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The Old versus the New Fredro, and his Continuing Relevance Today: Review of dr. hab. Marek Tracz-Tryniecki's, *Republika versus Monarchia: Myśl polityczna i prawna Andrzeja Maksymiliana Fredry*

Republika versus monarchia serves two main goals: first, it is an intellectual biography of Andrzej Maksymilian Fredro, a little-appreciated Polish political, social, and constitutional theorist of the 17th century. Second, it provides a springboard for further, more comprehensive research into Fredro's thought for contemporary social scientists as well as historians. To sum it up plainly, Tracz-Tryniecki persuasively argues that Fredro has received a bad rap in the history of Central-Eastern European ideas, and dispels the two main myths about his oeuvre: first, his association with the *liberum veto*and, by association, the guilt for its alleged role in the collapse of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; second, the accusation that his work was both inconsistent and unsystematic. I shall summarize both points briefly, before turning to future possibilities opened by Tracz-Tryniecki's research.

For those unfamiliar with the life and accomplishments of Fredro, a brief overview of his life, his times, and the attendant literature is in order. Born in the beginning of the 17th century to a family of middle nobility, Fredro completed his university studies at Kraków, briefly travelled to Western Europe (likely parts of Germany and the Benelux nations today). Around the age of 25, he became a member of the Sejm and undertook a long and difficult career, adding a role as a speaker for the Sejm and as the royal secretary. During his political life, he helped steer the nation through the interregnum following Władysław IV's death, advised John Casimir until his abdication. His first book, *Gestorum*, is dedicated to the interregnum between Sigismund Augustus to Stefan Batory, and it is certain that he was trying to link the current political and social problems of Poland-Lithuania with those of its past. Tracz-Tryniecki's understanding of Fredro highlights this use of the past as a pragmatic tool to solve contemporary problems as one of the unifying features of his intellectual development. Another example of this is Fredro's occasional commentary

on the classical model of government developed by the Greeks and the Romans, and applying it to understand and improve the times in which he lived.

Fredro's concerns with understanding how to successfully build a Republic was what drew his attention toward the legal mechanism of *liberum veto*, wherein any nobleman could, at any point during a parliamentary session, rise and unilaterally veto the proceeds, effectively ending any legislation. The practice has been blamed by historians for creating increasing anarchism in the Commonwealth, leading eventually to its collapse. As Fredro was one of the defenders of the practice, he has shared much of the blame for its misuse. However, as Tracz-Tryniecki reveals, Fredro's understanding and usage of the *liberum veto* was much more complex, and when he was a leader of the Sejm there were times when he actively tried to undermine or prevent its use. For Fredro, the *veto* existed as a mechanism to guarantee the unanimity rule in legislation, or as close to it as possible, and as a mechanism to protect the rights of the minority. However, at other times such as war or invasion, he recognized that the right to veto had to be suspended in order to preserve the good of the country. The liberum veto was thus more of a practical tool, rather than as an unyielding doctrine.

The second major objective that scholars have had with Fredro is his supposed inconsistencies: his first book, the *Gestorum*, was a history, but then he also wrote on military theory and tactics, on morality, on politics, on law, and other topics. However, in fairness to previous Fredro commentators, it may have been more the case that an incomplete and fragmentary record of Fredro's writings gave an incomplete picture. As other intellectuals during his time, Fredro wrote in Latin, and many of his significant works have never been translated. While some of his treatises were translated into Polish at the end of the 18th century, he was nearly completely forgotten during the Second Republic, and it was not until after WWII that there was renewed scholarly attention. However, it is really in the last twenty years or so, that there has been something of a Fredro renaissance, and Tracz-Tryniecki's intellectual biography serves as something of a capstone to the tetralogy of Fredro works translated, edited, and published by the Biblioteka Staropolskiej Myśli Politycznej (The Library of Old Polish Political Thought): *Militarium* I (2015), *Scriptorum* (2016), and *Gestorum* (2018).

