



THIS WEEK'S **RESEARCH REFLECTION**
THE HISTORY OF IDEAS 2

"RETHINK TODAY THROUGH A HISTORICAL LENS"

MALIN PEDRO ©

What is required for us to live in Peace?

This logbook is a blend of philosophical reflection, artistic appreciation and critical thinking. Why? I believe we need to deepen our understanding about fundamental questions about knowledge, truth and human nature. How this continues to shape our understanding of the world.

The transformative power of art is just amazing if you stop and embrace it. Art expresses human potential and shape cultural and intellectual movements.

To critically examine the shift in what we believe, knowledge creates an openness and willingness to reignite our view of everything that happens in today macropolitical landscape.

MALIN PEDRO



The Meaning School

What is required for us to live in Peace?

Throughout history, thinkers such as Machiavelli, Locke, and Montesquieu have attempted to answer this question. Their ideas remain just as relevant today as we discuss democracy, power, and justice.

My logbook begins with the fact that I am a reserve officer, and as discussions about a stronger European defense emerge, I reflect on my role in it. I do not want to go to war. You and I have other missions than that. I have no desire to put on a uniform and problem-solve under immense time pressure, tired and hungry under a tree on a chilly night. My hope is that this text will provide you with input for the discussions you have with your loved ones, at work, and elsewhere about what is happening right now.

Since this text focuses on political philosophy, I recall the time I heard a MiG-29 being shot down by American F-15s. Per-Ove Norell, the communications chief, and I hid in a tunnel on that March Day. This happened during NATO's intervention in Yugoslavia in 1999, during Operation Allied Force.

I also remember the Egyptian Spring from January to February 2011 when I was in a car while protesters were jumping onto vehicles that had stopped around me. I was in Sharm el-Sheikh, and



Egypt's president, Hosni Mubarak, was about to be overthrown. I was sent alone on an empty Boeing 737 to support Swedish travelers and tour guides in returning to Sweden.

What is happening now invites us to reflect on the concept of democracy and what we can do when we experience injustice. Below, I summarize some historical milestones. I move from feudalism to sovereign states and war to land on fundamental ideas in early modern political philosophy. What can we learn from Machiavelli, Bodin, and Locke today? Their ideas shaped our understanding of power, justice, and democracy and remain just as relevant in our time.

The transition from medieval feudalism to the emergence of sovereign states between the 1500s and 1600s was heavily influenced by the growth of cities, trade, and the flow of money. Farmers were no longer solely bound to their plots of land; upward mobility became possible (as my great-grandfather demonstrated). If one excelled in trade, one could import and export by sea. Kings increasingly built their own armies, requiring an organized state apparatus. The development of administrative science, *cameralism*, focused on structuring the state for the common good. By the 1600s, state structures looked radically different from those in the Middle Ages. Long live Bureaucracy!

Unlike today's clear ideological divisions, liberalism, socialism, conservatism, early modern political philosophy focused on moral philosophy and how society should be organized, and life should be lived. Analyses of human nature influenced governance, and moral virtues such as temperance, reliability, and courage shaped expectations for both rulers and citizens.

Legal traditions also played a central role. Roman law (*Corpus Juris Civilis*) was rediscovered in the 1100s and shaped European legal traditions. The University of Bologna became a center for legal studies, while local legal traditions evolved. Consider how Swedish provincial laws coexisted with church law. The rise of absolute monarchies and religious conflicts led to theories about the origins and legitimacy of political power.

Theories of the social contract and the state of nature became secular tools for both defending and critiquing the new social order. Questions such as: How did society originate? How did people live before the rise of civilization? What is human nature? And what is required for us to live in peace? became central.

Natural law is a universally valid moral norm, rooted in human reason and accessible to all, regardless of religious affiliation. In the state of nature, people were attributed the right to their body, property, and opinions.

Political individualism emerged because of the popularity of atom theory, where the individual was seen as the smallest indivisible unit of society. Hobbes and Bodin argued that sovereignty must be undivided, whereas Locke advocated for the division of power to prevent abuse.

Many of the thinkers mentioned wrote during times of war. Machiavelli ended up in prison and wrote to the Medici family, asking for forgiveness, without success. Jean Bodin wrote during the French Wars of Religion, Hugo Grotius wrote during the Thirty Years' War, and Thomas Hobbes wrote during the English Civil War. As for John Locke and Montesquieu, I have no idea what turmoil surrounded their writings. As for me, I am sitting in the café at Näckenbadet after a refreshing swim.



Historically, this journey begins in 1469 and lands around 1755. Niccolò Machiavelli remains one of the most influential thinkers in political realism. In *The Prince*, he separated politics from morality. Realpolitik is about power and the preservation of power, NOT moral ideals, and he advocated for a pragmatic approach to governance. *The ends justify the means...*

Bodin developed this idea by defining sovereignty as a necessary force for stability. He also discussed the limits of natural law, arguing that sovereignty is bound by universal moral principles that can be understood through reason.

Hugo Grotius continued the discourse on natural law and laid the foundation for international law. He argued that war could be legitimate in self-defense or to restore justice. His ideas have influenced how we view human rights, the laws of war, and diplomacy today. He also played a role in shaping a turning point for the 'Thirty Years' War.

Thomas Hobbes believed that a strong central authority was necessary to avoid anarchy and that the people had no right to overthrow a tyrant. John Locke, on the other hand, advocated for individual rights and limited government. If a government abused its power, the people had the right to overthrow it. Legislative and executive powers should be separate to prevent tyranny.

Montesquieu introduced the principle of the separation of powers and categorized forms of government into republics, monarchies, and despotisms. His ideas on legislative, executive, and judicial powers shaped modern democratic institutions, particularly the U.S. Constitution.

If these words help you navigate today's political challenges, I am grateful. I have friends and loved ones who have fallen in both Afghanistan and the Iraq War, and I know that the only way to win a war is not to engage in it. So why still someone engages into war? And what should we do when others engage us into war? How can we defend freedom and justice today without falling into the same traps that history has repeatedly shown us?

One of my daughters second name is Dove.

Lots of wonder,

MALIN PEDRO

