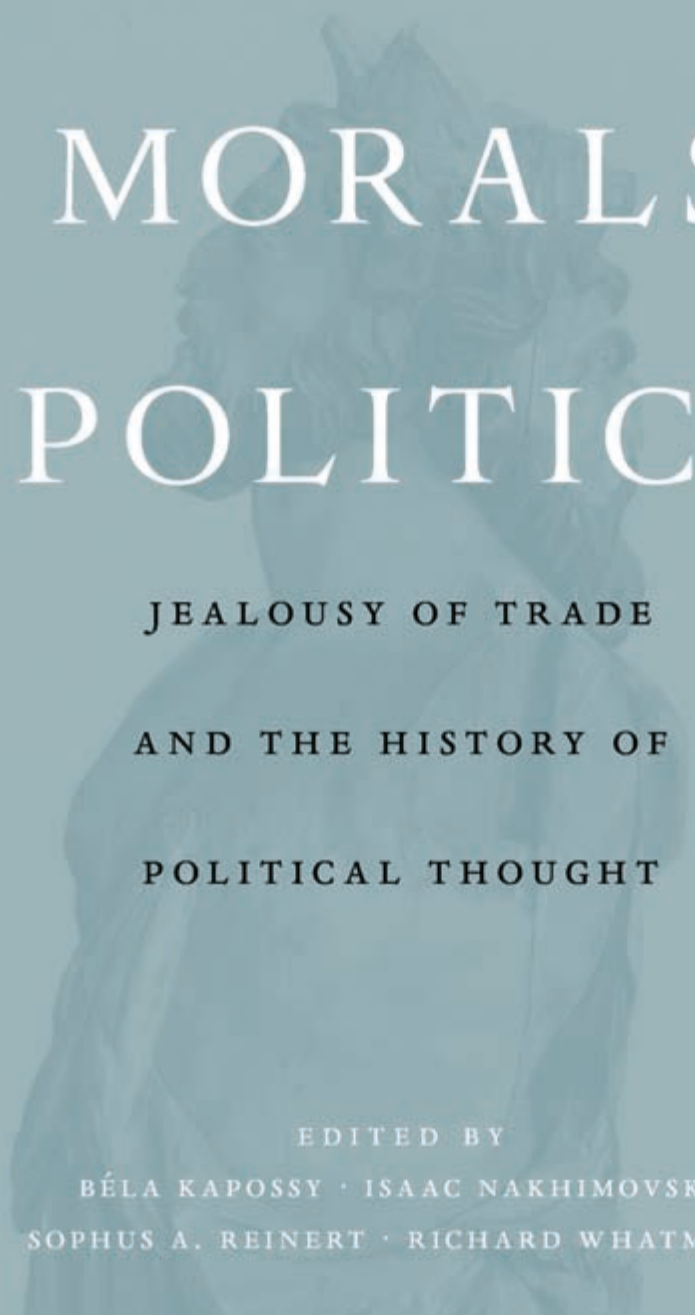


MARKETS MORALS POLITICS



JEALOUSY OF TRADE
AND THE HISTORY OF
POLITICAL THOUGHT

EDITED BY
BÉLA KAPOSSY · ISAAC NAKHIMOVSKY
SOPHUS A. REINERT · RICHARD WHATMORE

MARKETS, MORALS, POLITICS

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For Istvan Hont (1947–2013)

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MARKETS, MORALS, POLITICS

Introduction

BÉLA KAPOSSY, ISAAC NAKHIMOVSKY,
SOPHUS A. REINERT, AND RICHARD WHATMORE

I

IN THE INTRODUCTION to his 2005 masterpiece *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective*, Istvan Hont observed that, “The history of political thought is at its most helpful when it unmask[s] impasses and eliminates repetitive patterns of controversy.”¹ In place of such controversies, *Jealousy of Trade* supplied eye-opening accounts of the complexity and imaginative power of eighteenth-century thought. Hont showed just how vividly thinkers such as David Hume and Adam Smith had grappled with the problems posed by war, trade, and debt. His bold conclusion in *Jealousy of Trade* was that late twentieth-century- and early twenty-first-century debates about capitalism, globalization, and the nation-state had achieved no significant conceptual novelty over their eighteenth-century predecessors. Neither historians nor philosophers could afford to ignore or simplify Hume’s and Smith’s thinking about markets, morals, and politics. Hont was convinced that an adequate response to the political challenges of our own times required the entire

The editors would like to thank Anna Hont, without whose help this introduction could not have been written.

1. Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 4–5.

postrevolutionary edifice of modern social and political theory to be re-examined from this perspective. The groundbreaking scholarship on the history of political thought that Hont collected in *Jealousy of Trade*, and the challenge it leveled at contemporary political theory, forms the starting point for the chapters comprising this volume.

The approach to the history of political thought that produced *Jealousy of Trade* is already evident in a remarkable letter that Hont wrote on September 29, 1977, when he applied to King's College Cambridge for a fellowship in Economic or Social Theory on the project "Society and Political Economy, 1750–1850."² At the time, having defected from communist Hungary in October 1975, Hont was undertaking research on Hume at Oxford University, under the supervision of Hugh Trevor-Roper, then Regius Professor of History. Trevor-Roper, like many historians of the generation that grew up in the 1920s and 1930s, had been attracted by Marxism and the promise of making history a science. However, by 1950 he had become certain that increasingly dominant Marxist approaches to historical research were impeding scholarship, that ideas were as significant as economic forces, and that the relationship between economic and ideological development was never predictable.³ By the 1970s, Trevor-Roper was among the most influential historians working, and a renowned essayist and social commentator. However, Hont's application letter makes it clear that his approach was altogether the product of his work at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, where he had received a doctorate in 1974 for a 100,000 word study of "David Hume and Scotland" under the supervision of economic historian Éva Balázs.

Hont explained in his application letter that since his days as an undergraduate in Budapest he had been interested in "the theory of historiography and the epistemological problems of historical understanding." This interest had led him to identify a paradox in the dominant Marxist approach he had encountered in his Hungarian education. Hont stated that the historical research undertaken by Marxist historians lacked

2. Istvan Hont to David Parry, September 29, 1977, Istvan Hont Papers, University of St Andrews Special Collections.

3. Adam Sisman, *Hugh Trevor-Roper: The Biography* (London: Phoenix, 2011), 202. Trevor-Roper wrote that, "Marxism has been a great stimulus to historical study but by now it has long succumbed to intellectual sclerosis."

"any explicit theory." Marxist philosophers, by contrast—and Hont maintained an interest in the work of Georg Lukács especially—were producing theories of historical development that, however remarkable their conceptual power, did not inspire historical research; rather, they "virtually replaced historical enquiry itself."⁴ Hont's conclusion was that it was vital to write "philosophical history" but that this could only be achieved by "conceptually rigorous but nevertheless strictly historical study." His further claim was that the best guide to this kind of research had to be philosophers and historians who had not been driven to separate empirical research from theory and indeed would have rejected any presumption of a separation between such inquiries. Hont claimed that it was in the eighteenth century, during the period in Europe termed the Enlightenment, that exactly the kind of philosophy in which he was interested could be found. David Hume, Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, William Robertson, and John Millar were in the vanguard of a remarkable series of studies of economic development that were brilliant because they took seriously the historical specificity of any claim about economic action and acknowledged the political limits to economic innovation in addition to the economic limits on domestic and international politics. Life and history were characterized by the putting into practice of strategies for reform, improvement, or survival that always had unintended consequences. A philosophical history focused on the problems of the present had to acknowledge these facts about the human world.

The King's College committee that interviewed Istvan Hont appointed him, alongside Michael Ignatieff, to lead the "Society and Political Economy, 1750–1850" project. There was, of course, an overlap between Hont's approach and that of Cambridge historians of political thought John Dunn, Duncan Forbes, Gareth Stedman Jones, and

4. In 1981, Hont listed among his areas of expertise "Lukács and Marxism: the formative years" and "theories of really existing socialist societies in Eastern Europe." In 1983, Hont presented a paper at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London titled "The 'Populists' and the 'Urbanists': Hungarian Intellectuals and the Economic Reforms," and in 1984, at the Soviet and East European Politics and Society Seminar at St Anthony's College, Oxford, he presented the paper "Dictatorship over Need: The Budapest School's Analysis of Soviet-Type Societies." See Istvan Hont, *Curriculum vitae*, 1981 and 1984, Istvan Hont Papers, University of St Andrews Special Collections.

Quentin Skinner. The common denominator was a commitment to historicizing the fundamental tensions of political life. Historical research revealed the moral and causal claims that lay behind contemporary political theories and their predecessors. Awareness of the contingency of political assertions naturally led the Cambridge authors to articulate strong challenges to the dominant political ideologies of the day. This was the goal of the "Society and Political Economy" project, which questioned long-established liberal and Marxist perspectives on the eighteenth century and on the origins and nature of modern political and economic life in the West. Hont was particularly well positioned to realize this goal. He arrived on the project with a fully developed criticism of Marx's political economy. The point Hont made was that the socialist attempt to create a society without political divisions rested on spurious assumptions about economic life, which in turn rested on assumptions about putatively "natural" human behavior. Marx's impulse to go beyond politics was itself a product of the antipolitical utopianism that had characterized much early nineteenth-century liberal thought. Politics could not be avoided. Seeking to go beyond politics, to establish purely needs-based relationships, unavoidably restored political hierarchies and power relationships in other, no less problematic, guises. Acknowledging this fact entailed rewriting the history of modern political and economic thought in addition to engaging with contemporary political theory. As Hont put it in one of his many unpublished papers from the 1980s intended to form part of an introduction to a book entitled *After Adam Smith*:

In our analysis of the concept of "use value" in *Capital* we have shown that the first level of the Marxian analysis, which presupposed a natural determination of use values and needs, or at least their ultimate "natural" determination, led to contradictions in his analysis of societies which had an economy. If we were right in this analysis, we have to accept the conclusion that the Marxian project of a dynamic socialist society which is engaged in direct "natural" production of use values must inherently suffer from the same antimonies. If use values are not "naturally" linked to man's needs, then the socialism of the future cannot be a pure natural (meaning teleological in an Aristotelian fashion) economy. Unless, that is, there is also a polity, a network of socio-political institutions, which make this "natural"

link a social and political one. What is more, these political institutions of socialism must be of a new epistemic quality. If they behave like the market, i.e. they realize the emergence of new needs and innovations in production only after they had happened, *post festum*, they cannot be but constraints on the pure socialist "economy." This is an antimony which can only be clarified, if not solved, by a fundamental rethinking of the meaning of politics in the classical liberal tradition and, to the extent that it does have a "politics," in Marxism. Fundamentally, both traditions developed the notion that society moved forward not "by human actions resulting in unintended consequences" [but] rather by "human design." How can a future socialist polity overcome the difficulties kept in store by this idea? Political theory facing the future must concern itself with this question.⁵

Hont was certain that the Scottish writers of the eighteenth century, accepting as they were of analyses of economies and societies infused by unintended consequences, had more accurate and sophisticated knowledge of how politics worked in commercial societies competing internationally. One of the great questions Hont addressed was why the Scottish tradition had declined in the early nineteenth century. To him the story was a tragedy, because the loss of Scottish perspectives left the field of political economy open to the new liberal and Marxist traditions that, he believed, did so much damage in the twentieth century.⁶

Over the next twenty-five years, Hont labored to work out the contours of Scottish thought and to apply the resulting approach to the political and economic problems addressed by European societies since the seventeenth century. Hont was the guiding force behind *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, the volume he edited with Michael Ignatieff, which appeared to great acclaim in 1983. This was followed by a series of unfinished projects for single-authored monographs, provisionally titled *After Adam Smith: Political Economy and Theories of Commercial Society in*

5. Istvan Hont, "Alternative Political Economies? One Political Economy and Many Political Positions," *Political Economy and Society Working Papers*, undated, Istvan Hont Papers, University of St Andrews Special Collections.

6. Istvan Hont, "A Systematic Critique: Dugald Stewart and the Heritage of Adam Smith's System," in *After Adam Smith: Crossroads in Early Nineteenth Century Political Economy*, undated, Istvan Hont Papers, University of St Andrews Special Collections.

the Early Nineteenth Century, or After Adam Smith: Essays on the Coherence of the Political Economy Tradition in the Early Nineteenth Century, in addition to a further book with the provisional title *Culture, Needs, and Property Rights*. Hont also initiated a series of collaborative projects on the professionalization of economics in the nineteenth century, on the politics and moral philosophy of natural law theories, on the idea of sociability, on reason of state, and on perpetual peace. Hont did publish a series of pathbreaking articles between 1987 and 1996, which were brought together with an expansive overview of early modern and modern political thought to form *Jealousy of Trade* in 2005.

II

Istvan Hont was born on April 15, 1947, and grew up in a privileged and highly political setting that afforded direct insight into the functioning of postwar socialist Hungary. His father, János Hont, was deputy president of the National Planning Office and then deputy at the Ministry of Agriculture, where he implemented numerous agricultural reforms within the socialist economy, remarkably enabling farmers to maintain private smallholdings alongside giant cooperative ventures. His mother, Klára Kemény, was trained as an agricultural engineer and became the first female professor of engineering at a Hungarian university.

Hont attended state primary school and gymnasium in Budapest until 1964. From 1964 to 1965, he undertook national service in the Air Defense Corps of the Hungarian Army. His military service was limited to a single year because he had enrolled for a degree in electrical engineering at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. Owing to the intervention of his father, after two years of study, Hont was allowed to change course and enter the Faculty of Arts for a master's degree in history and philosophy, which he completed between 1968 and 1973. Gaining his doctorate only a year later, Hont spent 1973 and 1974 as a Junior Research Fellow at the Institute of History within the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and in 1975 he became "Research Officer" in the same institute. When he gained his prestigious post at the Institute of History in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Hont was already a member of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP); indeed, an academic career teaching philosophy required party membership.

He had joined during the 1969–1970 academic year, partly in order to have an academic career and partly as a sign of support for his parents, who remained committed to the socialist project. The decision to join the party was nevertheless a controversial one. In January 1968, Alexander Dubček had introduced civil and economic liberties in Czechoslovakia, and his Prague Spring was soon crushed by invading Soviet forces, leaving advocates of reform across the Eastern Bloc disillusioned. Some members of the circles with which Hont and his wife, Anna Lovas, were involved were critical of his membership in the MSZMP.

Hont's powerful father was able to secure the couple rare exit visas for research in the West. In 1972, they visited England, and Hont met distinguished Hume historian Duncan Forbes at Clare College in Cambridge. In autumn 1975, both Hont and his wife were given permission to spend thirty days in the West, where Hont undertook research on David Hume manuscripts in libraries in England and Scotland. Upon returning to London from Glasgow, they met Hont's great-aunt Marika Raisz, who had left Hungary for the United States in 1923 and who now offered them a stipend of one hundred pounds per month in order to sustain them if they defected. The decision to defect was made very much at the last moment. Further support came from economic historian Michael Postan, whom Hont had met in Budapest in the early 1970s when he had been assigned to accompany Postan during his visits to the city. Postan, then in his seventies, was originally from Bendery in the Russian province of Bessarabia and had been educated at Kiev. After leaving Russia at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, he became professor of economic history at Cambridge in 1937, and in the 1970s he was still writing books on medieval trade.

When they met in Budapest, Postan had discreetly suggested that Hont contact him should he ever decide to defect. It was on this basis that Hont contacted Postan from London and explained the situation to him. Postan agreed to help and took action. He speedily arranged a PhD place at Oxford for Hont under the supervision of Trevor-Roper, who agreed to supervise Hont after his residence status was secured. With the support of such figures and the resources provided by Hont's aunt's family, who agreed to pay the fees for the Oxford PhD, Hont and his wife decided to remain in London rather than returning to Budapest as their visas demanded.

The application to remain in the United Kingdom was made by lawyer and Scottish nationalist William McRae, whose wife was a family acquaintance. While Hont and his wife were waiting for permission to stay in the West after an interview at Lunar House, the Hungarian authorities took steps to get them to return to Budapest. Their families were interrogated and their houses searched, and Hont's mother-in-law lost her job. Hont's rationale for the defection was also bound up with his research on the Scots. He was determined to work on the eighteenth-century authors whose insights into the nature of society, Hont was already convinced, needed to be recovered if any purposive political theory for the future was to be attempted.

Hont's dedication to scholarship defined his character. Moving to England, despite the enormous risks it carried, would allow him to undertake the work he felt he had to do. Leaving the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party was a secondary but important consideration. Hont was repelled by the tasks imposed by party membership and had come to the conclusion that it prevented rather than facilitated proper research. He was convinced that the socialist experiment in Hungary, to which his parents had dedicated their lives, had failed in the sense of creating an oppressive, hierarchical, and corrupt society that destroyed individuality and demanded involvement in the often brutal practices of the military and the MSZMP. Remarkably for someone in 1975, Hont was also convinced, partly on the basis of classified information his father had shared with him from a young age, that socialist Hungary was going to collapse as a state. This collapse would bury the promise of socialist societies to bring about civil and political equality for all persons. Forms of nationalism would emerge that promoted anti-Semitism, a scourge that in its most murderous form had lacerated Istvan and Anna Hont's families. In 1975, then, departure was the answer.

III

Life in the West entailed absolute poverty, in the beginning, and entirely new lives. For Hont, there could be no question that the civil and political liberties existing in Western societies made them superior to life under socialism. At the same time, he could not accept Western

presumptions about having created ideal polities that were immune to crisis and collapse, representing an end to history. Indeed, Hont wanted to show that the capitalist vision was as utopian as its socialist alternative. Both systems were products of the long eighteenth century. Apologists for each system tended to avoid the historical analysis of foundational ideas because such a process would make clear the extent to which the problems evident in the relationship among commerce, politics, and war had never been resolved. They also presumed that the system they favored was more pacific than available alternatives and was least likely to result in economic crisis, national decline, and a return to global war. All of Hont's writings were characterized by a singular realism about the political present and future. He had learned such realism from the Scots, who had perceived their eighteenth-century predicament with particular clarity after the Union of 1707: they were a small and weak element of a composite monarchy dominated by England, facing political and economic challenges on every side, including from English writers convinced that the wealth of rich countries was always undercut by poor countries. Following the Scots, Hont also learned from the history of England's colonization of Ireland, which for most of the eighteenth century was prevented from developing any product that competed with the commerce of the mother country. What frightened the English was the prospect that Ireland's lower labor costs—the advantage of its poverty—would result in the loss of their trade, threatening their ability to provide for their self-defense. Hont's gift as an author and as a teacher was to bring such perceptions from the past to life, making them immediately relevant to contemporary problems, and revealing the depth of thought and the brilliance of argument that had formed the works of Smith, Hume, Ferguson, and many others.

In the introduction to the fourth book of *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith had famously called political economy “a branch of the science of a statesman or legislator.” The goal of political economy was first “to provide a plentiful revenue or subsistence for the people, or more properly to enable them to provide such a revenue or subsistence for themselves” and second “to supply the state or commonwealth with a

revenue sufficient for the public services.”⁷ Hont followed Smith in his perspective on political economy and in acknowledging that public and private revenues were always dependent on the survival of the state, or in other words on the international relations engaged in by the state. As such, Hont’s work was itself a contribution to a contemporary version of the science of the statesman or legislator. *Jealousy of Trade* explained that twentieth-century political theory in the West was hampered by its commitment to realist or liberal traditions of thought that failed to address the fact of the inevitable and ongoing politicization of the economy—a process whose effect on intellectual life dated back to the final decades of the seventeenth century. In his studies of the relationship between the political, the economic, and the international in the eighteenth century, Hont drove home the point that scholars and commentators were failing to appreciate eighteenth-century thought because they saw it through the flawed ideologies that were created in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Historians of political thought and political theorists had to accept that neither Hobbes nor Marx could serve as an adequate starting point for making sense of modern politics. In Hont’s view, Hobbes had not adequately analyzed the relationship between commerce and the state. For Hont, Hobbes was one of the last of the Renaissance humanists, because “there is no place for an economy in his politics in any important sense.” By contrast, Marx had striven to overcome politics, replacing it by “a pure exchange economy of genuine human utilities, cleansed of the distorting effects of private property and its political guardian, the state.” Such an aspiration was a utopian project or, in eighteenth-century terms, the product of unhealthy enthusiasm. Hont was convinced that Hume and Smith provided a more promising starting point for understanding the relationship between politics and the economy. The “analytical depth” of their insights into “the modern representative republic” and its alleged “elective affinity with markets” remained unsurpassed.⁸

Hont’s approach to the eighteenth century owed a great deal to John Pocock’s classic study *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political*

7. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776), vol. 2, 417.

8. Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, 2–4.

Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition (1975). There, and in a number of subsequent essays, Pocock had located the emergence of a critical perspective on commercial modernity as an inheritance of seventeenth-century “country” or “commonwealth” arguments. The “commonwealthmen,” whom Pocock called “neo-Harringtonians,” tended to attack the rise of commerce for fostering luxury and corrupting manners, weakening states by sapping martial virtue. Hont was critical of these categories because he felt that they could not be mapped onto the political positions taken by eighteenth-century actors. At the beginning of the century, for example, so-called commonwealthmen such as Robert Molesworth, Charles Davenant, and Andrew Fletcher took diametrically opposed positions on the burning questions of whether a political union of England and Wales with Ireland and with Scotland should be established. All of these figures accepted that the world had been transformed by the rise of commerce and its implications for war. Only states that embraced commerce could raise revenues to cover the costs of expensive modern military technologies. This meant that states began to compete for each other’s markets. Hont charted the singular threat to peace posed by the new “synergy of trade and war,” including the new “synergies . . . between republican patriotism and the modern politics of global markets.” This was the compound that Hume had labeled “jealousy of trade” and that threatened to lead to perpetual war among states unable to tolerate the wealth, or even the economic potential, of their neighbors.⁹ Reason of state dominated politics in the eighteenth century and spread to the economic realm, justifying imperial missions and wars against neighbors accused of being monopolists. Economic and military practices that led to the destruction of the trade of neighboring states became commonplace. The classic case with which Hont began was the English destruction of Irish economic prospects, with its far-reaching consequences. Hont was fascinated by the preemptory dominance of appeals to reason of state, and the speedy manner in which they undermined virtue-based approaches to politics, yielding a world of nationalism and mercantilism, ethnocentrism and

9. *Ibid.*, 11.

false democracy, and still dedicated to preventing the people from acting as political agents. This was the drama of the French Revolution as Hont recast it, presenting it in terms of a failed attempt to escape from the problems anticipated by so many eighteenth-century minds. For Hont, the postrevolutionary intellectual history of this drama had still only begun to be written.

Looking at eighteenth-century history from this angle led Hont to advise “jettisoning the conceptual baggage of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,” including the possibility of a third way between liberalism and Marxism. In an unpublished 2005 lecture he delivered at Chiba University in Japan, Hont charged that much intellectual history continued to be written in the form of “applied political ideology.” Herbert Butterfield, in *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931), had identified the Whig historians of the nineteenth century as supporters of English nationalism. Whig historians such as William Stubbs, James Anthony Froude, J. R. Seeley, and J. B. Bury had disguised the creation of the new as if it was old and established in consequence a “false historical consciousness.”¹⁰ For Hont, the key fact about the Cambridge School of political thought that had developed in the 1970s, and was associated with the work of so many of his Cambridge colleagues, was that it had attempted to carry forward Butterfield’s assault on false reconstructions of the national past. It did so via two routes. The first was through Pocock’s work on the impact of Machiavelli. Hont saw Pocock as someone who understood historical ideas as they developed prospectively rather than as foreshadowing the present as in liberal and Marxist accounts. Pocock, with his Cambridge friend Quentin Skinner, had demolished C. B. McPherson’s Marxist claims about Hobbes’s and Locke’s contributions, through their theories of “possessive individualism,” to the evolution of bourgeois society in the seventeenth century. Pocock also underlined the power of neo-Machiavellian political economy, the realist portrayals of the effects of commercial society on states battling to survive. Neo-Machiavellians perceived states to be more capable of defending themselves than ever before, but the price

10. Istvan Hont, “The Cambridge Moment: Virtue, History and Public Philosophy,” unpublished lecture, December 11–13, 2005, Chiba University. Istvan Hont Papers, University of St Andrews Special Collections.

was greater uncertainty about their own future, because commerce brought greater responsibilities for the state while increasing the likelihood of domestic and international crises.

The second branch of the Cambridge School to which Hont called attention in his 2005 lecture was the work of Duncan Forbes. Forbes's *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (1975) detailed Hume's refutation of the "vulgar Whig" claim that Protestantism and rebellion had established British liberty. Rather, in Hume's "sceptical Whig story," civil liberty became the foundation of all forms of liberty. In turn, liberty depended on the security of property, and had been established in Britain through the gradual increase in commerce. There was no original Saxon liberty, and civil liberty had not arisen because of the existence of democratic forms of politics within the tribes that brought down the Roman Empire. The history of liberty was bloody, but Hume was convinced that civil liberty could be established across Europe without states succumbing to the kinds of domestic crises that had plagued England during the civil wars of the seventeenth century. The new problems faced by states derived from the jealousy of trade, which could lead to national envy and animosity, in turn resulting in war and national bankruptcy. In his Chiba lecture, Hont described his own work as taking Forbes's interpretation forward by rectifying "Forbes' neglect of [Hume's] political economy."¹¹

According to Hont, Smith had followed Hume's view of the relationship between commerce and civil liberty but had provided a much more nuanced and specific history of how they had been established in Europe. Luxury had undermined both the Roman Empire and the polities of feudal Europe. When the Roman Empire in the West collapsed, however, several commercial cities managed to survive and to thrive by maintaining long-standing trade routes to the Middle East. Luxury itself was the basis of the power of the republics that emerged from the twelfth century, because of the addiction of European elites to the luxury goods of the East. The power of states such as Venice and Genoa was also derived from war, especially the Crusades. The feudal elites who established civil liberty in Europe did so not because they were

11. Ibid.

proto-democrats but rather in order to maintain their own sense of superiority and self-worth within their societies. These elites were gifted at making war, and the establishment of liberty was accompanied by the progress of luxury and war together across Europe. The story of pride and self-love, the great drivers of human activity, which inevitably brought conflict with them, was responsible for liberty, and everything that threatened to put an end to it. Unlike that of his friend Hume, Smith's conclusion was not doleful. Rather, he was optimistic that rich states, by promoting the division of labor in urban centers and developing new technologies, could succeed in maintaining international competitiveness and improving the lives of the poor. At the same time, Smith rejected mercantilist reason of state doctrine, which had led the British to establish companies for imperial gain at the expense of their colonies, causing misery and poverty from Ireland to the African coast and across India. Smith was equally critical of projectors among the British dissenters and their friends the physiocrats in France, who held that a reformed world could be created by the immediate introduction of free trade, beginning with unilateral action by any state. Smith, like Hume, sought to destroy illusions about the history of European liberty and the presumption of its connection to ancient traditions of liberty or to modern forms of political liberty.¹² At the same time, by using the science of the statesman or legislator, Smith believed it was possible to maintain both wealth and liberty. Hont explained this in a 2008 sequel to his classic analysis of what he called "the rich country—poor country" debate:

It was a central tenet of the *Wealth of Nations* that historically high living standards for entire nations were compatible both with significant inequality in property ownership and with the dictates of international price competition. The wealth of modern nations was not self-destructive but often self-reinforcing. If sustained

12. Hont developed this argument most fully in Istvan Hont, "Adam Smith's History of Law and Government as Political Theory," in *Political Judgement: Essays for John Dunn*, ed. Richard Bourke and Raymond Geuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 131–171; and Istvan Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

wealth creation failed, Smith wrote, “some other cause, we may be assured, most have concurred.” The cause of decline was more likely to be the inadequate grasp of the science of legislation, which included political economy, among policy makers rather than in some inherent catch in the economics of innovation and growth. If there was a recession, or signs of impending decline, Smith concluded, “the rich country must have been guilty of some error in its police.”¹³

Hont was well aware of the damage done by what he termed teleological or tunnel histories that emerged when his contemporaries in the history of political thought committed themselves to identifying republicanism or natural law as the most important forces in the story of the development of European liberty. What happened in Cambridge in the 1970s was what Hont called the formation of an “anti-school,” bringing together an eclectic group sharing a skepticism about liberal, Marxist, Straussian, and postmodern approaches to the past and therefore to the present.

Hont propounded a uniquely ambitious understanding of the history of political thought. He described it as *the* vital discipline capable of evaluating modern ideologies and working out their strengths and weaknesses through historical analysis. Hont was only partly joking when he said that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were “second-rate” in their political theorizing. Truly realist politics could only be erected on the basis of detailed study of “the period in which the interdependence of politics and the economy first emerged as the central topic of political theory.” Hont’s objective in writing *Jealousy of Trade* was “to identify political insights in eighteenth-century theories of international market rivalry that continue to be relevant for the twenty-first century.” It was the history of political thought written “with eyes firmly fixed on the challenges of today.”¹⁴

13. Istvan Hont, “The ‘Rich Country–Poor Country’ Debate Revisited: The Irish Origins and French Reception of the Hume Paradox,” in *David Hume’s Political Economy*, ed. Carl Wennerlind and Margaret Schabas (London: Routledge, 2008), 243–323 at 305.

14. Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, 4.

IV

The chapters comprising *Markets, Morals, and Politics* have been written by scholars who conducted intensive intellectual exchanges with Hont over the course of several decades. Regrettably, all of the contributors are men, a fact that reflects the limitations of the field of the history of political thought as Hont found it early in his career. The problem persists today, though among the many women who are now at the forefront of the field are those who encountered in Hont an exceptionally dedicated and generous teacher. *Markets, Morals, Politics* opens with two historiographical chapters, by Peter Miller (Chapter 1) and John Robertson (Chapter 2), and then proceeds with two discussions of Hobbes's legacy for eighteenth-century reform strategies, by Richard Tuck (Chapter 3) and Pasquale Pasquino (Chapter 4). The next four chapters, by Keith Tribe (Chapter 5), Michael Sonenscher (Chapter 6), Gareth Stedman Jones (Chapter 7), and Raymond Geuss (Chapter 8), are all concerned with the nineteenth-century afterlives of eighteenth-century political thought and political economy, especially the varieties of socialism and their relationship to republican traditions of political argument. The book concludes with two chapters, by John Pocock (Chapter 9) and John Dunn (Chapter 10), that expand on Hont's approach to international history, political theory, and the history of political thought. The organization of the chapters in many ways retraces the intellectual journey that Hont himself took, starting with Marx and historiography, going back to the seventeenth century to pose questions about sociability and its consequences, and moving from there to examine the nature of the commercial society that Marx had attacked, in order to draw out powerful consequences for politics and ideas today. The authors of the chapters were Hont's peers, with their own agendas, sometimes paralleling and sometimes conflicting with those of Hont. For the most part, rather than focusing directly on Hont's writings, the chapters explore some of the key insights that Hont's work produced.

Peter Miller's chapter, "Marx and Cultural History," underlines the fact that Hont's early aspiration was to build a bridge between the theoretical and empirical approaches to historical writing practiced in the communist Hungary where he had grown up. Hont was an expert

on Marx and knew all of Marx's writings intimately, but he never published an article on Marx, despite writing several unpublished papers and formulating a number of projects in which Marx figured prominently. Miller shows the extent to which Hont's fascination with Marx shaped all of his historical writing. More specifically, Miller shows that it is revealing to read Hont's writings against a backdrop of nineteenth-century debates about cultural history, in light of the materialist histories of culture that paralleled and critiqued that of Marx himself. These critiques were revived by Arnaldo Momigliano after the Second World War, and in a different fashion by John Pocock. Miller's chapter also offers a reading of Hont's interest in Pufendorf's idea of *cultura*, which described the continuous evolution of human needs in a way that keeps the history of ideas closely joined to the history of the material world. Hont had turned to Pufendorf in order to find out what Marx might have missed in his description of commercial societies and the social and cultural structures that underpinned them. In turn, this led Hont to argue that the generation of natural jurists who followed Pufendorf, including Hume, Smith, and Rousseau, continues to be of fundamental importance in understanding the politics and political economy of our own times.

