

RECONSTRUCTING THE TRADITIONS: QUENTIN  
SKINNER'S HISTORIANS' HISTORY  
OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

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Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought: Volume One, The Renaissance; Volume Two, The Age of Reformation*, Cambridge University Press, 1978, pp. xxiv + 305, vi + 405, cloth \$29.50, paper \$9.50 each.

I

These volumes have been keenly awaited, and will doubtless be the occasion of a good deal of controversy. The author's methodological writings (cited at I, 286-7) have made him a central figure in what has been called "the new history of political thought", and though it should not be too readily inferred that he has written this long-range study of several centuries (c. 1250-1600) with the intention of exhibiting all his methods in practice, it is certain to be read with an eye — not always friendly — to seeing what these have achieved.

In the preface Skinner describes his approach to the study of texts and says that "if it were practised with success, it might begin to give us a history of political theory with a genuinely historical character" (I, xi). On the jacket this becomes: "The work aspires, in this sense, to give the first genuinely historical account of the political thought of the period": and, readers and reviewers being what they are, we may soon find ourselves supposing that it claims to *be* the first genuinely historical account of the history of political thought or theory (terms, by the way, which ought not to be used as if they were interchangeable). Such a claim would be greeted with indignation, and there is probably going to be indignation anyway; so it is desirable to be as clear as possible in understanding exactly what Skinner is claiming. He certainly does not assert that no one before him has written "genuinely historical" history of political thought. He is seeking to establish, and to practise, a method which will assure us that what we are getting is history of political thought written in a manner rigorously confined to the discipline of history; an assurance which even the great historians (Figgis, Maitland, Woolf and Laski) who preceded him did not always provide. There are legitimate non-historical, and perhaps transhistorical, approaches to the study of political thought; but these cause

confusion when they intrude themselves upon the writing of history. Skinner is claiming that it is necessary, and possible, to delimit a method which will require the historian to write history and the non-historian to practise his/her activity at a distance.

What is it that is frequently unhistorical about works which claim to be histories of political thought? The answer depends upon a careful distinction between what is merely *not* historical and what is *falsely* historical. A reader — let us call him/her “political theorist” or “philosopher” — may read a text from the past and find that it suggests many trains of thought worth pursuing as part of the discipline of political theory or philosophy. To pursue them is a wholly legitimate activity; it does not invalidate, and is not invalidated by, the historian’s activity of seeking to establish what trains of thought were being pursued — or what other intellectual or linguistic performances engaged in — by the author who wrote the text, or by persons who read and responded to it in his time or thereafter. Should the historian suggest that the thoughts which interest the philosopher had no existence in the author’s time, or even at any moment in history preceding the philosopher’s own, the latter may legitimately reply (1) that he/she is reading the text at this moment and not at any other; (2) that he/she is using it as a stepping-stone to the thinking of thoughts which (a) are the philosopher’s rather than the author’s, (b) are not immediately dependent, for their truth or even their meaning, on the conditions obtaining at any historical moment.

At this stage the theorist or philosopher is merely thinking non-historically, in the sense that he/she is using the text for purposes and in ways which can be satisfactorily distinguished from those of the historian. There can be — and there has been — no objection to this. What cannot be legitimised, but is for several reasons very difficult to avoid, is that he/she should proceed as if interpretations of the text so constructed could be made the foundations of *historical* interpretation: as if meanings discovered by non-historical means and for non-historical purposes could be treated as meanings borne by the text, or intended by its author, in history; and as if histories of political thought could be constructed in terms of the being and becoming of meanings and intentions so discovered. Once this happens we pass from non-history to pseudo-history, or at best to the construction of ideal histories or historical myths. How this happens was lately shown by John G. Gunnell in his admirable study of “the myth of the great tradition” (Gunnell, 1979), though in the end he was not willing to extricate himself from the activity he studied. “History” constructed in this way has no place in the writing of historians, but it has a marked tendency to arise when theorists or philosophers write history. Skinner and others have been labouring to eliminate such pseudo-history and have concluded that the prime necessity is to establish a method of writing history of political thought which shall contain no statements not constructed and examined by

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historians using historical means for historical purposes. There must be a separation of functions; the theorist or philosopher must be asked to accept separate but equal status, and abstain from the practice of history if he/she is unwilling to accept its discipline.

With the historicist philosopher or theorist, who wants to disclaim the discipline of history with one hand while writing pseudo-history with the other, there is nothing to be done — nothing, at least, that has not been done many times already. A more subtly intractable problem arises, however — and I suspect this will soon be evident in the responses to Skinner's book — with theorists and philosophers who, while anxious to avoid the perpetuation of pseudo-history, are intent upon using texts from the past for legitimately non-historical purposes in the present. This is the problem of information. Such a theorist too easily appears as one who already knows enough history for his/her purposes, and is thrown into confusion by the wealth of new information which the historian conveys unbidden to colleagues in other disciplines. This appears both as impoverishing — because it seems to challenge, by removing them from historical reality, many familiar interpretations which the theorist has grown accustomed to using — and as embarrassingly rich, because it compels awareness of many new meanings borne, and effects exerted, by texts in history, which the theorist has not heard of before and does not yet know how to exploit for non-historical purposes. The theorist will now be tempted to condemn such information as theoretically and (however wrongly) historically "insignificant" (Shklar, 1978), and it is to be feared that we shall soon be reading attacks on Skinner similarly inspired. This seems a pity, since the historians' information was not intended to embarrass the theorist; but it is an aspect of reality, and the theorist should not stand aghast, complaining of being told truths which he/she does not know how to use. Such problems in communication, however, are hard to avoid when a rigorous separation is made between two modes of enquiry into the same field. It is evidence of our underlying historicism that the theorist should be dismayed by being informed that he/she is not a historian, after insisting all along that he/she is not.

