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Review Article

Clio Redivivus: Rethinking Early-Modern Thought

The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe. Edited by Anthony Pagden. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990. Pp. xi, 360. Paper, $16.95.

Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe. Edited by Edmund Leites. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988. Pp. ix, 269. $44.50.

Political Innovation and Conceptual Change. Edited by Terence Ball, James Farr and Russell L. Hanson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989. Pp. x, 366. Paper, $16.95.

The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy. Edited by Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990. Pp. xiii, 968. $89.50. Paper, $29.95.

In 1984, Cambridge University Press launched its "Ideas in Context" series under the joint editorship of Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind and Quentin Skinner. *Philosophy in History: Essays on the historiography of philosophy*, edited by these three, inaugurated the series, and by 1990 eighteen more volumes had appeared, including monographs such as Margo Todd's *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (1987) and Peter Novick's hugely successful *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (1988). Each volume in the series carries, opposite its title page, the statement of the overall editorial agenda. This includes the commitment to discovering and

discussing "the emergence of intellectual traditions and of related new disciplines." More particularly, the series is devoted to demonstrating the "development of ideas in their concrete contexts." *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe, Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe, and Political Innovation and Conceptual Change* are among the latest offerings in a series through which the general editors predict that the "artificial distinctions between the history of philosophy, of the various sciences, of society and politics, and of literature may be seen to dissolve."

This agenda is tailor-made for a new co-operative enterprise in approaching the early-modern period—a period in which the lines of demarcation that have since arisen between the various academic disciplines had not yet been drawn. Humanism, in other words, had not yet become the humanities—much less disintegrated into the stem division that separates the humanities from the sciences (see Grafton and Jardine). This latter, the accomplishment of the nineteenth century, is a phenomenon that in the past twenty years and more has elicited much attention. Thomas Kuhn's analysis in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago 1962) set forth an important interpretative framework that shook the foundations of positivist claims for the validity, autonomy, and priority of the sciences in the contemporary world and had the further effect of undermining the faith practitioners held as fundamental to the integrity of their respective disciplines. Then, by boldly questioning the dominant methods and procedures historically used in the humanities and human sciences, Michel Foucault, that great archaeologist of knowledge, became the leader of an anti-humanist assault that philosophers, literary theorists and even historians have eagerly joined.[1] The grand result of this modem critical phenomenon is that not only are the humanities facing a crisis, history itself threatens to become redundant. For from this perspective its material, the record left by past witnesses and commentators, is useful only, if at all, as a vast resource for indicating the shifting path of human experience and the relative nature of the human understanding of that experience.[2]

Two directions for future scholarship arise from this critical assault on the humanities in general and history in particular. They are distinct, but are neither mutually exclusive nor unrelated. One is that presentist issues henceforth direct our interest in the past—which is, ironically, a perverse

return to the positivistic framework discredited by Kuhn, and before him by Herbert Butterfield. The second is most readily recognizable among converts to the various manifestations of Critical Theory, the generic term that encompasses approaches to the past governed by a concern with linguistics, semiotics, and the "deconstruction" of texts. While an historian like Lawrence Stone can merely tip his hat to the existence of Critical Theory and contemptuously dismiss its impact on historical research, a critical movement that has spawned such offspring as "New Historicism," for instance, requires more serious attention.[3]

It is this challenge that informs the editorial task of Anthony Pagden in *Languages of Early-Modern Political Theory*, and, to a lesser degree, that of Edmund Leites in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*. The same challenge, moreover, lies behind the genesis of the entire Ideas in Context series, one of whose general editors, Quentin Skinner, has denounced both the presentism that underlies the "great texts" school of intellectual history and the sometimes uncritical empirical "text in context" approach to the history of ideas—both of which have played no small part in provoking both the critical and interdisciplinary rivalry that pervades academia. Since the mid 1960s Skinner has been busy hammering out a methodology that, while initially more pointed towards refuting Marxist historiography, not only rejects those approaches but also meets the challenges that have emerged from Critical Theory and other areas. Contexts, it should be added, do figure prominently in Skinner's method—without them he would hardly pass for an historian. The contexts he so painstakingly charts, however, are those conventions in which the subjects of his studies participated. One of Skinner's main contentions is that past writers challenged and on occasion subtly undermined, or reconstructed, those conventions. And he concedes that those same conventions could also be a limiting or constraining force. Political theorists, great and small, have been faced, in Skinner's words, with "the problem of tailoring [their] projects in order to fit the normative language" of their day.[4]