John Robertson's chapter, "Sociability in Sacred Historical Perspective," draws on Hont's insistence on the importance of "sociability" as the key to understanding eighteenth-century intellectual controversies about the likely future of commercial societies. Hont explored the manifold critical responses to Hobbes's denial of natural sociability within the Protestant natural law tradition. Here Robertson reconstructs responses to Hobbes in the distinct confessional context of the Catholic Italian states. The resources of the Protestant natural law tradition were unavailable to these Catholic authors, but by using sacred history and the history of religion and social conventions, particular writers, including Pietro Giannone and Giambattista Vico, provided a new understanding of the origins of sociability, one that nevertheless remained committed to respecting the historical facts of biblical history. To them and to writers working in a similar vein, it was religion, rather than needs, that was the agent of socialization in history. Robertson's chapter traces the history of the idea of using sacred history

to scrutinize the origins of sociability from the late seventeenth century into the nineteenth century.

Richard Tuck's chapter, "From Rousseau to Kant," offers an alternative reading of the history of ideas about politics and commercial society, centered on Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant rather than Hume and Smith. Tuck begins by underlining the extent to which early responses to Rousseau accepted that the iconoclastic Genevan author was reviving the philosophy of Hobbes. This led friends of Rousseau such as Diderot to defend Rousseau against accusations of Hobbism while simultaneously distancing themselves from him in order to maintain the integrity of the *Encyclopédie* as a distinct project. Rousseau's Hobbesian general will emerged from a variety of democratic processes involving the people, and this approach was naturally picked up in France during the 1790s by influential but now neglected authors such as dramatist Paul-Philippe Gudin de la Brenellerie. Hobbesian readings of Rousseau were also commonplace across the German states, and Tuck identifies Kant's reading of Rousseau as the greatest of them all. The very different Rousseau who emerged in the nineteenth century was either a radical democrat or a utopian idealist, and it was this latter version of Rousseau, Tuck concludes, that played a significant role in shaping Fichte's and Hegel's responses to the problems of the Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic eras and was passed on to the twentieth century.

Pasquale Pasquino's chapter, "Modern Representative Democracy: Intellectual Genealogy and Drawbacks," explains that the modern idea of representative government has its origins in the idea of political equality, the centerpiece of the Hobbesian intellectual revolution. For Hobbes, for political power to be legitimate, citizens had to give their authorization to the political actions of the polity they belonged to. Since, in Hobbes's worldview, there was no natural hierarchy on which to base political authority, a nonnatural justification needed to be established for the kinds of hierarchies that were essential to political stability. Pasquino's chapter is partly an attempt to show how thinkers in the eighteenth century who worked within the Hobbesian framework tried to develop constitutional mechanisms parallel to those imagined by Hobbes in forming legitimate states.

When the French and Americans during the era of revolutions settled on popular elections as the sole means of legitimate authorization in politics, options were narrowed. Later, authorization and election became synonymous in theories of modern democracy, and the alternative Hobbesian tradition began to be forgotten. The second part of Pasquino's chapter asks what elections are for, analyzing their benefits and drawbacks in the process. Pasquino underscores the limits of democracy to the extent that voters do not always make wise choices. Furthermore, elections in a democracy can always be challenged and lead to violence and upheaval. Pasquino ultimately asks what is good about electoral democracy, and he struggles to find unambiguously positive answers. Returning to eighteenth-century perspectives, he shows that elections can provide legitimacy for those who govern but may not be sufficient to secure the authorization of those who are governed.

Keith Tribe's chapter, "Revision, Reorganization, and Reform: Prussia, 1790–1820," observes that while Hont's published work was mostly focused on the long eighteenth century, he had long-standing interests in the process by which Enlightenment ideas were bridged across the era of revolutions. Tribe's chapter applies this perspective to the "Prussian Reforms," traditionally dated from Hardenberg's 1807 memorandum "Über die Reorganisation des Preußischen Staats" and generally regarded as an attempt to liberalize the Prussian state in the wake of its defeat by Napoleon's forces. Historians from Heinrich von Treitschke in 1879 to Reinhart Koselleck in 1975 have seen the reforms as demonstrating the failure of liberalism, thereby foreshadowing Germany's later history. Tribe rejects such readings, arguing instead that the "reforms" were only considered to be "reforms" much later in the nineteenth century. Rather, the "Prussian Reforms" need to be understood against an eighteenth-century background, specifically German natural law and the critical philosophy of Kant, which shaped the significant Prussian Code, the *Allgemeines Landrecht* of 1794. The real significance of the "reforms," for those who lived from the 1790s into the first decades of the nineteenth century, was the emerging political language of the era, the language of "reform," "revolution," and "reaction." Tribe concludes that rather

than signifying innovation, "reform" was a rhetorical tool used by "reformers" to justify policies that had already been established.

Michael Sonenscher's chapter, "Liberty, Autonomy, and Republican Historiography," presents a fundamental revision of our understanding of how republicanism came to be established as a topic of philosophical and historical inquiry. He does this using a detailed reading of Genevan historian and economist Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi's writings about the history of the Italian republics of the Middle Ages. Sonenscher rejects the view, which has become commonplace in recent decades, that republicanism can be seen as a coherent ideology across long spans of time. For Sonenscher, establishing the genealogy of republicanism is vital, as it allows us to reconstruct the historical context within which the principles of republicanism or civic humanism were discussed by people such as Hannah Arendt, Hans Baron, and more recently John Pocock, Quentin Skinner, and Philip Pettit. In this context, the key concept was autonomy. Putting autonomy back into the picture helps to throw a different light on both the history and historiography of republicanism. It does so not only because it places the origins and content of the civic tradition in a different conceptual context but also because it raises a number of questions about the putative differences between rights-based and republican political theories. As Sonenscher presents them, both of these apparently different visions of politics had a common conceptual origin because both took the concept of autonomy as their starting point. From the perspective set out in Sonenscher's chapter, the story of civic humanism is as much a story about the intellectual history of the nineteenth century as about Machiavelli, Harrington, and the Atlantic republican tradition.

Gareth Stedman Jones's chapter, "Millennium and Enlightenment: Robert Owen and the Second Coming of Truth," is also concerned with what happened to Sismondi's republicanism, which has been connected to Welsh and English strands of socialism by Gregory Claeys, among others. Stedman Jones focuses on Robert Owen, the great Welsh industrialist and moralist, arguing that religious traditions of piety and dissent were prominent sources of his socialism and that anticipation of a healthy millennium transforming humanity were equally, if not

more, significant. Owen and other British socialists turned away from the historically based analyses of the problems of commercial society that they had inherited from Hume and Smith. Rather, the evidence-based ahistorical philosophy of the rational dissenters dominated claims to truth and certainty about the reforms necessary to improve the lot of humanity.

Marx ridiculed Sismondi's idea of autonomy as a petit-bourgeois fantasy but was equally critical of the "crude" forms of communism that decried private property as the institutionalization of envy. Raymond Geuss's chapter, "Identification and the Politics of Envy," identifies the various forms of envy, jealousy, and emulation found in ancient philosophy. It goes on to show how Marx analyzed envy and how he employed his conclusions to repudiate notions of a positive community that crude communists were hoping to restore. Marx thought that, under crude communism, envy would congeal into an institutional form within the political structure of the radically egalitarian state, and this would simply displace the problem of envy. Rather, it was vital to accept that envy could never be abolished. In a postcapitalist and postpolitical society, envy would stop being solely about positional goods reinforcing individual ideas about reputation and status but would be associated more with real differences, including inborn talents and acquired skills. Geuss makes the Hontian point that the problem of envy cannot be left out of modern political theory. One possible way out, notably with regard to Marx, is to recognize that calls for greater distribution are expressions not simply of envy but rather of righteous indignation, founded on knowledge of how social and economic elites can dominate politics.

The final two chapters of *Markets, Morals, Politics* address the role of historians of political thought in understanding the practices of contemporary nation-states against the background of growing globalization. John Pocock's starting point in "Commerce, Credit and Sovereignty: The Nation-State as Historical Critique" is Hont's reconstruction of the eighteenth-century crisis of the nation-state. This crisis stemmed from perceptions of the loss of national sovereignty, defined as proprietorship over a specified territory and the natural resources that came with it. Hont was especially interested in Hume's fears that commerce and credit were no longer in any sense owned or

controlled by the people deemed to be sovereign over a particular territory identified as a nation-state. Because of such fears, eighteenth-century authors considered it vitally important to write the history of the relationship between commerce and sovereignty, and of the gradual dissolution of the social relationships usually perceived as natural to any stable polity. Pocock contrasts such histories with histories of the postmodern state, which accept the contingency of sovereignty, and the likely permanence of the loss of control that so worried eighteenth-century authors. Doubt itself is the modern condition, and the renunciation of fixed identities has become altogether normal. For Pocock, historical analysis aimed at understanding how we arrived at this unique contemporary moment is absolutely vital.

The final chapter, John Dunn's "Why We Need a Global History of Political Thought," reminds us that Hont's work emerged out of the failure of a previous globalization, that of Marx, or at least the Marxism associated with the Soviet Union. Hont sought to explain this failure in part by returning to the skepticism and antiteleological position of Hume, Rousseau, Smith, and Kant, who anticipated the making of destructive political choices and emphasized the likelihood of human ineffectuality and unintended consequences. Dunn points out that we now live in a world linked together in ways unimaginable to eighteenth-century minds and face problems that require an unprecedented scale of cooperation, both intellectually and practically, across the planet. Traditionally, solutions to this predicament might have been expected to arise from particular traditions of argument linked to experiences common to modern European societies. Dunn claims that this is no longer the case and that if genuinely global political cooperation is possible, it will require the services of a genuinely global history of political thought. As Dunn makes clear, this is to articulate a calling for the history of political thought that reflects Hont's ultimate aspirations.

Taken together, the chapters speak eloquently to Hont's profound influence on his students and friends and on the field that he in part created. His work and thought set the agenda for much of the recent work on European political economy of the eighteenth century. Like the best scholars, in his own work he pointed to work yet to be accomplished. In their own way, each of the contributors to this volume has followed Hont's inspirational lead.

1

Marx and Material Culture

Istvan Hont and the History of Scholarship

PETER N. MILLER

I

IN SEPTEMBER 1977, Istvan Hont applied for a fellowship at the King's College Research Centre for the project "Society and Political Economy 1780–1850."¹ Because, as he explained later, his work up to that point had been largely in Hungarian, Hont used the context of an application letter to draw up a curriculum vitae. This document, written at a turning point in his life—though of course he could not have known it—provides wonderful insight into the nature of his thinking. It also enables us to place his ideas, in a way that he never sought, in a deeper context that enables us to do with his arguments what he wanted to do with those of his historical subjects: to connect disparate but obviously related phenomena in order to see old problems in a new light.

"Over the past five years," he begins, "I have gradually developed an interest in research on the internal relationships between history and social and economic theory in the intellectual corpus of classical political economy." History on the one side, and theory on the other.

1. Istvan Hont to David Perry, 29 September 1977, Istvan Hont Papers, University of St Andrews Special Collections.

He went on to explain that he had made “a parallel study” of history and philosophy while at the University of Budapest. Philosophy courses, he wrote, concentrated on the history of philosophy and on Marxist studies, so economic issues were inevitably mixed in. It was this Marxist context that was crucial to the formulation of Hont’s question. Here is how he explains it: “From the time of my undergraduate studies I became interested in problems which lay on the borders of these two lines of study I was interested in, the theory of historiography and . . . the epistemological problems of historical understanding. My other major concern was the study of the development of Marx’s views on history and historical theory.” On the one hand, theory, and on the other, history. Bringing the two together meant making sense “of the possibilities and the structural difficulties of a theoretical, philosophical, history along Marxian lines.”

Marx, in short, stood at the time at the center of Hont’s intellectual universe. He was the star whose gravitational field created the reality, whether logically sound or not, that young people like Hont encountered at university in Hungary in the 1970s. Establishing Marx’s history (biography) presented one kind of familiar enough problem, “but in addition to this, every attempt to combine the results of twentieth-century historical research with the philosophical history of socio-economic formations revealed a paradox.” On the one hand, most Hungarian historians claimed to accept the validity of Marxian theory, but their actual historical work was completely independent of any theory. On the other hand, the kind of “theoretical history” practiced in the Marxist philosophy departments was almost entirely devoid of actual “historical inquiry.”

Hont’s conclusion was that “there was this intellectual divide between the worlds of empirical and theoretical history.” Not wanting to abandon either interest of his, he then formulated his goal: “to apply history itself to the study of this cleavage in historical understanding.” Study of “the problematic itself” offered the only way out of the impasse.

This is important. While, say, the history of philosophy as done by historians and by philosophers always differed, Hont was pointing to something else. He was referring to two very different ways of doing history and thinking of history—the one dominated by the practice of

research aimed at generating new facts and the other by the conceptualization of those facts. This was a problem in the history of knowledge and, specifically, of historical knowledge. Hont's vision of how to find a solution was equally profound: to write the history of prior scholarship in order to understand where the divide came from and then (hopefully) avoid replicating it. He decided to choose a single person because of the assumption that if history and philosophy cohered at all, we would see it most clearly in the life of a single person. He chose David Hume as that person because, from a purely methodological point of view, he wrote history and philosophy. But the choice of an eighteenth-century figure could not have been entirely adventitious even if Hont describes it "as an almost accidental choice" that "turned out to be very relevant." The realization that he happened on through the choice of Hume was "that classical eighteenth-century political economy stands at the very axis of a possible understanding of the genesis of theoretical history." In other words, it was in the eighteenth century that documentary history and philosophical history first had to work out their terms of engagement and, therefore, it was the place to begin Hont's project of epistemological reconstruction through historical research. Putting this new realization to the test was the subject of Hont's 1974 doctoral thesis, which focused on why eighteenth-century English political economy came out of Scotland.

The point, he wrote, was "not simply to indicate the similarity between the philosophical history attached to the classical Scottish political economy on the one hand and Marxian views on the other, but to explain their emergence." Some German and English scholars had noted this "affinity" but in treatments "very much lacking in theoretical precision and historical understanding." Hont's conclusion was that both the Scots and Marx deserved "a much more careful historical investigation."

The same could be said of Hont's own writings about the Scots and about Marx. While the former has attracted considerable attention, the latter has not. In this chapter, I would therefore like to examine Hont's writings about Marx, to use these accounts to help illuminate a side of Marx that has received little treatment, and then to situate Hont's own approach in a deeper historiographical context.

Hont's discovery through Marx of the difference between historians who pursued facts and philosophers who organized facts around large-scale concepts evokes Arnaldo Momigliano's distinction between antiquarians and historians. Momigliano, who was trained in history and classics, saw in the divided historical scholarship of the Renaissance a phenomenon with earlier roots and later shoots. The antiquarians who sought to reconstruct Roman life—law, calendar, religion, sports, food, and other areas—through artifacts as well as texts were motivated by the pleasure and, yes, the *Weltschmerz* of the encounter with the broken remains of the past. The historians sought to edify, telling tales about human nature, good government, and social life, all from the already known facts about that past in question. Momigliano identified these paths and then followed them into the eighteenth century, which he called the “age of antiquaries.” Later in his life, his interest kindled by an encounter with modern social theory, he wrote more about the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Altogether, his essays on the history of scholars and their scholarship now seem like an early, more intellectualized version of the history of scholarly practices, though at the time they probably looked most familiar when seen through the spectacles of the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*.

Momigliano's turn from ancient history to early modern antiquarians occurred in the wake of the Second World War. It could be seen, as I have argued elsewhere, as his response to a perceived epistemological crisis. Hont began from the realities of a postwar communist Hungary. For him, it was the treatment of Marx, and not classical philology, that made him aware of the dichotomy between historians and philosophers. If it was the twentieth-century treatments of a nineteenth-century figure that set him off, Hont looked for a solution in an intellectual tradition that began in the seventeenth century.

I hope the comparison I have drawn does not appear idle. Putting Hont and Momigliano together in this way not only deepens our understanding of Hont but also elaborates Momigliano's groundplan of the history of knowledge from the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries. The division between antiquarians and historians indeed can be viewed as paradigmatic for the developing history of the cultural sciences, just as Momigliano had hinted. Further, it connects the history of political thought to the history of historical research as varie-

ties of the same kind of historical scholarship. Finally, both Momigliano's approach and Hont's are part of the same essentially historiographical vision, in which present questions are the interim endpoints of prior work and themselves soon become, in turn, the basis on which new articulations will be proposed. Theirs was a truly philosophical understanding of history.

Let me sharpen my main point by making reference to John Pocock. His own work having been devoted to antiquarians (*The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*) and conceptualizers of the past (*The Machiavellian Moment*), at the end of his career he turned to Edward Gibbon as a synthesizing figure. He acknowledged this split and its significance by dedicating the first two volumes of the monumental *Religion and Barbarism* to Momigliano and Franco Venturi. The former stood for the importance of the antiquarian legacy for Gibbon and the latter for philosophical history. Working on Gibbon was Pocock's way of showing how phylogeny repeated ontogeny, how one person's development could track that of a wider society. But Pocock never actually connected them in Gibbon, never showed how antiquarianism and philosophical history fused. Hont's problematic, as we have seen, was the same. Was he more successful at identifying a historical moment when the two traditions came together?

II

Before we come back to this question in the context of history of scholarship and the uniting of history and theory, how exactly did Marx continue to matter for Hont? We have seen that Marx marked the very launching of Hont as a scholar, and it is clear that growing up in communist Hungary, knowledge of Marx would have been quite available if not ubiquitous. But later, when Hont was in the United Kingdom, what influence did Marx continue to have, if any, in Hont's mature publications?

In Hont's application from 1977, in addition to the role of Marx as intellectual *metteur-en-scène*, there is the explicit acknowledgment that for Marx the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment loomed large. In the last chapter of his Hungarian dissertation, Hont writes that he dealt with Marx's "famous critique" of Hume's monetary policy in

Towards a Critique of Political Economy and the *Randnoten*, some of which was sent on to Engels for the chapter on political economy in the *Anti-Dühring*. Hont's approach also documents the depth of his understanding; he explains in that application that he planned to use Marx's notebooks to reconstruct his reading of Hume.

But then Marx seemed to vanish from Hont's writing. Hont published on the period from the later seventeenth through the end of the eighteenth centuries. He lectured at Cambridge up through Hegel without mentioning Marx (at least not in the notes I made on one such cycle in 1992). One knew that Marx loomed in the background of many a conversation one had with him. But Marx was not the subject of a single published paper. In Hont's *Jealousy of Trade* (2005), Marx appears only twice, both times in the Introduction written specifically for that publication. In the first instance, he appears as a straw man antipode to Hobbes; if the latter gave us a politics without economy, Marx aimed at an economic solution that would dissolve all politics. In the second, Marx is again in the guise of a straw man, in this case as the one who saw "the potential for human liberation," as Hont puts it, in Adam Smith's division of labor. In neither case would we at all grasp the centrality of Marx for the specific shape of Hont's intellectual inquiry, nor its historiographical depth.²

In the middle of the 1980s, however, Hont developed the book project *After Adam Smith: Political Economy and Theories of Commercial Society in the Early Nineteenth Century*. The draft Introduction he penned to this never-finished book, "Alternative Political Economies?," is a serious discussion of Marx's definition of "use value." Its point was to expose the internal tension between the use value that Marx presupposed for natural societies and then for communist ones. This was a tension whose unresolved nature, Hont thought, would have an impact on any ongoing practice of Marxian economics. There is a moment when Hont declares, "It is interesting to note how little distance there is here between Marx's language and

2. Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 2, 77.

the discourse of eighteenth-century political economy."³ But then Hont turned to Marx and showed his back to the deeper past.

The route from Marx back to the seventeenth century is marked more clearly in a paper Hont presented in 1989 but never published, entitled "Negative Community and Communism: The Natural Law Tradition from Pufendorf to Marx." This is the only instance I have found where Marx appears in the title of a finished piece of Hont's work.⁴ Even more, Marx serves as the goal of the presentation: "In a broader sense I hope to shed some light on the origins of Marx's concept of communism and on the genesis and significance of his theory of historical stages," Hont writes. Because of the connection between negative community and historical materialism, the topic was a kind of highway connecting seventeenth-century debates with twentieth-century ones. Hont begins with Marx and observes that his thinking about communal as opposed to individual property drew on the thinking about property extant in the natural law tradition. Hont could not be clearer, saying, "The materialist conception of history is fundamentally the political economist's view of history." This was true for Marx, he writes, as it was for those French and British writers Marx acknowledged as his predecessors in this matter. Since nineteenth-century thinking about "modes of subsistence" and "superstructure" emerged out of political economy, and political economy itself emerged from the thinking about society embedded in the modern jurisprudential discourse, this was the way "to position Marx's contribution in a longer term historical perspective."⁵

The first analytical point that Hont makes is that Marx's view of property is filtered through his response to contemporary socialist

3. Istvan Hont, "Alternative Political Economies? One Political Economy and Many Political Positions (Outlines for the 'Introduction' of *After Adam Smith: Essays on the Development of Political Economy in the Early 19th Century*)," István Hont Papers, University of St Andrews Special Collections, 22.

4. I am extremely grateful to Béla Kapossy and Richard Whatmore for their assistance with the Hont Archive, now at St Andrews University. Keith Tribe reports finding an undated paper on Marx that may have been from the mid-1980s and, if it was, would have appeared "surprisingly orthodox" given Hont's work at the time (Keith Tribe, private communication).

5. Istvan Hont, "Negative Community and Communism: The Natural Law Tradition from Pufendorf to Marx" (paper presented at Workshop on the History of Political Culture, University of Chicago, February 1, 1989, 2–3).

critiques of property. Insofar as they explicitly took issue with the natural law foundation of bourgeois notions of property, much of Marx's stance on property reflected an attempt to distinguish his thinking from theirs. He also saw them not only as accepting the natural law vision of a "right to" but also misunderstanding it: whereas the seventeenth-century thinkers saw it as a relationship between men, Marx's contemporary socialists saw it as one between men and things. Their communism was "crude," according to Marx, because their vision of the human relationship to the material environment was crude. Their abolition of private property stemmed from and led to a much more limited view of human potential. By showing how Marx's criticism of their "positive" community showed both his awareness of the early modern discussions of "negative" community and its perdurability, Hont made a major contribution to Marx studies and to showing how important knowledge of the early modern natural law tradition was to contemporary political economic thinking. After laying out some of the discussion in Pufendorf, Hont returned to Marx and communism with a startling declaration: "Marx did not do much more than reassert the content of the original theory." The right to property developed in keeping with a society facing scarcity; eliminate that scarcity at some point in the future, and with it would go the idea of private property. Communism, then, "was nothing else but the idea of 'negative community' for our time, or more precisely, for our future."⁶

In this paper from 1989, Hont marks a path that leads directly from Pufendorf's thinking about community and property to Marx's thinking about community and property. The Pufendorf-Marx axis was already charted in an earlier work, though its Marxian endpoint was less explicit then. In early July 1984, Hont delivered a paper on "Samuel Pufendorf's Idea of *Cultura*" to a workshop on political economy at the King's College Research Centre. He introduced it in the terms of the 1977 application letter: the goal is "to find historically legitimate and at the same time cognitively potent tools" for understanding the history of political economy and its contemporary

6. Ibid., 6, 33.

situation. He would look for these tools in the notions of “civilization” and “culture.”⁷ In the careful analysis of these terms that followed, with its focus on Kant and Hegel, Hont made clear that civilization was a process signaling the move away from barbarism, while culture was but the end goal of the process. This had the effect of rejecting Norbert Elias’s neat, but to Hont’s mind false, distinction based on a misunderstanding of Kant’s response to Rousseau.

In his exploration of the genealogy of “civilization” and “culture,” Hont moved from Smith, who did not use either term, to Thomas Reid, who did, and then sideways to Christoph Adelung, who claimed, with some justification, to be the first to write a “history of culture,” *Versuch einer Geschichte der Cultur des menschlichen Geschlechts* (1782). It encompassed a combination of “refinement,” “enlightenment,” and “development of potentials,” all of which added up to culture but none of which defined it alone. Both Adelung and the Aberdeen-based Reid derived the term and its use from residual Latinate culture, and both, Hont argued, took it from writings on natural law, which remained Latinate through the eighteenth century. It was from Pufendorf, he argues, that the word *cultura* came into Latin use. “If the investigation of the textual context of his use of the term proves that its introduction was connected to the theoretical idiom of modern civilisation,” Hont concludes, “then we can make a significant step forward in clarifying the discursive connection between natural law and political economy as successive contributors to the theory of civilisation.”⁸

Hont began with language. He notes that from the Latin verb *colere* or *excolere* came both *cultura animi*, referring to the mind, and *cultus* or *cultura vitae*, referring to something wider but also vaguer. The move into the vernaculars in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries dulled the precise distinction in emphases here. It was with the rise of commercial society that culture became associated with “improvement, refinement, politeness, civilising, luxury and taste” as opposed to “rudeness, savagery, barbarity, lack of discipline.” With this

7. Istvan Hont, “Natural Jurisprudence, Political Economy, and the Concept of Civilisation: Samuel Pufendorf’s Theory of *Cultura*” (paper presented at the workshop The Identity of Political Economy: Between Utopia and the Critique of Civilisation, King’s College Research Centre, July 1–3, 1984, 1).

8. *Ibid.*, 29.

blurring, all future uses of culture were tarred—whether, as in the examples documented by Elias juxtaposed to “civilization” or in the contemporary uses of “cultural history” or “material culture.”⁹

Hont argued that Pufendorf was responding to Hobbes in identifying culture, and not the state, as the solution to the natural neediness of man. “Culture” played no role in the first edition of *De Jure Naturae et Gentium* (1662) but did in subsequent editions, as well as in the more user-friendly *De Officio Hominis et Civis juxta Legem Naturalem* (1682). Culture and, more precisely, “culture of the mind” (*cultura animi*)—or working on our judgment and rationality—was necessary for adequate performance in society. Hont suggests that Pufendorf took the phrase from Francis Bacon, who used it in his *Essays* as well as in the *Advancement of Learning* to refer not to moral aims but to moral means.¹⁰

In *De Officio*, Pufendorf offered a taxonomy of “cultura,” with *cultura animi* positioned higher than the culture of the body, whose purpose anyway was to support the higher end. Pufendorf’s vision, Hont maintains, was lost when the Latin *cultura* was sometimes translated into English as “culture”—usually when referring to mind or soul—and sometimes variously as “improvement,” “care,” and “exercise.”

But Pufendorf had still another way of inflecting *cultura*. This involved the orienting of individuals toward the duties owed to the particular societies in which they lived. This “adjustment,” as Hont puts it, of the individual mind toward the social Pufendorf called *cultura vitae*, or culture of life. For Pufendorf, following Hobbes, anything that was the “specific product of human labor” could be described in terms of *cultura*. More specifically, Hont argued that it was this particular notion of *cultura* that explained Pufendorf’s view of property but that it was washed away by his translators. Thus, when Pufendorf commented on “res per naturam citra industriam humanam productas,” the translator had no problem rendering it as “things which nature produc’d without the concurrence of Humane Industry.” But when Pufendorf used the word “culture” to describe that human intervention in the natural world, “res per naturam citraque culturam produ-

9. Ibid., 30.

10. Ibid., 32.

cuntur," the translator failed to acknowledge the different word choice: "things . . . not by bare unassisted Nature produc'd."¹¹ With this failure, the connection between culture and property disappeared.

However, "Pufendorf's focus on *cultura vitae*," Hont later summarizes, "was the origin of the 'four stages' theory that described the various stages of human material culture." The history of civilization correlated with the history of material development, and that development with the increasing social complexity from hunting-gathering, to herding, to agriculture, to commerce.¹² The notion of property, Hont argued, was historical because it followed the historical development of society.¹³ It was with Pufendorf that material culture, cultural development, and political thought became conjoined. Much of Hont's work was on the interrelationship between economic development and moral and political consequences, with luxury a good example.

Hont's attentiveness to the historical side of the modern natural law theory offers an important insight. Pufendorf, for instance, was not simply interested in *cultura* for abstract purposes. He was fascinated by how people and nations lived. Writing anonymously as Severino de Monzambano of Verona, he wrote a history of the German empire (1667), and under his own name he penned a very popular *Introduction to the History of the Principal Kingdoms and States of Europe* (1682) as well as histories of Sweden. Slipping into the very different genre of the interest or reason of state, Pufendorf demonstrated a command of the kind of facts that then fed back into his abstract thought. We could document the same for Locke and Grotius, for example. Locke was a governor of the Carolina colony, and Grotius wrote a history of Batavia, functioned as a diplomat negotiating for the United Provinces with the French and Swedes during the Thirty Years' War, and incorporated the latest arguments about the origins of the American natives into his treatise on the laws of war and peace. Hume and Smith were equally alive to the detailed facts that could drive their theory. In other

11. Ibid., 41.

12. Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, 46.

13. Ibid., 178. Hont again uses the phrase "material culture" to describe the dynamic of stadial theory (ibid., 179).

words, starting from the assumption that facts and their conceptualization ought not to be separated, Hont found that at the beginning of the tradition for which Marx was an endpoint, they were not.

III

Mapping *cultura* brings us directly to Marx and the nineteenth-century German attention to the material dimension of historical existence.¹⁴ Hont never wrote anything with the title “Marx and Material Culture” (nor, remarkably, has anyone else, at least not that I have found). But I would like to suggest that coming to this subject from Hont will help us understand it in a way that we couldn’t otherwise—and also help avoid the Scylla and Charybdis of factual myopia or Whiggish fuzziness. Hont wanted to understand Marx and his role by joining the work of the historians who quested for facts but did not pay equal attention to their conceptualization and the philosophers of history for whom facts were subservient to their big ideas. Marx remained the specter haunting Hont’s work but took the form of attention to material conditions. Property, stadial theory, *cultura*, luxury, and credit were all themes that Hont followed from Grotius, Hobbes, and especially Pufendorf, either through to Marx or toward Marx. Even the briefest reflection is enough to see that these are essential components of material existence.

Hont’s initial insight, back in 1977, was that to understand Marx one also had to understand his context. If we follow Hont’s recontextualization of Marx beyond the circle of his colleagues and critics toward those of his contemporaries who wrote about *cultura* in other contexts, one discovers that there is a way of talking about a historical discussion of “Marx and material culture.”

Marx happened to live through an explosion of writing on economic and cultural history in Germany, much of it liberal in politics and much of it connected in some way to the revolutions of 1848. Marx had little respect for much of this. And yet, many of these writers made

14. Much of what follows is developed at greater length in Peter N. Miller, *History and Its Objects: Antiquarianism and Material Culture since 1500* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017).

property, labor, society, material culture, and the science of culture key concepts. If Pufendorf, as Hont showed, helps establish the deep, longitudinal history of Marxian thought, I would argue that these contemporary writers help us pinpoint Marx's precise latitude.

The development of cultural history occurred in the 1830s and 1840s, that post-Hegelian borderland where culture was one of the ways in which spirit and matter were squared. Wilhelm Wachsmuth, for example, was a classicist who trained under Friedrich Creuzer at Heidelberg and taught at Kiel and Leipzig but had turned to the modern period by the French Revolution. He is remembered, insofar as he is remembered at all, for his *History of France in the Age of Revolution* (1840–1844 in four volumes), which was praised by Ranke and read by Marx, in Marx's case because of Wachsmuth's commitment to studying the social.¹⁵ The most original of these projects was Gustav Friedrich Klemm's effort to organize human social and material development in the ten volumes of his *General Cultural History* (1843–1853). His was no simple four-stage theory, but it followed the same basic premise, moving from the most primitive forms of social organization, such as polar peoples and fisherfolk, through the wild men of the forests and wastes and the native American peoples, before reaching Egypt and the more advanced societies of Asia and Europe.