Meanwhile Skinner, under attack from theorists and philosophers who will accuse him of excessive erudition, must expect to face the scrutiny of his fellow historians, who will need to assure themselves that he is not impoverishing the complex realities of history for the sake of theoretical or philosophical clarity. Here there arise a new set of problems, and to investigate these we must consider just what a rigorously historical exegesis must entail and how Skinner has carried it out.

In the same preface he tells us that the method he advocates "enables us to characterise what their authors were *doing* in writing" these texts (I, xiii). The history of political thought is *histoire événementielle*; it consists of actions performed by individuals in contexts which render them intelligible, and a

“genuinely historical” history must concentrate upon uncovering these actions as performed by individuals. Typically, the individual whose action must be studied is the author, though we may also find ourselves studying the action of some individual in reading, understanding (or misunderstanding) and responding to the author’s performance. In either case, however, our attention will be focussed upon thought as (or in) action; and the act of the agent’s consciousness which we desire to understand will typically (though not invariably) be an act of utterance, articulation, verbalisation in script or print. The Putney Debates, when a shorthand-writer happened to be present, provide almost the only case of a major document of political thought not the product of a conscious act of literary creation on some author’s part. There is a real sense in which “the history of political thought” is coming to be a conventional term for what is really a history of intellectual-verbal-literary-typographical *performances*.

The historian’s aim is to recover the action; whether the action *behind* the text, or the text *as* action, is a problem in hermeneutical and literary theory; and the division between historian and theorist recurs when we see that the theorist may extract meanings and implications from the text without needing to ask whether these ever formed part of the actions of historical individuals. The historian is concerned exclusively with those implications which he/she can show were intended or understood by individuals at some point or other in the history being studied; and though these implications may in principle be as numerous and diverse as those which the theorist, philosopher or critic extracts from the text, they are not necessarily coincident with them. The historian must hold to this distinction as a city to its walls, because it is the only safeguard against the construction of historical myth, pseudo-history and ideal history. Even should the historian engage in the construction of some ideal type of political theory as having historical existence, it will be with a view to erecting hypotheses concerning the actions, performances and thoughts of agents in history.

But actions are performed in contexts which give them meaning; *événements* take place in *moyenne durée*; and the context which gives meaning to an act of political and theoretical utterance may be defined *both* as “political” and as “linguistic”. Skinner rehearses the situation with which his own and others’ writings have familiarised students: it consists (I, xi-xiii) of (1) an agent, (2) a political phenomenon on which he desires to comment, (3) an existing structure of language which constrains his capacity to comment, (4) his speech act or performance which may result in modification of (2) or (3) or both. The history to be written now consists of both *événement* and *moyenne durée*, both *parole* and *langue*; of the intellectual and verbal acts of theorists as agents, and of the durable language-structures (or paradigms) within which and upon which they are performed. It will be noticed that this is to stress the linguistic

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context prior to stressing the political or the social.

“It will now be evident”, says Skinner (I, xiii), “why I wish to maintain that, if the history of political thought were to be written essentially as a history of ideologies, one outcome might be a clearer understanding of the links between theory and practice”. “Theory” is to denote understanding of the linguistic context within which an action must be specified if it is to be performed; and the agent as theorist finds himself obliged to explore the language in which he is to verbalise the action which as practitioner he desires to perform. But the word “ideology” is commonly employed to intimate some relation between (1) conceptual and verbal structures and (2) social experience and reality viewed in considerable depth and complexity. That does not seem to be quite how Skinner is using it here. The account which he has just given us seems to confine it to (1) the agent, (2) some action he desires to perform, (3) the language or languages available to him in which the action may be expressed; and if that is indeed all, then “ideology” may be a political but has not become a cultural or social reality, and in fact connotes little more than “rhetoric” — the employment in action of the available resources of recognised public speech. Time would be wasted in attempting to demonstrate that this is all Skinner takes it to be; we know better than that. But we can, I think, define — or perhaps delimit — the scope of this book by saying that it is a history of how publicists and theorists explored and exploited the resources of language available to them, but that it does not concern itself very much with the reasons why these languages, and not others, were available to them. Though Skinner alludes to the concept of *mentalité* (I, xii), he does not make much attempt to depict mental and verbal structures as existing for a whole constellation of social and cultural reasons; and one may suspect that his concern with action as the central historical reality has led him to confine himself, at times rather rigorously, to what named individuals did with the more formal vocabularies available to them — with the *parole* rather than the *langue*. One might say, in other terminology, that his concern is with the verb: with *verbum as factum* rather than as *logos*. (The same, for what it is worth, might be said of Hobbes, on whom Skinner wrote the essays which made him an acknowledged master.)