Skinner has gone on to argue persuasively that "the foundations of modern political thought" were far from being "modern" at all. In two volumes that examine political theories from Bartolus to Buchanan and Hobbes, and that define the relationship of those theories to the political issues that provoked them, we see the hazy origins of the modern concept

of the state take shape, but with frequent reminders about the actual (historical) intentions of the authors. It must be said that when Skinner eventually locates the origins of the modern concept of the state in the writings of Thomas Hobbes he seems to fall into the very trap he sought to avoid.[5] But it has been on the vexed issue of "intentions" that Skinner has contributed most to validating intellectual history as fundamental to the humanities and, to boot, to responding to Critical Theorists on their own terms. His method hinges on the idea that the intentions of long-dead authors can be recovered by reading their texts through the filter of their linguistic contexts. For Skinner such an examination reveals "the range of communications which could have been conventionally performed on the given occasion by the utterance of the given utterance," a revelation that in turn enables him to establish what any author, "in writing at the time he did write for the audience he intended to address, could in practice have been intending to communicate" (63-64). This approach has provoked a number of criticisms. On the one hand, Skinner comes close to relegating his authors to a Nietzschean prison house of language in which originality is impossible; on the other, in his concern to locate the specific context that stimulated any author he appears to dismiss the idea that the value and interpretation of texts change through time. Context, in this sense, takes on the appearance of what Andrew Lockyer has called "a closed and static universe of discourse" (207).[6] Skinner has listened, pondered over, and responded to the objections of his critics. He reiterates, though, that his endeavor is to seek—and his method best encourages the ability—to recover, as John Dunn had put it, "the historical identity" of any given text.[7]

The task demanded of the contributors to Pagden's and Leites's collections of essays has thus been one of reconstructing historical identities. Historians are in the majority in both collections, but philosophers, political scientists, and scholars who straddle these disciplines, like Skinner himself, J. G. A. Pocock, James Tully and Richard Tuck, are well represented in the common venture. Nor is the exercise confined to what may be called the predominantly English-speaking Cambridge group and their students. European scholars too have been co-opted. *Languages* contains essays by Eco Haitsma Mulier, from the University of Amsterdam, and the Italian scholar Gigliola Rossini, while *Conscience and Casuistry* boasts contributions by Jean Delumeau of the College de

France, and the German scholar H.-D. Kittsteiner. The very breadth of this scholarly representation is at once a boon to the goal of the series and an affirmation of international scholarly co-operation.

On the other hand, especially in *Conscience and Casuistry*, it ensures that no overall direction is promoted and that a kind of chaotic volume ensues. For this turns out to be a motley assortment of essays, some more, some less, concerned with the issue of conscience in early-modern Europe. Ostensibly, the volume is devoted to explaining/understanding the rise and fall of casuistry as the science of conscience, a science that was governed by the authority of the Church and its spokesmen. James Tully in the very first essay of the volume, however, and Richard Tuck in the very last, are only tangentially concerned with the issue of casuistry. Tuck, in good Skinnerite form, is more pointedly interested in retrieving the intentions of Thomas Hobbes. (Unfortunately for Leites, Tuck's treatments of Hobbes and the Church have appeared, or were booked, elsewhere.) And while Tully, in "Governing Conduct," does provide a powerful critique of the Kantian view that one outcome of early modern speculation was the liberation of the individual conscience, his overall effort is devoted to something else. By examining John Locke's moral philosophy through a Foucaultean lens which holds that knowledge equals power, what Tully offers is a radical and iconoclastic account of one who for so long has been considered the champion of liberty of conscience. Not so, Tully maintains; Locke was rather the champion of the rising mercantilist state, the spokesman for state indoctrination on the value of work, and the protagonist for statist control and coercion of the poor.

Tuck and Tully, aside (and with them Hobbes and Locke), if ever there existed a hegemony of religious authority in the past it can hardly be said that the scholars examining the question in *Conscience and Casuistry* agree upon its configuration. Jean Delumeau, in fact, challenges the notion wholesale. In "Prescription and Reality," he notes that to describe medieval Europe as Christendom is quite erroneous, arguing instead that "the large-scale Christianization of Europe is a relatively recent phenomenon," the result of an ongoing process, beginning with "the two Reformations, Protestant and Catholic." He sees seventeenth-century Christianity, whether Protestant or Catholic, as an "austere unanimist religion . . ., far more concerned than the medieval church to transform prescription and regulation into reality at the popular level, and