While Klemm was organizing ethnographic information into a diachronic narrative of increasing social and material complexity, another work from the 1830s, by the equally forgotten Karl Arnd (1788–1877), was organized around the concept of "material foundations." Arnd was born into a family of masons and began his career as a road and bridge inspector. But this led him to thinking about communications and economics, disposing him toward a philosophical position

15. For Marx, see *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, abt. 4, bd. 2 / 1 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1981), and, more generally, Jans-Peter Jaeck, *Die französische bürgerliche Revolution von 1789 im Frühwerk von Karl Marx (1843–1846). Geschichtsmethodologische Studien* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1979). In Marx's *Londoner Heften*, we find many references to two other works of Wachsmuth, the *Europäische Sittengeschichte vom Ursprunge volksthümlicher Gestaltungen bis auf unsere Zeit*, 5 vols. (Leipzig: Vogel, 1831–1839) and *Allgemeine Kulturgeschichte*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Vogel, 1850–1852). Burckhardt read Wachsmuth's *Grundriss der Allgemeinen Geschichte der Völker und Staaten* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1826) and also C. F. Hermann and Wilhelm Wachsmuth, *Hellenische Altertumskunde*, 2 vols. (Halle: Schwetschke, 1846).

on tariff-free trade. His earliest publications date from the 1820s and reflect his vocation, while those from the 1840s onward reflect his avocation. But right in between, and the pivot from one to the other, was a philosophical treatment of political economy entitled *The Material Foundations and Moral Claims of European Culture* (1835).¹⁶ In it, Arnd aimed to lay bare the full spectrum of connections between what nature presented to man and what man did to nature. While grounding his study on what was readily understood as material—food, clothing, and shelter—Arnd also generalized the material to describe the foundational layer of existence on which humans acted.¹⁷ He identified these workings as “natural laws.” Unlike Smith, whom he discussed at some length, Arnd insisted that the material dimension could not circumscribe the goals of human existence.¹⁸

Beginning with production in the most primitive stage of social life, and accounting for inequality as the basis of exchange as well as for the difference between “use-value” and “exchange-value,” Arnd came to the issue of “Capital.” He identified it with the value in objects, such as food, clothing, shelter, land, animals, tools, and coins, for example.¹⁹ In other words, like his exact contemporary Marx, Arnd was trying to generate a phenomenology of social life that accounted for its material dimension. Unlike Marx, he began not from Hegelianism but rather from the more anthropological side of Enlightenment philosophical histories, such as Iselin’s *Geschichte der Menschheit* or Schlözer’s *Statistik*.²⁰

Arnd also came to distinguish between “material” and “immaterial” goods. The former included basic things like food, clothing, and shelter, as well as sophisticated social constructs such as cities. But objects made by men for use could be both material and immaterial.

16. Karl Arnd, *Die materiellen Grundlagen und sittlichen Forderungen der europäischen Cultur* (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta’schen Buchhandlung, 1835). Old but still useful for background on Arnd and his position in economic history vis-à-vis Smith and Roscher is Max Adler, *Karl Arnd und seine Stellung in der Geschichte der Nationalökonomie* (Karlsruhe: G. Braunschen Hofbuchdruckerei, 1906).

17. Arnd, *Die materiellen Grundlagen*, 9, 24–25.

18. *Ibid.*, 30.

19. *Ibid.*, 34.

20. See Béla Kapossy, *Iselin contra Rousseau: Sociable Patriotism and the History of Mankind* (Basel: Schwabe, 2006).

Tools, for example, could produce other material goods. But they could also produce an image, which was an immaterial good. By introducing the question of art in this context, Arnd pointed directly to the ambivalence of the art object—a material thing but also a creation of spirit, by spirit, and for spirit.²¹ This allowed for the possibility of cultural history being oriented toward either material or immaterial objects (see Karl Lamprecht, for example, or Jacob Burckhardt).

In the second volume of his largely forgotten *General Outlines of Social Science* (1838, 1841), for example, Moritz von Lavergne-Peguilhen devoted an entire section to “General Laws of Culture” (*Allgemeine Kulturgesetze*). It began with a section devoted to “Kulturwissenschaft”—as far as I know, the first use of the term. Lavergne-Peguilhen explained that it had nothing to do with the formation of artists, scholars, or individuals in general but rather with the discovery of social laws for treating the population as a mass.²² The goal was the integration of “Production, Cultural and Political Activity” for the perfection of the “mass of the population.”²³ This could only be achieved through what Lavergne-Peguilhen called “Kulturwissenschaft.”²⁴ We could read this as a vision of political economy or sociology.

In 1843, Arnd put his thoughts into a more conventional package and published a textbook on political economy. It began with material goods, with introductory subsections devoted to “exchange value,” “production,” “prices,” and finally “Capital.” The immediately following discussion of “Labor” enabled Arnd to make the point that as a category it followed the development of society; in more primitive conditions, the labor was animal-like, but in more productive ones, it

21. Arnd, *Die materiellen Grundlagen*, 42.

22. Moritz von Lavergne-Peguilhen, *Grundzüge der Gesellschaftswissenschaft*, 2 vols. in 1 (Königsberg: J. H. Bon, 1838), vol. 2, 3–4. Even Angela Stender, who surveys not only the Lavergne-Peguilhen work's reception history but also that of its constituent parts, treats “Kulturwissenschaft,” by contrast, as utterly nonproblematic, with no history and needing no further elucidation. See Angela Stender, *Durch Gesellschaftswissenschaft zum idealen Staat: Moritz von Lavergne-Peguilhen (1801–1870)* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2005).

23. Lavergne-Peguilhen, *Grundzüge*, 3.

24. *Ibid.*, 6. By defining the place of Kulturwissenschaft between philosophical and practical learning, Lavergne-Peguilhen indicates his triangulation between the positions of Kant and Herder; it is the linking of the term to social process and “Produktionswissenschaft” that seems to mark the start of a new trajectory.

diverged more and more from that of base animals.²⁵ But thinking about economic life led Arnd, in turn, through the different stages of production, from hunter-gatherers to fisherfolk, pastoralists, agriculture, forestry, and mining. Only then did he come to trade. By anatomizing “every material good” into two components, a physical substance derived from nature, which is then transformed by human labor into something with exchange value, Arnd provided a material foundation for economic life but also a cultural account of how economic life transformed matter.²⁶ Arnd shows us what Klemm’s *Kulturgeschichte* might look like if written by an economic thinker.

Klemm and Arnd developed their thinking about culture, history, and material life outside of the university. Wilhelm Roscher’s exactly contemporary work on economic history, *An Outline of Lectures on Political Economy* (1843), came from within the university world. He began by declaring that the “historical method,” which he had detailed in his book on Thucydides, published the previous year, was not only about chronological narration. Applied to questions of national economy, history meant describing what people had done and how they had lived. And this, in turn, was only possible with the closest contact to the other “sciences of popular life, specifically, legal, political, and cultural history.” In Roscher’s hands, these relations had to be pursued not only from a contemporary perspective, no matter how difficult that was to achieve, but also historically, through the study of preceding “levels of culture” (*Kulturstufen*).²⁷

Roscher began with need, not far from where the modern heroes of natural law theory began: “With the progress of culture, the realm of goods also expanded.” These goods included things, personal services,

25. Karl Arnd, *Die naturgemässe Volkswirtschaft gegenüber dem Monopoli-engeiste und dem Communismus, mit einem Rückblicke auf die einschlagende Literatur* (Hanau: Friedrich König, 1843), 1–20, 38. Marx was dismissive of this work, calling it in the chapter devoted to the rate of interest in *Capital* “naïve” and its author “the philosopher of the dog tax” because of his advocacy of something like this. See Karl Marx, *Capital*, (New York: International Publishers, 1894), vol. 3, pt. 5, chap. 22, n7.

26. Arnd, *Die naturgemässe Volkswirtschaft*, 116.

27. Wilhelm Roscher, *Grundriss zu Vorlesungen über die Staatswirtschaft. Nach geschichtlicher Methode* (Göttingen: Dieterischen Buchhandlung, 1843), iv.

and relationships.²⁸ This made a history of economic activity into an arena for the study of the development of a people: its character and cultural attainments.²⁹ Like Klemm, Roscher's outline history of national economics began with the lowest cultural level, that of hunters and fisherfolk, and then moved to pastoralists and agriculturalists.³⁰ Unlike Klemm, Roscher plugged this history of economic life into a narrative of political development in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe.³¹ Corn laws, forestry, and mining were all approached as economic, political, social, and cultural functions.³²

But it was when Roscher turned to "industriousness" and explored its rise in medieval city cultures that the line between economic and cultural history blurred completely. Trying to explore an attitude, or a behavior, through external activity meant developing a historical framework that did not yet exist. "Communications" was one of the categories Roscher identified as uniting economic and cultural history: "The situation of the means of transportation is an important symptom of economic culture." This was true of all times, though Roscher focused on the modern era.³³ Finally, "Population," the subject of chapter 4 and the direct continuation of Schlözer's work on *Statistik*, raised a series of questions about happiness, culture and cultural diversity, and economic life.³⁴

Lorenz von Stein would follow the same trajectory: volume 1 of his *System of Political Science* was devoted to *Statistik*, volume 2 to the neologism "Social Theory" (*Gesellschaftslehre*). While he did not use the term "Kulturwissenschaft," Stein shared Lavergne-Peguilhen's conviction about the social as the most meaningful unit of measure. If so many of those who wrote *Kulturgeschichte* were liberal supporters of the revolutions in 1848, Stein's political indoctrination was France in 1840, which led him to publish *Socialism and Communism in Contemporary France* (1842). His way to social theory led back from

28. Ibid., 3.

29. Ibid., 3–4.

30. Ibid., 27–31.

31. Ibid., 35.

32. Ibid., 54–57.

33. Ibid., 86.

34. Ibid., 93.

society. The *novum* of the proletariat led him to call for a “Wissenschaft der Gesellschaft,” while the revolutions of 1848 pushed him to write a full-scale *History of the Social Movement in France from 1789 to Our Day* in three volumes.³⁵ It was deep into his 150 page Introduction to the latter that he proclaimed that the solution to the social question lay in “the relationship between Capital and Labor.”³⁶ *Social Theory: The Concept of Society* (1855) was the partial fulfillment of this idea—only its first part was ever written.

IV

The approaches to material existence through an economic lens by Klemm, Lavergne-Peguillen, Stein, Arnd, and Roscher in the 1840s connect us directly with the concerns of the middle-aged Marx even if he himself was but a casual or, even worse, selective reader of this literature. In the exactly contemporary *German Ideology*, Marx emphasized that his theory focused on the real and not the imaginary: “They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be verified in a purely empirical way.”³⁷

Indeed, if we follow Marx’s argument, we see the same attention to the anthropological but inflected toward a monocausal economic teleology, breaking away from Klemm’s naturalism. One could say, perhaps, that Marx introduced a theoretical sophistication to the realm of modern social study that Klemm’s *Kulturwissenschaft* lacked, still focused as it was on the early modern antiquarian model of collection, description, and comparison. For Marx, the way in which men lived—Klemm’s approach—depended rather on their actual means of subsistence and mode of production. Going a step further, Marx suggested

35. Lorenz von Stein, *Sozialismus und Kommunismus des heutigen Frankreich. Ein Beitrag zur Zeitgeschichte* (Leipzig: O. Wiegand, 1842); Lorenz von Stein, *Die Geschichte der sozialen Bewegung in Frankreichs von 1789 bis auf unsere Tage*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: O. Wiegand, 1850).

36. Stein, *Die Geschichte der sozialen Bewegung*, vol. 1, 126.

37. Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 149.

that mode of production “is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production.”³⁸

Marx can also serve as a prism to help separate Klemm from contemporary writers on *Culturgeschichte*. For example, if we look at Georg Friedrich Kolb in his *History of Mankind and Culture* (1843), later retitled *Cultural History of Mankind* (1869–1870), we see how much closer his version of cultural history is to Marx than to Klemm. As Friedrich Jodl wrote, commenting on Kolb’s approach, his is a history of the masses.³⁹ The masses provided Kolb with his frame of reference and even his notion of culture. In 1843, he declared that “true culture exists within each People to the extent to which all of its social institutions and relationships promote and conduce to the development and elaboration of all available mental and physical powers for the permanent foundation and reasonable application of the intellect and the material well-being of the total society.”⁴⁰

Marx’s own particular contribution was, of course, to emphasize the connection between, first, individuals and their material lives and then, second, those material lives and political conditions. This boldly went where Klemm hesitated. “The social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life process of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people’s imagination, but as they *really* are; i.e. as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will.”⁴¹ Marx even suggested—notoriously, for the history of ideas—that high culture, too, was a function of these material realities: “The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of

38. Ibid., 150.

39. J. Friedrich Jodl, *Die Kulturgeschichtsschreibung* (Halle: C. E. M. Pfeffer, 1878), 31.

40. Kolb, quoted in Jodl, *Die Kulturgeschichtsschreibung*, 32–33.

41. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 154.

real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behavior. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people."⁴²

The basis on which the early Marx reached these conclusions was a kind of philosophical reading of history. He makes sense, or at least becomes less unique, if read against the background of works like Stein's *Gesellschaftslehre* (Marx himself was a reader of Stein and seems to have gotten from him the terms "class" and "proletariat").⁴³ Stein connected Klemm's and Arnd's notion of "material foundations" to the idea of property. He even called it "the material foundation of society." It was property, he wrote, "through which the material world came to intervene in personal life." This intervention turned an "ethical order" into a social one and led to the clear conclusion that property was "the material foundation of society."⁴⁴ Stein writes, "Things which happen in society, come to be realized through the relationship to property and so create what we call the form of society."⁴⁵ That Stein's discussion of property is immediately followed by its relationship to "labor" helps us understand that though his argument may seem to play out at too great a level of abstraction, the fact is that this is a post-Hegelian generation's way of talking about the impact and workings of material culture.⁴⁶

Marx may start from these shared terms, but his insight into the relationship between human beings, objects, and history goes well beyond them. It is in his analysis of the notion of "use value" in the first

42. Ibid.

43. For Marx's dependence on Stein, see Kaethe Mengelberg, "Lorenz von Stein and His Contribution to Historical Sociology," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22 (1961): 267–274 at 267nn2–3.

44. Lorenz von Stein, *Die Gesellschaftslehre. Erste Abtheilung. Der Begriff der Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: J. W. Cotta'scher Verlag, 1856), 37–38, 145.

45. Ibid., 38.

46. See, for example, Stein, *Die Gesellschaftslehre*, 154–155, 158. For the Hegelian angle, see, for instance, the perceptive review of Heinz Nitzschke's *Die Geschichtsphilosophie Lorenz von Steins: Ein Beitrag zur Geistesgeschichte des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* by the young Felix Gilbert in *Social Research* 4 (1937): 258–260. More recently, see Joachim Singelmann and Peter Singelmann, "Lorenz von Stein and the Paradigmatic Bifurcation of Social Theory in the Nineteenth Century," *British Journal of Sociology* 37 (1986): 431–452.

chapters of *Capital*, in volume 1 from the unpublished “Alternative Political Economies?,” that Hont shows how our very contemporary conversation about history from things could be seen as if coded directly into Marx’s argument.

Marx—and Hont—begin from the thing or object in its “natural particularity,” its “physical palpable existence.” The commodity, or use value, is a way of thinking about that object as a thing that satisfies another person’s needs. The “usefulness” in some sense follows from “the physical properties of the commodity. . . . It is therefore the physical body of the commodity itself, for instance iron, corn, a diamond, which is the use value or useful thing.” But since most objects are made or transformed by men, that transforming labor is preserved, somehow, in the object itself. And so the outcome of the objects produced by men contains in it all that human effort. Wealth, or use value, is therefore, according to Marx, “historical,” since discovering and disinterring all of its impacted use value is “the work of history.” In the object, that use value is “dead,” since it is completely irrelevant to the fact of its consumption. The consumer, to put it bluntly, is not interested in the history in the object. (We might say more precisely that this is true for some kinds of objects—say, consumer goods—and not others, such as art objects.) Marx’s political insistence that there is no unmediated relationship between man and object is therefore also a blanket insistence on the ineradicable presence of history. The history of the world in a hundred, a million, or a billion objects follows directly from this conceptual foundation.⁴⁷

It is at this point that Marx’s ontology of the object, motivated by revolutionary politics, meets up with the antiquarians’ deep history of objects, motivated by conservative politics (with a small “c”). Marx’s ventriloquism of the consumer’s disdain for an object’s use value as “dead” history perfectly—and stunningly—parallels the modern historians’ disdain for “dead” antiquarian learning. Both Marx and the antiquarians are committed to the task of archaeological excavation, though for different reasons. Where they part company, significantly, is in their interest in the historical per se and in their attentiveness to

47. Hont, “Alternative Political Economies?,” 4–6.

the individual thing. For Marx, history was studied for a purpose beyond history, and always toward the collective, as in the *Theses on Feuerbach*; for the antiquarians, research could be reward and pleasure enough in itself, and individual documents, lives, and stories were worthy objects of study in themselves.⁴⁸

The very late Marx, however, turned strikingly toward history and, in particular, the latest work on prehistory. Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks* document his intense engagement with Lewis Morgan and John Lubbock, among others, in the years 1880–1882. Marx was looking for communism in prehistory, and he found what he was looking for in Morgan. Engels, who would incorporate much of this Marx into his *Origin of the Family* (1884), began his commentary in the 1888 edition of the *Communist Manifesto* by noting “that is, all written history. In 1847, the prehistory of society, the social organization existing previous to recorded history, was all but unknown.”⁴⁹ Like Nietzsche at exactly the same time (1878–1879), Marx grasped that the vast depth of prehistory altered the kinds of generalizations that historians and philosophers routinely made about the natural condition of man.

If we were to think that Klemm would have been an obvious source for Marx and therefore been puzzled by his absence, the fact is that Marx agreed. In a letter to Engels in 1869, he lamented not knowing of Klemm's work, specifically *Die Werkzeuge und Waffen*, before completing the first volume of *Capital*. He specifically mentioned that his discussions of the “Labor Process” and “Division of Labor” would have been aided by the rich evidence provided by Klemm. It may be the fact that Marx's interest in ethnology developed relatively late that kept Klemm from him until then.⁵⁰

48. Thesis IX: “The highest point attained by contemplative materialism, that is, materialism which does not comprehend sensuousness as practical activity, is the contemplation of single individuals in civil society.” Thesis X: “The standpoint of the old materialism is ‘civil’ society; the standpoint of the new is *human* society, or socialised humanity.” See Marx, *The German Ideology*, 145.

49. Lawrence Krader, “Introduction,” *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx*, ed. L. Krader (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972), 81.

50. Ernst Germer, “Die Vorgeschichte der Gründung des Museums für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig 1868–1869: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Ethnographie und des Museumswesens,” *Jahrbuch des Museums für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig* 26 (1969): 5–39 at 35n115. In any event, Marx's notes on Klemm's *Die Werkzeuge und Waffen* are extensive. See *Karl Marx Friedrich Engels Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)*,

The relationship between economic and cultural history continued on through the second half of the nineteenth century in the pages of the journal founded as the standard-bearer for cultural history in Germany. The *Zeitschrift für deutsche Kulturgeschichte* [*Journal of German Cultural History*] was published out of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum between 1856 and 1859 and by a commercial publisher in Hanover between 1872 and 1875. One of the most interesting insights that emerges from a perusal of the four volumes published in its first series is the common ground between “cultural history” and “national economy.” In part this is a rediscovery of Schlözer’s vision of *Statistik* and in part taking cultural geography seriously in an age that was obsessed by both culture and geography. There follows the realization that once political economy becomes national economy and switches its focus from universal to local, it then becomes dependent on the physical and psychic characteristics of a particular land and population. And this, as Aufseß’s chart showed so well, was an integral part of cultural history. As we will see, this alignment between economic and cultural history becomes even more pronounced in the journal’s second series.⁵¹ Moreover, both cultural history and national economy could be viewed as practical or concrete sciences, opposed to the abstract and ideal. “We build up theories and spin out systems”—all fantasies, writes August von Eye. Cultural history and national economy were instead sciences of the real, of “experience” as Fabri, Klemm, and Roscher put it, and an antidote to the very German tendency lambasted by Marx at the beginning of his *German Ideology*.⁵²

When the *Zeitschrift für deutsche Kulturgeschichte* came back to life in 1872 in Hanover under the sole editorship of Johannes Müller, it focused a bit more narrowly on national economy, though without

abt. 4, bd. 32, ed. Hans-Peter Harstick, Richard Sperl et al., (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1999), 374. Note that while Marx only annotated eight pages from volume 1, he covered volume 2 with marginalia.

51. Dr. Peez [*sic*], “Berührungspunkte zwischen Kulturgeschichte und Nationalökonomie,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Kulturgeschichte* 3 (1858): 413–426.

52. A. von Eye, “Ueber die Bedeutung des Studiums der Kulturgeschichte für unsere Zeit,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Kulturgeschichte* 1 (1856): 419, 425. Strangely, aside from the initial *mise-en-scène*, there is no further discussion of National Economy in the entire article!

coming out and saying so.⁵³ The founding of the *Reich* the previous year had shifted the landscape of debate. No longer was the pre-1848 quest for unity of the *Volk* across the plurality of its “organism” the burning issue. There was greater willingness on the part of university-based historians to identify with the new journal: even Wilhelm von Giesebrecht, who celebrated Ranke and attacked antiquarianism in the first number of the *Historische Zeitschrift*, contributed an article—on women’s history, no less!—and Droysen finally associated his name with the journal’s efforts. The subscription of these few, but important, professors shows that for them the crux of their resistance was to the type of subject matter studied and to the museum as the publisher. A focus on economic life and a shift to a commercial publisher alleviated their fears of declining professional standards.

Johannes Falke’s lead article, “Cultural History and National Economic Theory,” staked out the distance traveled from the first series. Falke began from the realm of the state, acknowledged its importance, and then argued that its sphere did not embrace the whole life of people. Historians needed to take into account those activities that supported material existence, for it was in the pursuit of fundamental needs such as food, clothing, and shelter—that is, in economic activity—that human beings distinguished themselves from animals. While animals had only their senses and instincts to work with, humans had spiritual resources and aspirations. With these, humans transformed nature into culture. Economic history, in this vision, was actually a form of cultural history.

For Falke, there was no hard and fast line separating the economic from the spiritual life of man, no way to mark precisely the difference between, to use his example, commerce and the technical arts. “And so,” Falke summed up, “what is economic life other than a history of what happens from day to day, from year to year, and from century to century, for individuals, for a people, for all humankind?” This is a vision of economic history as cultural history that would come to char-

53. The “Prospektus,” written by Müller and introducing the first volume, repeats all the generalities rolled out fourteen years earlier. See Johannes Müller, “Prospektus,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Kulturgeschichte*, 2nd ser. 1 (1872): [v]–[vii].

acterize the work of Lamprecht but that Falke in 1872 identified with the work of Lamprecht's teacher, Roscher.⁵⁴

Roscher was already identified with the application of a historical method to the study of economic thought. As early as 1843, he was subsuming a whole series of cultural questions within his economic history. It was precisely during the years of the second series of the *Zeitschrift für deutsche Kulturgeschichte* that Roscher published his last book, *History of National Economy in Germany* (1874). Roscher anchored the forerunners of "National Economic" thought in the history of history in Germany. In the beginning, he wrote, there was Johann Jacob Winckelmann, but also Heyne and the Göttingen School. He noted that at the same time J. A. Reemer's "very dry, but influential textbooks" showed that political history was "bound up also with cultural history in the widest sense." He specifically enumerated bourgeois constitutionalism, commerce, and trade, as well as the arts and sciences.⁵⁵ Roscher wrote that this broad reach was complemented outside of history by developments in philology and geography. He identified F. A. Wolf's *Altertumswissenschaft* as a kind of *Statistik* for the ancient world, and Boeckh and Müller in the next generation as following Wolf's commitment to the material context of ancient life. Geography, as practiced by travelers such as Alexander von Humboldt, was full of discussions of natural products. Geography, as the academic field practiced by scholars like Carl Ritter (1779–1859), led directly to questions of how people lived.⁵⁶

Roscher's ambition was "to take men as they really are"—almost Marx's very words in *The German Ideology*. To do this, he argued, a historical perspective was absolutely necessary. Only history revealed the changing needs, capacities, and relationships of people. Without it, an assessment of any of these would be doomed to error. The two questions that political economy had to answer—and Roscher thought them equally important—were "what is?" and "what should be?" They had to be answered in terms of historical reality, not by theoretical

54. Johannes Falke, "Die Kulturgeschichte und die Volkswirtschaftslehre," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Kulturgeschichte*, 2nd ser. 1 (1872): 10, 28.

55. Wilhelm Roscher, *Geschichte der National-Oekonomie in Deutschland* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1874), 913.

56. *Ibid.*, 913–915.

modeling of states of nature.⁵⁷ In essays such as “On the Agriculture of the Most Ancient Germans” or “A Main National-Economic Principle of Forestry,” questions of culture—how people lived and worked—were frequently addressed.⁵⁸

Economic life was part of cultural history. When Falke asked “what is economic life other than the day to day?” he was speaking Roscher’s language. When Lamprecht, just a few years later, declared that he would “investigate the development of the material culture of the Low Countries in their totality, from their legal and economic sides, out of the conviction that the specific ideal circle of beliefs of man can much better [be grasped] in the total development of culture through the spheres of specific real or material culture, of economy and of law” than from anything else, he, too, was speaking Roscher’s language.⁵⁹

Lamprecht, however, was also not above presenting his *German History* as a Marxian history.⁶⁰ Though he set off an enormous debate about cultural history, Lamprecht could sound extremely reductionist as well: “The material is the foundation for spiritual cultural patrimony. Intellectual creations are a luxury elaborated after physical needs are satisfied. All questions regarding the origins of culture are therefore resolved in the question, ‘What fosters the development of the material foundations of culture?’” Lamprecht proceeded to quote Engels for support.⁶¹

But, in fact, Lamprecht’s attention to the individual within the group marked his distancing himself from Marx. Lamprecht saw Marx as having tried to create a new kind of history but failing because of a dogmatic commitment to monocausal explanation by class. “The real error in Marx’s theory of history,” Lamprecht wrote, “is that as a result of an error in the dialectical conclusion, while completely

57. Ibid., 1032–1033.

58. Wilhelm Roscher, *Ansichten der Volkswirtschaft aus dem geschichtlichen Standpunkte* (Leipzig: C. F. Winter, 1861), chaps. 2 and 3, 47–116.

59. Karl Lamprecht, *Deutsches Wirtschaftsleben im Mittelalter* (Leipzig: Dürr, 1885–1886), vol. 2, 4.

60. For this, see Roger Chickering, *Karl Lamprecht: A German Academic Life* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1993), 175.

61. Karl Lamprecht, “Was ist Kulturgeschichte?,” in *Alternative zu Ranke: Schriften zur Geschichtstheorie*, ed. Hans Schleier (Leipzig: P. Reclam, 1988), 271 note *.

neglecting the psychological factors of economic processes, conclusions are immediately drawn about spiritual manifestations and their consequences."⁶² In fact, Lamprecht wrote elsewhere, without an understanding of psychic changes, social and economic change did not add up to a theory: "We see that this is the doctrine of Karl Marx, the theory of the so-called, though most unhappily so-called, historical materialism."⁶³ Marx and Engels failed because they did not grasp—or even try to grasp—the inner, individual phenomena of sociopsychic progress. And yet Lamprecht was clear that "it would, of course, be going too far simply to deny the real importance of their theory."⁶⁴

V

Hont would have agreed with Lamprecht's judgment. It was going too far to deny the importance of Marx and Engels' theory. The remedy, however, was not less history but more. But how much? This is the question that we might pose to the Hont of the 1977 application to the King's College Research Centre. The answer he gave, again and again, in his work was that to get the theory right, he would have to do the history like a historian. The depth of his searching arguments reflects the depth of his research. When Hont decided that the history of political thought had to be done as the history of scholarship, he took for himself no obvious models. Because he was always thinking about the contemporary working of these concepts from the past and used the history to get them right, intensive scholarship that was only backward-looking, of the sort associated with the Warburg Institute, for example, could supply him only with information, not with exempla.

When, in 1977, he formulated his original position in terms of a dichotomy between those Hungarian students of Marx who knew many facts but had no theory to help motivate and organize those facts and those who had many philosophies of history but controlled few facts,

62. Quoted in Luise Schorn-Schütte, *Karl Lamprecht. Kulturgeschichtsschreibung zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 129.

63. Karl Lamprecht, *What Is History?* (New York: Macmillan, 1905), lecture 6, 190.

64. *Ibid.*, 191.

he probably had not read Momigliano's 1950 article in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. In it, Momigliano laid out a history of historical research in which the parallel tracks of antiquarians (facts only, please) and historians (narrators) came together very rarely, most notably with Gibbon and Winckelmann—both of the generation of Hume and Smith—but otherwise never connected. Nor might Hont have identified his problem with this one.

Yet, putting the two of them together, we can discern how the turn to history of scholarship could have had the effect of overcoming the gap between fact and theory. Momigliano himself was responding to the earlier twentieth-century skepticism and relativism that he, and others, saw in the collapse of the European democracies in the 1930s when he looked back to the Pyrrhonism of the seventeenth century and saw antiquarianism as the answer. Hont was responding to the failure of Communist scholarship on Marx and looked to the natural law tradition and the Scottish Enlightenment as a way to understand where Marx came from—and it has been argued that Pyrrhonism was an important stimulus there, too.⁶⁵

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant wrote that, "Concepts without percepts are empty, percepts without concepts are blind."⁶⁶ By the second half of the nineteenth century, with philosophers of history seeking to defend the legitimacy of the historical sciences from utter subordination to the natural sciences, Kant was called back into action. Wilhelm Dilthey set himself the task of building the "Critique of Historical Reason" that Kant never attempted, and Heinrich Rickert developed a taxonomy of natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) and cultural sciences (*Kulturwissenschaften*) in order to show how the latter had its own integrity. But in formulating the purpose of these latter, it is important to note that at this point in his argument Rickert redefines them as the "historical cultural sciences" (*historische Kulturwissenschaften*) and explains their purpose as ac-

65. James Moore, "Natural Law and the Pyrrhonian Controversy," in *Philosophy and Science in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Peter Jones (Edinburgh: J. Donald, 1988), 31–33.

66. Quoted in Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 73.

commodating the individuating nature of historical research to the need for explanatory generalization.⁶⁷

In short, we have here the conceptual kernel of what both Momigliano and Hont were reacting to. This “problem of knowledge” reflected both the internal crisis of philosophy after Hegel and the external threat to philosophy (and the human sciences more generally) from the simultaneous rise of the experimental sciences. The specific form it took for history was the “Crisis of Historicism” of the first half of the twentieth century and was embodied by the clash between Cassirer and Heidegger. The overlapping political storm—if one assumes a relationship between ideas and events—had a direct impact on the lives of Momigliano and Hont (both of them had parents rounded up by the Nazis; only Hont’s survived the war) and on the shaping of their postwar intellectual horizons. Their turn to history of scholarship was a way past, even an overcoming of, that crisis. Momigliano’s move placed his own work in the history of history, Hont’s in the history of political economy. That both history and political economy, or at least its ancestor, were joined once in the work of the modern theorists of natural law, Grotius and Pufendorf (Hobbes much less), and then again in Gibbon, was the point recognized by Pocock in his twin dedications to the great students of the life of these traditions from the generation prior to his own, Momigliano and Venturi. Putting all this together, just like putting Marx together with his historically minded contemporaries, enables us to see the way in which historical and conceptual thinking need to remain joined in our work practice in order to see it in that of our ancestors.

More specific to the question of Marx and material culture, not only can we now see more clearly Marx’s own position relative to the ongoing contemporary discussion of material culture but by adding Marx into that mix we also get a much clearer sense of how important that strand actually was. Hont’s own work on Pufendorf’s notion of *cultura* takes on new importance as a result, for it emerges as not just a taxonomy, as he put it, but a predictive mapping of the tensions in the various forms of cultural history and cultural science as they came into

67. Heinrich Rickert, *Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1926), 80, 83.

being in the era of Marx. And since these tensions continue to shape treatments of and attitudes toward material history, that mapping has real value for those interested in understanding cultural history and material culture studies.

"The history of political thought," Hont wrote in 2005, "is at its most helpful when it unmask[s] impasses and eliminates repetitive patterns of controversy," but "this kind of intellectual history is worthwhile only if it is scrupulously correct in its scholarship."⁶⁸ And then, as if signaling us back to the question that launched his career, he concludes of his own work that *Jealousy of Trade*—and, I would say, everything he wrote—"is neither a teleological nor an antiquarian work."

68. Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, 5, 156.

2

Sociability in Sacred Historical Perspective, 1650–1800

JOHN ROBERTSON

THE PHENOMENON OF “society,” the realm of the “social,” came into sharper focus than ever before in the 150 years after 1650. It did not do so in direct opposition to the political but rather began to be discussed in ways that anticipated, complicated, enriched—and also limited—the sphere of politics. This occurred, of course, in ordinary life: in the new “sociability” of the coffee house, the salon, and the Masonic lodge (exclusive as these could still be). More profoundly, it was also manifest in the increasing complexity of economic activity, where countless individuals now made decisions in the market every day, decisions that governments struggled to keep up with. At the same time, by processes that may have been stimulated by those developments but were in no simple sense their effect, “society” and “sociability” emerged as distinct categories within political thought, concepts in their own right:

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societas alongside, distinguishable from, *civitas*, the city or state. To advance this claim is not to suppose that the phenomenon of “society” had been unknown or not discussed before 1650. The instinct, or the need, to be sociable had long been thought indispensable to the formation of the *civitas*. Conceptually, however, society had been contained within *civitas*. After 1650, there was a new willingness to separate the concepts of society and sociability from the *civitas*.

The proposition that “society” became a focus of inquiry in its own right in the eighteenth century has long been central to the intellectual history of the Enlightenment. It was at the heart of Hugh Trevor-Roper’s portrayal of the Enlightenment philosophy of history, and more particularly of the phenomenon of the Scottish Enlightenment, in the 1960s.¹ Some fifty years later, Dan Edelstein would still characterize “society” as “the subject of the modern story” in his “genealogy” of the Enlightenment.² John Pocock, more directly concerned with political thought and disposed to think that more than one process of Enlightenment was involved, likewise portrayed “sociology” as a novel preoccupation of the eighteenth century.³

No one, however, has thought harder and to more stimulating effect about the history of the concept of “sociability” than Istvan Hont. From his earliest studies of Pufendorf’s natural law as the key to understanding Adam Smith and Karl Marx, first presented with unforgettable urgency to the 1984 conference of the King’s College,

1. Hugh Trevor-Roper, “The Historical Philosophy of the Enlightenment,” delivered to the first International Congress on the Enlightenment in 1963, reprinted in Hugh Trevor-Roper, *History and the Enlightenment* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 1–16; Hugh Trevor-Roper, “The Scottish Enlightenment,” delivered to the second International Congress on the Enlightenment in Edinburgh in 1967, reprinted in Trevor-Roper, *History and the Enlightenment*, 17–33.

2. Dan Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 31–36: chap. 4, “Society, the Subject of the Modern Story.”

3. John G. A. Pocock, “The Mobility of Property and the Rise of Eighteenth-Century Sociology,” in John G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 103–123, and other essays in the volume, where Pocock identifies thinking about the social with jurisprudential rather than civic humanist modes of thinking, e.g., at 39–43. Pocock’s commitment to more than one Enlightenment is eloquently stated in John G. A. Pocock, “Historiography and Enlightenment: A View of Their History,” *Modern Intellectual History* 5 (2008): 83–96.

Cambridge, research project on “Political Economy and Society 1750–1850,” until his posthumously published Carlyle Lectures of 2009 on Rousseau and Smith, Hont made himself, his audiences, and his readers think harder about the story of “sociability” than ever before.⁴ As framed and discussed in his most recent book, the concept of “commercial sociability” is not only what underlies and connects the thinking of the supposedly antagonistic Rousseau and Smith: it also holds the key to understanding the political thought of the eighteenth century.⁵ In this chapter, I try to follow Hont’s injunction to think harder about the history of the concept of sociability by drawing attention to a hitherto understudied line of inquiry, one distinct from that embodied in natural law and which instead approached the problem from within the domains of sacred history and the history of religion.

In this case, too, the story begins with Thomas Hobbes and his unprecedentedly aggressive critique of the idea of “natural sociability.”⁶ The best-known version of this critique is in chapter 13 of *Leviathan* (1651), on “the natural condition of mankind.” But Hobbes had earlier thrown down the gauntlet to his fellow philosophers in the second

4. The title of the 1984 conference was “The Identity of Political Economy: Between Utopia and the Critique of Civilisation” (July 1–3, 1984). Alas, the papers of this conference did not lead to a publication, unlike its predecessor in 1979, which had yielded *Wealth and Virtue*, ed. Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Instead, the argument from Pufendorf appeared as Istvan Hont, “The Language of Sociability and Commerce: Samuel Pufendorf and the Theoretical Foundations of the ‘Four-Stages’ Theory,” in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 253–276, reprinted in Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 159–184. The Carlyle Lectures have been published as Istvan Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith*, ed. Béla Kapossy and Michael Sonenscher (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

5. For reasons that would be interesting to explore, Hont was never much interested in the Enlightenment as a category in intellectual history, or whether we should think in terms of Enlightenment in the singular or the plural. It may be inferred that he found the concept of Enlightenment carried too much distracting baggage of its own, whether in its history (as “lumières” and “Aufklärung” as well as “Enlightenment”) or in its appropriation by historians with social and cultural as well as intellectual agendas.

6. For Hont on Hobbes on sociability, see Istvan Hont, “An Introduction,” in *Jealousy of Trade*, 1–10, 41–45; Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society*, 5–8, 10–12.

paragraph of *De Cive* (1642), where he dismissed as “false” Aristotle’s axiom that man is born apt for society (*aptum natum ad societatem*).⁷ The challenge was not simply to the authority of Aristotle: a whole tradition of Protestant natural law thinking was at stake. Since Melancthon, Protestants had argued that man’s original sinfulness was offset by an obligation under the law of nature to preserve and behave peacefully toward others (*ad alterum*). The obligation ensured man’s natural sociability, his willingness to accept society. Hobbes retained this obligation insofar as his first law of nature was to seek peace. But he cut away almost everything that underpinned it.⁸ He did this by reducing “the natural condition of mankind” to a nonhistorical abstraction. Although Hobbes allows that a man in that condition may know the law of nature, he makes it clear that such a man will receive no assistance in doing so from those around him. Whereas Grotius had illustrated the law of nature from ancient poetry, finding natural law expressed in human culture or civilization, Hobbes removed all traces of civilization from the state of nature. Natural law was rendered a set of dispositional values, guidance on how to behave peaceably, to be adhered to only if possible without loss of security. In the natural condition, the only sure way to attain peace was through the artifice of the covenant and the sovereign state, without which natural law could have no effective force. Natural law therefore could not make society; the concept of society presupposed that of the state.

There were aspects of Hobbes’s discussion that might seem to belie this—his treatment of families or of natural religion.⁹ But they were swept aside by his relentless emphasis on the necessity of sovereign power. After Hobbes, the challenge to admit man’s natural unsocia-

7. Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive: The Latin Version*, ed. Howard Warrender (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), chap. 1, sec. 2, 90–93; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Noel Malcolm, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), vol. 2, *The English and Latin Texts (i)*, chap. 13, 188–197.

8. On the particularly Protestant interpretation of the natural law of sociability and Hobbes’s relation to it, see Annabel Brett, *Changes of State: Nature and the Limits of the City in Early Modern Natural Law* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 62–71.

9. On these, see Kinch Hoekstra, “Hobbes on the Natural Condition of Mankind,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes’s Leviathan*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 109–127.

bility would reverberate through political thought until the end of the eighteenth century. One line of response, dominant in Protestant Northern Europe and explored by Hont and other modern scholars, built the case for society as preceding government through a renewed engagement with natural law, reinforced by historical conjecture. Another, to which I want to draw more attention, was most fully developed in Catholic Southern Europe and drew on the resources of sacred history as well as the natural history of religion to dispute the account offered by the Protestant natural lawyers.¹⁰

Among the first to grapple with Hobbes's argument was Lutheran jurist Samuel Pufendorf. Responding explicitly to the second paragraph of *De cive* in his *De jure naturae et gentium* (1670), Pufendorf made it the fundamental law of nature that every man ought to preserve and promote a peaceful "sociableness" (*socialitas*) with others.¹¹ At the same time, Pufendorf accepted the force of Hobbes's thesis that men were naturally "indigent"—needy—and hence competitive. But he was reluctant to reduce the problem to a simple contrast between the natural condition of man and the artifice of a sovereign state. At length in *De jure naturae* and more succinctly in *De officio hominis et civis* (1673), Pufendorf explored ways in which men and women could be considered to have developed social institutions before they agreed to form a political community (a *civitas*). These institutions included language and the family; with language he associated property, since both will have required agreement. Through them, natural man would have developed a culture of sociable living (a *cultus vitae*) before submitting to the state.¹² In this way, Pufendorf added a temporal dimension to

10. In an earlier treatment of this theme, I focused specifically on the Neapolitan response to Hobbes. See John Robertson, "Sacred History and Political Thought: Neapolitan Responses to the Problem of Sociability after Hobbes," *The Historical Journal* 56 (2013): 1–29.

11. Samuel Pufendorf, *De jure naturae et gentium libri octo* (Amsterdam: Joannem Pauli, 1698), trans. by B. Kennet as *Of the Law of Nature and Nations* (Amsterdam, 1712), bk. 2, chap. 3, sec.15: "The fundamental law of nature," secs.16–18: "Hobbes's opinion enquired into." Engagement with Hobbes recurs throughout *De jure naturae*; for an excellent discussion of this and the ways in which it shaped Pufendorf's argument, see T. J. Hochstrasser, *Natural Law Theories in the Early Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 40–71.

12. Pufendorf, *De jure naturae* / *Of the Law of Nature and Nations*, bk. 2, chaps. 1–3, on natural man, the natural state of man, and the law of nature; chap. 4,

the formation of society and made it possible to envisage the law of nature enjoining sociability as taking effect gradually.

With this temporal dimension, Pufendorf created conceptual space for the use of “conjectural history” in explaining the formation of society. This was Hont’s point in identifying Pufendorf as the originator of the “four stages” theory of historical development, used by Adam Smith to explain the rise of modern, commercial society.¹³ Such conjecture might refer to examples, from history (including the Bible), from ancient literature, or from travelers’ reports on parts of the world “discovered” by Europeans. But a conjectural account of social development was free not to follow the actual course of history and to separate temporality from history.

If one wished to give a historical account of the formation of society, by contrast, it was necessary to start from the Bible, for the Bible was still held to be the oldest record of human history. At a time when texts were the preferred form of evidence (while interpretation of artifacts and archaeological evidence was regarded as much less secure), the Bible was assumed to provide the earliest textual evidence of human activity. But the Bible was sacred, not civil, history and had to be interpreted accordingly. It was the Word of God, as revealed to the prophets and the apostles, and it told the history of God’s relations with his people, the Hebrews of the Old Testament, and the Jewish and Gentile Christians of the New Testament. Its interpretation required an understanding of the concept of prophecy as the medium of divine ut-

on the duties of man toward himself, foremost among them the “culture of the mind” (*cultura animi*); bk. 4, on speech and property, especially chaps. 1, 4, sec. 6; bk. 6, “Of Matrimony,” on families as primary societies; bk. 7, chap. 1, on the causes and motives inducing men to establish civil societies, especially sec. 3. Abbreviated in Samuel Pufendorf, *De officio hominis et civis juxta legem naturalem libri duo* (London: Adamus Junghans, 1673), trans. by Michael Silverthorne as *On the Duty of Man and Citizen*, ed. James Tully (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), bk. 1, chaps. 3, 10, 12; bk. 2, chaps. 1, 2, 5. For a fuller account of Pufendorf’s argument along the lines summarized here, see Michael Seidler, “Introductory Essay” to *Samuel Pufendorf’s On the Natural State of Man: The 1678 Latin Edition and English Translation*, trans. Michael Seidler (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1990), 30–36, 49–52. See also the pioneering discussion in Hans Medick, *Naturzustand und Naturgeschichte der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973), 40–63, to which Seidler refers.

13. Hont, “The Language of Sociability and Commerce,” 178.

terances, and familiarity with the theological principles which held it together. At the heart of the Christian Bible, of course, was the story of the Fall and redemption; but while for theologians of all confessions the salvation narrative must remain central, the Old Testament offered those interested in the history of man a rich body of evidence for the emergence and survival of the earliest nations. For this purpose, the Flood rather than the Fall was the starting point, inaugurating a narrative centered on the Hebrews but extending to their neighbors in the ancient Middle East: the Chaldeans, with whom Abraham had made his home; the Egyptians, among whom the Hebrews spent long years of exile; and the Persians, whose capture of Jerusalem and destruction of the First Temple inaugurated the Babylonian exile early in the sixth century BC.

The scope for using sacred history as a resource was much enhanced by the proliferation of scholarship devoted to it. By the middle of the seventeenth century, both the text of the Bible and its content had been subject to scholarly scrutiny for several hundred years. Humanist critical expertise posed an array of questions for the biblical text. At the head of these were questions of language, authorship, and chronology, and on all of them answers multiplied. There was no original text of the Bible; it had been written in several languages—Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic—and the Hebrew version in particular carried the problem of the late addition of vowel points. The authorship of the several books, and above of all the Pentateuch, traditionally ascribed to Moses, could not be taken at face value; as a result, the status of prophecy was open to reinterpretation. The chronologies were irreconcilable, as the greatest of chronologists, Joseph Scaliger, had to concede. Together, these developments undermined the coherence of scripture as the univocal Word of God. If anything, the pace of inquiry quickened over the century, on both sides of the confessional divide, culminating in the works of Protestants Louis Cappel, Isaac Vossius, and Jean le Clerc, and Catholics Jean Morin and Richard Simon.¹⁴

14. Pierre Gibert, *L'invention critique de la Bible: XVe—XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), is an introduction. More substantial are: Jean Bernier, *La critique du Pentateuque de Hobbes à Calmet* (Paris: Champion, 2010); Anthony Grafton, "Joseph Scaliger and Historical Chronology: The Rise and Fall of a Discipline," *History and Theory* 14 (1975): 156–185; Anthony Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger: A Study*

Alongside biblical criticism, scholarship in fields ancillary to the Bible also flourished in the late seventeenth century. Examples include Samuel Bochart's biblical geography, Thomas Stanley and others on ancient philosophy, and numerous works devoted to other ancient Middle Eastern peoples, including the Chaldeans, the Persians, and above all the Egyptians—from whom it was clear that the Hebrews had borrowed many of their customs.¹⁵ In addition to sacred history, there was equally a growing interest in the natural history of religion. This was not, as has sometimes been supposed, an anti-Christian or irreligious inquiry; on the contrary, by making idolatry an expression of man's natural inclination toward religion (rather than the temptation of the devil), it served to explain the variety of pagan religious beliefs that Christians were encountering across the world and to facilitate the process of conversion.¹⁶ By the late seventeenth century, therefore, the fields of sacred history and the history of religion saw

in the *History of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), vol. 2, *Historical Chronology*; Nicholas Hardy, *Criticism and Confession. The Bible in the Seventeenth-Century Republic of Letters* (Oxford: Oxford-Warburg Studies, 2017); François Laplanche, *L'écriture, le sacré et l'histoire. Érudits et politiques protestants devant la Bible en France au XVII^e siècle* (Amsterdam: Holland University Press, 1986), on Cappel; Scott Mandelbrote, "Isaac Vossius and the Septuagint," in *Isaac Vossius (1618–1689): Between Science and Scholarship*, ed. E. Jorink and D. van Miert (Leiden: Brill, 2012). Richard Simon remains relatively understudied, but see Paul Auvray, *Richard Simon, 1638–1712: étude bio-bibliographique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974).

15. For an overview of recent scholarship, see Dmitri Levitin, "From Sacred History to the History of Religion: Paganism, Judaism and Christianity in European Historiography from Reformation to 'Enlightenment,'" *The Historical Journal* 55 (2012): 1117–1160. On Bochart, see Zur Shalev, *Sacred Words and Worlds: Geography, Religion, and Scholarship, 1550–1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). On histories of ancient philosophy, see Dmitri Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom in the Age of the New Science: Histories of Philosophy in England c. 1640–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). On John Spencer and the "Egyptian" character of Hebrew customs, see Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), chap. 3; Dmitri Levitin, "John Spencer's *De legibus Hebraeorum* (1683–85) and 'Enlightened' Sacred History: A New Interpretation," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 76 (2013): 49–92. A survey that treats the subject proleptically as anticipating nineteenth-century comparative religious studies is Guy Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

16. Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Theology, Ethnography, and the Historicization of Idolatry," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 4 (2006): 571–596.

considerable scholarly activity—and controversy. They were as lively as the study of natural law, and potentially they were at least as rewarding to those who would explore the earliest forms of society.

The first to appreciate the potential of sacred history for this larger purpose was Benedict Spinoza. (Hobbes had earlier exploited biblical scholarship for his own purposes, demonstrating that both the Old and the New Testaments endorsed the subordination of the priesthood to the civil sovereign.) Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670) is usually portrayed as an anguished plea for liberty of thought, directed at the intolerance displayed by the orthodox Calvinist Churches in the Dutch republic, where Spinoza lived.¹⁷ It was that—but it was also a sustained analysis of the Bible as sacred history. Spinoza began by explaining the Bible's status as the "Word of God" through an analysis of prophecy. Exercising their imagination, not their reason, the prophets, beginning with Moses, had recorded the divine speech acts in forms designed to be comprehensible by a rude and unlearned Hebrew people. The record of prophecy was by no means stable: textual criticism showed that virtually nothing about the authorship, language, or canon of the Bible could be taken at face value. The best that could be supposed, according to Spinoza, was that the Bible as we have it was composed by the priest and scribe Ezra following the return from the Babylonian exile. As such, its text had been established after the first and (Spinoza suggests) only legitimately founded Jewish Commonwealth had ceased to exist, and its authority thereafter depended on its usage. The Bible would continue to count as the Word of God, Spinoza emphasized, only as long as it was accepted as such.¹⁸

Nevertheless, the Bible had continued to fulfill this role, in its character as a history. It was a history, a narrative, of successive initia-

17. Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011). Fuller and better is Susan James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics: The Theological-Political Treatise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

18. Benedict Spinoza, *Oeuvres III Tractatus Theologico-Politicus: Traité théologico-politique*, Latin text ed. Fokke Akkerman, French trans. Jacqueline Lagrée and Pierre-François Moreau (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999); and the English translation, Benedict Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza Volume II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 65–354, chaps. 1–3, 7–10, 12.

tives, beginning with those of Moses, to teach piety and obedience, first to the Hebrews and then, through Christ, to all mankind. The piety and obedience inculcated into the ancient Hebrews, Spinoza argued, was what had socialized them, making possible their existence and development as a nation. Government alone could not be enough—nor could the divine natural law, which could only be understood by philosophers, not by a rude and uneducated people. It was through the laws and ceremonies instituted by Moses, and then written down in his name, that the Hebrews were formed into a people and were able subsequently to maintain a sociable existence. In effect, Spinoza offered sacred history as an alternative to natural law as an explanation of sociability; in the Judaeo-Christian world, the world Spinoza took his readers to be living in, it was the “Word of God,” interpreted as piety and obedience and recorded as history, not the law of nature, that had taught men to behave so as to overcome their natural unsociability.¹⁹

Noel Malcolm has objected that neither Hobbes nor Spinoza was an original scholar of the Bible. Rather, Spinoza’s account of the text of the Bible drew radical conclusions from the scholarship of others.²⁰ But the argument of the *Theological-Political Treatise* was more important than its scholarship. The work mattered because it demonstrated the uses to which sacred history could be put. It immediately provoked the Church authorities, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. In Holland, where the book was published, several assemblies within the Dutch Reformed Church condemned the *Treatise* as

19. Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, chaps. 4, 5, 13–16. Of particular importance to this interpretation of Spinoza on sacred history is his careful separation, in chap. 16, para. [19], of the state of nature from religion, and hence of the former from revealed divine law. In the state of nature, every man lives by the laws of appetite by virtue of the sovereign right of nature, and this state is by nature and in time prior to religion. No one knows by nature that he is obliged to obey God, and hence to love his neighbor as himself. See Spinoza, *Oeuvres III*, 526–527; Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 292–293. This does not seem to support Wiep van Bunge’s argument (which, however, is based on the *Ethics*) that Spinoza upheld man’s natural sociability. See Wiep van Bunge, *Spinoza Past and Present: Essays on Spinoza, Spinozism and Spinoza Scholarship* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 92–93, 112, 201. In his *De Jure Naturae/Of the Laws of Nature*, bk. 2, chap. 2, sec. 3, Pufendorf criticized Spinoza’s account of individual “right” as a variation on Hobbes’s account of human nature.

20. Noel Malcolm, “Hobbes, Ezra, and the Bible: The History of a Subversive Idea,” in *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 383–431.

“blasphemous” and “obscene” and requested its suppression.²¹ The reaction in Rome, many hundreds of miles away, was just as hostile. The *Treatise* was investigated and condemned by the Holy Office as early as 1678. The alarm caused by Spinoza’s work, along with that of the aggressively polemical Isaac Vossius, may also have prompted the Holy Office (or Inquisition) and its sister, the Congregation of the Index of Prohibited Books, to take a closer interest in the new biblical scholarship more generally, and in particular the writings of the most radical of the scholars, Richard Simon, whose *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (1678) was condemned in 1682.²²

That the Catholic authorities should be as alarmed by Spinoza as his Calvinist fellow countrymen was understandable. The status of the Bible was a highly sensitive issue, since the Council of Trent had ruled that only the Vulgate was to be treated as authoritative.²³ But the works of Spinoza, Vossius, and Simon do seem to have provoked a reaction in a way that the scholarship of their immediate predecessors, the Catholic Morin and the Protestant Cappel, had not. What is most interesting, nevertheless, is that the hostile response in Rome did not deter Catholic thinkers from recognizing what Spinoza had been doing and from setting out to use sacred history for similar purposes. For as we shall now see, it was two thinkers from Roman Catholic Naples, Pietro Giannone and Giambattista Vico, who would be the most imaginative exponents of sacred history as a resource for exploring the formation of society and responding to the Hobbesian problem of natural unsociability.

To understand why these Catholic thinkers should have had recourse to sacred history, notwithstanding the determined hostility of the authorities in Rome, we need first, however, to explain why they were unable to draw on the resources of natural law. Until the middle decades of the seventeenth century, as Annabel Brett has recently

21. Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, chap. 15, “The Onslaught.”

22. For the condemnations of Spinoza and Simon, see Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, the Vatican, Rome, Index Diarii, vol. 7 (1665–1682), fol. 126 (December 1678), and fols. 159–161: April, June, December 1682. On the added provocation of Vossius and his condemnation, see Mandelbrote, “Isaac Vossius and the Septuagint.”

23. Gigliola Fragnito, *La Bibbia al rogo: la censura ecclesiastica e i volgarizzamenti della Scrittura* (1471–1605) (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997).

reminded us, Roman Catholic thinkers confidently deployed one of the richest sets of conceptual resources ever applied to the study of human behavior, Aristotelian Scholasticism. For the philosopher theologians of the “Second Scholastic”—the Dominicans Vitoria and Soto, and the Jesuits Suárez and Vázquez—natural law was the starting point for inquiry into the post-lapsarian condition of man. Taking off from Aristotle’s proposition that man was by nature formed for society, they had explored the ways in which the city, the *civitas*, guided by the Church, should fulfill man’s natural potential.²⁴ The fertility of this inquiry was still evident in the mid-seventeenth century in the works of Spanish Jesuits Juan de Lugo and Rodrigo de Arriaga. But they were the last of this line; by the early eighteenth century, it seems, Scholastic natural law had little or nothing to offer Catholic thinkers concerned with the problem of sociability. What had happened?

The general problem of the decline of the Second Scholastic has barely begun to be investigated. But Brett’s account of Scholastic natural law enables two suggestions to be made to explain its inability to contribute to the sociability debate. One is that sociability had never been the problem for Catholic natural lawyers that it was for Protestants. Following Aristotle, Catholics assumed that it was man’s purpose, his *telos*, to be sociable. The critical question was how the *civitas* might best fulfill that purpose. A key moment on the way to its doing so was the division of the common into property, a process many in the Second Scholastic treated as subject to the *jus gentium* rather than the law of nature. Here history entered their argument: the *jus gentium* had emerged as a form of customary law in specific times and places, and the Scholastics readily turned to sacred history for evidence of its earliest development. But the *jus gentium* still presupposed the formation of the *civitas*, leaving little room in which to develop an independent concept of society.²⁵

24. Brett, *Changes of State*.

25. Ibid., 72–89, 196–199, on the differences between the Catholic and Protestant conceptions of natural law, and on the debate over the status of the *jus gentium*. See also Annabel Brett, “Later Scholastic Philosophy of Law,” in *A Treatise of Legal Philosophy and General Jurisprudence*, Volume 6: *A History of*

A second suggestion concerns the increasing concentration of Scholastic moral theology on casuistry: giving advice on individual cases of conscience. Casuistry was popularly associated with the Jesuits but was by no means their monopoly; the most famous casuists of the later seventeenth century were Sicilian Theatine Antonio Diana and Spanish Cistercian Juan Caramuel, known as “princeps laxistarum,” who between 1656 and 1673 held a bishopric near Naples.²⁶ Casuistry is often reduced to “probabilism”—flexibility in the choice of which “approved” opinion to follow in a particular case of conscience. But it had deeper conceptual roots in Scholasticism itself. For if, as Brett argues in *Changes of State*, the metaphysical foundation of the Second Scholastic’s moral theology was a concern with agency, and hence with problems of motivation and obligation, an interest in conscience was a consistent outcome of that concern.²⁷ The Second Scholastic, it seems, was neither interested in nor well equipped to respond to the suggestion that sociability was a problem.²⁸

Just at the moment when Catholic natural law was narrowing into casuistry, however, it was subject to a ferocious attack from its own side, an attack that thrust the problem of sociability to the center of Catholic attention. The assault was the work of Augustinian, Jansenist critics of the Jesuits’ “laxity,” both in their casuistry and in their conduct of overseas missions. The attack was spearheaded by Pascal’s

the Philosophy of Law from the Ancient Greeks to the Scholastics, ed. F. D. Miller and C-A. Biondi, 2nd ed. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), 335–375, esp. 367–369.

26. For the biographies of Diana and Caramuel, see J. Schmutz, ed., *Scholasticon*, sec. “Nomenclator,” www.scholasticon.fr/Database/Scholastiques.

27. Brett, *Changes of State*, 37–61: chap. 2, “Constructing Human Agency.”

28. This is not to claim that Scholastic natural law thinking disappeared completely from the Catholic world. Romana Bassi has shown that it informed the critical response of a number of Venetian philosophers to the work of Rousseau. See Romana Bassi, *Natura, uguaglianza, libertà. Rousseau nel Settecento Veneto* (Pisa: ETS, 2008). Brett points to the existence of Giovanni Guarini, a Sicilian critic of the Protestant natural jurists in the second half of the eighteenth century. See Annabel Brett, “Natural Right and Civil Community: The Civil Philosophy of Hugo Grotius,” *Historical Journal* 45 (2002): 31–51, esp. 50–51. For an overview of the problem from a nineteenth-century vantage point, see Merio Scattola, “Protestantesimo e diritto natural cattolico nel XVIII secolo,” in *Illuminismo e Protestantismo*, ed. G. Cantarutti and S. Ferrari (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2010), 131–147.

Lettres provinciales (1659).²⁹ Withering in his mockery of Diana and Caramuel as well as the Jesuits, Pascal argued that their fundamental error lay in slighting the consequences of the Fall, which had left man weak and concupiscent, his natural potential drastically reduced or even cut off. Only the offer of salvation by divine grace could redeem human nature. But if fallen man was as sinful as this, how was he ever able to live in society? Pascal, Nicole, and others argued that the answer must lie in mutual need: paradoxically, self-interest required society for its satisfaction. Holding this view of human nature, the Augustinians also repudiated the Stoic idea of virtue, exploring instead their common ground with Epicureanism. In turn, these commitments exposed them to the challenge of Hobbes, whose account of human nature, along with those of Grotius and Pufendorf, was widely regarded as “Epicurean.”³⁰ The outcome was that the Augustinians challenged Catholics to admit the force of Hobbes’s denial of Aristotelian natural sociability and to look for a persuasive response. With little help to be expected from Scholastic natural law, they had to look elsewhere.

There were good reasons why it should have been Neapolitan thinkers who responded to the challenge. The third-largest city in Europe (after London and Paris) at the start of the eighteenth century, Naples was still a major intellectual center. It was a city of academies and of substantial, up-to-date libraries; its men of letters, supported by the booksellers, maintained contact with the wider European republic of letters and kept abreast of new thinking in Northern Europe, while printers were on hand to produce their own books. The Neapolitans were particularly well informed about both modern French philosophy, including Augustinian controversy, and biblical criticism and sacred historical scholarship. The library of Giuseppe Valletta, a wealthy lawyer who built his collection in the second half of the seventeenth century and opened it to fellow men of letters, was rich in both cate-

29. Girolamo Imbruglia, “Le *Lettere provinciali* e la critica di Pascal all’idolatria gesuita: tra propaganda e opinione pubblica,” in *L’Europa divisa e i nuovi mondi: per Adriano Prosperi*, ed. M. Donattini, G. Marocci, and S. Pastore (Pisa: Della Normale, 2011), 217–226.

30. On the use of “Epicurean” as a proxy for denial of the natural sociability of man, see the acute observations in Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society*, 13–15.

gories of works.³¹ Other manuscript evidence, as well as the archive of papers read to the Accademia Medina Coeli, instituted and named after one of the last Spanish viceroys, indicates that the level of discussion of the issues current in sacred historical scholarship was high.³²

Naples was also close to Rome, and its men of letters were well aware of the sensitivity shown by Rome's intellectual authorities toward Augustinianism and the new developments in biblical criticism alike. But this did not mean that they were without freedom of maneuver. Pressure from Rome served as a provocation as well as a limitation, framing an agenda that the Neapolitans might choose to defy (and risk the consequences) but could also adapt to original ends. Reminders of Rome's concern were given in the second decade of the eighteenth century, when two young Neapolitans, in Rome to further their clerical and scholarly careers, had their works investigated by the Congregation of the Index of Prohibited Books. The first to be subjected to this process of intellectual vetting was Celestino Galiani, a rising star of the Benedictines, for a set of *Theses* on the Old and New Testaments that raised a number of current issues in biblical

31. After his death, Valletta's books were transferred to the Oratorian Convent of the Girolamini, in Naples, where Vico was employed to list them. A manuscript list, entitled "Antico Catalogo della Biblioteca dei Girolamini, attribuito a Giambattista Vico," was consulted on microfilm number 27.1.10. (Regrettably, the manuscripts and books of the Girolamini Library cannot at present be consulted; the library became a crime scene following extensive thefts from its collections by its librarian.) On Valletta, his interests, his writings, and his library, see V. I. Comparato, *Giuseppe Valletta: un intellettuale napoletano della fine del Seicento* (Naples: Nella sede dell'Istituto, 1970).

32. Also in the Biblioteca Oratoriana dei Girolamini is a manuscript discussing Richard Simon's assessment of the authorship of the Pentateuch: MS 28.4.1.(2), fols. 13r–30r. The lectures delivered at the Accademia Medina Coeli have been published as *Lezioni dell'Accademia di Palazzo del Duca di Medina Coeli (Napoli 1698–1701)*, ed. Michele Rak with Maria Conforti and Carmela Lombardi, 5 vols. (Naples: Istituto italiano per gli studi filosofici, 2000–2005). Volume 1 contains lectures on the ancient Assyrians, Hebrews, and Persians. In addition to the editors' introductory material (gathered in vol. 5), see Maria Conforti, "Scienza, erudizione e storia nell'Accademia di Medina Coeli: spunti provvisori," *Studi filosofici* 8–9 (1985–1986): 101–127. For an overview of Neapolitan intellectual life c. 1680–1720, see John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 101–109, 121–134.

scholarship.³³ Shortly afterward, Biagio Garofalo was likewise referred to the Congregation of the Index for a monograph comparing ancient Greek and Hebrew (biblical) poetry.³⁴

Both Galiani and Garofalo were well connected, requiring the secretary and cardinals of the Congregation of the Index to tread carefully; the offending works received more than the usual number of readers' reports setting out the disputed issues. In the end, Galiani's *Theses* were spared being put in the Index of Prohibited Books by a last-minute papal intervention, while Garofalo was forbidden to republish his book until it had been corrected.³⁵ Although the proceedings of the Congregation of the Index were supposed to be secret, both men knew that their works had been referred, for both composed additional defenses of their arguments. It is likely that their friends in Naples also knew about the cases; both men maintained connections there, and Garofalo, unusually, was a friend of both Giannone and Vico.