All this can be very easily justified. Too much concern with *logos*, as we have seen, can lead to the construction of ideal histories, in which the potentialities of language are explored without regard to the actualities of history. And if Skinner seems at times to be writing with Ockham’s razor, severely restricting the number of language-contexts in which individuals can be seen to have acted, that very economy has permitted him to mobilise and present an astonishing number of individuals and their performances. Some theorists and philosophers, I have already suggested, will certainly find the forest too dense for their methods of survey; and those historians who will on the contrary be

aware of the economies and austerities that have been practised will be well advised to consider the book for what it offers them: a drastic rearrangement, and at the same time an enrichment, of the accepted paradigms used in presenting the subject. New traditions are presented, and our own traditions are altered.

## II

Volume I: *The Renaissance* is a study of political humanism, especially in its republican form. Starting as far back as the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it traces the growth of an ideal of liberty, whereby Italian city republics affirmed, first, their political autonomy as against the Empire and subsequently the Papacy; second, their internal character as communities of individuals living together in citizenship, which they affirmed partly as a means of asserting the autonomy they desired and partly as an ideal desirable for its own sake. This *libertas*, the re-affirmation of a classical ideal, is one of the two modes in which "liberty" has been asserted throughout the early modern period — the other being the legal, moral and economic liberty of the individual as against the encroachments of power (Hexter, 1979, pp. 293-303) — and its assertion we take to be one of "the foundations of modern political thought". Skinner, however, is not primarily concerned to explicate his title, or to expound in detail wherein it is that "modern" differs from "medieval" or from "ancient". This is in many ways no bad thing. To erect a complex model of "medieval political thought", is almost inescapably to write the kind of ideal history which, as we have seen, philosophers tend to demand but Skinner is determined to avoid; and we have enough knowledge by now of the distortions and fanaticisms which can arise when "modernity" is treated as itself a historical category. Yet there the word is in his title, and we are entitled to ask what use is to be made of it. His answer will emerge in due time, and has little to do with the shaping of his first chapters or even his first volume. What may be said at this stage, however, is that Skinner gives an essentially simple account of the "ideology" with which the Italian cities had to contend: it was the claim of some Bolognese jurists that the Emperor possessed *merum imperium* over the *regnum Italicum* (I, 4-8). The suggestion, dear to so many historians from Burckhardt to Baron, that there was a pre-existing cosmos of medieval ideas about universal authority, *regnum* and *sacerdotium*, from which the republics had to break free, is not rendered much further explicit.

There is no predetermined requirement that the history of political ideas, merely because they are capable of macrocosmic extension, must be shown taking place in a context of macrocosmic change. But it might on the other hand be argued, first, that the context in which a linguistic action takes place is not inherently limited to that which is necessary to make it intelligible as an

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action; secondly, that the way in which we have seen Skinner using the word "ideology" is a little inclined to suggest that it is so limited. One of the characteristics that leads me to describe this as a very "Cambridge" book is its determination to operate from phenomena, not from models. Skinner does not begin by erecting a macrocosm to show what thought was like when it was "medieval" and not yet "modern", or to generalise about the conceptual conditions under which republican ideology was required to develop — as is done, for example, in the first three chapters of *The Machiavellian Moment*. He establishes a relatively simple and microcosmic "moment", in which the "ideological" need was to rebut the Emperor's claim (and after him the Pope's) to *imperium* in Italy, and proceeds to explore the ways in which this rebuttal was made and to consider their consequences. He now pursues modes of thought in action, and their existence has consequences which soon bring him to escape from the initial context. The latter, it is true, does not explain either the existence or the consequences of the languages of thought in which its needs were met; and there may be a price to be paid for Skinner's decision to use microscope first and telescope second. For the present, however, we are considering his rhetoric, the strategy of exposition which he has chosen in order to mobilise his material.

The claims of the republics were put forward in two languages: the one rhetorical, the other scholastic and juristic. Though not new — Skinner is following Kristeller (1961), Garin (1965), Baron (1966) and others — this is in many ways the central and crucial assertion of the whole book. It needs to be stressed that the rhetorical and scholastic modes of "political thought" differ in regard to their linguistic, even more than of their conceptual, structure. The mere presence of rhetoric ensures that "the history of political thought" tends to become a "history of political speech"; the rhetoricians were not merely saying different things from the scholastics, or saying them in a different way, but claiming to modify, and actually modifying by their presence, the role of speech in political life. Not all rhetoricians were republicans, but every republic needed to advance the claims of rhetoric. Long before the great humanists of the *quattrocento*, Boncompagno da Siena, John of Viterbo and Brunetto Latini (all figures of the thirteenth century) were declaring that virtues must be actualised in actions and expressed in speech, and that the republic or community of citizens was the only political form in which speech, action and virtue were possible.