to turn the ideal of the few into the daily life of all" (149). Christianity took on the character of a religion of coercion and cultural conformity as a result of the Reformation, he insists. Delumeau's thesis is provocative and persuasive, complementing the argument made by Peter J. van Kessel *à propos* Padua in the sixteenth century, and more recently by Benjamin J. Kaplan in regard to the Dutch, that "pluriformity" and accommodation tended to give way, with the enthusiasm of Tridentine and Protestant reformers, to the principle of "holy uniformity." Van Kessel characterizes sixteenth-century Christianity as a type in which diversity co-existed with a broad ideal of consensus. This was by no means a "tolerant" age, he insists; one of its key features, however, was an "absence of intolerance"—if we understand intolerance as an aspect of ideology that grew hand in hand with the denominational rivalry that erupted in the mid 1500s (256-75; Kaplan 239-55).

That being said, it is also clear that Delumeau's stress falls somewhere other than on the concern to explain the novel face of Christianity in the seventeenth century. This essay is a translation of his 1975 inaugural lecture at the College de France, in which Delumeau set out the state of French scholarship and an agenda for future research. In good *annales* fashion he affirms the value of the propensity in French historiography for the perspective of *la longue durée*, while at the same time pointing to the shortcomings evident in the quantification method so dear to the hearts of *annalistes*. He calls for more attention to "qualitative" history, holding up the example of Keith Thomas in *Religion and the Decline of Magic* for emulation. The great gap that he directs attention to is the shifting role of religion in society, above all the shifting social and intellectual reactions to its organized and institutional face, something that cannot be assessed with reference to statistics alone. Delumeau views the history of civilization as one of ongoing spiritual reaction and renewal. The key to understanding this phenomenon, he suggests, is through the study of texts—the "prescription" part of his title. To this he incorporates a sociological aspect to assess "reality"—numbers and figures are necessary to compute a phenomenon as the praxis of language was transformed into concrete action in the world of matter. Here, it becomes clear that the study of history reveals a bad joke in operation in the universe, as reformers, carried away with their zeal and ideology, rode roughshod over the "sub-proletariat" in the attempt to eliminate supersti-

tion, ensure the acculturation of society, to which end "a kind of indoctrination unknown in the Middle Ages" became the *modus operandi* of institutionalized religion.

But it is precisely by following Delumeau's focus on the institution of the church and what approximates a Marxist perspective on the cultural alienation of the masses that a reader comes to wonder whether the insights offered by an English social historian like Margaret Spufford have any equivalent in France. In a recent essay she questioned the notion of English puritanism as one that sought to whip the undisciplined masses of the countryside into (Protestant) piety and (economic-individualistic) shape. Suggesting as well that the ignorant and illiterate could be as devotionally committed to Christianity as any member of an elite bourgeoisie, she seriously questions the novelty of "puritan" efforts at social control by pointing to earlier attempts that were provoked by economic crisis. Might the same be said for other areas of Europe? Delumeau also seems to take the complaints made by local clergy against recalcitrant parishioners at face value, holding, moreover, that the resistance to the coercive religion based on fear on the part of peasants and sub-proletariats was something that saved what might be called the real spirit of Christianity. It turns out that the key to his approach, in this essay, at least (and as he admits at p. 143), is less the goal of coming to grips with either the prescription or reality of Christianity in the seventeenth century. It is to establish a framework for tackling the origins—explaining the background—of the desacralization movement of the eighteenth century. This in turn points to the dechristianization movement of the French Revolution, that centre of all French—and modern—historiography. The quest for antecedents and origins of an event that lay a century and half away must inevitably miss the point in establishing the impact and role of religion in early modern society.

Problems of a different nature crop up in Margaret Sampson's contribution to the Leites collection, "Laxity and Liberty in Seventeenth-century English Political Thought," as well as in Leites's own essay, "Casuistry and Character." Both demonstrate a lingering attachment to the old Hegelian notion that the march of history is one of the unfolding of reason in the universe, which includes the concomitant view of human liberation from the shackles of superstition and clerical control. Also evident is a propensity for favoring other grand causal theories, such as