Republika vs Monarchia is intended as a clear contribution to the burgeoning literature on the vibrant Republican tradition in Poland-Lithuania in the 16th-18th centuries, and Tracz-Tryniecki firmly situates himself within the tradition of Ogonowski, Bernacki, Krwawicz-Grześkowiak, Pietrzyk-Reeves, and Augustyniak, Sulima-Kaminski among others. The case Tracz-Tryniecki builds is convincing: from his days as a young student traveling abroad Fredro became exposed to the

winds of absolutism that were blowing across Europe, and the proper role for the king within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth envisioned by Fredro matured into something between the American presidency and the British sovereign. Fredro was also concerned with the inculcation of classical virtue ethics into the ruling classes and the sovereign, so that there was a set of both external and internal constraints on abuse of power. These virtues were necessary to create the idea of the common good, and the greatest threat was the elevation of private interests over and against this public spirit. For this reason, Fredro also could be suspicious of the lust for wealth or political power by members of the nobility or the king, as a constant temptation that had to be checked if the Republic was to survive.

Though many aspects of Fredro's thinking were ahead of their time, many of his views would be considered unacceptable for modern audiences. For example, his vision of Poland was specifically Catholic and as a bulwark of Christian Europe would certainly be unappealing in today's largely secular conception of the state. Of course, it is important to point out that this too was pragmatic for its time and perhaps necessary due to Poland-Lithuania's history of fighting against Eastern Orthodox invaders from Moscow as well as Muslim invaders from Turkey. Thus, perhaps there is something to be said that his invocation of Poland as a Christian defender of Europe was strategic, in rallying for support in its role on the edge of the continent. Further, Fredro defended the system of serfdom at the time, and that the nobles, as the most virtuous, had the right to rule and to educate their people, though, combined with Christian themes, the nobles also were to serve the public good, rather than their own interests.

Fredro's theory of human nature is pessimistic in the sense that he believes that man is always beset by fear, rather than naturally good and peaceful, and this fear needs be overcome and turned to the good. However, he also believes that man has a great, natural desire for freedom. The balance between these two forces explains the origin of monarchy: the individual does not want to take up the responsibility for themselves, and thus appoints a ruler to make decisions for them. The stronger the obedience to a king, the more fear, rather than freedom, was winning in the struggle.

Tracz-Tryniecki's biography of Fredro also opens up new perspectives to be researched and more questions to be asked. For example, Fredro's understanding of interregna betweenkings was a "constitutional moment", in which the social, legal, and political identity of a society had the opportunity to reform itself. Due to the uniqueness of Poland's elected monarchy, interregna were relatively frequent, and, in theory, every new king had to promise to uphold the laws, and often new kings had to bargain with the nobility to gain the throne, further extending the rights of the nobility. Though not as frequent or as institutionalized as in Poland,

this has striking parallels with William of Orange negotiating with Parliament in order to receive the throne of England, or perhaps the constitutional reforms in the restoration of the monarchies throughout Europe in Napoleon's wake. This socio-historical conception of the role that a weak monarchy played in the evolution of administrative and institutional structures, as well as Fredro's detailed theorizing and speculation about how institutions change during this process, may possess qualities that are of universal application for political theory.

Another important research topic is the more complex treatment of the *liberum veto* than Fredro is given credit for, including when it should be or should not be used. At its heart, the *veto* was essentially a claim that unanimity is necessary for a republican form of government to function. For political scientists and economists, this theory is remarkably similar to questions about unanimity, super-majoritarianism, and majoritarianism present in research on voting systems, such as public choice. Fredro's admission that there are constraints that make the *veto* inappropriate suggests criteria that distinguish unanimity from majoritarianism that may provide interesting intersectional research between political scientists, public choice economists, and historians of Eastern-Central Europe.

Though a complex thinker who struggled to deeply grasp what was happening to a society undergoing rapid change and turmoil, Fredro was not unsystematic in either approach or content of study. Through extensive use of Fredro's own writings, Tracz-Tryniecki has succeeded in contextualizing the difficult and complex times in which he lived, taking great pains to map out Fredro's intellectual development and posing new challenges for historians as well as contemporary social sciences. Indeed, we may only be at the beginning of the renaissance in Fredro scholarship.

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