Cicero was the master ancient of the rhetoricians; Aristotle of the scholastics; Justinian (perhaps) of the jurists. In expounding the second, or scholastic-jurist, mode of republican assertion, Skinner stresses how the thirteenth-century revival of *polis* values in the course of the renaissance of Aristotelian studies joined forces, on the one hand, with the affirmation of Roman civic action being carried out by the rhetoricians and, on the other, assisted the jurist

Bartolus of Saxoferrato (in the spelling he prefers) in declaring that a republic might claim *de facto* to exercise the *imperium* otherwise belonging to the Emperor, and so to be *sibi princeps*. The ideological strategies of the fourteenth century ensured that when the scholastic Marsiglio of Padua affirmed a similar doctrine, he was arguing for the independence of municipal authority from papal control, and so using a republican argument to the temporary profit of the Emperor. The republic which was *sibi princeps* and the king who was *imperator in regno suo*, however, were to be the ultimate beneficiaries of this revival of a local secular autonomy; or rather, what the republics of the Renaissance began the kings of the Age of Reformation continued, and what kings began militant Protestant associations were to continue in claiming to resist even kings themselves. This story has been told before, but Skinner is to tell it in new language and with new insights.

We have now before us the image of a republican ideology part rhetorical and part juristic, interacting with an anti-papal ideology part juristic and part scholastic. It is from the latter that Skinner is to draw the main connecting thread of his entire pattern; the concept of a "radical scholasticism", originating in the *via moderna* of William of Ockham, carried on by Marsiglio of Padua, conciliarists such as Jean Gerson and Sorbonne theorists such as John Mair and Jacques Almain, to the ultimate benefit of Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans and monarchomachs. Before we pursue this pattern, however, we must consider that Volume I is principally concerned with an Italian republican civic humanism which was rhetorical rather than scholastic, Ciceronian and Stoic rather than Aristotelian. It is at this point that we have moved decisively away from the traditional organisation of the history of political thought as a history of political philosophies; for rhetoric, though it may convey many messages pertaining to theory and philosophy, is by its nature distinct from either. We must realise, also, that the subject-matter of rhetorically-based political thought is frequently *sui generis*, and remote from the juristic and scholastic pattern of ideas so easy to associate with formal philosophy. The rhetorician's concern was with morality and style, with virtue as speech in action; what he took up from the traditions of the *polis*, therefore, was the idea of virtue as expressed in civic actions and in the relationships obtaining between citizens. His ideal Roman, Cicero, was an orator and not a jurist, and the great tradition of ideas about *ius* and *imperium* — the true legacy of Rome in political thought — he left largely in the hands of the jurist and his ally the scholastic. This great division in the Latin legacy persisted in both medieval and neo-classicist thinking, and a consequence is that republican humanism, with its stress upon virtue, corruption and liberty in the sense of participation, is conceptually and linguistically discontinuous with the juristically-based modes of thought and speech which stress right, authority and liberty in the sense of immunity. Francesco Guicciardini was a doctor of laws, but one would hardly



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guess it from his writings on citizenship and action.

Skinner seems to produce only one theorist at home in both the republican and the juristic vocabularies: Mario Salamonio (I, 148-52; II, 131-34), a Roman patrician with Florentine political experience. He shows that rhetorical and scholastic (Ciceronian and Bartolist) modes of republican expression ran parallel, but not that they converged; he is not anxious (I, 149) to take up the possibility that Savonarola used an apocalyptic vocabulary to link citizenship with grace. He is, however, able to exploit this dichotomy so as to clarify in a most valuable manner our understanding of the European response to Machiavelli. Anti-Machiavellism, it turns out, was principally a scholastic creation, the work of Italian and Spanish Dominicans and especially Spanish Jesuits (the Huguenot anti-Machiavellism of Innocent Gentillet was a minor affair, local and chauvinistic). Reading Machiavelli in a scholastic context, they were able to attribute to him a systematically normative doctrine of *ragione di stato* which he had never called by that name, and which existed more to be attacked than to be adopted (I, 248-51); and the Jesuit revivers of Thomism were able to bracket a "Machiavellian" heresy that dominion was founded in necessity with an "Ockhamist" and "Lutheran" heresy that it was founded in the direct command of God (II, 143, 171-2). It cannot be called illegitimate to read Machiavelli in a scholastic context, and yet we have to recall that he had never addressed himself to that context or used the words attributed to him when his speech was translated into that vocabulary. The scholastics, after all, were heresy-hunters and inquisitors, and the essence of the inquisitor's art is showing that you meant what you did not intend, and must have intended what you did not say. In the school of Leo Strauss the *domini canes* have found their modern successors; but they are not the only students of political thought to proceed by treating as philosophy that which was never spoken as such. It is hard for even the most resolute to avoid this.

There is a vitally important difference between the rhetorical and the juristic modes of attributing liberty and autonomy to the local community. The one is republican; the other is better described as populist. The one asserts the moral centrality of the relations among citizens, and is concerned with virtue, equality, participation and their corruptions. The other employs the complex vocabulary of Roman law to elaborate the idea that the *populus* is capable of generating *imperium* and conferring it upon princes and magistrates: that the people are under God the origin of all just power. But the classical republic does not rest upon a grant of *imperium*, and the *lex regia* sets up principates and monarchies rather than republics. We have consequently a very long journey to make, through modes of thought essentially magisterial and monarchic — in which the popular origin of power either does or does not modify the *imperium* of the ruler — before we reach the era of Rousseau and Madison, when the concepts of republican and representative government lay

so close together that it was necessary to clarify their relationship; and in much of that journey the classical republic plays no visible role whatever.