Clearly these cases were a warning to others. But it is a mistake, I think, to see them simply in a negative light. For the records of the Congregation of the Index, specifically its readers' reports, also enable the historian to understand the framework in which the Church would

33. Celestino Galiani, *Conclusiones selectae ex historia Veteris Testamenti, ab orbe condito ad Abrahae in Chananaeam profectionem* (Rome: s.n., 1708), extended and reissued as *Assertiones theologicae* ([Rome]: 1710); it was the second edition that was referred to the Congregation of the Index, which discussed it under the title *Theses ex Sacra scriptura*.

34. Biagio Garofalo, *Considerazioni intorno alla poesia degli Ebrei e dei Greci* (Rome: F. Gonzaga, 1707). The book was dedicated to Pope Clement XI. For a modern edition, see Biagio Garofalo, *Considerazioni intorno alla poesia degli Ebrei e dei Greci*, ed. Manuela Sanna with Anna Lissa (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2014).

35. The Galiani case ran from August 1710 to January 1714. The references are: Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, Index Diarii, vol. 14 (1708–1721), fols. 26r–29r, 32r–v, 38v, 53ff., 60, 62, with the readers' reports collected with agenda papers in Index Protocolli BBBB, fols. 137r–141r, 190r–198r, 296, 320r–336r, 340r. The case is the subject of a monograph by Gustavo Costa, *Celestino Galiani a la Sacra Scrittura: Alle radici del pensiero napoletano del Settecento* (Rome: Aracne, 2011). As will be seen, I do not agree with Costa's predominantly negative reading of the case. Garofalo's work was not referred to the Congregation of the Index of Prohibited Books until September 1713, and proceedings did not end until the publication of a decree of the Congregation of the Index in February 1718. The references are: Index Diario vol. 14, fols. 75, 81–83, 87, 121–123, 135–137, 139, 149–152, with the readers' reports in the Index Protocolli DDDD, fols. 37–38, 43–57, 198–203.

permit discussion of the Bible and sacred history to take place.³⁶ From a preliminary reading of the material, four issues stand out as being of particular importance to the Roman authorities. Two were textual and had worried the Congregation of the Index when it considered Simon's *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*; they concerned authorship and chronology. There could be no significant qualification either of Moses's authorship of the Pentateuch or of the chronology of the Old Testament (which in the Vulgate allowed for just under 4,000 years between the Creation and the birth of Christ). The two other issues were matters of theological interpretation. Commentary on the Bible, even on its poetry, should not call into question the orthodox, Scholastic account of God's power, and hence of his providence; and it should not qualify the free exercise of his grace.³⁷ In setting these limits on discussion, the Church was indeed clinging to old orthodoxies. But it could not prevent Catholic thinkers from engaging with sacred history. Those who believed they were in a position to do so, like Giannone, might explicitly defy the shibboleths of Roman orthodoxy. But others, like Vico, can be seen to have taken key elements of the Roman agenda and adapted them to their own purposes, successfully exploiting the potential of sacred history as a resource for the discussion of the formation of human societies.

Pietro Giannone engaged with sacred history in the "Triregno," a work he composed in manuscript (but did not publish) while in exile in Vienna between 1731 and 1733.³⁸ He was there because he had already defied the Church by publishing his *Storia civile del regno di Napoli* (1723)—for which he was swiftly condemned by the Holy Office and forced to flee Naples and take refuge in the capital of the

36. The Congregation of the Index of Prohibited Books worked by a system akin to "peer review," with the secretary obtaining one or more reports on a suspected work, reports which were delivered orally to the assembled cardinals, to inform their decisions. These reports were then filed by the secretary to the Congregation of the Index with other agenda papers in the "Index Protocolli."

37. See note 26 for references to the reports in the two cases collected in the Index Protocolli. Particularly careful and precise in its identification of the critical issues was the report on Garofalo's *Considerazioni* by Prospero Lambertini, the future Pope Benedict XIV, delivered on July 15, 1715. See Index Protocolli DDDD, fols. 43–57.

38. Pietro Giannone, *Il Triregno: I Del regno terreno, II Del regno celeste, III Del regno papale*, ed. A. Parente, 3 vols. (Bari: G. Laterza, 1940).

Austrian monarchy, to which the kingdom of Naples belonged.³⁹ In this setting, Giannone did not need to adhere to Rome's agenda. Nor did he; rather, throughout the "Triregno" he acknowledged debts to a range of heterodox writers and did not disguise an attachment to materialism.⁴⁰ The shibboleths of Catholic sacred history, the insistence on Vulgate chronology and Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, he avowed in the breach. The former he was happy to accept on the basis that all the ancient chronologies were uncertain and that of the Vulgate would have to be combined with others; the latter he acknowledged on "the system of Richard Simon," supposing that it derived from originals spoken by Moses, in much the same way as Homer was taken to be the "author" of poems he had not written down.⁴¹ On this basis, Giannone suggested, the Pentateuch and the later historical books of the Old Testament were uniquely valuable as the earliest record of the formation and survival of a people.

Thus understood, sacred history was interesting to Giannone for the same reason that it was to Spinoza, as the history of the socialization of a singularly primitive people. Afterwards, in his autobiography, Giannone would sum up his purpose in the "Triregno" as having been to investigate with the aid of history "the making of the world and its ancient inhabitants: the condition and end of man, and how by speech and reflection he had . . . inaugurated civil society (*la società civile*)."⁴² In the first volume, devoted to the Old Testament, Giannone identified three institutions as having been essential to Hebrew society: first, marriage, reinforced when necessary by concubinage and even incest, to ensure the reproduction of families; second, war, to acquire and preserve territory—for which purpose the Hebrews had pursued war without inhibition, and often with exemplary cruelty; and finally reli-

39. Pietro Giannone, *Storia civile del regno di Napoli*, 3 vols. (Naples: Niccolò Naso, 1723). For his own account of its publication and condemnation, and his flight to Vienna, see Pietro Giannone, *Vita scritta da lui medesimo*, ed. S. Bertelli (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1960), 63–101.

40. Two studies of the sources of the "Triregno" are Giuseppe Ricuperati, *L'esperienza civile e religiosa di Pietro Giannone* (Milan: R. Ricciardi, 1970); Lina Mannarino, *Le mille favole degli antichi: ebraismo e cultura europea nel pensiero religioso di Pietro Giannone* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1999).

41. Giannone, *Il Triregno*, vol. 1, 3–7, 14–19, 33–38.

42. Giannone, *Vita*, 183.

gion, which in the Hebrews' case had clearly involved idolatry, learned from the Egyptians among whom they had lived for so long.⁴³ In these ways, he argued, the Old Testament recorded the "earthly" or natural kingdom of man, from which had emerged "civil society."

By contrast, Vico never left the kingdom of Naples, and chose to abide by Rome's orthodoxy. Indeed he went to some lengths to secure approval and support for his "New Science" in Rome in the aftermath of Giannone's flight and condemnation, opportunistically advertising his work as an answer to Bayle and other Protestant philosophers and claiming that he would draw the principles of the new science "dentro quelli della storia sacra"—"from within those of sacred history."⁴⁴ But the ways in which Vico adapted Rome's agenda for the interpretation of sacred history were anything but straightforward.

The *Scienza nuova*, the *New Science*, was first published in 1725, before being extensively rewritten for a second edition in 1730, with only a few further revisions in the third edition, published in 1744, the year of Vico's death.⁴⁵ In all these editions, Vico explicitly presented the work as a refutation of the arguments of the Protestant natural lawyers, Grotius and Pufendorf. Grotius had erred, first, in separating nature and grace so far as to argue that "his system would hold good . . . even were all knowledge of God set aside."⁴⁶ By contrast, Vico's system depended on the operation of divine providence. Second, both Grotius

43. Giannone, *Il Triregno*, vol. 1, 126–136, 200–201, 161–178.

44. Giambattista Vico to Filippo Maria Monti, 18 November 1724, and to Cardinal Lorenzo Corsini (future Pope Clement XII), in Giambattista Vico, *Epistole, con aggiunte le epistole dei suoi corrispondenti*, ed. Manuela Sanna (Naples: Morano, 1992), 108–110, 117–118.

45. Giambattista Vico, *Principi di una scienza nuova, intorno alla natura delle nazioni, per la quale si ritrovano i principi di altro Sistema del diritto natural delle genti* (Naples: Mosca, 1725), hereafter *Scienza nuova 1725*; Giambattista Vico, *Principi di scienza nuova d'intorno alla commune natura delle nazioni* (Naples: G. and S. Elia, 1744), hereafter *Scienza nuova 1744*. Both are included in Giambattista Vico, *Opere*, ed. Andrea Battistini, 2 vols. (Milan: Mondadori, 1990). For a translation of the 1725 edition, see Giambattista Vico, *The First New Science*, trans. and ed. L. Pompa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); for the 1744 edition, see Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. T. G. Bergin and M. H. Fisch, revised ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984). These are the two editions principally referred to. References will be to section numbers, dispensing with the need to give page numbers in both the Italian edition and the translations. For the second edition, the *Scienza nuova 1730*, see note 49.

46. Vico, *Scienza nuova 1725*, sec.16.

and Pufendorf had adopted the Hobbesian, “Epicurean” view of the earliest men as fierce and violent—yet supposed that they were capable of understanding the law of nature.⁴⁷ This was implausible, for the earliest men were creatures of their imaginations, incapable of reason. What worked on the imaginations of those men was a fear of God: it was religion, whether revealed or idolatrous, not the law of nature, that had first socialized men and women.⁴⁸ The religious beliefs of those first men could, however, provide evidence of their mental development: although Grotius had been wrong to suppose that ancient poetry contained fully formed natural law, Hobbes was equally wrong to suppose that all culture, in the forms of religion and poetry, should be eliminated from the understanding of socialization. To Vico, mythology and heroic poetry, above all the poems of Homer, were invaluable sources for understanding just how men and women learned to be sociable.

Vico’s adaptation of sacred history to explain how men became sociable was nothing if not ingenious. Taking the Flood, as recounted in Genesis, to be the start of recoverable human history, Vico used the period of time given by the genealogies of Noah’s long-lived offspring to conjecture how solitary, feral beings—they were indeed Hobbes’s “fierce and violent men,” as Vico admitted in the second edition of the *Scienza nuova*—must have become sufficiently sociable to form families and, in due course, communities.⁴⁹ Vico was careful to exempt the Hebrews themselves, the offspring of Shem, from this account; their history was the work of divine revelation. It was the Gentile descendants of Ham and Japhet who interested him, for their history illustrated the working of divine providence. Cast abroad as the floodwaters receded, roaming the damp earth alone, and growing to giant stature because (unlike the Hebrews, who were given laws for purification) they had no incentive to keep themselves clean, these Gentiles owed

47. *Ibid.*, secs.16, 18.

48. *Ibid.*, secs.19–20, also sec. 25 (i.e., [chap.] 7: “Oltre quella della fede, umana necessità è di ripetere i principi di questa scienza dalla storia sacra” (Faith and necessity require the principles of this science to be drawn from sacred history).

49. See Giambattista Vico, *Scienza nuova* 1730, ed. Paolo Cristofolini, in Giambattista Vico, *Opere di Giambattista Vico VII* (Naples: Il Mulino, 2002), 100, also in Vico, *Scienza nuova* 1744, sec.179.

their socialization to idolatry. Cowering before the thunder generated by the drying out of the earth, they had imagined that it expressed the anger of God at their coupling with unknown women in the open. In their fear, they had taken their women to live permanently with them in caves, there to form independent families, whose children were certainly their own.⁵⁰ In due course, these families extended into clans, migrated to the coasts, and formed themselves into cities.

For all that Vico set the Hebrews apart, his account of Gentile socialization derived much of its power from its appropriation of themes from sacred history. The prevalence of idolatry in the absence of revelation; the absolute priority of reproduction, even at the cost of incest; and the giant stature of the first men were all ideas familiar from the Book of Genesis. Moreover, Vico was explicit in his acceptance of the orthodox framework of sacred history. The chronological table that he placed before the opening chapter of the second edition of the *Scienza nuova* took the Vulgate's dating of the Creation and the Flood as given.⁵¹ As important, at the center of his explanation for the course of history was a concept of divine providence that depended on a strictly orthodox understanding of the difference between God's absolute and ordinary power.⁵² Moreover, the claim that this concept of providence was the expression of a "rational civil theology"—"una teologia civile ragionata"—(rather than a revealed or natural theology) carefully left the operation of divine grace unaffected, and separate from that of divine providence.⁵³ In these vital respects, Vico accepted the orthodox framework of sacred history, adopting the very principles that had been insisted on by the Index readers of Galiani and Garofalo. But he did so in a way that then enabled him to hollow out that framework, creating space for an account of how savage, Hobbesian man

50. Vico, *Scienza nuova* 1725, secs. 94–116; Vico, *Scienza nuova* 1744, secs. 142–146, 165–179, 330–337, 369–373.

51. Vico, *Scienza nuova* 1730, 61–62; Vico, *Scienza nuova* 1744, secs. 43–44.

52. Enrico Nuzzo, "Between Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Italian Culture in the Early 1700s: Giambattista Vico and Paolo Mattia Doria," in *The Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy, 1600–1750*, ed. Sarah Mortimer and John Robertson (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 205–234.

53. Vico, *Scienza nuova* 1744, secs. 2, 342 ("una teologia civile ragionata della provvidenza divina"—the formula first appears in this edition), 310, 1110 (for the distinction between divine providence and divine grace).

became social over time. Here Vico joined sacred history to the natural history of religion, presenting the idolatry of the Gentiles as an extension of sacred history: together they explained how solitary, post-Diluvian man had been made social.

For Giannone and Vico, therefore, the framework set by the Church for the use of sacred history was no bar to its imaginative reconstruction, the better to explain the process of socialization. Instead, I suggest, the Catholic approach to sacred history provides a context in common for the two Neapolitan thinkers, a context all the more revealing given that they are conventionally studied apart, as if their intellectual concerns were quite separate. It was through engagement with sacred history that Giannone and Vico, in their very different ways, were able to join and contribute to the same wider European inquiry into human sociability.⁵⁴

Neither Vico nor Giannone, however, had direct successors. The manuscript of Giannone's "*Triregno*" fell into the hands of the Holy Office following his own kidnapping and imprisonment, and the few surviving copies seem to have had only a limited circulation. Vico had been able to publish the *Scienza nuova*, but it was rarely read outside Italy until late in the century; crucially, it was not translated into French until the nineteenth century. On the face of it, the story I have been telling had come to an end, and could not contribute to Enlightenment thinking after 1750.

There is no denying that several of those who would shape the Enlightenment inquiry into the progress of society were dismissive of sacred history. Three works published within a year of each other in the 1750s seemed set to bury it altogether. Voltaire ostentatiously began his *Essai sur les mœurs* (1756), a universal history intended to replace Bossuet's *Histoire universelle* (1681), in the Far East, on the grounds that Chinese historical records, not the Bible of the Hebrews, were the oldest available. Only after chapters devoted to the civilizations and religions of China and India did he reach the peoples of the Middle East,

54. For a fuller development of this interpretation of Giannone and Vico, see Robertson, "Sacred History and Political Thought."

from whom he omitted the Hebrews and Judaism.⁵⁵ David Hume was equally dismissive, remarking in his *Natural History of Religion* (1757) that however elevated the idea of God suggested by Moses and the prophets, to ordinary Jews he was simply a national deity—one among many in the history of religion. There was nothing uniquely interesting, he implied, about the ancient Hebrews.⁵⁶ But the greatest damage was done by Rousseau, when in the *Discours sur l'inégalité* (1755) he rejected a historical approach to the study of natural man, specifically on the grounds that it would have to rely on the Bible. For the Bible would seem to demonstrate that man had never been in a purely natural state, and that there had always been inequality. Like Hobbes, Rousseau would strip natural man of any trace of culture; reference to the Bible would make that impossible. An inquiry into natural man, he insisted, must be based on conjectures that are completely free of the constraints of historical evidence.⁵⁷

But the contribution of sacred history to the study of the formation of society was not over; it continued to stimulate thinking on the subject in Germany, France, and Italy. The German engagement with sacred history has recently attracted the attention of a number of scholars. Rousseau's challenge to the priority of Genesis was met, at least half-seriously, by the young Thomas Abbt.⁵⁸ More substantively, Göttingen scholar J. D. Michaelis made biblical studies the starting

55. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756), in Voltaire, *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. B. Bernard, J. Renwick, N. Cronk, J. Godden, and H. Durantion (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 2009), vol. 22, chaps. 1–10. When finished, this edition of the *Essai* will consist of nine volumes (vols. 21–27 of the complete works).

56. David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, first published as one of *Four Dissertations* (London, 1757) in the *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, by David Hume, ed. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, 1898), vol. 2, 331n1 for the original wording of 1757.

57. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755), in Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, *Du Contrat Social, Écrits politiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 132–133. For a translation, see Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality among Men*, or *Second Discourse*, in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 132.

58. Avi Lifschitz, "Genesis for Historians: Thomas Abbt on Biblical and Conjectural Accounts of Human Nature," *History of European Ideas* 41, no. 5 (2015): 605–618.

point for extensive inquiries into the languages and ethnography of the contemporary and ancient Near East.⁵⁹ Farther north, J. G. Herder interpreted ancient Hebrew poetry as an early, exemplary expression of national character.⁶⁰ Running through many of these inquiries was a concern with restating the case for man's natural sociability, countering the "Epicurean" argument to the contrary of Rousseau and his predecessors in the inquiry into early, natural man.⁶¹

Relatively neglected but arguably more continuous with the line of inquiry pioneered by Vico was the interest shown in sacred history and the history of religion in France and in Italy. Here the key figure was Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger. With early interests in natural history and the history of language, Boulanger contributed several articles to the *Encyclopédie*, among them essays on the Déluge, on the Guèbres (the Parsi), and on the Hebrew language. In the first, he argued that the biblical Flood was the same as that remembered in the pagan, classical sources: it had indeed been universal, a cataclysm in the natural history of the world, which had required its survivors to rebuild their societies almost from scratch. Boulanger went on to develop this supposition in two works, *Recherches sur l'origine du despotisme oriental* (1761), in which he traced the intimate connection between theocracy and despotism, and the three-volume *L'Antiquité dévoilée par ses usages* (1766). Both works were published, and may have been edited, by the Baron D'Holbach after Boulanger's death in 1759.⁶²

59. Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Avi Lifschitz, *Language and Enlightenment: The Berlin Debates of the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

60. Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, 169–176; Christoph Bultmann, *Die biblische Urgeschichte in der Aufklärung: Johann Gottfried Herders Interpretation der Genesis* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).

61. Eva Piirimäe, "Philosophy, Sociability, and Modern Patriotism: Young Herder between Rousseau and Abbt," *History of European Ideas* 41, no. 5 (2015): 640–661.

62. The pioneering modern study of Boulanger was by Franco Venturi, *L'antichità svelata e l'idea del progresso in N. A. Boulanger (1722–1759)* (Bari: Laterza, 1947). For a study that is primarily biobibliographical, see Paul Sadrin, *Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger (1722–1759), ou avant nous le déluge* (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1986).

L'Antiquité dévoilée was Boulanger's *summa*, capacious in its curiosity. What had struck Boulanger was the presence of the biblical Flood in the mythologies of all ancient civilizations. Moreover, the ways in which the Flood was commemorated, in funeral rites, mysteries, and liturgical ceremonies, had been very similar across the nations. Through study of these rites and ceremonies, Boulanger believed he could integrate sacred history with natural and profane (civil) history, and biblical antiquity with classical antiquity and what was then known about Chinese and American traditions. In turn, these held the key to the history of man in society. For since the Flood had obliterated all traces of existence before it, only from its aftermath could we learn about the origins of society. As Boulanger put it in his "Avant-propos," he intended his inquiries into "the origin and the spirit of religious practices" to serve as "an introduction to the history of man in society."⁶³

To Neapolitan economist Ferdinando Galiani, in Paris in the 1760s on a diplomatic mission and close to the *philosophes*, the resemblances between Boulanger's work and Vico's were such that the French *Encyclopédiste* must have read, and plagiarized, his predecessor. Reviewing the evidence, Franco Venturi dismissed the charge: not only was there no evidence that Boulanger had read Vico's *Scienza Nuova*, but his conception of "progress" was very different from Vico's.⁶⁴ Arguably, however, the continuity of their inquiries was the more interesting for the

63. Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger, *L'Antiquité dévoilée par ses usages, ou Examen critique des principales opinions, cérémonies et institutions religieuses et politiques des différens peuples de la Terre*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: Rey, 1766), "Avant-Propos," in vol. 1, 1–34, quotation at 23. There is a facsimile edition with notes by Paul Sadrin. See Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger, *L'Antiquité dévoilée par ses usages*, ed. Paul Sadrin, Annales Littéraires de l'Université de Besançon 215 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1978).

64. Venturi, *L'antichità svelata*, 124–140: "Boulanger e Vico." Galiani had reported his suspicions to his employer, the chief minister in Naples, Bernardo Tanucci; subsequently they were taken up by others, notably the anti-Enlightenment critic Pietro Napoli-Signorelli. In 1947, the same year that Venturi published his dismissal of the charge of plagiarism, the suggestion that Vico must have influenced Boulanger was aired again, by J. Chaix-Ruy, "Un disciple hétérodoxe de Jean-Baptiste Vico: Nicolas Boulanger," *Revue de Littérature Comparée* 21 (1947): 161–189, whose arguments were in turn met with skepticism by John Hampton, *Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger et la science de son temps* (Geneva: E. Droz, 1955), 123–126.

absence of a direct connection, for there was a French context for Boulanger's interests, in the scholarly study of ancient Eastern religions and languages pursued by members of the Académie des Inscriptions.⁶⁵ To these Boulanger added a new ingredient, from which Vico had closed himself off, an interest in natural history, and in particular in natural catastrophe. Boulanger's inspirations here were several and included English cosmologists Thomas Burnet and John Woodward, and in France the Abbé Pluche, Fontenelle, Henri Gautier, and the Jansenist theologians of "figurism." Reinforcing (and borrowing from) Boulanger was the Comte de Buffon, whose *Histoire naturelle* (1749) implicitly detached the natural history of the world from the chronological straightjacket of Genesis while demonstrating the scale and environmental consequences of natural upheavals such as earthquakes and inundations.⁶⁶ Boulanger's renewed engagement with sacred history and the history of religion is interesting precisely because it did not depend on Vico. Rather, in a new intellectual context, it demonstrates the continuing potential of this approach to the problem of sociability.

Two decades later, however, another Neapolitan made the connection between the two. Modestly titled, Francesco Mario Pagano's *Saggi politici*, "Political Essays" (1783–1785, second edition 1791–1792), was one of the most remarkable works of the late Enlightenment, a sweeping study of the socialization of men and women from the earliest recoverable stage of human life to the present.⁶⁷ Pagano was generous in his acknowledgments, looking back over the history of the moral and political sciences and saluting the contributions of Machiavelli, Hobbes, Grotius, Locke, and Montesquieu; among his contemporaries, he acknowledged the historians Voltaire, Mably, Robertson, Hume, and

65. On these, see Venturi, *L'antichità svelata*, 13–34; Sadrin, *Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger*, 142–173.

66. Maria Susana Seguin, *Science et religion dans la pensée française du XVIIIe siècle: le mythe du déluge universel* (Paris: Champion, 2001). On Boulanger in this context, see particularly 170–177, 414–430; on Buffon, 177–188.

67. Francesco Mario Pagano, *De Saggi politici*, 2 vols. (Naples: G. Verriento, 1783–1785); Francesco Mario Pagano, *Saggi politici. De' principii, progressi e decadenza delle società, edizione seconda, corretta ed accresciuta*, 3 vols. (Naples: Filippo Raimondi, 1791–1792). Unless otherwise indicated, references that follow are to the second edition, in the modern edition edited by Luigi and Laura Salvetti Firpo (Naples: Vivarium, 1993).

Gibbon.⁶⁸ But among those who were of particular importance to the framing of his own argument were Rousseau, Boulanger, and the philosopher to whom he referred with local pride as “il nostro Vico.”⁶⁹

For Pagano, the key to understanding human history was to combine study of the physical and the moral forces that had shaped it. He had no doubt that the natural historians, headed by Buffon, had transformed the study of human history, making it impossible to ignore the incidence and effects of natural catastrophe in the formation of the earliest societies. Pagano did not follow Buffon uncritically (any more than he did Vico and Pagano): the natural historians were mistaken in their belief that humans had first emerged in the far north, in Siberia, since it was at the poles that the earth had begun to cool after its separation from the sun. The “cradle” of human society had indeed been, as scholars had long supposed, the Near East, where the first civilizations had been the empires of the Chaldeans and Egyptians.⁷⁰ (The Hebrews received more occasional mention; they had not formed a civilization.) These had been joined by the ancient Greeks, for whose earliest history Homer remained “la nostra certa guida.”⁷¹

Sacred history as such was not therefore Pagano’s starting point, and he did not follow Boulanger in casting the biblical Flood as the universal catastrophe, from which all human history must be written. But he did infer that the incidence of natural catastrophe, and the resulting

68. Pagano, *Saggi politici*, 9–12 (“Introduzione”).

69. The three are referred to throughout the work, though Boulanger as often by allusion as by name. They are discussed together in a passage at the start of the second essay, on the savage state of man and the origin of families. See Pagano, *Saggi politici*, 142–143. Other references to Boulanger are at 117 and 188, along with several unacknowledged references to *L’Antiquité dévoilée* noted by the editors. Vico is first referred to in the “Introduzione” to the second edition as having opened “un nuovo e intentato sentiero” (13)—a new and untried path, the common Lucretian metaphor for originality; by chapter 8 of book 1, he is “nostro ingegnossissimo Vico” (65). Further references to “il nostro Vico” are at 75, 126, *passim*. In a note “to the reader” prefixed to vol. 2 of the second edition, Pagano dismissed with contempt the accusation (by Napoli-Signorelli) that he in turn had plagiarized Boulanger and Vico (137).

70. A critique of the theories of the origin of the earth and man of Buffon and Jean-Sylvain Bailly formed the second part of the new “Introduction” to the second edition. See Pagano, *Saggi politici*, 29–44; see also 51–54, 63–76 (*Saggi politici*, vol. 1, chaps. 2, 7–11), for extended criticism of Vico for discounting the civilizations of the Egyptians and Chaldeans.

71. Pagano, *Saggi politici*, 203 (vol. 3, chap. 1).

competition for resources, had determined the essential characteristics of the earliest men, which had persisted from the immediate aftermath of eruptions and inundations, through the formation of families, and into the earliest “savage” societies.⁷² In those conditions, men instinctively resorted to force and to religion to articulate their fear. Among the earliest humans, Pagano insisted, sociability had been nonexistent. He was dismissive of Rousseau’s and even Boulanger’s efforts to salvage weaker instincts of benevolence or at least pity for others’ suffering.⁷³ In particular, Pagano underlined the violence with which savage (and later barbarian) men had competed for women.⁷⁴ What had nonetheless made it possible for men and women to become “sociable” was their possession of the quality of “perfectibility,” the capacity to improve their condition.⁷⁵ Gradually, the need to defend themselves and their families had brought men together, in alliances which they had then sealed by religious observances. To Pagano, as to Vico and Boulanger, therefore, it was religion that had socialized men, well before they settled in cities and formed organized political unions. As they did so, of course, priests had taken advantage, insinuating themselves into positions of unwarranted authority, forming theocracies where there should have been civil governments.⁷⁶ But this had been the historically explicable outcome of the indispensable role of religion in making society possible in the first place.

Pagano’s work was the culmination of a central thread of Enlightenment inquiry into the origins of society. But the *Saggi politici* are unlikely to be the end of the story, which may be seen to continue into the nineteenth century, for example in Benjamin Constant’s many-volume study of ancient religions, an undertaking first conceived in

72. Respectively the subjects of the first, second, and third “saggi”: “I Del periodo di tutte l’umane cose e dell’analisi dello spirito umano qual fu dopo le fisiche catastrofi della terra”; “II Del selvaggio stato degli uomini e dell’origine delle famiglie”; “III Dell’origine e stabilimento delle prime società.”

73. Pagano, *Saggi politici*, 141–143 (vol. 2, chap. 1).

74. Ibid., 147–156 (vol. 2, chaps. 4–5).

75. Ibid., 156–158 (vol. 2, chap. 6): “La sola qualità di *perfettibilità*, cioè l’attitudine a divenir migliore, socievoli rende gli uomini” (156). Pagano did not here cite or allude to Rousseau, a reflection, perhaps, of the extent to which the quality of “perfectibility” was now generally ascribed to man.

76. Pagano, *Saggi politici*, 211–220 (vol. 3, chaps. 4–8).

the 1780s.⁷⁷ Nor indeed did the story begin with the Enlightenment. It is a story, I have argued, that must be traced back to the later seventeenth century, to the recourse by a number of Catholic thinkers to sacred history in order to respond to the challenge thrown down by Hobbes's denial of natural sociability, and the Augustinian insistence on fallen man's dependence on his passions. Unable to draw on the resources of natural law, as Protestants were still able to do, Catholics had drawn inspiration from the flourishing state of sacred historical scholarship while defying or adapting to the efforts of the authorities in Rome to check its perceived threat to Tridentine orthodoxy. At the heart of this initiative were the Neapolitans Giannone and Vico, the former inspired by Spinoza to treat the biblical Hebrews as exemplary in formation and survival as a people, the latter taking off from sacred history to explore the socialization of the Gentiles by idolatry. This is the story to which Boulanger and Pagano added further chapters; if we grasp it as a whole, we can reconstruct a hitherto missing dimension of the history of sociability as a subject of political thought.

77. Benjamin Constant, *De la Religion considérée dans sa source, ses formes et ses développements* (Paris: Bossange, 1824–1831). See Helena Rosenblatt, *Liberal Values: Benjamin Constant and the Politics of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

3

From Rousseau to Kant

RICHARD TUCK

THE LATE ISTVAN HONT emphasized on many occasions, particularly in his Carlyle Lectures, that we should read Rousseau as a kind of Hobbesian. He was particularly concerned with Rousseau's second *Discourse* in this context; it is, for example, the principal—indeed, almost the sole—focus of the lectures. And there is no doubt that when the *Discourse* appeared, it was very largely understood by its first readers in this way. When they opened it, after all, they found the famous claim in its Preface that “all the rules of natural right” could be derived “without its being necessary to introduce [the principle] of sociability,” a remark that instantly aligned Rousseau with Hobbes, and virtually only Hobbes, among his predecessors. Samuel Pufendorf and his followers, indeed, had largely devoted themselves precisely to defending a principle of sociability against Hobbes's attacks. When Rousseau said later in the *Discourse* that “Hobbes had seen clearly the defects of all the modern definitions of natural right,” that also seemed to his early readers to be—as in fact it was—a declaration of war on Pufendorf and of loyalty to Hobbes. They were entirely skeptical about the sincerity and the consistency of Rousseau's criticisms of Hobbes, and Rousseau's denial of natural sociability was the principal target in almost all the early criticisms of the *Discourse*.

