of people. Who might they be? The, the idea, the complaint here has been that substantial groups of people who have gained the grades they, they need to gain certain types of (occupation) occupation or education, or whatever, are substantially disadvantaged by affirmative action quotas, in India of course as you know, they're called reservations.

So if people have achieved the target grades for admission to publicly funded universities and colleges anyway, well, shouldn't they, aren't they entitled to those as rewards for their success? Now could it be that reservations for those who haven't achieved the grades disadvantage those who have achieved the grades anyway? The right to have structural disadvantage recognized is therefore set against the right to the reward for achievement.

These are both potentially liberal principles - it's not clear how liberalism can actually resolve these kinds of antinomies, these kinds of apparent contradictions. Well, we shouldn't be surprised that therefore the supposed arguments degenerate so quickly into bitterly entrenched positions and mutual hatred, if not worse. They were in fact never arguments in the first place - they were only assertions of purported rights. Liberalism has no conceptual resources with which to resolve conflicts of rights. And it has no resources, no conceptual resources, with which to decide what is to count as a right in the first place, and therefore to count as something worth absolute protection.

Yet the language of rights has come to permeate almost all of our contemporary public discourse. It has become almost the standard language in making, making a case for and judging the legitimacy of a state or a social (economy) or economic system or any specific law or policy. I take that from Richard Bellamy's book on liberalism.

Well, in addition, the principle of choice which liberalism claims we have as of right because we are human beings, the principle of choice which is so central to liberalism is nothing less than illusory. In practice, we see only more and more sameness, in tastes, perceptions, and clichés in a shopping mall culture where vast numbers of shops all sell the same junk.

I've taken that quotation from, from Ronald Beiner's book on the liberalism; it's called *What's the Matter with Liberalism?* Much of the junk may also be built to fail after a given time so that we have to go back and buy the newest version, irrespective of the often unrecyclable rubbish that such a practice generates; and not just unrecyclable - I should add toxic rubbish - that such a practice generates.

The so-called consumer choices involved here are not intelligible as choices at all. And a way of life in which this kind of consumption is the defining feature cannot possibly qualify for the respect that liberalism itself requires that we give all ways of life. Beiner himself says, why should we respect a way of life that is, I quote, "surveil, conformist and unreflective". I've added here, "or worse"; the quotation is straight from Beiner.

What would it even mean to respect such a way of life? What is it, what does it mean, to respect a way of life in which people are unthinking, addicted consumers, and as Beiner says, conformist and unreflective? Are we to respect or be neutral about, say, a way of life whose central principle could be even worse than that? Can we respect a way of life where the central principle is genocide? Or the propagation of hate? Or permanent militarization for war, and so on? Can we actually respect such ways of life? Liberalism requires us to be neutral about people's choices to, to adopt such ways of life or such attitudes.

But that then makes the idea of moral neutrality unintelligible. Does it make any sense at all? Well, the further consequence is that liberal requirements for the neutrality of the state also collapse. What would it mean for the state to be neutral about scientific discoveries, for example, in the treatment of deadly diseases, or about precautions against natural disasters, or about economic growth? Liberalism nevertheless has to assume that the state must be neutral about such things. I take that point from Beiner's very fierce criticism of liberalism.

Now, these dead ends and incoherencies have a deeper source in liberalism. They actually lie in liberalism's conception of the human being as a radical chooser and nothing else. For liberalism to choose is to be human; choosing, therefore, is the essence of personhood. This, yes, it certainly leads to the problems, you know, that we've identified earlier - just now - but it also amounts to a substantial theory of human nature, that is, a philosophical anthropology of precisely the kind, precisely the kind that liberalism requires us to refrain from adopting or asserting.

Liberalism offered us, it offered us and it was part of a historical process, whereby we achieved liberation from feudality, inherited privilege and arbitrary power, including the abuse of power by long-established religious institutions. But, liberalism has only delivered us into another sort of captivity. That is the captivity of sterile and irresolvable oppositions between competing rights.

It has, furthermore, made possible a combination of private perfection and public squalor or emptiness because it cannot accommodate the idea of shared predicaments which are other than chance developments. At that point, it can only fall silent.