Perhaps this is why J. H. Burns found *The Machiavellian Moment* "an oddly unconvincing book" (Burns, 1977) and J. H. Hexter was troubled by its refusal to explore the relationship between two concepts of liberty (Hexter, 1979). In the light of Skinner's paradigm — the duality of the rhetorical-republican and the scholastic-juristic modes — it can be seen as a tunnel history, a mining of the republican seam from Machiavelli to Madison which opens up no lateral galleries into the alternative mode. If so, its relation to *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* is complementary; for Skinner's second volume is a tunnel driven through the scholastic and populist seam to approximately the year 1600. But because he steadfastly refuses to set foot in the seventeenth century, he does not reach the point where the seams begin again to converge and republican ideas are taken up outside Italy (Fink, 1945; Robbins, 1959; Venturi, 1971); and his account of the republican tradition ends with it suspended like Mahomet's coffin. A chapter headed "The Survival of Republican Values" concludes with a section headed "The End of Republican Liberty". We hear of Paolo Paruta (I, 142) but not of Paolo Sarpi; of Traiano Boccalini (I, 168, 188-9) but not of Scipione Ammirato or Virgilio Malvezzi; there is, in short, less about Venetian thinking (Bouwmsma, 1968), or Tacitean (Levy, 1967; Schellhase, 1976; McKenzie, 1979), than there would have been had Skinner chosen to carry his story past 1600. This undoubtedly does something to the balance of the book and the operation of its paradigm; to see what, we must explore Volume II: *The Age of the Reformation*.

### III

The investigation of humanist thought outside the ideology of city republicanism (which never became fully established in Antwerp, Nuremberg or Berne) is actually contained in the last three chapters of Volume I, headed "The Northern Renaissance". Here a classical rhetoric of public morality, with Erasmus rather than Petrarch (or Machiavelli) as its ruling spirit, is seen making its way on royal and imperial ground. Instead of *Il Principe* and the *Dialogo del Reggimento di Firenze*, we have *The Book Named the Governor* and the *Dialogue of Counsel*; instead of treatises on the *vivere civile* and its *virtù*, we have literature designed to teach a new cognition of values to princes and the courtiers and clerics who desire to be their counsellors. The counsellor is obedient to established and Christian authority, and we expect to hear less about the moral ambiguities of action; only as the theorist of *ragione di stato* does Machiavelli find much place in the world of the kings. But northern humanism is not without its critical and subversive possibilities. *Ragione di stato* is discussed (I, 248-255; II, 171-3): Montaigne thinks stoic obedience, and

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Bodin acceptance of the sovereign, the only remedy to the power of Fortune (II, 278-9, 292-3). There is the withering philological analysis of Roman law, in which legal humanism (Kelley, 1970) succeeds in altering the whole perception of law's place in society and history (I, 201-08). The anti-scholasticism and anti-monasticism of the Erasmians lays an egg for Luther to hatch. Finally, the vocabulary of northern humanism, even at its most conventional, seems vastly to enhance the counsellor's capacity to recognise, verbalise and perhaps act upon the processes taking place in court, church and society. Though citizen and counsellor seem very different things, Arthur B. Ferguson can use (and Skinner cite) the title *The Articulate Citizen and the English Renaissance*; and Volume I concludes with a study of the desperately radical *Utopia* of the deeply conservative More.

But in fact northern humanism plays only an auxiliary role in the interplay of political vocabularies which makes up the true subject of this book. Volume II has for plot the impact of Reformation upon a world of scholastics and jurists. Here we must become especially aware of the extreme economy which Skinner displays in selecting the contexts in which the events of his history are to take place. The expansion of the idea of counsel occurred in a universe of existing ideas about kingship and law, *regnum et sacerdotium*, and we might expect to find some general exposition of the vocabulary of late medieval monarchy, designed to tell us what contexts northern humanism had to penetrate and modify. Yet on the whole Skinner avoids doing this. Perhaps he wished — and we might sympathise — to avoid the ideal history likely to arise from any confrontation of "medieval" and "modern". But in France, England, Germany, Spain, Geneva and Scotland — his horizon does not extend east to Poland or Hungary — the humanism of counsel encountered powerful and idiosyncratic national and regional societies, possessing institutions and speaking languages of their own; and this is a point at which Skinner's conception of "ideology" might have been deepened and clarified. If he had explored these regional traditions, he might have supplied a historical geography of political thought, showing why it developed in different ways and took shape in some regions and not in others; but on the whole he has not pursued this opportunity. The course of events in the sixteenth century obliges him to spend so much time in France that humanists and legists are to be seen debating their kingdom's structure and its history (II, 259-75, 309-18); the scholastic John Mair writes a *History of Greater Britain*; and we hear something of the historiography of the Anglican Church established by Bale and Foxe (II, 489, 99-100, 107-8). Yet it comes as something of a shock to realise that Sir John Fortescue appears only (II, 54-6) as one who used the idiosyncrasy of English customary law to suggest that civil and canon law had no place in that realm. That he was the author of a doctrine of kingship *regale et politicum*, of crucial importance in all Elizabethan and Stuart constitutional debate, is never mentioned at all.