Weber's "protestant ethic" thesis. Relying entirely on selective examples of texts, both Sampson and Leites see the task of caring for the conscience during the seventeenth century passing out of the hands of the clergy and into the hands of laypersons (secular political theorists for Sampson; novelists for Leites). Sampson, arguing that "Grotius, Hobbes, Nedham, and Locke all claimed justice as the exclusive territory of the lay casuist (or natural rights theorists)" (117), obviously believes that contemporaries as well as later commentators found those claims convincing. How far they were challenges to the actual state of things does not really get aired. For his part, Leites argues the logical inconsistency in early seventeenth-century English Protestantism when on the one hand it proclaimed the autonomy of the individual will in matters of conscience, yet on the other produced a body of casuistical treatises which implicitly contradicted that claim by exhibiting external authority. Leites's care for textual precision is commendable, approaching, at times, the attention that might be lavished by a deconstructionist. Unfortunately, his assumptions are sometimes questionable. While clearly correct in claiming the Levellers as spokesmen for the radical application of Protestants' claims, viz, that "Society had no right to deprive anyone of the use of his judgement because of his poverty," Leites goes on to suggest that the franchise was the most important aspect of the Leveller program and then imposes a totally ahistorical interjection about the differences between the Levellers and nineteenth-century "proponents of the secret ballot" (122). What the Levellers did not propose in relation to the vote (and which it follows logically that they should have, according to Leites) becomes symptomatic of their failure. This technique is tantamount to lifting the Levellers out of their specific historical—and highly charged political—context, and forces them to respond to a question of Leites's own making. In this case, familiarity with scholarship more recent than Woodhouse's *Puritanism and Liberty* (1950) might have helped temper what is in other respects an illuminating piece.[8]

It might be thought that little of the critically-alert consideration of the early modern period promoted by Skinner is readily evident in *Conscience and Casuistry*. Contemporary scholarship still appears bounded by modern preconceptions and now questionable interpretative schemes. Other essays here, however, do provide fresh perspectives as they explicitly or implicitly reject hindsight, or as they deliberately abstain

from examining the past in anachronistic terms. One such is John Bossy's contribution, "Moral Arithmetic: Seven Sins into Ten Commandments," which argues that official Catholic morality, based during the Middle Ages on the Seven Deadly Sins, became from the fifteenth century onwards grounded on biblicism, in particular the Decalogue. This is a valuable rejoinder to the argument of Delumeau. According to Bossy, Christendom became something more like a real entity with the adoption of the Ten Commandments as a moral code, a process that was championed by Ockham and, in his turn, Gerson. The Christianization of Europe was achieved, in these terms, not thanks to the Reformation, but due to the efforts of earlier scholastics.

Bossy convincingly re-creates an important element in the process of moral inculcation under the sponsorship of the church. It is one, moreover, that has been overshadowed as historical attention has focussed on issues that tended towards the disintegration of "orthodox" authority and hence helped achieve the liberation of the individual. From this perspective, once important or controversial historical actors cease to attract interest. Consider the Jesuits. As an order they have survived the aspersions cast on them successively by James I of England, Blaise Pascal and the Jansenists in seventeenth-century France, a host of protestant divines and secular thinkers, and even the Marquis de Pomball in eighteenth-century Portugal. They are still with us, even if they do not wield the same power or stimulate the same responses they once did. But neither have they elicited much attention in recent years, except perhaps among their own scholars. Johann P. Sommerville and Margaret Sampson, however, underline the powerful and provocative position they once enjoyed as casuists. It might be said that some of the myths surrounding the "sophistry of the Jesuits" can be laid to rest, especially as argued by Sommerville in "The 'New Art of Lying': Equivocation, Mental Reservation, and Casuistry." More importantly, however, their historical role in religious and political polemics is once again affirmed and shown to be intrinsic to any rounded understanding of early-modern morality and thought.

If the Jesuits are still with us, can the same be said about casuistry, the "science" devoted to examining particular moral problems in light of general moral principles? If indeed casuistry has passed into the wayside of discarded concepts, H.-D. Kittsteiner illustrates Kant's reworking of it

and notes his innovatory understanding of its function in society. In "Kant and Casuistry," Kittsteiner argues that whereas earlier casuists sought "to bring the realities of the world into harmony with religious demands that stood in relation to heaven," Kant's moral law, epitomized in his "categorical imperative," "obtains a teleological orientation with respect to a philosophy of history," in which "a moral union of reasonable world-citizens [is] considered as possible" (212-13). There are at least two possible conclusions to be drawn from this argument that stresses Kant's idealism. Historically, as well as providing a philosophical justification for the Enlightenment, Kant can be seen to have been doing much to reverse the tensions imposed on Christians by the Church's shift from the Seven Sins to the Decalogue as the basis for moral instruction. For, as Bossy explains, at that juncture the focus of morality changed; thenceforth, and for a good three centuries, morality ceased to be devoted to inculcating worldly and neighborly duties and instead concentrated on the duties owed to God. Thanks to Kant, then, morality returned to more social and human goals. More fundamentally, Kittsteiner's argument about Kant illustrates the transition from casuistry to ethics. Henceforth, neither churchmen nor novelists nor political theorists are guardians of the moral code; to adapt a Miltonic phrase, new philosophers are old Jesuits writ large.

