

## ***Reason Papers* Retrospective**

### Thanks for the Memories

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In 1971, while I was teaching a course during my final year of graduate studies at the University of Washington, some undergraduates told me about a nascent political movement called “libertarianism” that was defended by a charismatic young philosopher named Tibor Machan (which they rhymed with “taken”). This intrigued me because up until then I knew of no academic philosopher other than John Hospers who had evinced the slightest sympathy toward Ayn Rand, Ludwig von Mises, or any other advocates of political and economic freedom. Those students also recommend the magazine *Reason* to which I promptly subscribed and found to be a cornucopia of innovative approaches to practical public policy as well as political theory.

Later, after I started teaching at Bowling Green State University, I saw an announcement in *Reason* of a prospective journal called *Reason Papers*, to be edited by none other than Tibor Machan. I was heartened to learn of this plan to establish a serious journal devoted to the rational treatment of normative issues and open to a wide spectrum of theoretical viewpoints. For at that time there was virtually no publishing outlet for academic scholars interested in the study of political freedom. Mainstream academic journals offered only articles and reviews of books by welfare liberals and more extreme statist. Serious scholars of liberty therefore faced a terrible dilemma: skew their work to conform to conventional interdicts or else stop writing on normative topics.

In my own case, I had already published articles on Aristotle’s metaphysics in regular philosophy journals, but I was now at work on a new paper arguing that Aristotle’s political theory rested on a mistake. Because he did not distinguish between the political state (which claims a monopoly on the legitimate use of force) and the greater

community (including family and civil society), he failed to grasp the insights of ancient advocates of limited government. Reckoning that the chances of acceptance by an established journal were slim to none, I submitted the piece to *Reason Papers*. Tibor Machan, having no idea who I was, ran it past some specialists in Greek philosophy and decided to publish in 1974 “The State and the Community in Aristotle’s *Politics*” in what turned out to be the first issue of *Reason Papers*.<sup>1</sup> This article had an important place in my philosophical development. My first publication on Aristotle’s politics and on political philosophy generally, it served as the point of departure for my future work in both areas, including my 1995 book *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle’s Politics*<sup>2</sup> and my forthcoming book, *Aristotelian Statecraft*.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as a result of this publication I was able to form personal relationships that endured throughout my life. Tibor arranged for me to be invited to a conference where I became acquainted with not only Machan (rhymes with “pecan,” I learned) but also Douglas Den Uyl and Douglas Rasmussen (dubbed by Tibor as “the two Dougs”), Eric Mack, and other creative young thinkers to whom I feel enormous intellectual debts. Over the years since then, I have met and learned from many contributors to *Reason Papers*.

I contributed several more articles and reviews to *Reason Papers* in subsequent years. Especially heartfelt for me was “Aristotle and the Natural Rights Tradition,” which I wrote for an issue titled *The Free and Noble Spirit: A Festschrift for John Hospers*.<sup>4</sup> Toward the end of a long and distinguished career, John Hospers wrote a treatise, *Libertarianism: A Political Philosophy for Tomorrow*,<sup>5</sup> and assumed editorship of the *Personalist* in which he published important articles by Tibor Machan, Eric Mack, Robert Nozick, the two Dougs, and others. I have the greatest respect for Hospers, an outstanding

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<sup>1</sup> Fred D. Miller, Jr. “The State and the Community in Aristotle’s *Politics*,” *Reason Papers* 1 (Fall 1974): pp. 61–69.

<sup>2</sup> Fred D. Miller, Jr., *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle’s Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Fred D. Miller, Jr., *Aristotelian Statecraft: Studies in the Political Philosophy of Aristotle* (Leuven: Peeters, forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> Fred D. Miller, Jr., “Aristotle and the Natural Rights Tradition,” *Reason Papers* 13 (Spring 1988): pp. 166–81.

<sup>5</sup> John Hospers, *Libertarianism: A Political Philosophy for Tomorrow* (Saugatuck, MI: Nash Publishing, 1971).

philosopher who saw the light and courageously stood by his convictions regardless of the consequences.

I also had the pleasure of guest editing a special issue on ethics and political philosophy.<sup>6</sup> This included a symposium of critical essays on feminist philosophy and also a symposium on Rasmussen and Den Uyl's book *Liberty and Nature: An Aristotelian Defense of Liberal Order*,<sup>7</sup> a major work that has greatly influenced my own thinking on the nature of rights.

I then happily accepted an invitation to contribute a short essay, "A Philosopher for the New Millennium?" to a special forum on Ayn Rand and Philosophy.<sup>8</sup> Although Rand did not write lengthy philosophical treatises, she was in my view the most original and important philosophical thinker in the twentieth century. My early reading of her works steered me to the study of Aristotle, and I have continued to gain valuable insights from her writings.

Finally, I must thank the many authors who contributed to *Reason, Rights, and the Rule of Law*, a special Festschrift issue of *Reason Papers* in my honor, guest edited by Carrie-Ann Biondi, a former graduate student of mine.<sup>9</sup> I was deeply humbled by this recognition by so many people whose work I admire and in a journal which I hold in the highest esteem. Over the past half century, year after year, under the editorship of Tibor Machan, Aeon Skoble, Irfan Khawaja, Carrie-Ann Biondi, and Shawn E. Klein, *Reason Papers* has by far more than fulfilled its initial promise of providing a venue for free-thinking scholars to offer original and enlightening essays without being impeded by disciplinary boundaries and ideological strictures. It has been an honor and privilege for me to share in its mission.

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<sup>6</sup> *Special Issue on Ethics and Political Philosophy*, *Reason Papers* 18 (Fall 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Rasmussen and Douglas Den Uyl, *Liberty and Nature: An Aristotelian Defense of Liberal Order* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Fred D. Miller, Jr., "A Philosopher for the New Millennium?" *Reason Papers* 23 (Fall 1998): pp. 66–69.

<sup>9</sup> *Reason, Rights, and the Rule of Law: A Festschrift for Fred D. Miller, Jr.*, *Reason Papers* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2023).