We must understand, however, the deliberate austerity with which these volumes, for all their richness of detail, are planned. Their sustained intention is to distinguish between the rhetorical, scholastic and juristic traditions of political thought, and to study the interactions between them. These traditions were held in common by all of Latin Christendom, a cultural area in which humanists, scholastics, civilians — and soon we must add Protestant and Counter-Reformation ideologues — constituted a series of freely circulating intellectual communities. It has therefore been possible to plan this book on a "European" scale, selecting "Latin" rather than "national" contexts in which the principal styles of thought may be shown in action. Should we insist upon the thesis that this was an age in which the universe of Latin Christendom broke apart to form a diversity of nation-states, we should merely be asking for a history of political thought written upon an alternative pattern. Skinner has not set out to map and explore the cultural diversity of early-modern political thought in all its richness of texture, so much as to persuade us to revise the paradigms which have been governing our understanding of its history. His enterprise is highly programmatic, and is conducted by means of an extremely rigorous selection of texts and contexts. The wealth of detail cannot blind us to this, or alter the fact that the notion of "ideology" is at times heavily attracted towards the notion of "paradigm".

Volume II: *The Age of Reformation* displays Skinner at the height of his powers, organising a most complex picture with masterly skill. Its chosen theme is the relation between Lutheranism and Calvinism on the one hand, and on the other that "radical scholasticism" which was mentioned earlier and now emerges as the guiding thread that Skinner uses to organise the history of early modern political thought. This is a large claim and — though Figgis, Laski and others are acknowledged as predecessors (II, 123n) — a disturbing innovation in the established wisdom; the rest of the book and the rest of this essay will be devoted to vindicating it. Where the *via antiqua* of Thomas Aquinas upheld the harmony between natural reason and God's will, the *via moderna* traceable from Duns Scotus through William of Ockham, and his conciliarist and Sorbonnist successors, denied the capacity of human reason to organise itself to a level where reality and morality could appear as anything except the impenetrable will and command of God. In political terms, this meant that community and authority, which appeared in the *via antiqua* as the natural outcome of right reason, needing no divine action to bring them into existence, seemed to those upon the *via moderna* the necessary consequences of human sin, enjoined upon men by divine command which the limitations of their being left them incapable of fully comprehending. Civil authority was rooted in necessity and was therefore partly mysterious; and the direct command of God which established it had been given only once and had not been reiterated in the case of ecclesiastical authority. The Church was therefore excluded from

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civil authority and confined to spiritual functions, while secular princes and magistrates acquired some part of the divine authority displayed by judges and kings in Israel. In terms of Hellenic political philosophy, the *via moderna* was a little less Aristotelian than it was Stoic, since the latter school had tended to find the origins of political society in discovered necessity rather than innate rationality.

Ockhamist and nominalist thinking played its part in preparing the spiritual crisis which convinced Luther that only faith in God's unbidden grace could connect the believer to his salvation; and from this crisis Luther emerged with the conviction that the authority of the civil magistrate was directly ordained by God as a means to the punishment of human sin, so that even the tyrannous ruler might in no circumstances be resisted or disobeyed. But conciliarists of the *via moderna* — such as Jean Gerson, whose teaching was carried on at Paris by Mair and Almain — while concurring in the view that civil society, since it could not be the creation of natural reason, must have arisen as a consequence of sin, had developed a view of its origin far more secular, anthropocentric and even populist. In order to control evil-doers, the people had incorporated itself as a community and conferred *imperium* on the magistrate; and where Thomas Aquinas held that in so doing it had established an authority of a kind not previously existing and so could not bind the magistrate in its exercise, the radical scholastics affirmed that the people could give nothing which was not in it already, and so retained authority over the magistrate whom it created. What the radicals had affirmed of the Church in their attempt to render the Pope subject to conciliar authority, they did not hesitate to re-affirm of civil society; but what the secular ruler lost by finding himself the people's creature was at first more than made up by finding himself wielding an authority which God had not conferred on Pope or bishop. The advent of Protestantism, however, was to set him new problems.

It is the populist component in radical scholastic thought which Skinner contends was the means of converting the Protestant belief in non-resistance into an ideology of revolution. When the Lutherans of Germany (long before there were any Calvinists to join the debate) reluctantly made up their minds to justify resisting the Emperor, they got around the Pauline injunction to obey the higher powers ordained of God by pointing out that power was in fact distributed widely and diversely among men, so that one magistrate might perhaps resist another who was behaving unjustly. There were two directions which this argument could take. One, favoured by a group of jurists around Philip of Hesse (II, 195-96), was simply Bartolist; it sought means of showing how the inferior magistrate might be said to hold an *imperium* not immediately dependent on the Emperor. Not even among the outspoken resisters of Nuremberg do we seem to find German republicans who held that their city was *sibi princeps*; but through the door marked "inferior magistrate"

all kinds of constitutionalism could enter into Protestant resistance theory. Not only Roman law (II, 124-28) but feudal and customary law of many varieties (II, 129-30) could be employed in defence of the rights of inferior magistrates, though since the English "ancient constitution" does not in fact exemplify the union of constitutionalism with resistance theory, I may be permitted to sound a warning against its mention in this context (Skinner is cautious in doing so; II, 311). In France, where the king's authority was animatedly discussed in relation to both Roman and customary law, and neo-Bartolist jurisprudence tended to make him *imperator in regno suo* while denying *imperium* to inferior magistrates, constitutionalism, legal humanism and Huguenot resistance theory entered upon a memorably complex debate (Church, 1941; De Caprariis, 1950; Kelley, 1970). This is the context in which Skinner sets up his main analysis of Bodin (II, 284-301).