And indeed, Kant is one of those thinkers who figures prominently in any "great texts" ensemble that traces the morphology of Western thought down through the ages. It is he who has been credited with marking the break between past and present, early-modern and modern thought, and his revolutionary status is certainly upheld by Kittsteiner. But the extent of his influence in shaping the modern understanding of the history of philosophy has begun to be seriously questioned, not least by Richard Tuck. In "Optics and Sceptics: The Philosophical Foundation of Hobbes's Political Thought," (*Conscience and Casuistry* 235-63) and in "The 'Modern' Theory of Natural Law," (*Languages of Political Theory* 99-119), Tuck offers a view of seventeenth-century moral and political thought that Kant, in his Enlightenment optimism, would hardly have appreciated. True, one of Kant's great challenges was confuting eighteenth-century scepticism as articulated by Hume and others. This was a far cry, however, and had an entirely different goal, from the scepticism confronting early modern thinkers like Hugo Grotius and Thomas

Hobbes. Understanding the nature of that earlier sceptical assault, Tuck maintains, leads to a different picture of the history of philosophical thought, at least as it has come down to us.

In two finely crafted essays Tuck shows that it was the challenge posed by early-modern sceptics like Montaigne that shaped the endeavors of Grotius and Hobbes (and Descartes and others, besides). The villainous theorist of absolutism is completely disregarded here as Hobbes is shown to have been fervently involved in the issues facing his contemporaries, English and French alike.[9] Over twenty years ago Skinner did much to fix Hobbes in the intellectual context of English civil war and Interregnum debates; now Tuck widens the discursive context which stimulated Hobbes, making a persuasive case for his view that Hobbes's "overall purpose" was "the underpinning of a pre-existing modern moral science," the one produced by Dutch natural rights theorist Grotius. Contrary to the post-Kantian construction, Grotius himself is shown to be no heir to the pre-Renaissance school of natural rights theorists. His minimalist universal principles—the right to self-defence and the law prohibiting the wanton injury of another—were, according to Tuck, not a reworking of earlier Aristotelian natural rights theories but a response to the powerful sceptical onslaught, launched by Montaigne and pursued by Charron, in the realms of epistemology, theology and politics.

The sceptics' prescription for moral and political guidance was the invocation of prudence, derived from the view that everyone naturally sought survival in the uncertain circumstances of civil war. Self-preservation, therefore, the only universal rule acceptable to the sceptics, formed the fundamental precept in the Grotian and Hobbesian moral scheme. Tuck insists that "it was the search for truth in a world of uncertainty which absorbed Hobbes" (*Conscience* 249). To this end, he became preoccupied with finding the basis for certainty in a theory of optics, which was expressed in his law of motion. But Tuck does more than merely rethink the intentions harbored by Hobbes as he produced his mechanistic philosophy (one that would hardly have calmed John Donne, even as he lamented the "new philosophy" that cast "all in doubt"). He also broadens the basis for understanding the humanist context that Hobbes emerged from, and Grotius remained a part of, a humanist environment devoted on the one hand to examining and extrapolating on the legacy of antiquity and, on the other, to experimenting with all forms

of literature (*Languages* 116). Stressing the point that humanist exegesis frequently led to the logic of scepticism, Tuck illuminates the issue that provoked that crisis in certainty to which Grotius and Hobbes responded. Gigliola Rossini, in "The Criticism of Rhetorical Historiography and the Ideal of Scientific Method: History, Language and Science in the Political Language of Thomas Hobbes" (*Languages* 303-24), provides something of a complementary piece to this side of Tuck's thesis. Arguing that Hobbes's preoccupation with displacing the still dominant Aristotelianism of the time was part of a broader concern to undermine the humanist absorption with rhetoric and history, which provided a very uncertain basis for any theory or science of political obligation, Rossini discusses the breadth of what she posits as Hobbes's anti-humanist rebellion. From the translation of Thucydides (1628) to the *Elements of Law* (1640) and beyond, she claims, there is "not a contradiction but a real continuity in Hobbes's evaluation of the cognitive status of rhetorical knowledge."

