

direction to the one he proposed. When Rawls died in 2002, some of the tributes noted that his ideas were finally being picked up in the speeches and writings of an American president. Unfortunately that president was not George W. Bush, who was then in the White House. It was Josiah Bartlet, the Nobel-prizewinning economist and all-round good guy who occupied the make-believe White House in *The West Wing*. Rawls’s ideas are powerful philosophy. The danger is that they turn into fantasy politics.

More recently a different philosophical approach to the problem of structural injustice has emerged. If modern democracy results in a thin and essentially negative conception of politics, why not try to beef it up by reconnecting it with its republican roots? The core idea of classical republicanism is that people need *power*, not just protection. They require this power to resist the power of the rich to exploit their material advantages to dominate public life. A neutral politics of fairness is not enough to remedy the imbalance. Republican justice requires an active politics of redress. The inspiration for this idea is often Machiavelli, who has been resuscitated by contemporary political philosophers in an attempt to break free from the long shadow of Hobbes.

Although Machiavelli is essentially a pre-modern thinker, his version of republicanism has all sorts of possible modern uses. It can apply wherever one group is dominated by another: the poor by the rich, women by men, children by adults, patients by doctors, even animals by humans. The ideal of non-domination implies that politics has to provide a meaningful corrective for every such

relationship: it needs to give anyone who is on the receiving end of unequal treatment the means to fight back. These tools will inevitably go beyond conventional political rights, such as the right to vote. That is never going to be enough on its own. (Certainly it won’t work for animals.) Non-domination requires material help. The disadvantaged need ready access to information, communication, education and representation. This means prioritising social institutions such as trade unions and welfare schemes like universal health-care and free childcare. It also takes money. If every adult was paid a living wage by the state, no woman need find herself economically trapped in an abusive relationship. She could always afford to get out. That’s not the republicanism Machiavelli had in mind, but it’s a plausible extension of his confrontational view of politics.

Contemporary republican philosophers don’t want to go back to seventeenth-century Lucca: there wasn’t much healthcare there, universal or otherwise. Rather, they want to build on modern democracy to enable it to reach its full potential. Non-domination is a negative idea, but it’s a much richer negative idea than the rival liberal democratic idea of being left alone. Yet, precisely because we have got so used to being left alone, republicanism is a hard sell in modern democracies. It makes heavy political demands on us and places a high premium on full political participation (a far higher premium than Constant did, and even he was asking for a lot). It is a more robust political philosophy than Rawls’s, because it takes power seriously. Nonetheless it does not fit neatly with liberal democracy,