Well, how did we end up here? Part of the problem is that if we accept choice as the essence of personhood, then liberalism rules out any substantive inquiry into the content and the context of the choices we make. For example, Beiner and many others excoriate much of the uniformity of our contemporary lives. But much of that uniformity is driven and demonstrably driven by commercial pressures in the markets and these constitute an, these markets constitute an, an essential element in the liberal conception of autonomy in the first place.

Yet advertising has come to, to be in the sale of lifestyle rather in substance. The fact that it has undoubtedly has much to do with the kind of commercial pressures in the markets, and those are, those markets are an essential element in liberalism, remember that liberalism is committed to the free-market economy. The larger corporations know this, they know just how important advertising is, and they have colossal advertising budgets. They also mount – and this is well demonstrated, very well-sourced, very widely sourced - the larger corporations around the world also mount fierce and often coordinated campaigns against, for example, attempts by states to restrict alcohol and tobacco advertising, or to impose minimum alcohol pricing as has been done for a long time in Scandinavia, and has been done relatively recently in Scotland with quite beneficent, beneficial public policy results.

Even within particular markets, you know, within particular markets, commercial pressures often have a less obvious but no less insidious effect. For example, a free and diverse media is crucial to liberal societies. Notice that, remember, the diversity of opinion, diversity of analysis, diversity of positions is central to liberalism. But competition among commercial media invariably means that there is constant pressure within the media to cut costs, especially by cutting staff. That makes the commercial media more and not less dependent on official and corporate press releases, so the content and tone of a lot of news starts to look more and more uniform. The practice within media organizations and this is well documented, very widely published in, in research on the media, the practice is to cut beat staff, reporting staff, precisely because the beat is expensive, it takes time, we don't know what we're going to find. It takes a reporter time to get to know a beat, to get to know the contacts on a beat, and so on. And the result is that more and more reporting staff are spending their time in the office in front of computer screens, being bombarded by official and corporate press releases. What they tend to do is increasing; this is documented, there is nothing secret about it, is top and tail the content, add their own introductory topping, tail the thing off with some sort of conclusion if they have time, and put the stuff out anyway. Now this is thoroughly documented in the world's mass media.

In addition, we need to remember that, and again, this is thoroughly documented, market pressures mean that the world's media are increasingly not only huge corporations with multimedia outlets, that is television, radio, the internet, even what has been called the dead tree press, the print media, and so on. But very often, major media corporations are themselves only part of gigantic conglomerates that is, collections of corporates under single if you like, single groupings of shareholder ownership. And the result is that the content and tone of a lot of news starts to look more and more uniform. On top of that, this has been (me) documented in media research, what gets left out tends to be (much) more and more similar. We'll meet this again, if we have occasion to do so, in respect of coverage of the environmental catastrophe that we're in the middle of.

Well, on top of that, liberal doctrine has a problem. If the state is to be a neutral enforcer of laws, can it, therefore, be an active participant in the media - but we're very familiar with intense state participation in the media, either to direct narratives or remove things from narratives, or in fact in, in a kind of symbiosis with the media in which it is been demonstrated the rest of us, the public, simply - from which most of us are simply excluded. And this is acknowledged by

thoughtful participants in the upper reaches of the media, and very often in the upper reaches of politics.

So even in the serious press, one result is - this is documented, by the way - is that public relations material, press releases and wire copy can amount to 70 percent of news coverage; and that was being said 10 or 12 years ago. The pressures are very noticeable today and if we follow the media closely, we'll see them.

Okay, all is not lost, as we shall see. But one major result is that we the public end up less and less well informed about the major issues facing us. We end up largely unaware of major issues the (me), the media choose not to mention at all, but our decisions are crucial to the survival even of liberal democracy with all its flaws. The point is not just that liberalism cannot challenge (us) the choices we make but it rules out, the point is that it rules out inquiry into whether our, whether or not our choices are well-informed or made under coercion or deceit or under pressure such as highly (pre) persuasive and seductive advertising; the content and context of our choices disappear.

And liberalism cannot offer us resources with which to investigate these contexts - because for liberalism, ultimately we're choosers - and in strict liberalism, there is no questioning our choices. Now, these kinds of problems have generated responses that we should not be at all surprised about that. And many of these responses adapt classical republicanism for the contemporary world. The ideas involved have their source in the work of Aristotle. And for Aristotle, the defining feature of humanity is that we're speakers of language.