Hobbes's attachment to the Thucydidean model of historical inquiry was both a lifelong interest and foundational for his critical, and early, anti-rhetorical stance, argues Rossini. But that very criticism should be seen as "the prelude to the discovery of a scientific method to which history itself had to be subordinated." In his later philosophical writings Hobbes consistently invoked history in order, first, to deny its validity as a "demonstrative science." In this guise, it served the very valuable function of emphasizing "the historical, and therefore neither necessary nor universal, origin of the values of justice." Secondly, however, history served the equally valuable function of confirming "the necessity of defining what is *just* and *unjust* within 'authentic' knowledge." By concentrating on his nominalism, his ongoing concern with illustrating the rhetorical and "relativist" nature of both language and history, Rossini amply demonstrates that Hobbes's "science" of politics emerged from his criticism of rhetorical historiography. Along the way, she also insists that humanist context hardly played that ambiguous role in the development of his political and moral thought, as argued by Leo Strauss. By establishing the contemporary rhetorical approach to history, and by reminding us of Hobbes's consistent attacks on demagoguery, Rossini adds another dimension to Hobbesian scholarship. Moreover, without ever once bringing up scepticism she manages to imply its importance for Hobbes. Tuck's thesis—that in order to be convincing, post-sceptical

theorists like Hobbes (and Grotius) had to engage with sceptical arguments—is given further weight by a scholar who has approached Hobbes from an entirely different angle.[10]

The close concern for concrete contextualization evident in the essays by Tuck and Rossini also permeates the remaining essays in *Languages*. In contrast to the Leites volume, Anthony Pagden's editorial hand is evident throughout this collection, and the result is a tight and cohesive volume that validates two essential points. The first is that political theorists in the early modern period participated in common discursive practices. J. G. A. Pocock provides the theoretical underpinnings for this thesis by discussing a method by which the variety of discourses that pervaded the linguistic universe inhabited by political theorists of the early modern period may be uncovered. Pocock redirects the focus of intellectual historians and rechristens his "*metier*" the history of political discourse—the study of the "idioms, rhetorics, specialised vocabularies and grammars, modes of discourse or ways of talking about politics . . . employed in the political discourse of early-modern Europe" (21). Like Skinner, Pocock was engaged in working out a method for intellectual history before the advent of Critical Theory in history. In light of its invasion, it is therefore now timely and fashionable that by stressing that the element of language must be the first item of inquiry in any given historical text, Pocock, like Skinner, can make a fundamental concession to the criticism of literary theorists and deconstructionists. And in his scheme, again much like Skinner's, language must be recognized as the vehicle that mediates thought and action. However, for Pocock, language is far from static, being conditioned and altered by time, place and culture. Past writers emerge as conscious agents, actively participating in what turns out to be a far from monolithic prison house of language.

The historian, then, is only partly archaeologist, remaining for the most part detective but becoming also something of a language analyst. Four such languages are treated in this volume: that of Aristotelianism, with its stress on natural law; that which has become known as classical republicanism and whose practitioners range from Machiavelli and Thomas More to James Harrington; that which indicates the prevalence of commercial attitudes in society; and finally, that concerned with establishing a science of politics. Deciphering the variety of idioms in each of these is a large task that demands that the historian become

acutely attuned to the role of rhetoric and metaphor in any given language. There are advantages as well as weaknesses in this approach. The most glaring weakness is the lack of training in most historians, in techniques of literary criticism—which are quite distinct from cultural or philosophical, even historical, modes of analysis. For all the discussion of languages in this volume, and for all that its focus lies in demonstrating the variety of discursive practices in the past, there is little attention to the actual debates over language among the early moderns. Thus Gigliola Rossini, in thrashing out the intellectual background to Hobbes's argument with historiography and demagoguery, affirms that Francis Bacon repudiated rhetoric as an Aristotelian form of false knowledge. Bacon was in fact very closely concerned to establish rhetoric as a legitimate aspect of his so-called new human philosophy.[11] His argument here was with the "Ciceronians," as was long ago demonstrated by Morris Croll, and as has been more recently reemphasized by other literary scholars.

It could well be that scholarship, split up as it is among the various academic disciplines—each with their own priorities and different critical modes—has become too unmanageable for any single historian to follow every angle of scholarship in respect to a particular problem. This is a problem that remains to be overcome, but it emerges as a gap even in Richard Tuck's examination of the emergence of the "modern" theory of natural law in Grotius and Hobbes. For one of the sceptics' greatest weapons was the "neo-Senecan" and Tacitean language in which their assault on neo-Aristotelian certainty was expressed.[12] It was thus with the language as well as the epistemological issue that Hugo Grotius and Thomas Hobbes engaged. It seems that only when literary historians too have been co-opted into the enterprise envisaged by the "Ideas in Context" series, might a rounder, all-inclusive recapturing of the languages of early-modern Europe be achieved.