But today I want to trace another reading of Rousseau as a Hobbesian, and the opposition to it, which Istvan to some extent neglected and that may change the way in which we ought to think about Rousseau. Not

merely the second *Discourse* but also the *Social Contract* was seen early on as a Hobbesian project. For example, Dutch philosopher and jurist Eli Luzac, in his *Lettre d'un anonime à Monsieur J. J. Rousseau* (1766), seized on Rousseau's remark in book 1, chapter 8 of the *Social Contract* that "the passage from the state of nature to the civil state produces a very remarkable change in man, by substituting justice for instinct in his conduct, and giving his actions the morality they had formerly lacked" and exclaimed that "to talk in this way is not only to outdo Hobbes, but to go beyond all the bounds of good sense."¹ And the lengthy *Lettre d'un citoyen de Genève à un autre citoyen* of 1768, probably by Rousseau's friend the Genevan Jacob Vernet (an acute and not at all unsympathetic reader), expressly said of Rousseau, very perceptively, that "believing with *Hobbes* that men are born the enemies of one another, and that our worst enemies are our superiors, like him he remedies this by Despotism, though locating it in a different place. Whereas Hobbes gives arbitrary power to a Prince, Mr Rousseau (who knows no middle ground) instead gives a similar power to the multitude."²

Vernet may in fact have been responding to the first appearance in print of Rousseau's celebrated letter of the previous year to Mirabeau in which Rousseau said that there was no middle position between "the most austere democracy" and "the most perfect Hobbism." The letter was published in Mirabeau's *Précis de l'Ordre Légal* (1768) and thereafter reprinted and noted regularly; it was included in the 1782 edition of Rousseau's *Oeuvres* and subsequent editions.³

1. "Vous dites que 'le passage de l'état de nature, à l'état civil, substitue dans sa conduite la justice à l'instinct' &c. mais en parler comme vous faites, ce n'est pas seulement rencherir sur Hobbes, c'est passer toutes les bornes du bon sens." See [Eli Luzac], *Lettre d'un anonime à Monsieur J. J. Rousseau* (Paris : Desain et Saillant, 1766), 70. Luzac (1723–1796) was a commentator on Wolff as well as a writer on commerce, classical philology, and other topics. He would later be a fierce opponent of the Batavian Republic.

2. "Mr. Rousseau, qui croyant avec *Hobbes* que les hommes sont nés ennemis les uns des autres, & croyant de plus que nous n'avons pas de pires ennemis que nos supérieurs, y remédie comme lui par le Despotisme, mais en le plaçant differemment. Car au lieu que Hobbes donne le pover arbitraire à un Prince, Mr. Rousseau qui ne connoit point les milieux, donne un semblable pouvoir à la multitude." See [Jacob Vernet], *Lettre d'un citoyen de Genève à un autre citoyen* [[Geneva] : s.n., 1768], 72–73.

3. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Collection complète des oeuvres de J. J. Rousseau* (Geneva: Société typographique, 1782), vol. 24, 472–478. See Michael Sonenscher,

In particular, and this is the theme I want to pursue, these early readers of the *Social Contract* all assumed that Rousseau's *volonté générale* was broadly similar to a people's collective will as described by Pufendorf and of course by Hobbes, the most obvious example of which, as both Pufendorf and Hobbes acknowledged, was a democratic decision by majority voting, and they straightforwardly concluded that it might therefore be the source of a Hobbesian tyranny. The very term *volonté générale*, as we now understand following the work of Bruno Bernardi and Mike Sonenscher, came into Rousseau from the Barbeyrac translation of Pufendorf's *De Iure Naturae*. At VII.5.5, where Pufendorf was discussing the nature of democratic sovereignty, he said that "in moral Considerations there is no manner of Absurdity in supposing that those particular Wills [*volontez particulières*], which unite and conspire to make up the Will of the Community [*Corps Moral*], should want some Power or Quality which the general Will [*volonté générale*] is possess'd of."⁴ Similarly, at VII.2.5, the Barbeyrac Pufendorf talks of the "resolutions" of the sovereign that "passent pour la volonté de tous en général & de chacun en particulier." This is, I think, an unacknowledged quotation from du Verdur's translation of Hobbes's *De Cive* (1660), which also talks about the will of the sovereign being taken for "la volonté de tous eux en general, & de chacun en particulier" (V.6), a translation of *omnes et singuli* that Sorbiere, in his more widely read translation, did not use.⁵

The first readers did *not* suppose that the *volonté générale* was what many modern writers on Rousseau have believed, a kind of bearer of the common interest that might in principle be detachable from the actual votes or the particular wills of the citizens; indeed, one of the most exhaustive early critics of the book objected to Rousseau precisely

Sans-culottes: An Eighteenth-Century Emblem in the French Revolution (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 200–201.

4. "Enimvero in moralibus hautquaquam absurdum eft, particulares illas voluntates, ex quarum conspiratione voluntas universitatis resultat, destitui aliqua facultate, qua huic inest." See Samuel Pufendorf, *De Iure Naturae et Gentium*, with comments by Johan Nicolaus Hertius and Jean Barbeyrac, 2 vols. (Frankfurt and Leipzig: Knoch, 1744), vol. 2, 187.

5. There is a good discussion of the issue in Bruno Bernardi, *La fabrique des concepts. Recherches sur l'invention conceptuelle chez Rousseau* (Paris: Champion, 2006), 393–434, and a useful footnote in Sonenscher, *Sans-culottes*, 117.

on the grounds that he did not believe this about the general will. Commenting on the famous and inscrutable remark at the beginning of book 2, chapter 3 that “the general will is always right and tends to the public advantage; . . . the people is never corrupted, but it is often deceived,” Jesuit Guillaume-François Berthier responded by saying that, unlike Rousseau,

I compare *the general will*, in a community of a people, to the light of pure and unspotted [*saine*] reason in each man taken by themselves. This pure and unspotted reason is *always right*, always inclines to the true good, and proposes what is of greatest advantage; but often this light is obscured by the passions. . . . It is the same in a community or a people. There the passions rule, producing the particular wills and stifling the general will. The more numerous a people, the more this general will proves difficult to show itself in its purity and fullness. . . . I believe that in every state there is a general will which tends to the true good, but I am very sure that there is nothing more difficult than putting it into practice by means of general assemblies of all the people, and by way of adding votes. There are so many particular wills, that the general will is obscured. . . .

Our author agrees that in a community there is a set of particular wills; but take away, he says, from these same wills the pluses and minuses that cancel one another, and the general will remains as the sum of the differences. If we take away from the particular wills the pluses and minuses of those wills, I see that there will remain a sum of differences in them, but that will not form the general will. For instance, let us suppose that a hundred men deliberate, and that I know very well that there is among them a general will which is the desire to achieve the public good; but each of these hundred men has a particular will, of a kind which may even have the same object in many of them, but which is more lively or more extensive in some of them than in others. . . . And let us suppose that the public good is to maintain peace, but a large number among these hundred men want war, some to satisfy their ambition, others to have an opportunity to enrich themselves, some to win fame through their military talents, others to satisfy their curiosity, and others to assuage their passion of vengeance. There will then be differences among the particular wills, but eventually, during the deliberation, the pluses and minuses will disappear. If all hundred men wish

equally for the war, but for different reasons, I say that the sum of the differences will never form the general will, which, in our example, ought to have for its object not war but peace.⁶

And insofar as the *Social Contract* had openly appreciative readers in the years before the Revolution, they agreed with the book's critics about how it should be understood. The most faithfully Rousseauian figure of this period (to whose importance both Keith Baker and Roger Barny drew attention) was the Bordeaux *avocat* Guillaume-Joseph Saige, whose *Catéchisme du citoyen: ou, éléments du droit public françois, par demandes et par réponses* was published and then immediately condemned in 1775.⁷ In it, Saige argued that a society could only be secure if it was governed by a *volonté générale* that was "the common will [*voeu commun*] of all the members of the society, clearly manifested, and concerned with an object of public interest." He even went so far as to say that "by the essence of the civil state, sovereign authority can only legitimately reside in the body of the people, since the will of all [*volonté de tous*] is the only thing which invariably tends to the main purpose of a political institution."

Exactly the same was true of the extensive literature at the beginning of the Revolution that called on Rousseau to defend the actions of the Third Estate. Barny collected many examples of this in his exhaustive studies of Rousseauist literature in the 1780s and 1790s; a par-

6. Guillaume-François Berthier, *Observations sur Le Contrat Social de J. J. Rousseau* (Paris: Chez Mérigot le jeune, 1789), 66–71. This was published posthumously; Berthier had died in 1782. The "Avertissement de l'éditeur" (v–vii) says that the work was begun as soon as the *Social Contract* appeared, but was abandoned after action was taken against the *Social Contract* (the publisher appears to have confused the *Social Contract*, which was not formally condemned by the Parlement, with *Emile*, which was). Berthier had reached book 3, chapter 12, and his manuscript was published with additions commissioned by the publisher to complete the work. It is primarily a defense of Grotius, Pufendorf, Barbeyrac, and Burlamaqui against Rousseau's strictures, which illustrates that contemporaries understood very well the principal focus of the *Social Contract*. See Robert Derathé, "Les refutations du contrat social au XVIII^e siècle," *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau* 32 (1950–1952): 7–54.

7. Keith Baker, "A Classical Republican in Eighteenth-Century Bordeaux: Guillaume-Joseph Saige," in *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 128–152; Roger Barny, *Prélude Idéologique à la Révolution Française: Le Rousseauisme avant 1789* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1985), 101–120.

ticularly good one is provided by Jean-Baptiste Sallaville in his *De l'organisation d'un état monarchique* (1789). Sallaville quoted Rousseau's famous remark in book 4, chapter 2 of the *Social Contract* that "Each man, in giving his vote, states his opinion on that point [as to whether the proposal is in conformity to the general will]; and the general will is found by counting votes. When therefore the opinion that is contrary to my own prevails, this proves neither more nor less than that I was mistaken, and that what I thought to be the general will was not so." His interpretation of this remark was that when I vote "I can be wrong and consequently vote against my will, which is aimed at the maintenance and prosperity of the association. It is just the same, whatever the number of votes allied to mine, if the majority is not on my side. The will of the majority is therefore the expression of the general will; it is the Sovereign; it constitutes the Law. All the other wills should abase themselves before it; and its decrees must have the force of Destiny."⁸ This Rousseauianism continued to be attacked as Hobbesian; for example, Achille Nicolas Isnard, in his *Observations sur le Principe qui a Produit les Révolutions de France, de Genève et d'Amérique, dans le Dix-huitieme Siecle* of the same year, which denounced the *Social Contract* for containing "the dangerous principle which has produced the revolutions in the homeland of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which has detached America from England, and which may detach France from the House of Bourbon," said that "he who says the

8. Jean-Baptiste Salaville, *De l'organisation d'un état monarchique, ou Considérations sur les vices de la monarchie françoise, & sur la nécessité de lui donner une constitution* ([Paris]: s.n., 1789), 53–54. See Roger Barny, *Le triomphe du droit naturel: la constitution de la doctrine révolutionnaire des droits de l'homme* (1787–1789) (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997), 124–126. Jean-Paul Rabaut Saint Etienne provided a rather different explanation of the role of the majority in establishing the general will: each voter recognizes that the general will expresses the common interest, but he votes in accordance with his own *amour de soi*. The plurality of votes expresses the "preponderant" interest, and in the absence of "privilege," the preponderant interest is the general will. See Jean-Paul Rabaut Saint Etienne, *Question de droit public: Doit-on recueillir les voix, dans les états-généraux, par ordres, ou par têtes de délibérans?* ([Paris]: "En Languedoc," 1789), 9–16. For further examples of the use of Rousseau in the debates of 1789, see Richard Tuck, *The Sleeping Sovereign: The Invention of Modern Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), chap. 3.

law is the expression of the general will, is the follower of Epicurus, of Thomas Hobbes, and of Jean Jacques Rousseau.”⁹

As I argued in *The Sleeping Sovereign*, the idea that the general will is the will of a majority of citizens was combined—in the eyes of many of these early Revolutionary thinkers—with the idea that it would be expressed only on fundamental constitutional matters. They were well aware of the importance to Rousseau of the distinction between *sovereignty* and *government*, and they understood that the most natural institutional correlate of the distinction was something like a system of constitutional plebiscites. Thus (for example) Jean-Baptiste Salle, defending Condorcet’s scheme for constitutional ratification by the people combined with representative government, said that without such a scheme “following Rousseau, a Nation is not constituted.”¹⁰ The sovereign people could not be represented in their sovereignty, and therefore had to legislate themselves, by majority voting, on issues of general importance, but they could delegate to a government, or a set of governmental institutions (since Rousseau was not at all opposed to mixed *government*), all other decisions, including many that had a legislative character. The enthusiasm of these Rousseauians for a majoritarian general will should not be understood as enthusiasm for the popular politics of the Jacobins; as far as most of them were concerned, the Jacobins violated Rousseau’s principles, since they melded government and sovereignty and made both democratic—something Rousseau expressly condemned.

In the early years of the Revolution, however, one voice was raised in opposition to this straightforwardly majoritarian reading of Rousseau, and though it undeniably made very little impact at first in France, it turned out to have an enormous impact on the reading of Rousseau in Germany, and through this on political thought in general; indeed, it can be seen as the origin of the commonest modern understanding of the *Social Contract*. This was the voice of Paul Philippe Gudin de la Brenellerie, in a couple of books published in 1789 and

9. Achille Nicolas Isnard, *Observations sur le Principe qui a Produit les Révolutions de France, de Genève et d’Amérique, dans le Dix-huitieme Siecle* (Evreux : Veuve Malassis, 1789), 4, 22.

10. Jean-Baptiste Salle, *Examen critique de la Constitution de 1793* (Paris: s.n., 1794), 16.

1790. The first was *Essai sur l'histoire des Comices de Rome, des Etats-généraux de la France et du Parlement d'Angleterre*, and the second was given the bold title *Supplément au Contract Social*.¹¹ The importance of Gudin has been stressed by both Sonenscher and Barny,¹² though neither looked at his influence in Germany. Already in the *Essai sur l'histoire des Comices* (which was an attempt to influence the actions of the forthcoming Estates-General), Gudin combined admiration for Rousseau with anxiety about majoritarianism; he remarked early in the book that in large societies there was a constant tendency "to submit the general will to the will of the most numerous party, or the most powerful."¹³ Accordingly, he was unusually attentive to Rousseau's suggestions about institutional design in books 3 and 4 of the *Social Contract*, and in particular he praised Rousseau's account of the tribunate, declaring that all states need a *régulateur* to prevent the exercise of untrammelled legislative and executive power. In the case of pre-Revolutionary France, he found this tribunicial power in the Parlement, and in England, he argued, the tribunicial power was divided between the House of Commons, the House of Lords, and the king, with each being able to veto the others' actions.¹⁴

As his remarks about England illustrate, Gudin's view of the tribunicial power was in fact some distance from Rousseau's; Rousseau after all had expressly said in book 4, chapter 5 of the *Social Contract* that the tribunate "should have no share in either legislative or executive power." By the time Gudin came to write his *Supplément*, the institution that he had singled out in France as possessing this essential tribunicial power had been abolished, but he continued to hope for something like it; he still praised the English constitution for its

11. Pierre-Paul Gudin de la Brenellerie, *Essai sur l'histoire des Comices de Rome, des Etats-Généraux de la France et du Parlement de l'Angleterre*, 3 vols. (Philadelphie [Paris]: Maradan, 1789). Though it was not printed until 1791, the dedication to the National Assembly is dated 30 October (xii), and it was accepted by the Assembly on 16 December ([299]).

12. Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge: Public Debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 311–319; Roger Barny, *L'Éclatement Révolutionnaire du Rousseauisme* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1988), 28–53.

13. Gudin, *Essai sur l'histoire des Comices de Rome*, vols. 1, 2.

14. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 265.

effective system of vetoes, though he acknowledged that it would now be impossible to replicate such a system in France, and implied that only public opinion might operate as a constraint on the legislature.¹⁵ In addition to his continued advocacy of a tribunate, Gudin was concerned with reinterpreting the *Social Contract* to fit a broadly Sieyèsian account of the *pouvoir constituant* and *pouvoir constitué*. Sieyès, as is now well understood, had introduced this terminology at the start of the Revolution in order to theorize a separation of roles (and ideally of personnel) between the Assembly's function as a constituent assembly drawing up a new constitution and its function as a legislature. He did not take the *pouvoir constituant* to be vested in the people acting through a constitutional plebiscite, and indeed he was very hostile to their doing so. Sieyès was explicitly critical of Rousseau for asserting that the will cannot be represented, and in general he treated Rousseau with very little respect.¹⁶

Gudin, however, believed that the idea of a representative *pouvoir constituant* was compatible with the fundamentals of Rousseau's theory. Ingeniously, he took Rousseau's account in book 2, chapter 7 of the "Legislator" to be an account of a *pouvoir constituant*: "When a people leaves the woods to join together as a society, or when an ancient nation renounces its old way of being in order to adopt a new one, there is an interval when a constitution is formed; and one man, or several men, are charged by general consent with instituting the *corps politique* and forming the legislation which will govern them."¹⁷ The examples he then gave of this process were precisely the examples Rousseau gave of a legislator, namely Lycurgus and the Roman decemvirs. But Gudin did not quote or cite Rousseau's emphatic statement in book 2, chapter 7 that the Legislator can only draft laws, which have to be ratified by the entire people: "He, therefore, who draws up the

15. Paul Philippe Gudin, *Supplément au Contract Social* (Paris : Maradan et Perlet, 1791), 146. See his remark at the end of the chapter on "l'impossibilité de former en France une chambre-haute."

16. See Christine Fauré, "Sieyès, Rousseau et la théorie du contrat," in *Figures de Sieyès*, ed. Pierre-Yves Quiviger, Vincent Denis, and Jean Salem (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2008), 213–226, particularly 222 for his criticism of Rousseau on the representation of the will.

17. Gudin, *Supplément*, 28.

laws has, or should have, no right of legislation, and the people cannot, even if it wishes, deprive itself of this incommunicable right, because, according to the fundamental compact, only the general will can bind the individuals, and there can be no assurance that a particular will is in conformity with the general will, until it has been put to the free vote of the people." In actuality, the spirit of book II, chapter 7 is much closer—as one might have expected—to the views of people like Salle and Condorcet than it was to those of Sieyès or Gudin.

And when Gudin turned expressly to deal with the idea of the general will, he reiterated his hostility to simple majoritarianism:

Whatever form the legislative assembly of a nation takes, whether it is all the people or their representatives, what matters is that the laws which it passes should be the expression of the *general will*, and not of one party which dominates the assembly.

The majority [*pluralité*] of votes never expresses anything but the will of the most numerous party; but that party is not always that of the generality [*généralité*] of the citizens.

However, the general will has certain signs which characterise it.

The profound genius of the author of the *Social Contract* allowed him to discern the characteristic signs of this will; he has shown them to us, and they are such as it is impossible to misunderstand.

The particular will, he said, tends, by its very nature, to partiality, while the general will tends to equality [*Social Contract* book 2, chapter 1].

It is by no means certain, he also said, in his *Discourse on Political Economy*, that its [the people's] decision would be the expression of the general will.

The general will is always on the side which is most favourable to the public interest, that is to say, most equitable; so that it is needful only to act justly, to be certain of following the general will.

Equality of rights, justice in everything; these are the signs by which the citizens can always recognise whether the laws which are proposed come from the general will, or from the wills of a party which has seized the majority of votes.

It is to oppose the decisions of such a party, and to give time to minds which have been misled or prejudiced to return to the general will, that it has been indispensable for all governments with any

principles to establish a regulator. This is what was called by the Romans tribunician power, a term we may also use.¹⁸

And having reinterpreted the general will in this fashion, Gudin was able to link Rousseau to the physiocrats and their belief that a state could be governed according to principles of reason—despite the fact that in his letter to Mirabeau Rousseau himself had expressly linked physiocracy to despotism.

Gudin's *Supplément* was reprinted a number of times in France over the course of 1791 and 1792, testimony to the interest in it there in those years.¹⁹ But what has, I think, been overlooked is that it enjoyed the rare distinction within this French Revolutionary literature of being translated into German, as early as 1792.²⁰ In September 1791, the French version had also received a long and thoughtful review from August Wilhelm Rehberg in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*.²¹ Rehberg subsequently included large parts of the review in a collection of essays on the Revolution, his *Enquiries into the French Revolution* (1793).²² Both in his review and in the *Enquiries*, Rehberg repeated Gudin's interpretation of Rousseau's general will as the expression of "reason, which is the same for everyone." He denounced the "recent theorists" and "the new legislators of France" for not recognizing that Rousseau's Sovereign "did not correspond to anyone, to any association of people, and even less to the group who constitutes the people, but uniquely to reason itself." And—with of course very little textual

18. Ibid., 20–22.

19. Three editions in 1791 and one in 1792 are listed in Barny, *L'Éclatement*, 231n67.

20. Paul Philippe Gudin, *Zusatz zu Rousseau's Gesellschafts-vertrag*, trans. Eberhard F. Hübner (Königsberg: Nicolovius, 1792). Sieyès's principal writings were not translated into German until his *Politische Schriften* appeared at Leipzig in 1796; few if any of the other major Revolutionary writers had their works translated in the 1790s, though their works in French were extensively reviewed in the German press.

21. August Wilhelm Rehberg, review of Paul Philippe Gudin, *Supplément au Contract Social*, *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung vom Jahre 1791*, no. 246 (September 12, 1791): 537–542.

22. August Wilhelm Rehberg, *Untersuchungen über die Französische Revolution: nebst kritischen Nachrichten von den merkwürdigsten Schriften welche darüber in Frankreich erschienen sind* (Hanover: Chr. Ritscher, 1793). For a French translation, see Lukas K. Sosoe, ed., *Recherches sur la Révolution Française* (Paris: Vrin, 1998).

authority—he claimed that Rousseau’s distinction between the general will and the will of all (a distinction in reality, as we have seen, almost identical to Hobbes’s distinction between the will of a people and the will of a multitude) was a distinction between “a collective decision [*gemeinschaftlicher Entschluss*]” (this being the will of all) and “the pure will of reason [*reinen Willen der Vernunft*].”²³ Rehberg also endorsed Gudin’s assimilation of Rousseau to the physiocrats, adding a reference to Mercier de la Rivière, and emphasizing that in “an enlightened people” a ruler should make only “those laws which reason ordains,” so “*Despotisme légal sous l’Empire de l’Evidance*”²⁴ turned out, in Rehberg’s view, to be perfectly compatible with Rousseau’s ideas. However, neither Rousseau nor the physiocrats, Rehberg went on to say, were good guides to actual politics: all of them were speculative and theoretical, and the consequence of people actually trying to put their principles into practice had been disastrous. At this point, Rehberg’s respect for Burke (whose *Reflections* he had reviewed earlier in 1791)²⁵ surfaced, though unlike Burke he combined a commitment to pragmatic politics with an appreciation of the value of Rousseauian speculation; he drew an analogy between Rousseau’s ideas and a simplified mathematical model of the world that was true and gave a genuine insight into principles but could not be used as an accurate description of it.

What we can think of as Gudin’s interpretation of Rousseau then made its way into the highest levels of German philosophy when Fichte picked it up in his *Contribution to the Rectification of the Public’s Judgment of the French Revolution* (1793), a response to Rehberg’s

23. Rehberg, *Untersuchungen*, 7–8; Sosoe, *Recherches*, 82.

24. An allusion to Mercier de la Rivière, *L’ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politiques*, 2 vols. (London: Jean Nourse, 1767), particularly vol. 1, chap. 24.

25. August Wilhelm Rehberg, review of Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung vom Jahre 1791*, no. 71 (March 4, 1791), vol. 1, cols. 561–566. See also August Wilhelm Rehberg, review of Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung vom Jahre 1791*, no. 243 (September 8, 1791), vol. 3, cols. 513–520; August Wilhelm Rehberg, review of Edmund Burke, *An appeal from the new, to the old Whigs* [Burke’s Letter to a Member of the National Assembly], *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung vom Jahre 1791*, no. 273 (October 11, 1791), vol. 4, cols. 65–67, part of which he also excerpted in August Wilhelm Rehberg, *Der Neue Deutsche Merkur vom Jahre 1791* (Weimar, 1791), vol. 2, 225ff.

Enquiries. Fichte's principal quarrel was with Rehberg's belief that actual politics could not—and should not—correspond to a moral ideal; he was otherwise sympathetic to Rehberg's version of Rousseau, saying that Rehberg “has made an important discovery on this subject: it is that Rousseau's *general will* is the result of a confusion with man's moral nature, by virtue of which he is—and can only be—subject to the law of practical Reason.—I do not want to enquire here into what Rousseau said or thought; I only want to ask what Herr R[ehberg] should have said.”²⁶

He continued by arguing that Rehberg was correct in believing that politics was concerned only with those matters that were left by the law of practical Reason to our free choice and with the “alienable [*veräußerlichen*] rights of man.” Where Rehberg went wrong was simply in his failure to see that it followed from this that a civil order could only be the deliberate and voluntary construct of its citizens and that they could therefore make or remake their constitution at any time.

For Gudin, Rehberg, and Fichte, the critical point was that what the general will expressed was not the general willingness of a people to act together on a specific set of measures that they had voted on, which involved a degree of contingency or arbitrariness in the selection of goals that they found quite unacceptable. Instead, it expressed simply the willingness of each citizen to live with the particular set of fellow citizens to which he had committed himself, in accordance with a set of rational principles whose content could not be derived merely from a political process such as majoritarian voting. This even led Fichte in his *Contribution* to claim that in principle it was possible for politics to be superseded by the working-out of the implications of practical Reason: if a constitution perfectly secured its end of establishing “a culture of liberty” in which no one transgressed another's rights, then “the machine would stop, . . . the universal law of reason would combine all men in a perfect harmony of their sentiments,” and “there would be no need of judges to resolve their differences.”²⁷ He repeated this in his *Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation* (1794):

26. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Beitrag zur Berichtigung der Urtheile des Publikums über die französische Revolution* ([Zurich]: s.n., 1793), vol. 1, 66.

27. *Ibid.*, 101.

Despite what a very great man [this was Kant; I will come back to this] has said, life in the state is not one of man's absolute aims. The state is, instead, only a *means for establishing a perfect society*, a means which exists only under specific circumstances. Like all those human institutions which are mere means, the state aims at abolishing itself. *The goal of all government is to make government superfluous.* Though the time has certainly not yet come, nor do I know how many myriads or myriads of myriads of years it may take (here we are not at all concerned with applicability in life, but only with justifying a speculative proposition), there will certainly be a point in the a priori foreordained career of the human species when all civic bonds will become superfluous. This is that point when reason, rather than strength or cunning, will be universally recognized as the highest court of appeal.²⁸

Fichte qualified this blunt statement in some of his later writings,²⁹ observing that "to the extent that the state is related to human fallibility . . . then the state is completely necessary and can never cease to exist," but he continued to say that "to the extent that the state is related to an evil will, to the extent that it is a compulsory power, then its final aim is undoubtedly to make itself superfluous."³⁰ Moreover, in *Foundations of Natural Right*, he argued that the essence of Rousseau's general will was "that each receive what is right," and that the only element of "arbitrary choice" (*Willkür*) in politics was the initial decision to enter into a civil association with the group of people whom one chooses as one's fellow citizens.³¹

Accordingly, Fichte had no interest in a distinction between legislative and executive power of the kind that was central to Rousseau,

28. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 156–157.

29. In part 1 of his *Foundations of Natural Right*, which he wrote the following year; in a review of Kant's *Perpetual Peace*, which he wrote at the same time; and in a note he added to the 1796 Danish translation of the *Einige Vorlesungen*. See Isaac Nakhimovsky, *The Closed Commercial State: Perpetual Peace and Commercial Society from Rousseau to Fichte* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 45ff.

30. Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, 157.

31. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*, ed. Frederick Neuhouser, trans. Michael Baur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 98–99.

in which a sovereign people legislates as a collectivity. The only question that concerned him was whether there could be some kind of control over the “intelligent being” or beings who made the laws (which could include even a hereditary monarch),³² and his answer to this question, as is well known, was that any “rightful” constitution had to include an institution he termed an “ephorate,” which would impeach the ruler in front of the people when “right and the law have ceased to function altogether.”³³ As his contemporaries recognized, Fichte’s theory resembled Sieyès’s,³⁴ and to the degree to which it did so, it was not fundamentally Rousseauian. It is striking that Fichte placed so much weight on an “ephorate,” which, as he himself observed, was really more like the Roman tribunate,³⁵ since as we have seen, this was a central feature of Gudin’s argument. Both Gudin and Fichte took the view that a fully rational constitution *had* to include some institution with tribunicial power, and they were unusual in arguing this in the early 1790s—though at about the same time that Fichte was writing his *Foundations of Natural Right*, Sieyès was proposing his *jury constitutionnaire* to the National Convention, which at least one contemporary saw as similar to Fichte’s ephorate.³⁶

Fichte’s theory, and his use of Rousseau, should be contrasted with Kant’s. At least as early as 1784—that is, well before the publication of Gudin’s *Supplément*, and at a time when what we can term the Hobbesian reading of the *Social Contract* was all but universal—Kant was putting his fundamental political ideas in front of his students in his lectures on natural law, for which we possess a set of student notes from that year. In their essential respects, his ideas do not appear to have changed much between the 1784 lectures and the full account of them in his *Metaphysics of Morals*, which was published in 1797. Already in the 1784 lectures, he was emphasizing that men were *obliged* to enter into a political association; his pupil Gottfried Feyerabend recorded him as saying that “so far, no one has fully understood that it is one of the first duties to enter civil society. Hobbes and Rousseau,

32. *Ibid.*, 251.

33. *Ibid.*, 150.

34. Nakhimovsky, *The Closed Commercial State*, 58–59.

35. Fichte, *Foundations*, 151 note c.

36. Nakhimovsky, *The Closed Commercial State*, 56–57.

however, have had some idea of this." This is a very striking remark, and it expresses Kant's conviction that Hobbes and Rousseau had both seen something no one else had seen about the *necessity* of politics. In all his political writings, Kant emphasized that a civil union was obligatory in a deep sense; in his *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, also from 1784, he described it as fulfilling "the highest purpose of nature—i.e. the development of all natural capacities,"³⁷ while in *Theory and Practice* (1793) he described the entry into a civil state as "an absolute and primary duty in all external relationships whatsoever among human beings (who cannot avoid mutually influencing one another)."³⁸ This is most probably the passage in Kant to which Fichte was referring in his remark in his *Lectures concerning the Scholar's Vocation* quoted earlier about the "very great man" and against which he reiterated his own view that the state is not necessary for a fully developed moral and social life.³⁹

For Fichte, as we have seen, the state was always contingent, in the sense that it was needed because of a contingent fact about human beings, that they were (in his words) "fallible." As he emphasized in *Foundations of Natural Right*, *mutual mistrust* was the only reason for the state's existence. Two human beings could live in security with one another "only if the law of right is the inviolable law of both parties' wills; and if both are not mutually convinced that this is the case, no agreement can provide such security, for the agreement they make can be effective only if they have subjected their wills to the law of right."⁴⁰ In this respect, Fichte's theory resembled a familiar reading of Hobbes's according to which the state of nature is a state of war simply because no one can be trusted to abstain from aggression. But, for Kant, the critical problem of the state of nature was not mutual mistrust (though

37. Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings*, ed. H. S. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 45.

38. *Ibid.*, 73.

39. Though Daniel Breazeale in his edition of Fichte's *Early Philosophical Writings* conjectures that the allusion is to the *Idea for a Universal History*, it seems much more likely that it is to *Theory and Practice*, given that only in the latter work does Kant describe the entry into civil society as an "absolute" duty. *Theory and Practice* was published in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* the year before Fichte's *Einige Vorlesungen*.

40. Fichte, *Foundations*, 124.

that was of course an element in it) but rather the uneliminable variety of human *judgment*, and so his theory resembled much more what I have argued in various places is the correct reading of Hobbes.⁴¹

In his notes on the 1784 lectures, Feyerabend recorded Kant's answer to the question of why men had to leave the state of nature and enter civil society:

If two are quarreling about something a third can decide how the right of the one relates to the right of the other since the first two are not following someone else's judgment but only their own. *Justitia commutativa* is the right that everyone recognizes through his own understanding, *distributiva* is where the judgment of a third person has to be valid for me as well. *Neminem laede* is *principium justitiae commutativae* but not *distributivae*. *Justitia distributiva* requires external laws that have general validity for everyone and that determine for everyone what is rightful and what is not rightful. *Justitia commutativa* has no *effectus* without *justitia distributiva*. It is *principium dijudicationis* not *executionis*. If I judge on what is right others may judge differently and they do not observe my judgment. Through *justitia distributiva* I am secured in my property. That is the *status civilis* and it is here that there is an external legislation and power.