But the prescriptive and historical search after the origins of magisterial authority would not of itself give rise to any theory of populism. It was a group of Saxon jurists (II, 197-99) in the first Lutheran debate about the justification of resistance who propounded what Skinner describes as the "private law" thesis. This contained the explosive implication that should a magistrate behave unjustly, he might be resisted and slain by a private individual of no magisterial authority at all, since he had forfeited title to be treated as anything more than such an individual himself. Here was the germ of all future debate about dissolution of government, state of nature and social contract; but Skinner would have us look to the previous history of radical scholastic thought. The implication that civil society could be reduced to the relations obtaining between individuals before the constitution of authority was readily intelligible in terms of the perception — more Stoic than Aristotelian, more Ockhamist than Thomist — that it had arisen when individuals incorporated themselves as a people in response to the necessities of existence; and it presented the process whereby "the powers that be are ordained of God" as one in which the people took part at the foundation of civil society. Lutheran and Calvinist theorists of resistance displayed a very understandable reluctance in adopting this argument rather than the more conservative alternative advanced by the Hessians; but as it made its way into accepted speech, both the authority of inferior magistrates, and the historic origins of institutions which the new constitutional antiquarians were seeking out, could increasingly be presented as enacted by popular election. We begin to see why Hotman's *Francogallia* is an essay in populist history, while an English panegyric upon the immemorial antiquity of custom is not.

As the Hessian and Saxon modes of argument merge, the advocacy of resistance passes from Lutheran to Calvinist hands. Calvin's theory of ephors — which he acquired from Cicero, Melanchthon and Zwingli (II, 231-32) — is one move in the pattern, since ephors are not mere inferior magistrates, but

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*populares magistratus* whose right of resistance may be retained by the popular assemblies, or assemblies of estates, in which they were elected. Skinner, however, is emphatic that there is nothing particularly original about the ideas put forward by the Calvinists; at best, they were only completing what the Ockhamists and Lutherans had begun before them. The nearest we come to a distinctively Calvinist contribution is in the doctrine of covenant, whereby a people undertake with God that they will maintain true religion and the structure of magistracy that it implies (II, 236-38). But, says Skinner, a covenant may be the source of a *duty* to resist (chapter 7, at large); it can never be the source of a *right* to do so, and our problem is to trace the process whereby not only resistance, but the revolutionary reconstitution of government, became a right established in the people at the very foundation of civil society. To understand this (which is the business of his ninth and last chapter) we must understand how the notions of magistracy, law, history and covenant itself came to be pervaded by populist doctrines of social origin which were in every case of radical-scholastic foundation. The process is completed by Mornay (taken at II, 305, n. 3, to be the author of the *Defence of Liberty against Tyrants*) in whom a complex pattern of both covenants and contracts becomes the substance of a doctrine which appears to ground the whole structure of authority in civil society upon a series of acts of institution by the people (II, 325-37). From Mornay we look ahead to Locke, characterised (following Dunn, 1969) as author of "the classical text of radical Calvinist politics" (II, 239) — a judgment which must raise problems for those concerned with his place in a Whig context.

Part of Skinner's intention in advancing this interpretation is to call in question "the sort of Weberian analysis of Calvinism as a revolutionary ideology which has recently come to be so widely accepted" (II, 322-23). There could be no better illustration of the gap which exists between Skinner's own use of "ideology" at I, xiii, and the sense in which he uses it here. Weber (1958), Tawney (1929), Hill (1964), Walzer (1966) and George (1961) all proceeded by asserting the existence of a Calvinist or Puritan *mentalité*, explaining it as "ideology" on Marxist or Weberian premises, and presenting it as a plausible source of the political ideas propounded by those said to possess it. For Skinner, with his fiercely exact eye for political thought as *événement*, this is unnecessary. To speak of "ideology" is to assert no more than the presence of a political actor who needs to say something, and of a variety of languages available to him in which things may be said. And this means not only that Skinner's methodology is as Ockhamist as his history, and that he is telling us that *mentalités* and ideologies *non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*; it means also that the pursuit of languages is not the same enterprise as the pursuit of *mentalités*, and may lead to the discovery in historical reality of important and operative modes of thought and speech which are not

coincident with what is often meant by "ideologies". We may dismiss from consideration those who regard it as a moral and ideological offence that one is not engaged in the pursuit of ideology (Ashcraft, 1975; Wood, 1976); but it is not contested that a *mentalité* may be established as a historical reality and an act of political speech shown to be part of its configuration. We may then set about juxtaposing this way of looking at the act with Skinner's; but he will insist on the autonomy of his approach, and perhaps of the other as well.