Still, the great advantage of the strategy promoted by Pocock in *Languages* and adopted by most of the contributors in the volume is that it demands the scuttling of overarching interpretative schemes—a technique that used to predominate (and is still, as we have seen, evident) in historical practice. Most of the essays in *Languages* manifest this tendency, none more, perhaps, than Anthony Pagden's own contribution, "Dispossessing the barbarian: The Language of Spanish Thomism and the

Debate over the Property Rights of the American Indians," and Mark Goldie's "The Civil Religion of James Harrington." Pagden, one would venture to predict, will be thought "reactionary" in the debates that are presently punctuating this, the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's landing in the Americas. But his study adequately indicates how unimportant the Americas initially were in the European arena of discourse. Dominicans, he also shows, were hardly the bogeymen of contemporary mythology. While their public spokesmen were the first defenders of the rights of the native inhabitants, Dominican polemicists were nevertheless more urgently interested in combating the Lutheran heresy and above all strove to refute Lutheran arguments about sovereignty and the right of deposition. As natural law arguments became more fully worked out, the American Indians figured more prominently in Spanish polemics; less, however, to justify the Spanish presence in "the Indies," as to provide "a legitimate reason" for war "among Christian princes," especially against heretics like Henry VIII of England (94).

For his part, Mark Goldie offers a corrective to "modern commentators who suppose that Harrington's rationalism consists in the utilitarian calculus of interests" (211). Goldie will provoke fierce debate in airing what he charges is the often overlooked religiosity of Harrington's thought in this argument, and the factor of religion as an informing principle in the development of a modern concept of ideology is repeated by Goldie in his contribution to *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*. In this collection, Goldie's essay on "Ideology," John Dunn on "Revolution," Quentin Skinner on "The State," and Jock Gunn on "Public Opinion" and "Public Interest," are about the only five, out of fourteen, that maintain an historical perspective and thus refrain from simply tracing the shifts that have attended the various meanings of political concepts—a method that characterizes most of the other essays, and suggests that their authors have never heard of Herbert Butterfield. This collection has a distinct political agenda which is set out in the Editors' Introduction. Here, an appeal is made for Western civilization (or the thinking part thereof) to break out of its lethargy and reflect upon the sorry state of contemporary political rhetoric. As the editors affirm: "By uncovering and recovering lost meanings conceptual histories enable us to escape the politically stultifying confines of a parochial and increasingly dangerous present" (5). Just how to go about escaping and, presuma-

bly, altering this dangerous present is never adequately explained. An outright call for revolution would have been refreshing. Instead, this volume tends towards the sterile, as the history of political concepts is discussed from the comforts of the privilege halls of academe.

Apart from the contributions by Goldie and others, it is the discussion of theory and method that arouses the historian's greatest interest in this volume. For, in the methodological essay by James Farr, much is said about understanding conceptual change historically, about inclining "towards a fairly strong contextualism," and about engaging in "genuine historical thinking" (40-41). But when all is said and done, and when this theory of conceptual history is set against the alternative presented in the preceding essay by Quentin Skinner, one could hardly be faulted for believing that Farr's understanding of the concept of *history* extends only as far as acknowledging that concepts used in the past have a history. Owing much, apparently, to the German *Begriffsgeschichte* school, Farr recommends a kind of synchronic dialectic with the past as a means of understanding the changing nature of political concepts; furthermore, this is the type of dynamic he sees as the key characteristic in conceptual change viewed historically (cf. Richter, "Conceptual History" 604-37; "*Begriffsgeschichte*" 247-63). This is a complete reversal of Skinner's appeal for an examination of the social and cultural conventions that lie implicit—and therefore to be uncovered—in any historically situated concept.

Thus it is quite ironical that Skinner, who seems to have been impelled into the "Ideas in Context" venture in critical reaction to the presentism of analytic philosophy, the Whiggishness of historical inquiry, and the challenge posed by Critical Theorists to understanding the past, comes across in this later volume of the series as a collaborator in the very features of contemporary scholarship that, in its various manifestations, he set out to condemn. For, overall, the only questionable merit of *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change* lies in its proclamation that the discipline of political science has been converted to the view that politics is linguistically conceived and the language is historically constituted. And as such a superficial methodology is applied in the Social Sciences, the result tends to a resurgence of presentism, however defined.