We are therefore reasoning beings; that in turn is what makes us political beings. In Aristotle's phrase, it makes us *zoo politika*, the Greek plural, the singular is *zoon politikon*. Now it is, it is only by speaking reasoningly that we can determine how to organize our lives, and our public institutions, and public spaces, and even, and even the shape of our private lives. It is only by speaking reasoningly that we can decide what is just and fair in our arrangements and procedures.

According to Aristotle, the task is to live well and that is why we need to address our disagreements and differences so that, so that we can bring them under something we all share, namely the concern to live well. For Aristotle that is the characteristically human purpose or *telos*. *Telos*, I understand, in Modern Greek has a connotation of the ultimate purpose of life.

Yes, in classical Greek, if I'm not mistaken, it does retain that connotation. But for Aristotle, the characteristically distinctively human purpose is to live well.

And it is precisely in the pursuit of that *telos* that we need to address our disagreements and differences openly. Now, there's no attempt here to pretend that we have no differences or disagreements. Republican thought starts with the plain fact, we find this in Aristotle, as much as we do anywhere else. Republican thought starts with the plain fact that differences and disagreements occur all the time in human life.

But instead of responding to them by excluding or enslaving or exterminating those with whom we disagree, or by retreating behind non-negotiable rights which purportedly require no justification, instead of all that, republicanism requires, republicanism does require that we reason about our disagreements in order to recognize what those disagreements are about. That means recognizing and learning about the factors behind them so that we can see how these relate to the good, to the concern to live well.

Abortion is almost a canonical example here, the sterile positions taken, I do not intend the pun, by the way, the sterile positions taken for and against abortion in a rights discourse exclude the wider questions of the circumstances in which conception itself occurred, and these would include not only matters of forced sex, such, such as rape or coerced sex, but other forms of coercion which may be less obvious, such as the quality and breadth of sex education for people of all ages, including children and young people, such as access to contraceptive advice and services, such as the matter of patriarchal cultures in which women are expected to conceive until they have a male child, and so on.

I'm only raising those issues, we'll, we'll wind up shortly and come back to republicanism in our next lecture. But I'm raising these to show just how very different - to introduce the idea of how republicanism, republican thought requires that we, that we reason however difficult the task about our disagreements and differences. It does offer the promise that we can at least recognize others' predicaments however difficult and unrecognizable we find their positions, their situations and their ways of life.

It requires that we take other people's positions, situations and history very seriously. We may disagree about those just as they may disagree about ours and with us - but, this does mean that we do not collapse into, into the utterly sterile and irresolvable conflicts of rights, which in liberalism lead to these insoluble impasses, these insoluble differences and put themselves,

rights put themselves beyond justification or, or any form of wider consideration whether contextual or otherwise.

Now, what I've done is that try to show that there is a significant set of responses which has undergone a considerable revival in the last 30 or 40 years in political thought all around the world. And this very considerable range of responses has been, among other things, a response to the dominance of rights discourses, not only in, in the theory of the state and theory of society, in ethical theory, but in the ways our states are constituted, and in elements of major constitutions around the world.

One example that we saw earlier was, was the Shafin Jahan ruling in the Indian Supreme Court in 2018, I think it was in 2018. Now, is the principle of, of choice of faith and choice of marriage partner and so on, is that a liberal principle as articulated in the Indian constitution? It may or may not be but the point is that it, the, the judgment itself seems to express liberal principles or draws upon what looked like liberal principles in the Indian Constitution.

We'll find such principles all over the world. I in the United States, the right to bear arms, bear and use arms in self-defense is an absolute right; it's asserted in characteristically liberal terms. So my point here, my theme here, has been to show that there have been significant responses in the form of an adapted classical republicanism which offer the promise, look as though they could open fields of discourse in which we do not end up in these utterly sterile, utterly sterile (irresoluble) irresolvable conflicts, which at worst can only end in violence.

So I'll stop there, we'll conclude this introductory lecture here, this opening lecture on republicanism and citizenship. We we'll come back to this next time.