Skinner has returned to the position of Figgis (1923), who held that there was a high road "from Gerson to Grotius", and of Laski (1936) and Oakley (1962) who held that there was another "from (the Council of) Constance to (the Revolution of) 1688" (II, 123, n. 1). Not Thomas Aquinas (to say nothing of the Devil) but William of Ockham was the first Whig. There is a superb chapter on "The Revival of Thomism", which demonstrates that the restoration of the natural-law theory of society was a majestic act of intellectual reaction by Spanish Jesuits, desirous in the name of the Counter-Reformation of refuting Ockham, Luther, Machiavelli and Erasmus in a single *auto da razon* (even Sepulveda, it turns out, was rejected less because he denied the humanity of the Indians than because he seemed to suggest that dominion might be founded in grace; II, 168). James I and the Anglicans were wrong in supposing that Jesuits and Puritans were allied against them; Mariana's justification of resistance is a borrowing of conciliarist ideas otherwise repudiated (II, 346-47).

An important step in the development of a theory of resistance as a right is said to have been the adoption from Gerson of the doctrine of subjective right (II, 116-117). *Ius* or right could inhere only in the individual, who exercised it as an unlimited *potestas* over a thing, so that it could not possibly form the basis of a ruler's *imperium* over a *res publica*. Here is the origin of all property theory and possessive individualism, but we observe (II, 328-29) that it did not stem from the need to vindicate the private ownership of goods so much as from the need of a formal definition of the role of *imperium*; the individual must be proprietor if he was to retain possession of the rights which he delegated to the magistrate. At this point the student trained in contemporary neo-Aristotelianism may detect that crucial transition from "classic natural law" to "modern natural right" which he has been taught to consider the key to the history of political philosophy; and he may note that *via antiqua* and *via moderna* were opposed in the sixteenth century over this very question. But a doctrine derived from the *via moderna* cannot have been founded by those fiendish "moderns" and "teachers of evil", Machiavelli and Hobbes — even though Hobbes had much to do with its later growth, it took a scholastic training to make one suppose that Machiavelli ever heard of it. *Via moderna* was as scholastic as *via antiqua*, and as ancient; both originated in the thirteenth-century revival of Aristotle, and it was the latter which had to be revived at the Council of Trent. The difference between them, furthermore, was that



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the "ancient" held Greek philosophy to be in accord with Christian revelation, whereas the "modern" did not; and it follows that for both the historical moment separating "antiquity" and "modernity" was that of Christ's incarnation, when the Old Law had come to an end (II, 150). The *via moderna*, like the *devotio moderna*, held that faith had decisively superseded philosophy; and the twentieth-century legend of the "great tradition" and the "modern" conspiracy against it (Gunnell, 1979) is a historical myth designed to carry on the warfare of Aristotelian philosophy against both science and faith.

Skinner concludes with a disquisition on "the acquisition of the modern concept of the State" (II, 349), with which "as an omnipresent yet impersonal power, we may be said to enter the modern world: the modern theory of the State remains to be constructed, but its foundations are now complete" (II, 358; *explicit liber*). This is the sum of what he has to say to us concerning the transition to "the modern world", and since I have praised his book as not overmuch concerned with this mode of presentation, it would be ungracious to cavil at the end. The Conclusion consists largely of semantics, in which the sixteenth-century use of *status*, *stato*, *état*, "estate", and "state" is said to have changed in ways which reveal the emergence of "the modern concept". Perhaps they do, though it would be easy to allege counter-examples in which non-modern usages persisted. A more general criticism would be that this is an odd way to end a book whose second volume has been devoted to the growth of theories of resistance and revolution. In Mornay and Buchanan, the theorists with whom the book essentially concludes, we might be said to have something much more like a "modern conception" of civil society: a complex of activities originated by a people, generating and conferring the authority which they both necessitate and limit. One can see how "civil society" in this sense might be said to entail the existence of "the state" in the sense in which Skinner is using the word; but it might have been better to let the book end in the dialectic between the two.

To say so, however, entails a further ingratitude: the book ends too soon. There is need of a further volume, carrying the story forward another hundred years, and if Skinner will not write it someone else will have to. In the century separating Mornay and Buchanan from Locke and Pufendorf, republican humanism underwent its northern revival; religious and civil theories of resistance and authority were convulsed and restated; doctrines of natural law and *ius gentium* advanced and expanded; and the word "modern" began to be used in its modern sense. A great deal of this happened in England, and it is noteworthy that Skinner's account of English political thought breaks off about 1560. We are not systematically introduced to Hooker, and though we meet Suarez, Bellarmine and Mariana, the Jesuit adversaries of James I, we hear nothing of the works of that academically sound monarch himself. The reason

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is plain: there is no dealing with James or Hooker without entering the mammoth cave of Puritan studies, from which one could not hope to emerge for at least a hundred years. It may also be inferred, from Skinner's citation of the forthcoming books of Richard Tuck and James Tully (both 1977), as well as from Duncan Forbes's recent study of Hume (1976), that Cambridge scholarship has in store for us a massive revival of an interpretation of the seventeenth century from a viewpoint stressing jurisprudence and the resurgence of *ius gentium*, which Forbes has pitted against civic humanism as a key to the Scottish Enlightenment. There is then no danger of starvation, and it would be churlish to complain that Skinner has left us much to do. The paradigms are upheaved, and the work goes forward.

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