If the quest for understanding the contemporary relevance of any given historical text, movement, author, or even concept, stimulated the launching of the series, this volume reflects the total collapsing of history into mere illustration. The same, though, and this should be stressed, cannot be said of the other volumes examined here, much less the *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*. A valuable reference-book, this volume includes the most up-to-date scholarship on Renaissance thought and a number of reappraisals of the intellectual features of this crucial period in the history of Western thinking. Much like the original impetus behind the launching of "Ideas in Context," the *History* has been prompted by the goal of recovering an *historical* understanding of that Latin-based culture which conjoined early-modern European intellectuals, and in which "the schemata of philosophy" comprehended all those areas that have since become distinct disciplines in the Humanities and Sciences (3). It is the historical nature of the past that Skinner, a leading light behind this volume as well as the "Ideas in Context" venture, once again insists upon. And as he does so, it seems to me that he is asking several fundamental questions of his contemporaries: Are current-day academic divisions of labor, objectives, and methodologies entirely justified? Can and should the boundaries that have been established around the areas of the humanities be transcended? Can and should the anti-humanist onslaught launched by deconstructionists be confuted? To ask these questions is to admit that in its contemporary state academia is in peril of stagnation; it is to suggest that the current state of intellectual crisis—evident in the protectionism and elitism that pervade many academic departments on the one hand, and the atomism, sometimes nihilism, that pervades contemporary western thought on the other—threatens to envelop us and smother both the concern for the human past and hopes for the human future.

To attempt to answer these same questions is to affirm the place of scholarship in an ongoing human endeavor in which understanding the past in its variety, and according to its peculiar and particular contexts, occupies a prime place. This does not mean that history offers pat answers or easy solutions to contemporary social and political ills. On the contrary, it is to recognize the ever changing convolution of contexts that punctuates human existence. It is as well an appeal for us to come to terms with our own individual assumptions and presuppositions, a

recognition that, in turn, begs that we examine the present in its own terms and for its own ends (Skinner, "Meaning" 67). If I am correct in my reading of Skinner's vision of the relationship of history to present concerns, he appears as at once a Lorenzo Valla, dismissing the Donation of Constantine as an historical myth, and at the same time a Richard Overton, who on behalf of the Levellers demanded a new constitution adequate to the times on the basis that new times had new needs and these could not be met by mere affirmations of old principles. But this is not to reject the past entirely, for first we must know it. In this scenario, history emerges as the queen of the humanities; the historian, the champion of a new humanist endeavor.

NOTES

1. For a recent assessment of Foucault's "rise" to intellectual preeminence, see Hutton.
2. This crisis has spawned a vast literature. See, for example, LaCapra, Kellner, and for histories of "history," Novick, Tosh.
3. See Stone. His short and would-be lethal attack on "post-modernism" has provoked rebukes by Joyce and Kelly.
4. Many of Skinner's critical essays have been collected and published as *Meaning and Context*, ed. Tully. The words quoted are to be found in "Language and Political Change," *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. Farr et al, 22. For the history of this article, see p. 6 n. 1.
5. Skinner makes this the case less in *Foundations* than in "The State," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. Ball et al, 90-131. See, however, the criticisms made by Oakeshott.
6. See Lockyer. A number of essays critical of Skinner's method are included in Tully.
7. See Skinner, "A Reply to my Critics." For a more positive analysis of Skinner's contribution to the study of ideas in context, see Tully's introduction, 7-25; and for an indication of several key historiographical shortcomings in Skinner's approach, see Wootton, 11-14.
8. Two very different approaches to understanding the Levellers in their seventeenth-century context are proposed by Davis and Wootton.
9. Cf. the more obvious political-scientist approach to Hobbes, as reflected in the essays collected and edited by Dietz; cf. also, Shapin and Shaeffer.
10. Both Rossini and Tuck, nevertheless, do tend to forget that Hobbes ultimately found no way out of the fundamental problem he and contemporaries faced other than by setting up an artificial authority to control and provide security for society. Hobbes's

science of politics was all very well but he still needed to create a Leviathan to be the final arbiter in matters that could find no unanimous consent among the diversity of human society. Skinner has recently provided a timely reminder of this all-important facet of Hobbes's use (and not his complete repudiation of) rhetoric. See "Thomas Hobbes: Rhetoric and the Construction of Morality"; see also Johnston.

11. "The duty and office of rhetoric is to apply reason to the imagination for the better moving of the will," *Advancement of Learning*, in *Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. Spedding et al, 7 vols. (1868), III, 409; "Rhetoric is to the imagination what logic is to the understanding," *De Augmentis*, bk vi, pt 3. See *Works* III: 409. n. 1.
12. See, for example, Schmitt.

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