The example Kant gave of the difficulty of determining what is right was "if I shoot game and it runs onto someone else's land and dies there I believe I have a right to take it from there. But the other can say: what I find on my land is mine." Neither claim can exactly be said to be *correct*, in the absence of settled laws, and legal systems can (and do) vary in how they treat the question. Even within the United States, the law differs between states on this very issue. For example, in Minnesota it is apparently legal to enter someone else's land on foot without permis-

41. In his review of *Perpetual Peace*, Fichte alleged that "in the course of his own investigations of natural right, and on the basis of principles independent of the hitherto familiar Kantian one, the present reviewer arrived at these same conclusions." Broadly speaking, of course, this is true, insofar as each of them believed in a state of nature that was liable to tip over into warfare, and a solution to the state of nature through the creation of a general will. But, in his review, Fichte took Kant's account of the state of nature to be the same as his own, meaning one that stressed the *insecurity* of the state, whereas, as we shall see, Kant was more interested in the ineradicable clash of judgment in it.

sion to retrieve wounded game, but in Texas it is not. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant used the example of settled ownership to make the same point:

[S]ince it is largely impossible to discover who was absolutely first (the original owner) in the series of putative owners deriving their right from each other, no trade in external things, no matter how well it may agree with the formal conditions of this kind of justice (*iustitia commutativa*), can guarantee a secure acquisition.

Here again reason giving laws with regard to rights comes forth with a principle of *distributive justice*, of adopting as its guiding rule for the legitimacy of possession, not the way in which it would be judged *in itself* by the private will of each (in the state of nature), but by the way it would be judged before a *court* in a condition brought about by the united will of all (in a civil condition).⁴²

And when he discussed the laws of war in 1784, he said (according to Feyerabend) that, "Since war is the *modus jus persequendi in statu naturali*, and everyone justly ignores what reasons the other might have, all act *bona fide*, and thus every war is just as long as everyone is convinced of the truth of his opinion." Hobbes could have said exactly this.

In the full account he gave of his ideas, in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant made quite explicit (in terms that must have been deliberately aimed at Fichte) his belief that it was not because of any human failing that men had to enter civil society:

It is not experience from which we learn of men's maxim of violence and of their malevolent tendency to attack one another before external legislation endowed with power appears. It is therefore not some fact that makes coercion through public law necessary. On the contrary, however well disposed and law-abiding men might be, it still lies a priori in the rational Idea of such a condition (one that is not rightful) that before a public lawful condition is established, individual men, peoples, and states can never be secure against violence from one another, since each has its own right to do *what seems right and good to it* and not to be dependent upon another's opinion about

42. Immanuel Kant, "Rechtslehre" ("Doctrine of Right"), sec. 39, in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 117–118.

this. So, unless it wants to renounce any concepts of Right, the first thing it has to resolve upon is the principle that it must leave the state of nature, in which each follows its own judgement, unite itself with all others (with which it cannot help interacting), subject itself to a public lawful external coercion, and so enter into a condition in which what is to be recognized as belonging to it is determined *by law* and is allotted to it by adequate *power* (not its own but an external power); that is to say, it ought above all else to enter a civil condition.⁴³

Kant was quite correct in saying that, understood in this way, only Hobbes and Rousseau had seen why men had to enter civil society, for they were the only major writers—and perhaps the only writers *tout court*—before Kant who had taken the view that the legislative order was necessary in order to solve the problem of radically differing judgments that could not be reconciled through reason alone, and that differing judgments were not examples of the failure of reasoning.

When Kant turned to the question of what the nature of a legislative order was, his answer also tracked Rousseau's account, in particular, very closely, though with one possible difference. As Feyerabend recorded him saying in 1784:

An original contract, which is an idea that is necessarily given by reason, grounds all civil societies. We have to conceive of all laws in civil society as being given by the consent of all. . . . The highest legislator . . . has to be him who is strictly incapable of doing wrong. Now, if people unite with each other they can do no wrong to themselves. Consequently, the law is such that it is not unrightful, since the will of all is the law. They are all legislators. It is also impossible that there be any other case where a law could be just. Therefore, every law that has not been generated by consent is unjust, since only he who can do no wrong is the highest legislator.

In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant said the same.⁴⁴

43. Ibid., sec. 44, 123–124.

44. "The legislative authority can belong only to the united will of the people. . . . Therefore only the concurring and united will of all, insofar as each decides the same thing for all and all for each, and so only the general united will of the people, can be legislative." Ibid., sec. 46, 125.

Moreover, he believed, with both Hobbes and Rousseau, that *majoritarianism* was a central feature of this kind of legislative order. In *Theory and Practice*, he remarked that “an entire people cannot, however, be expected to reach unanimity, but only to show a majority of votes (and not even of direct votes, but simply of the votes of those delegated in a large nation to represent the people). Thus the actual principle of being content with majority decisions must be accepted unanimously and embodied in a contract; and this itself must be the ultimate basis on which a civil constitution is established.”⁴⁵

The initial agreement to form a civil society was essentially an agreement to be bound by majority voting and thereby create a workable system for making the kinds of determinations about contested views that were necessary to solve the conflicts of the state of nature. The members of a particular civil society had to be unanimous in their wish to form the society, but *what* they agreed to was that the majority would decide matters henceforward; and as we saw earlier, this was also the way that early Rousseauians read the *Social Contract*. It is not even the case that when Kant said that “in a large nation” the majority would have to be “of those delegated . . . to represent the people” he was necessarily being un-Rousseauian, for Rousseau himself, in his *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, had proposed mandated delegates as a way of achieving what he had argued for in the *Social Contract*.⁴⁶ We have no reason to suppose that in this passage Kant was not thinking about mandating.

However, the key difference between Kant and both Hobbes and Rousseau lay in the most well-known and distinctive feature of Kant’s political theory, which again goes back at least to the 1784 lectures. This is his claim that (as Feyerabend recorded it succinctly) “every law that has not been generated by consent is unjust, since only he who can do no wrong is the highest legislator. The highest legislative power thus pertains to him who follows the law. We do not have to ask now whether people ever came together with this intention and made their laws in such a fashion. The laws of a despot can be just, if they are such that they could have been made by the whole people.”

45. Kant, *Political Writings*, 79.

46. See Tuck, *The Sleeping Sovereign*.

Or, as Kant put it at greater length and with more precision in *Theory and Practice*, the original contract

is in fact merely an *idea* of reason, which nonetheless has undoubted practical reality; for it can oblige every legislator to frame his laws in such a way that they could have been produced by the united will [*vereinigten Willen*] of a whole nation, and to regard each subject, in so far as he can claim citizenship, as if he had consented within the general will [*als ob er zu einem solchen Willen mit zusammen gestimmt habe*]. This is the test of the rightfulness of every public law. For if the law is such that a whole people could not *possibly* agree to it (for example, if it is stated that a certain class of *subjects* must be privileged as a hereditary *ruling class*), it is unjust; but if it is at least *possible* that a people could agree to it, it is our duty to consider the law as just, even if the people is at present in such a position or attitude of mind that it would probably refuse its consent if it were consulted.⁴⁷

Unlike Fichte's theory, Kant's leaves largely open the question of what is to count as a correct or legitimate law; the application of reason *cannot* by itself determine the laws under which a people should live. If we take seriously Kant's remarks about majoritarianism in *Theory and Practice*, it would even follow that anything that might conceivably command *majority* support (within the framework of the formal rights to which all would assent) would be a legitimate measure. The substance of any measure that, in the view of the radical Rousseauians such as Saige or Salle, counted as a valid law could also be the substance of a Kantian law. The difference was purely that Kant provided his own twist on the Rousseauian tradition by allowing speculation about such a law to stand in for the business of actually ascertaining the popular will. But he was always clear that in principle the popular will *once ascertained*, and generated according to the conditions in which all Rousseauians believed (in particular, in a setting in which there were no distorting partial associations), would trump whatever the speculative laws were; speculation was, as he repeatedly insisted, merely provisional.

47. Kant, *Political Writings*, 79.

It was this feature of Kant's theory that led contemporaries to compare him with Sieyès, and one can certainly see why they did so.⁴⁸ But as I said earlier, Sieyès believed that there were no circumstances in which a modern state could have its general will expressed through anything other than representation; he thought this in part because he was committed to the idea that legislation had to be preceded by deliberation, and no large state could engage in the kind of intimate discussion that he thought was necessary.⁴⁹ There is no trace in Kant of this kind of commitment, another respect in which he resembled Rousseau (who said that the general will would be best expressed when "the citizens had no communication one with another") and, of course, Hobbes. An emphasis on deliberation for obvious reasons tends to be associated with a belief that there is a right answer to a political question, which the process of discussion brings out, and as we have seen, that was not at all Kant's view.

Moreover, it is not at all clear that Kant ruled out the actual creation of a fully Rousseauian state in a modern nation. The issue is, what did Kant mean by "provisionality"? Did he understand this "*idea of reason*" *only* as an idea, and did he rule out as an actual state of affairs something like a genuinely Rousseauian constitution, of the kind the French radicals were seeking to create? I think the best answer to this question is that Kant *did* suppose that it was a practical possibility to create a Rousseauian state, that only such a state would be fully legitimate, and that we are under a duty to bring it about,

48. See Nakhimovsky, *The Closed Commercial State*, 23ff.

49. "It is not a question of some democratic head count, but of proposing, listening, consulting, changing one's opinion, in short forming together a common will. To allay all doubt in this respect, we should appreciate that even in the strictest democracy this is the only way to form a common will. It is not in the watches of the night, with everyone in their own houses, that the democrats who are most jealous of their liberty form and fix their individual opinion, to be carried from there into the public space; only to return to their houses to start over again in complete solitude, in the event that no will common to the majority could be extracted from these isolated opinions. We would emphatically say that such a means of forming a common will would be absurd. When people gather, it is to deliberate, to know what other people are thinking, to benefit from mutual enlightenment, to compare particular wills, modify them, reconcile them, and eventually achieve a result which is common to a plurality." See Abbé Sieyès, *Dire de l'Abbé Sieyès; sur la question du Veto Royal; A la Séance du 7 Septembre 1789* (Paris: s.n., [1789]), 17–18, my translation.

though he was also very sensitive to the obstacles that lay in the way. The scholar who has thought most deeply about this question in recent years, Elizabeth Ellis, has taken a different view: she holds that both in his account of perpetual peace and in his account of civil society, Kant believed that there was a fundamental barrier to actually achieving a “conclusive” state of affairs, and that human beings have to live perpetually in a provisional condition. She has based her interpretation primarily on Kant’s pretty explicit statements about perpetual provisionality in the international sphere, both in *Perpetual Peace* and, especially, in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, where Kant said that “*perpetual peace*, the ultimate goal of the whole Right of Nations, is indeed an unachievable Idea. Still, the political principles directed towards perpetual peace, of entering into such alliances of states, which serve for continual *approximation* to it, are not unachievable. Instead, since continual approximation to it is a task based on duty and therefore on the Right of men and of states, this can certainly be achieved.”⁵⁰

But (leaving aside the fact that *Perpetual Peace* is more equivocal on this subject) it is not at all clear that Kant thought the same about the *civil* association. The reason he gave in *The Metaphysics of Morals* for supposing that perpetual peace at the international level is strictly impossible was that a universal or near-universal state could never effectively control the entire earth; he may also have had in mind the cogent reasons he gave in *Perpetual Peace* against a universal monarchy.⁵¹ But there is no reason of *this* kind for supposing that a civil association of a genuinely republican kind is impossible, and nowhere does Kant present one. In *The Contest of the Faculties* (published in

50. Kant, “Rechtslehre,” sec. 61, in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 156, and the Conclusion, 160–161. Compare Kant, *Political Writings*, 105 (*Perpetual Peace*), where Kant says that “the positive idea of a *world republic* cannot be realised” because it is “not the will of the nations, according to their present conception of international right,” and also 114, where he says that it is “our duty to work towards this goal, which is more than an empty chimera”—so in *Perpetual Peace* he was less definite than he was in *The Metaphysics of Morals* that the goal is radically impossible to attain. Compare also his remark in *Theory and Practice*, 92: “whatever reason shows to be valid in theory, is also valid in practice.” See Elizabeth Ellis, *Kant’s Politics: Provisional Theory for an Uncertain World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), e.g., 36 and 133.

51. Kant, *Political Writings*, 113.

1798, only one year after *The Metaphysics of Morals*), he made reasonably clear what he thought:

[I]f we . . . think of the commonwealth in terms of concepts of pure reason, it may be called a Platonic *ideal* . . . , which is not an empty figment of the imagination, but the eternal norm for all civil constitutions whatsoever, and a means of ending all wars. A civil society organised in conformity with it and governed by laws of freedom is an example representing it in the world of experience . . . , and it can only be achieved by a laborious process, after innumerable wars and conflicts. But its constitution, once it has been attained as a whole, is the best qualified to keep out war, the destroyer of everything good. Thus it is our duty to enter into a constitution of this kind; and in the meantime, since it will be a considerable time before this takes place, it is the duty of monarchs to govern in a *republican* (not a democratic) manner, even though they may *rule autocratically*. In other words, they should treat the people in accordance with principles akin in spirit to the laws of freedom which a people of mature rational powers would prescribe for itself, even if the people is not literally asked for its consent.⁵²

And at the end of this section, he exclaimed, “the after-pains of the present war will force the political prophet to admit that the human race must soon take a turn for the better, and this turn is now already in sight.”⁵³

So Kant’s attitude toward the possibility of a fully legitimate or “conclusive” civil association was not, in the end, so different from Rousseau’s. The utopian character of Rousseau’s political thought has often been exaggerated. It is increasingly clear that Rousseau’s theory was not some idyll of an ancient republic but rather a serious attempt to think about what a transformed modern state might look like. It was “utopian” in the sense that it was not proposed as an analysis of existing states, but it was not utopian in the sense that it was intended to be an *unrealizable* vision. The idea that Rousseau was a utopian of this latter kind seems to date, as we have seen, from the reworking of Rousseau by Gudin and Mercier, followed by Rehberg, and Kant seems

52. Ibid., 187.

53. Ibid., 190.

to have implicitly dissented from this aspect of their interpretation as well as from their account of the general will.

What is unusual about Kant, in comparison with both Rousseau and, I would say, Hobbes, but that is another question, in this respect is not that he believed a well-founded state was impossible; just like them, he thought that it would indeed come into being, in a future that might not be particularly remote. Where he differed from them is that he thought that even in the present, and in the absence of such a state, what a “republic” might pass as its legislation could be used as a critical principle with which to judge the legitimacy of an existing law. But since (if what I have been suggesting is correct) he believed that a republic can indeed be brought into being, and that we have a duty to facilitate its emergence, “provisional right” should be thought of as pre-eminently *transitional*, and the Kantian state as no different from the Rousseauian or the Hobbesian state in its most important features.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, these two rival ways of reading Rousseau—either as a radical democrat (at the level of sovereignty) or as a utopian whose idea of the general will was a principle to be applied independently of actual democratic politics—continued to confront one another, particularly in Germany and the German-speaking countries. The most influential statement of the former view came from the perceptive counterrevolutionary Carl Ludwig von Haller, whose *The Restoration of Political Science* (1816) made its way into the curricula of many nineteenth-century universities. Haller was one of the principal critics of the radical democracy of the Revolution, and in volume 1 of his book, he traced the growth of what he took to be this malignant idea among modern writers. Rousseau, as one would expect, was one of Haller’s chief targets, but Haller recognized that

[h]e was not the inventor of the system which has the origin of States derived from a chimerical social contract, and consequently from the original sovereignty of the people; . . . the essential difference between Hobbes and Rousseau consists in only one point. Hobbes, after the formation of the social contract, wants the people who are the initial sovereign to *delegate* all their power to a prince or a senate; Rousseau pretends on the contrary that the people keep it in full and complete possession. Hobbes says that the will of the prince is the general will; Rousseau teaches that the people express it themselves;

but in the opinion of each of them, the general will has the right to rule without exception, it is infallible. In both systems, the individual has renounced all power, all will, all particular judgement; but in the first, it is in favour of one man or a number of individuals; in the second it is in favour of everyone, or at least the majority.⁵⁴

Elsewhere, he remarked that “Hobbes is, and always will be, by his principle, the father of all the Jacobins.”⁵⁵

Haller argued the same about Kant: he accused him, too, of Jacobinism, and he went on to say that “his principles have the most striking resemblance to those of Hobbes, from whom they were manifestly taken, at least in part, but which Kant has rendered even more dangerous.” The particular danger he diagnosed was Kant’s idea of provisional right, which he described as a “radical sophism which . . . almost no one has observed, a sophism of a new kind and one which is unique to its author.” He understood this idea in the way I have just suggested, as a proposal for actual change in civil constitutions, and exclaimed that to put men under a duty to move toward republican government

is to pour out the most subtle, secret and dangerous poison of revolution. In effect, this assertion has for its direct object the ceaseless attempt to destroy the States of the kind which exist today, and gradually poison them with the *aqua tofana*, in order to introduce the pretence of *legal*, that is, revolutionary, constitutions. . . . Hobbes calls the State of War, a primitive and imaginary state, while Kant gives this name to the actual state of society; Hobbes teaches that

54. Carl Ludwig von Haller, *Restauration der Staats-Wissenschaft: oder Theorie des natürlich-geselligen Zustands*, 6 vols. (Winterthur: Steinerische Buchhandlung, 1816–1834), vol. 1, 117. See also Haller’s own translation of the work into French, *Restauration de la Science Politique ou Théorie de l’Etat Social Naturel* (Lyon, 1824), vol. 1, 134–135. For the same point, see also Haller, *Restauration der Staats-Wissenschaft*, vol. 1, 38–39, 58; Haller, *Restauration de la Science Politique*, vol. 1, 41–42, 67–68. A similar point was made by the liberal monarchist Victor Cousin in his lectures at the Sorbonne in 1819–1820: while Hobbes believed in “despotisme monarchique,” Rousseau believed in “despotisme républicain,” and Rousseau’s idea of the sovereignty of the general will “tue la loi” since it deprives it of justice. See Victor Cousin, *Cours d’histoire de la philosophie morale au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris: Ladrangé, 1839), vol. 1, 294, 299.

55. Haller, *Restauration der Staats-Wissenschaft*, vol. 1, 40; Haller, *Restauration de la Science Politique*, vol. 1, 44.

we have left this state, while Kant wants us to leave it now; but for both of them, the supreme law is not justice, but peace.⁵⁶

Haller also fully recognized the difference between Kant and Fichte, observing that “the great sophist of Königsberg” believed that civil society rested ultimately on compulsion, while Fichte believed that sociability without force was possible and that the ultimate end of government was to destroy itself.⁵⁷

The other way of reading Rousseau in Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century was the Fichtean; this was partly embodied in one of the standard German translations of the *Social Contract*, by Franz Wilhelm Jung (1800), which included a long Foreword interpreting the *Social Contract* along very Fichtean lines, emphasizing (as was common in this way of reading Rousseau) that Rousseau needed to be supplemented with a theory of representation, and ending by extolling Bonaparte and the Constitution of the Year VIII (which Sieyès played a large part in drafting).⁵⁸ Reading this translation, alongside the German translation of Gudin’s *Supplément*, must have led many Germans in these years to take up this interpretation of Rousseau, and it duly made its way, to great effect, into the Hegelian tradition.

Hegel himself was somewhat circumspect in reading the interpretation of the general will as a rational principle straightforwardly into Rousseau himself, but he certainly treated the *Social Contract* as the origin of this view (which he himself, of course, subscribed to):

The universal will is not to be looked on as compounded of definitively individual wills, so that these remain absolute; otherwise the saying would be correct: “Where the minority must obey the majority, there is no freedom.” The universal will must really be the rational will, even if we are not conscious of the fact; the state is therefore not an association which is decreed by the arbitrary will of individuals. The wrong apprehension of these principles does not con-

56. Haller, *Restauration der Staats-Wissenschaft*, vol. 1, 70–73; Haller, *Restauration de la Science Politique*, vol. 1, 79–82.

57. Haller, *Restauration der Staats-Wissenschaft*, vol. 1, 268–269; Haller, *Restauration de la Science Politique*, vol. 1, 324–325.

58. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Vom gesellschaftlichen Verträge, oder, über die Grundsätze der Staatslehre*, trans. Franz Wilhelm Jung (Frankfurt am Main: F. Esslinger, 1800), x, xxxix–xl. See Nakhimovsky, *The Closed Commercial State*, 40.

cern us. What does concern us is this, that thereby there should come into consciousness as content the sense that man has liberty in his spirit as the altogether absolute, that free-will is the Notion of man. . . . The principle of freedom emerged in Rousseau, and gave to man, who apprehends himself as infinite, this infinite strength.⁵⁹

In other words, for Hegel, Rousseau had apprehended the true idea of the universal will, though it was still compromised in his work by a tendency toward majoritarianism; in his German successors, he thought, this tendency disappeared, though both Kant and Fichte (he believed) remained too individualistic in their political thought.

This reading of Rousseau, in turn, became central to the ideas of the “English Idealists,” the English philosophers, mostly at Oxford (indeed, mostly at Balliol), who admired Hegel and attempted to develop his ideas in a late nineteenth-century context. The first of them, T. H. Green, said of Rousseau in his *Lectures on Political Obligation* (written in the late 1870s) that it is

clear that the sovereignty of which Rousseau discusses the origin and attributes, is something essentially different from the supreme coercive power which previous writers on the “jus civile” had in view. . . . What he says of it is what Plato or Aristotle might have said of the *theios nous* [divine intelligence], which is the source of the laws and discipline of the ideal polity and what a follower of Kant might say of the “pure practical reason,” which renders the individual obedient to a law of which he regards himself, in virtue of his reason, as the author.⁶⁰

And he summed up what he took to be the ambiguous legacy of Rousseau in the following very revealing passage:

The practical result is a vague exaltation of the prerogatives of the sovereign people, without any corresponding limitation of the conditions under which an act is to be deemed that of the sovereign people. The justifiability of laws and acts of government, and of the

59. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 3 vols., trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simon (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), vol. 3, 402.

60. T. H. Green, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* (London: Longmans, 1895), 82.

rights which these confer, comes to be sought simply in the fact that the people wills them, not in the fact that they represent a true “*volonté générale*,” an impartial and disinterested will for the common good. Thus the question of what really needs to be enacted by the state in order to secure the condition under which a good life is possible, is lost sight of in the quest for majorities; and as the will of the people in any other sense than the measure of what the people will tolerate is really unascertainable in the great nations of Europe, the way is prepared for the sophistries of modern political management, for manipulating electoral bodies, for influencing elected bodies, and procuring plebiscites.⁶¹

We find almost exactly the same sentiments in the writings of Green’s pupil and successor as Whyte’s Professor, William Wallace,⁶² and in those of another of Green’s pupils, Bernard Bosanquet.⁶³ This kind of approach has remained extremely common in the English-speaking world down to the present day; it can be found in G. D. H. Cole’s Introduction to his *Everyman* edition in 1914 (which was still the standard translation when I was an undergraduate, and to me is still Rousseau speaking in English), in which he acknowledged both Green and Bosanquet as authorities, and it lurks (though in a very different form) behind the idea that Rousseau’s general will is legitimated by its *epistemic* function, since in both kinds of accounts any dissent from the general will means that we are wrong in some more fundamental sense than merely being mistaken about what we as a community will finally agree to. But as we have seen, for the first readers of Rousseau, such an interpretation would have been surprising: they understood very clearly the resemblance between Rousseau and Hobbes, and it was only when Rousseau began to be used on behalf of the democratic revolution of the 1790s that this changed.

61. *Ibid.*, 82–83.

62. William Wallace, “Our Natural Rights,” in William Wallace, *Lectures and Essays on Natural Theology and Ethics*, ed. Edward Caird (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1898), 244–245.

63. Bernard Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (London: Macmillan, 1899), 108.

4

Modern Representative Democracy

Intellectual Genealogy and Drawbacks

PASQUALE PASQUINO

THIS CHAPTER has its origin in conversations I started more than twenty-five years ago with Istvan Hont in Cambridge about Hobbes and Sieyès, the modern state, representative government, and contemporary democracy. It discusses, at least in part, issues that parallel the object of chapter 7 of his book *Jealousy of Trade*. My greatest regret is that it is now too late to talk with him about my ideas.

I

Democracy, in the sense in which we use this term nowadays from a descriptive point of view, is a form of government (*Herrschaftsform*), a hierarchic organization of social life, where, under specific conditions, an elite exercises political authority and the citizens obey the commandments enacted by that elite.¹

Modern democracy is a political system that was established in its original form—representative government—in some few countries between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries (and in many more only after the Second World War). Notably, it exists in a variety of

1. Herman Heller, "Politische Demokratie und soziale Homogenität," in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1971), vol. 2, 426.

forms and institutional structures in the United States, France, and the United Kingdom (but also in some former British colonies, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries).² More specifically, it exists as a federal and presidential system in the United States; a centralized/unitary parliamentary republic in France—stabilized starting in 1870, the beginning of the Third Republic³—and a constitutional monarchy (which was at its origin a *mixed government*, that of the so-called *Old English Constitution*), to slowly become a parliamentary democracy, in the United Kingdom. This original form is different from the one existing nowadays in most representative governments, which can be qualified as *constitutional democracy*. By this expression, I mean a government that is characterized not by parliamentary sovereignty but rather by a structure of *divided power* between elected and nonelected organs, both exercising political authority and hence having the power to enact binding legal norms. I believe nonetheless that parliamentary and constitutional democracies are two species of the same genus, for which this chapter analyzes the common genealogy.

As is well known, these regimes originally had different names; they were called mostly *republic* in America and *gouvernement représentatif* in France. There is now quite a rich literature on the history of the term “democracy.”⁴ The object of the first part of these re-

2. During the Second World War, Britain, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada were allies that had democratic regimes. Ireland, Iceland, Sweden, and Switzerland were neutral democracies. Although occupied during the war, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway were democracies before and after occupation.

Latin America had already experienced different versions of a democratic regime in the nineteenth century, but they have been more or less unstable, and I have not the competence to discuss them. A systematic analysis should necessarily consider them. For the contemporary situation, see UN Non-governmental Liaison Service, “Democracy in Latin America,” <http://www.un-ngls.org/orf/democracy-undp-publication.htm>.

For a limited historical perspective, see Eduardo Posada-Carbo, *Elections before Democracy: The History of Elections in Europe and Latin America* (New York: St. Martin's, 1996); Adam Przeworski, “The Mechanics of Regime Instability in Latin America,” *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 1, no. 1 (2009): 5–36.

3. The current (fifth) French republic is instead a bicameral but “semipresidential” political system.

4. For France, see Philip J. Costopoulos and Pierre Rosanvallon, “The History of the Word ‘Democracy’ in France,” *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 4 (1995): 140–154. For

marks is the intellectual/ideological foundations of *representative government*,⁵ the original core of the political system that, following the American usage⁶ and Tocqueville, we ended up calling *democracy* tout court. Modern representative government—and this is the first claim I want to posit—has its intellectual roots in the conception of *political equality* that is at the core of the Hobbesian conceptual revolution.

Hobbes's human equality. It is not possible to discuss in the context of this chapter the details of how Hobbes conceives of and justifies human equality; I shall nonetheless present some textual evidence supporting my interpretation. In the *Elements of Law, Natural, and Politic* (II.20.19), we read: “For by nature men have *equal right*; this inequality [between those who command and those who have to obey] therefore must proceed from the power of the commonwealth [through authorization]. He therefore that doth any act lawfully by his own authority, which another may not, doth it by the power of the commonwealth in himself [my italics].”⁷ In the perspective of this chapter, the crucial passage is *Leviathan* XV. 21:

The question who is the better man has no place in the condition of mere nature, where (as has been shown before) *all men are equal*. The *inequality* that now is *has been introduced by the laws civil*. I know that *Aristotle* in the first book of his *Politics*, for a foundation of his doctrine, *maketh men by nature, some more worthy to command*, meaning the wiser sort, such as he thought himself to be for his philosophy; *others to serve*, meaning those that had strong bodies, but were not philosophers as he; as master and servant were *not introduced*

the United States, see Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: Norton, 2005); Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789–1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

5. We now speak mostly of “representative democracy.”

6. See Wilentz, *American Democracy*.

7. Moreover, see Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1994), 13.2: “I find yet a greater equality amongst men than that of strength”; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 15.21; Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law, Natural, and Politic*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 1.14.13, 1.14.14; Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*, ed. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 1.11, 1.15; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 14.18. See also the entry “equality” in S. A. Lloyd, ed., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hobbes* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 171–175.

by consent of men, but by difference of wit: which is not only against reason, but also against experience. (*italics mine*)

Hierarchy in political society is an artifact and result of delegation; this is Hobbes's crucial claim.⁸

Christianity, to be sure, introduced into Western culture some basic idea of equality, but its impact on political theory (until John Locke) was almost nil.⁹ In a recent important article, Kinch Hoekstra¹⁰ claims that the idea of equality did not originate with Hobbes at all. Hoekstra offers an important list of texts where it is claimed that men are equal, but he overlooks the circumstance that most of these quotes, coming from the Christian tradition, do not draw any significant consequence for political theory from their conception of equality. The text from the *Digest* (more specifically, Ulpian, *Institutes*, book 1), on the other hand, has to be quoted in its entirety to understand its limited scope:

Manumissions also belong to the *jus gentium*. Manumission means sending out of one's hand, that is, granting of freedom. For whereas one who is in slavery is subjected to the hand (*manus*) and power of another, on being sent out of hand he is freed of that power. All of which originated from the *jus gentium*, since, of course, everyone would be born free by the natural law, and manumission would not be known when slavery was unknown. But after slavery came in by the *jus gentium*, there followed the boon (*beneficium*) of manumission. And thenceforth, we all being called by the one natural name "men," in the *jus gentium* there came to be three classes: free men, and set against those slaves and the third class, freedmen, that is, those who had stopped being slaves.¹¹

8. Hobbes's presentation of Aristotle's political doctrine is not really fair, but this is not my topic here.

9. See Martin A. Bertman, "Equality in Hobbes, with Reference to Aristotle," *Review of Politics* 38, no. 4 (1976): 534–544.

10. Kinch Hoekstra, "Hobbesian Equality," in S. A. Lloyd, ed., *Hobbes Today: Insights for the 21st Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 76–112.

11. Alan Watson, ed., *Digest of Justinian* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), vol. 1, 73. The Latin text (Ulpianus, Dig. 1, 1, 4) reads: "Manumissiones quoque iuris gentium sunt. est autem manumissio de manu missio, id est datio libertatis: nam quamdiu quis in servitute est, manui et potestati suppositus est, manumissus liberatur potestate. quae res a iure gentium originem

Hobbes distinguishes between slaves and servants in *Leviathan* chapter 20 (paragraphs 10 and 11, in the context of the discussion of despotic dominion). One can contract to be a servant, but slaves have no obligation at all to those holding them, because no *covenant* has passed between them and their masters. The discussion in chapter 21 of the *true liberties* of subjects confirms that one cannot contract away one's right of resisting death, wounds, chains, or imprisonment. It is Locke, by the way, in chapter 5, section 24, of the *Second Treatise*, who explicitly argues that people may contract into servitude but not slavery.

By the expression "political equality," I mean with the author of *Leviathan* (1651) that in a given society *nobody* has a "natural authority," allowing him/them to govern the members of the body politic and hence to make and impose binding collective decisions on them. In Hobbes's conception, the government of the polity has to have, and in its *entirety*,¹² one specific foundation: *citizens' authorization*. It is true that in many other political regimes, past and present, a *section* of the governmental structure was/is elected, notably many magistrates in Rome,¹³ the House of Commons in the Old English Constitution, and in some of the German *ständische Verfassungen*—but with Hobbes, citizens' authorization becomes the *only* source of legitimacy of political power, which, by the way, according to him (a point on which I agree), has to preexist in order to be authorized. This is why

sumpsit, utpote cum iure naturali omnes liberi nascerentur nec esset nota manumissio, cum servitus esset incognita: sed posteaquam iure gentium servitus invasit, secutum est beneficium manumissionis."

See also Maria B. Cocco, "*Servi e liberti* nella Sardegna romana alla luce della documentazione epigrafica" (Doctoral diss., University of Sassari, 2010), 26. Cocco (rightly) observes, "per Ulpiano la schiavitù non era più sancita per legge di natura, ma l'uomo, libero in base allo *ius naturale*, poteva divenire schiavo di un altro uomo a causa del risultato di processi storici e convenzioni sociali, anche se universalmente accettate." Available at http://eprints.uniss.it/4914/1/Cocco_MB_Servi_liberti_Sardegna_romana.pdf.

12. "Although elections were used in ancient Athens, in Rome, and in the selection of popes and Holy Roman emperors, the origins of elections in the contemporary world lie in the gradual emergence of representative government in Europe and North America beginning in the 17th century." See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, sub voce "election," <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/182308/election#toc229014>.

13. See Theodor Mommsen, *Römisches Staatsrecht*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1876).

we can speak of a *de facto* theory of authorization. Modern elections, as I argue in this chapter, presuppose an *empty seat* of political power,¹⁴ since only the *names* of those who will occupy that seat are decided, up to a point (candidacies are often controlled by political parties), by the voters.

It is possible to say (with John Dunn¹⁵) that the basic principle of representative government is “others-authorization”—the others being those who are supposed to obey the commandments of the few people exercising political authority. If the members of a given society¹⁶ are politically equal—meaning they consider themselves equals or are considered formally as such by the elite(s)—those who govern need authorization in order to exercise their function (of command). Political power, being not *natural*—with the absence of a *natural* (meaning ontologically based and socially accepted) *hierarchy* between the members of the community—has the nature of an *artifact*. Authorization is the mechanism by which the artifact of legitimate power is established, meaning it is recognized and stabilized by those who have to obey political power and who, through the mechanism of authorization, become the authors of the power itself.

This is the language used famously by Hobbes, who in chapter 16 of his masterwork introduces the concept of *representative*¹⁷ to qualify

14. See Siegfried Landshut, “Empirische Forschung und Grundlagenforschung in der Politischen Wissenschaft,” in *Kritik der Soziologie und andere Schriften zur Politik* (Neuwied am Rhein: Luchterhand, 1969), 315–316.

15. See John Dunn, “Judging Democracy as Form of Government for Given Territories: Utopia or Apologetics?” in *Democracy in a Russian Mirror*, ed. Adam Przeworski (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 97–109.

16. It is out of the scope of this chapter to consider the complex questions connected with borders and rules of inclusion or exclusion of individuals into a political society.

On the concept of “people,” see notably Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942), chap. 20, no. 4, 243–249. The “people” in a democracy is from a legal point of view a “constituted power” (the electoral power). The list of voters is established by some authority, not by the citizens themselves.

17. Richard Tuck brought to my attention years ago that the term *representation* first appeared in the French translation by Samuel Sorbière of the original Latin version of *De Cive* (chap. 6.1, remark: multitude): “D’où l’on peut voir la différence que je mets entre cette multitude que je nomme le peuple, qui se gouverne régulièrement par l’autorité du magistrat, qui compose une personne civile, qui nous *représente* tout le corps du public, la ville, ou l’État, et à qui je ne

the institution of the government in a society where there is no natural hierarchy between its members and where the subjects are qualified as *authors* (those who authorize) and the government as a *persona ficta*, the “actor,” speaking for the subjects and as their representative. A consequence of this equalitarian conception of the members of the political community is that the government, meaning those who occupy that position, do not exercise power any more *sui iuris* but by other-authorization or delegation; they are, as we say today, with some exaggeration, agents of a principal: one (political community) and two (logically distinct actors), sovereign and multitude.¹⁸ The political body cannot survive without the sovereign representative, but Leviathan, the government, does not exist without the authorization of the subjects—*simul stabunt*, in the commonwealth, or *simul cadunt*, in the state of nature! The Hobbesian conceptual revolution is the beginning of the end of a long-lasting political philosophy based on an anatomy of society where instead of equal individuals (from the political point of view, the point of view of command and obedience), the body politic was made up of *mere tes poleos*, substantive and unequal parts of the city or society.¹⁹

* * *

The next question I need to discuss concerns the form or the concrete modality of “authorization.” What exactly is the mechanism by which the subjects authorize the artifact we call *government*? This question is crucial to understanding the nature of representative (authorized) government.

Hobbes, like most *contractarians* (the authors of the modern social contract school)—notably Samuel Pufendorf, who was very prominent in the sense of being the most well known and influential figure of that

donne qu’une volonté; et cette autre multitude qui ne garde point d’ordre, qui est comme une hydre à cent têtes, et qui doit ne prétendre dans la république qu’à la gloire de l’obéissance.” Available at http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/hobbes_thomas/le_citoyen/le_citoyen.html, 81: Remarque. This text seems to be missing in the Latin version of the same work published in Amsterdam in 1647. The French translation of 1649 was prepared by Sorbière jointly with Hobbes.

18. This distinction is graphically visible in the original frontispiece of *Leviathan*.

19. See Pasquale Pasquino, “Machiavelli and Aristotle: The Anatomies of the City,” *History of European Ideas* 35, no. 4 (2009): 397–407.

school in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries²⁰—claimed that the mechanism of authorization was itself the fact of *rational* obedience to the commandments of the government. As Baruch Spinoza, certainly the most profound and original follower of Hobbes, put forth, *oboedientia facit imperantem*,²¹ meaning that voluntary obedience by the citizens is the true basis of political power (notably in societies where there was no powerful standing army and where the government did not control the terrifying military power that it can exercise in contemporary political systems).

Hobbes's intellectual enterprise consisted of giving mundane *and* theological arguments²² in favor of obedience/authorization to a government, with a crucial caveat, however, which makes the radical difference between the sheer fact of obedience—which may have a variety of reasons, including fear and coercion—and that which makes obedience rational by imposing duties and factual obligations on the government as well as on the citizens. Citizens' obedience is for Hobbes rational, justified, and becomes authorization only if political authority is able to guarantee citizens' *right* to "life and limbs" (and eternal salvation—as he tried to show in the third and fourth parts of his *Leviathan*). I do not need to enter here into the analysis of his arguments;²³ what I want to stress and focus on here is the circumstance that only the citizens' authorization (which goes under the quite misleading

20. See notably Pufendorf's *De statu hominum naturali* (1678). The English translation of this text appears in Samuel Pufendorf, *On the Natural State of Men*, ed., annot., trans., and introd. by Michael Seidler (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1990).

21. Quoted in Herman Heller, "Die Souveränität: Ein Beitrag zur Theorie des Staats- und Völkerrechts," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, 57, fn123.

22. In this sense, see the following important books on Hobbes: David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Cultural Transformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); S. A. Lloyd, *Ideals as Interests in Hobbes's Leviathan: The Power of Mind over Matter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

23. I presented some of them in three articles: Pasquale Pasquino, "Thomas Hobbes: la condition naturelle de l'humanité," *Revue Française de Science Politique* 44, no. 2 (1994): 294–307; Pasquale Pasquino, "Thomas Hobbes: la condition légale dans le Commonwealth," *Cahiers de Philosophie de l'Université de Caen* 34 (2000): 147–164; Pasquale Pasquino, "Hobbes, Religion and Rational Choice: Hobbes's Two Leviathans and the Fool," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 82 (2001): 406–441.

name of *social contract*)²⁴ to a government, able to fulfill that “protective function,”²⁵ justifies the authority of power as well as citizens’ political obligation to obey the civil law, the commands of the sovereign.

The crucial step in this story, and its starting point, is that there exists no natural hierarchy among the members of a society, no natural authority (like the one that exists between parents and their minor children or between the king and his subjects in a traditional society—in the Weberian language a *traditional legitimacy*). So, political power (the power exercised by some few individuals in a given society over all its members) needs a nonnaturalistic justification of hierarchy in order to be considered legitimate, and its legitimacy is now connected with the fact of authorization.²⁶

* * *

With the American and French constitutions at the end of the eighteenth century, the general²⁷ mechanism of authorization took the form of the popular choice of representatives: the *popular election* (*pro*

24. On the epistemic nature of the “contract,” see Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1946), 174.

25. On the authorization of a de facto existing power, I follow Frederic William Maitland, *A Historical Sketch of Liberty and Equality as Ideals of English Political Philosophy from the Time of Hobbes to the Time of Coleridge* (1875), republished in *The Collected Papers of Frederic William Maitland*, ed. H. A. L. Fisher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), vol. 1, iff.

26. The contrast between the Aristotelian and classical typologies of forms of government is worth a few words. Aristotle distinguished good from bad *politeiai*, but the criterion of goodness was not the existence of a mechanism of authorization but rather the goal of the government: the public interest as opposed to the interest of the (one-few-many) governing people. The entire political work of Thomas Hobbes is a fundamental and successful effort to produce arguments in favor of the authorization of political authority independently from the number of those who govern, a long chain of rational arguments supporting the idea of political power as an artifact.

27. As we know, there were partial exceptions to the electoral authorization in both the American and the first French revolutionary constitutions. Nonetheless, the hereditary king of the 1791 chart (which lasted only a few months) was a public official and drew his legitimacy from the Constitution, not from a special superior nature of the kingship. As for the American federal judiciary, based on the English model, it was not electorally accountable but considered somehow “indirectly” elected by the voters who chose the representatives appointing the judges. The justification of this exception in the *Federalist Papers* is not entirely clear and persuasive. Elsewhere I try to offer what seems to me a more satisfactory justification of this important exception, which again has Hobbesian roots. See Pasquale

tempore). Notice that the pope, too, is elected, but his appointment being for life, he is not accountable to the cardinals, technically his (human) constituency, for a renewal of his position as head of the Catholic Church. In the second part of this chapter, I come back to the nature and property of this mechanism that was traditionally considered typical of the “aristocratic” regimes.²⁸ For now, I want to focus on the fact that *authorization* and *election* became synonyms in the theory of the modern (post-social contract) representative government.

The French case is, from a conceptual point of view, particularly enlightening. The Founding Fathers of the French Constitution of 1789–1791 were fighting against the power of the king in the *ancien regime* and its ideology and justification. They had to offer an alternative to the traditional idea of the superior nature of the king of France, authorized by God, through the *sacre of Reims*,²⁹ the ceremony of unction that took place in the cathedral of the city of Reims. To do so, the idea was suggested, in the words of Abbé Sieyès, that “since all the citizens have to obey the laws—the commandments of the public authority—all of them have to participate somehow in the production and the enactment of the laws.”³⁰ Moreover, as direct participation was not possible in a commercial society based on the division of labor,³¹ citizens’ participation had to take the form of popular election of representatives and government. Election *pro tempore* (we speak of *free*

Pasquino, “A Political Theory of Constitutional Democracy” (Straus Working Papers 4/2013), <http://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/siwp/WP4Pasquino.pdf>.

28. The “aristocratic” character of elections has been explored in Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

29. Ralph E. Giesey, “Inaugural Aspects of French Royal Ceremonials,” in *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*, ed. János M. Bak (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

30. Speech at the National Assembly, September 7, 1789 (*Archives Parlementaires*, VIII, 594). Women were excluded from active citizenship since they were equated at that time to children (!), whose obedience was assured respectively by husbands and parents.

31. In his manuscripts, Sieyès often contrasted the Athenian democracy with the representative government of his contemporary commercial society and spoke positively of Hobbes; on this last point, see the manuscript at the National Archives 284 AP 2 dossier 3(1), reproduced in Pasquale Pasquino, *Sieyes et l'invention de la constitution en France* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1998), 165–166; Murray Forsyth, *Reason and Revolution: The Political Thought of the Abbé Sieyes* (New York: Leicester University Press, 1987).

and repeated elections) became the form of the modern authorization and legitimation of political power in a society where there was no belief in a natural hierarchy among the citizens, a society and a set of beliefs that could be characterized as the *Hobbesian moment*. This type of political culture did not start to be revised and transformed in Europe until after the Second World War, when parliamentary sovereignty was challenged by the introduction of nonelected, nonaccountable organs able to contrast the monopoly of the elected legislative state organs in the process of lawmaking.

Notice, by the way, that the concept of “people”—meaning those who authorize the government, those who have *political rights*—designates in turn an artificial body; they did not coincide with the totality of the inhabitants of a political community and were defined by artificial/civil laws. It took more than a century, in the three countries I am considering, to realize what we call “universal suffrage,”³² with the inclusion in “the people” of all the adult³³ members of a society, without distinction of race, gender, religion, or other differences.

It has to be observed, moreover, that the word *people* designates in the vocabulary of modern representative government two distinct and supposedly overlapping political actors. On one side are the collection of citizen-voters, those who authorize the representatives through election. Sieyès used the expression *pouvoir commettant* to qualify this popular function. In his language, this is a *constituted* power, since the number of voters and the modalities of the elections—the electoral law—are established by positive law (the constitution or, more frequently, by ordinary statutory legislation). On the other side, the “people” were also supposed to exercise the so-called *pouvoir constituant*. This is presented as the origin and source of any governmental power itself (as in the case of the *social contract*) and as having the function of establishing through the constitution the *empty seat* (the position of government) that the *pouvoir commettant* will fill up with

32. Woman's suffrage was established in 1920 in the United States, 1928 in Britain, 1944 in France, 1918 in Germany, and 1990 in Switzerland.

33. What “adult” means depends again on the positive laws of each given society. It may go from sixteen years (Austria) to twenty-five (the active voters for the Italian Senate).

names through the concrete mechanism of authorization: elections.³⁴ The doctrine of the *pouvoir constituant*³⁵ can in turn be connected to the political egalitarianism of the social contract tradition. Since there is no natural hierarchical structure justifying *political authority*, this one has to be thought of as the result of a popular decision / authorization and as a limited power, functioning to guarantee equal citizens' rights.

In Sieyès's doctrine, elections fulfill a variety of functions. They are at the same time (1) the legal, repeated form of authorization of public authority; (2) the mechanism for choosing the name of those who govern (which is not the case for the concept of authorization in Hobbes, which seems to presuppose both the authority and someone exercising it³⁶—the authorization giving it stability in exchange for protection, and only in this case); (3) the exclusive foundation of the representative legislative power;³⁷ and (4) the true rationale of the political obligation of the citizens to obey the positive law. It is worth noticing that in Sieyès's doctrine there is no longer consciousness of the possibly dangerous divisive consequences of the elections to which Francesco Guicciardini, among many others, drew attention in his work (*Discorso di Logrogno*, 1512)—nowadays one can think of the effect of elections in a country like Egypt. The reason for it is probably not only the slightly utopian/hyperoptimistic conception of the French Founding Fathers but also, at least in the case of Sieyès, the idea that the people, the *nation*, the *Third Estate*, was a homogeneous body with essentially the same interests, since the *others*—the nobility and the king—were excluded from citizenship. Radical pluralism and competitive elections do not seem to live well together. Only a limited plu-

34. See Pasquale Pasquino, "Constitution et pouvoir constituant: le double corps du peuple," in *Figures de Sieyes*, ed. Pierre-Yves Quiviger, Vincent Denis, and Jean Salem (Paris: Presses Universitaires de la Sorbonne, 2008), 13–23. Pufendorf famously distinguished between *pactum unionis* and *pactum subiectionis*. See Robert Derathé, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la science politique de son temps* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), 209–216.

35. For arguments on its "liberal" character, see Pasquino, *Sieyes*.

36. At least in the case of the *commonwealth by acquisition*, which seems the most common form of *Leviathan*.

37. Hence Sieyès's rejection of any king's veto power, the king being a non-elected official.

ralism is compatible with a mechanism of authorization that produces winners and losers.³⁸

* * *

On the other side of the Atlantic, the American constitution established the principle that the government has to be “republican” in the sense that James Madison gives to this polysemic word.³⁹ In Federalist #10 we read, “A republic, by which I mean a government in which the scheme of representation takes place,” to which he adds, interestingly, “The two great points of difference between a democracy and a republic are: first, the delegation of the government, in the latter, to *a small number of citizens elected by the rest*; secondly, the greater number of citizens, and greater sphere of country, over which the latter may be extended [my italics].” And in Federalist #39:

We may define a republic to be, or at least may bestow that name on, a government which *derives all its powers* directly or indirectly *from the great body of the people*, and is administered by persons holding their offices during pleasure, for a limited period, or during good behavior. It is ESSENTIAL to such a government that it be derived from the great body of the society, not from an inconsiderable proportion, or a favored class of it; otherwise a handful of tyrannical nobles, exercising their oppressions by a delegation of their powers, might aspire to the rank of republicans, and claim for their government the honorable title of republic. It is SUFFICIENT for such a government that the persons administering it be appointed, *either directly or indirectly*, by the people; and that they hold their appointments by either of the tenures just specified. (italics mine)

This text would require a long commentary, but it is clear that here, too, in the American constitutional doctrine, we see that elections (*pro tempore*) become the fundamental instrument of authorization of political power. Elections started to be considered in France, and

38. On this question, see Pasquale Pasquino, “Politische Einheit, Demokratie und Pluralismus,” in *Staatslehre in der Weimarer Republik: Hermann Heller zu ehren*, ed. Ilse Staff and Christoph Müller (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 114–127.

39. For a collection of Madison’s quotations on this concept, see <http://www.outsidethebeltway.com/madisons-definitions-of-republic/>.

likewise in the United States, as the basic principle of authorization and hence of legitimacy of the government in a society of equals, where this word means the absence of a natural hierarchy as to governmental power, *no less* but also *no more* than that. Economic or other forms of equality are not part of the genetic structure of modern representative government.

I can sum up what I have been saying so far. In a representative government (*vulgo* democracy), political power is *artificial* (versus *natural*) and exercised by a small number of citizens, who need to be authorized through periodic elections in order to claim the legitimacy of giving commands (laws).

To the question "Who made you King?" ("Who gave you the right to give me orders—laws—since we are naturally equal in the body politic, meaning as citizens?"), those who govern can easily answer: "You citizens, through periodical elections. This means that my power comes from your authorization and this free authorization is also the reason why you have to obey my laws (which are in a sense your laws since I am your representative)."⁴⁰ "You citizen" is evidently one of the numerous rhetorical expressions used by the modern political language, since it covers up a double *synecdoche*. Synecdoche, as commonly understood, is a figure of speech in which a term for a part of something is used to refer to the whole thing. Actually, popular authorization, the choice through elections of the parties and individuals who are going to exercise political power, is the name we gave to the adding together of individual options of a segment of the citizenry, in general its plurality (the largest minority, as is more evident in the systems that use majoritarian electoral laws)—so that the "people" is identified with a section of it, its majority or plurality. We actually call "people" a subset of the citizen voters and *will of the people* one of a

40. This argument is already present in Hobbes, when he claims that civil laws are not "external obstacles," that they do not limit citizens' freedom, since the civil power speaks for them, or more exactly the citizens speak through the representative. This is why in Hobbes there is no explicit agency problem, but only the natural right and the *conatus* to resist de facto political power if it doesn't fulfill its constitutive function of guaranteeing the natural *right* to "life and limbs" of the subjects. See Quentin Skinner, "Thomas Hobbes and the Proper Signification of Liberty," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 40 (1990): 121–151; Pasquino, "Thomas Hobbes: la condition naturelle de l'humanité."

section of representatives: the majority of the members of the elected assembly (notably in the parliamentary systems). This is why we have to speak of double synecdoche in representative democracies. The will of the majority of the Parliament is equated with the will of this institution, and moreover the will of the voters, which through the algorithm of electoral law produces a majority in the parliament, is identified with the popular will.

In the United States and in the postparliamentary, constitutional democracies, which exist almost everywhere in the world today, elections are, however, not the exclusive mechanism producing legitimacy for governmental institutions making important binding decisions for the body politic.⁴¹ Constitutional/Supreme Courts and central banks, to say nothing of supranational or international organizations and global financial markets, play a crucial role in the lives of citizens of societies we still call, for absence of a better name, “democratic.” Citizens not only do not govern themselves—which has never been the case, at least in modern representative governments—but it is also difficult to claim that electoral authorization and accountability, which we now normally connect with repeated elections, are the unique and paramount foundation of the legitimacy of contemporary political authority as the classical doctrine of representative government pretended. In any event, here I want to focus on the electoral mechanism, its properties, and its normative qualities.

* * *

In the first part of this chapter, I tried to show that elections have a strong connection with the idea introduced by Thomas Hobbes that the members of a given community are *politically equal*, since there is no *natural hierarchy* justifying that some specific people can give orders (i.e., govern the other members of the community). So political *authority* needs *authorization*, and with the French Revolution and the American constitution at the end of the eighteenth century, popular *elections* became the essential mechanism to authorize and legitimize political power. I argue that the idea of equality, as the absence of

41. This is also true in the United Kingdom, where the House of Lords is not elected and not accountable to the voters and still exercises some legislative power, not to mention the new Supreme Court.

natural hierarchy among members of a given society, is the starting point of modern representative democracy, which is a system where political authority has to be justified, and the only possible justification is authorization by the many (citizens) of the few (government).

This authorization took the form at the beginning, with Hobbes, of voluntary, rational (justified, self-serving) obedience, or de facto consensus to the power of the sovereign able to protect and guarantee fundamental rights. Later on, authorization became *free elections*, so that if the citizens (the majority of them) are not happy—for whatever reason—with what the government does, they can always replace, at the end of the mandate, those who govern with some other people. In the last section of this chapter, I want to speak of modern competitive elections and consider some of their downsides.

* * *

Contemporary democracy is often identified, notably in American political science via Anthony Downs's partial reading of the political theory of Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter,⁴² with what Schumpeter called the "democratic method," the mechanism through which political elites in competition ask voters to make the choice among them in order to occupy governmental positions. Famously (or perhaps not), Schumpeter was identifying democracy in 1942 with the Westminster model.⁴³ Think of the interesting circumstance that almost all his examples illustrating democratic system are drawn from British political history (even more remarkable considering that Schumpeter was living in the United States when he wrote his book). Let me reiterate, before going ahead, that his remarkable analysis does not exhaust either the description of the real existing democracies (RED, mostly constitutional democracies) or the normative idea of a good

42. For a more accurate reading of Schumpeter's political theory, see Alessandro Pizzorno, "On the Rationality of Democratic Choice," *Telos* 63 (1985): 41–69.

43. In the absence of a majoritarian electoral law and a two-party system, the thesis should be partially rephrased claiming that elections assign seats in Parliament proportionally to the distribution of the popular vote among political parties present in the competition. The composition of the government is the result after the election of coalitions among political parties willing to support an executive in Parliament.

government—in my opinion, a government able to protect fundamental rights.

II

What is the function of elections and what is good or bad about them?

This is the question I want to start discussing in what follows.

1. *Selecting elites.* The classical theory, the origins of which can be found notably in Aristotle⁴⁴ (and which is discussed at length by Bernard Manin in his book *Principles of Representative Government*), states that elections are a mechanism to select the elite, the best citizens, those who are better fit to govern the country. This dimension becomes immediately clear if we contrast election with lotteries as a mechanism to select those who are apt to govern the city. A democratic conception of strict equality (the one opposed by Montesquieu⁴⁵ and accepted by the Athenians in a completely different historical context)—where strict equality means equal ability to govern the city—justifies lotteries⁴⁶ and makes useless a mechanism for selecting the *best* citizens.

That elections would have been the device to select the elites and the experts is likely what Madison and Sieyès used to believe, with some justification. In their time, *salient*⁴⁷ candidates, the only ones

44. References to the terms in the Index of E. Barker's translation of Aristotle, *Politics*, *sub voce* "election" (αἵρεσις, αἵρεσθαι) and in the Index of the excellent French translation by Pierre Pellegrin.

45. Montesquieu speaks notably of *égalité extrême*: «Le principe de la démocratie se corrompt, non seulement lorsqu'on perd l'esprit d'égalité, mais encore quand on prend l'esprit d'égalité extrême, et que chacun veut être égal à ceux qu'il choisit pour lui commander. Pour lors, le peuple, ne pouvant souffrir le pouvoir même qu'il confie, veut tout faire par lui-même, délibérer pour le sénat, exécuter pour les magistrats, et dépouiller tous les juges». See [Charles-Louis de Secondat] Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit de lois*, ed. Victor Goldschmidt (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1979), bk. 8, chap. 2, 234.

46. These were very important for selecting the *dikastai* (the jurors) and the *nomothetai* (the "legislators," to use an anachronistic term); the *ekklesia* instead was simply open to the Athenian citizens. And the magistracies (the *archontes*), sorted by lotteries, did not play a particularly important role at all in the city government (they were not comparable with the Roman republican magistrates *cum imperio*). As is well known, the *strategoï* (the generals) were instead elected each year.

47. The introduction of this concept is in my opinion the most relevant and original contribution of Manin's book concerning contemporary elections. The

who could be selected (in the absence of modern political parties), were probably members of the intellectual elite—one may even say with Carl Schmitt that they were members of the social class characterized by (some) *Besitz* (wealth) and (good) *Bildung* (education).

This is not true anymore, since money (*Besitz* more than *Bildung*) and *media visibility* are nowadays much more relevant in order for candidates to be salient. Alternatively, depending on the electoral system and on the structure of the political offer, citizens often vote for parties and their visible leaders rather than for single candidates who sometimes (notably in electoral systems with long lists of candidates chosen by the parties, or in the case of election to the European Parliament) voters may not know at all.

Denying the role of salience for the candidates (and of partisan choice for the voters) would mean believing that the idea of political equality, as opposed to the meaning specified in this chapter, should be understood instead in the strict Athenian equalitarian sense, making elections pointless. It made some sense to avoid them in the ancient democracy, where all the citizens were politically active and somehow experts. Nowadays, rejecting elections would just be a form of disqualification of the role of competence in the contemporary world based on the division of labor and on the increasing complexity of governmental functions. Nonetheless, in contemporary society, elections select mostly *salient* candidates (or at least political leaders) rather than the best or fittest citizens to govern a country.

2. *Making right decisions.* A more extravagant theory (sometimes vaguely deduced from some of Condorcet's ideas)⁴⁸ claims that

term *salience* in this context has in reality nothing to do with the classical Aristotelian/Madisonian idea of elections as a mechanism able to select the people more gifted to govern in the general interest—a sort of objective aristocracy. Nowadays, elections produce and reproduce a sort of oligarchical *pro tempore* government made up by individuals who for *whatever* reason are more salient (visible) than others. On the last page of his book, Manin writes, “L'élection sélectionne nécessairement des élites, mais il appartient aux citoyens ordinaires de définir ce qui constitue une élite et qui y appartient.” See B. Manin, *Principes du gouvernement représentatif* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1995), 308. These individuals may be media people, salient just because they are well known and visible, not at all because of their ability or experience of government.

48. I briefly discuss the ideas of Condorcet about voting in Pasquale Pasquino, “Majority Rules in Constitutional Democracies,” in *Majority Decisions*, ed.

elections based on majority rule are a good mechanism to apprehend/reveal the general will—which is supposed to be *right*. In this hypothesis, there are a variety of implicit assumptions that have to be discussed and, I guess, refuted:

- (A) the equation of the will of the majority with the popular will—as already hinted (speaking of the double synecdoche).
- (B) the identification of the plurality (the largest minority, which is in general the number of popular votes sufficient to produce a majority of seats in the legislative assembly) with the majority.
- (C) the conflating of the will of the majority of the representatives with the will of their voters (known as the “agency problem”).

It is evident, to begin with, that these assumptions do not pass any rational scrutiny. Consider, for instance, a political system where there are more than two parties, a majoritarian electoral law, and no party with more than 50 percent of the popular vote; then the winner gets the majority of parliamentary seats without the majority of the popular vote.⁴⁹ Even more problematic is the assumption that the voters make *wise decisions*. There is plenty of historical evidence that this is not the case (the crucial elections in Prussia in 1932, the American elections in 2000, 2004, and 2016, and most of the Italian elections in the

Stéphanie Novak and Jon Elster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 219–235. On Condorcet and collective decision mechanisms, a remarkable analysis has been produced by Antoine Houlou-Garcia, *Le théorème du jury: de la décision collective à la mesure collective*, Mémoire de recherche en sciences sociales (master's thesis, Paris: EHESS, 2015). I hope that his work will soon be published in English.

49. A rich collection of data supporting the claim in the text can be found in Jean-Claude Colliard, “Les systèmes électoraux dans les Constitutions des pays de l'Union européenne,” *Cahiers du Conseil constitutionnel* 13 (2003) (Dossier: La sincérité du scrutin), n.p. Here we read: “Toute représentation, parce qu'elle consiste par essence à réduire la diversité qui caractérise plusieurs millions d'électeurs à celle, forcément moins élevée, qui sera incarnée par quelques centaines de représentants, emporte une déformation de l'opinion.” Furthermore, in electoral systems based on proportional representation, it can be easily shown that there is a different form of disproportionality of the vote, which is pretty well known to anyone who is familiar with a country using that type of electoral law: a very small party in a pivotal position for building up a majority in the Parliament has a “coalitional power” disproportionate vis-à-vis its real weight in the popular vote.

last twenty years, just to give a few relatively uncontroversial examples). Moreover, the *reductio* of popular will to the (supposed) will of the majority is justifiable only in a utilitarian maximizing approach or in a holistic one. In the 1920s, Kelsen produced probably the best analytical assessment of the mechanism of majority rule, of which he was a very severe critic. Rather than offering here my interpretation of an often-misread text, I invite the reader to consider the following passage from this major work on democratic theory, at the end of Kelsen's analysis of majority rule:

The transformation in the concept of freedom, from the notion of the individual's freedom from state rule to the notion of the individual's participation in state rule, also signifies democracy's detachment from liberalism. Because the demand for democracy is considered met to the extent that those subject to the state order participate in its creation, the ideal of democracy is independent of the extent to which the state order affects the individuals who create it—that is, independent of the degree to which it interferes with their “freedom.” As long as state authority emanates from the individuals subject to it, democracy is possible even in the case of unlimited expansion of the state order over the individual—that is, complete annihilation of individual “freedom” and negation of the liberal ideal. And history shows that democratic state authority does not tend less towards expansion than autocratic state authority.

Given the unavoidable distance between the will of the individual and the state order—the individual will, which forms the starting point of the demand for freedom, while the state order confronts the individual as an alien will, even in a democracy, where this distance is reduced to a minimum—a further transformation occurs in the notion of political freedom. The fundamentally impossible freedom of the individual gradually fades into the background, and the freedom of the social collective comes to the fore. The protest against being ruled by equals is as unavoidable in a democracy as its consequence: the shift in political consciousness to construction of the anonymous person of the state as ruling subject. From it, and not from externally visible persons, authority may emanate. A mysterious general will and an almost mystical general person are detached from the wills and personalities of the individuals. This fictional isolation occurs not so much with regard to the will of the subjects as with regard to the

will of those who rule in fact, and who now appear to be nothing more than organs of a hypostasized ruling subject. In an autocracy, a man made of flesh and blood is considered the ruler, even if he is raised to the status of a god. In a democracy, the state as such becomes the ruling subject. Here the personification of the state hides the fact that man rules over man, unbearable to democratic sensibilities. The personification of the state, now fundamental to the theory of the law of the state, doubtlessly also has its roots in this ideology of democracy.⁵⁰

The idea that the majority is right is a very problematic extension of Condorcet's jury theorem, which, by the way, and independently from the quite restrictive assumption made by this author,⁵¹ makes sense if people decide about facts (is Mr. X guilty of the crime Z?) and facts are only one element of political decisions. So it is highly unpersuasive that elections speak of truth or justice, whatever these terms may mean.

3. *Defusing societal conflicts.* A less extravagant theory defends the idea that elections—here “competitive” elections—are a mechanism to avoid violent conflicts among political elites. Historical evidence shows, though, that there may be here yet another argumentative fallacy: conflating the cause with the effects. To avoid violent conflicts, it is not enough to introduce free elections. Contemporary Iraq, Egypt, Bangladesh, and Pakistan quite eloquently exemplify that rather than pacifying the society, elections can ignite violence and produce disruptive conflicts.

So *specific conditions* have to preexist in order to have at the same time electoral competition and social peace. Schumpeter, in the disregarded fundamental chapter 23 of his book *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, presented a number of interesting remarks on what he called the conditions of success of the “democratic method,” meaning the mechanism of competitive elections to select the government. His preconditions concern essentially, and importantly, the quality of the

50. The quotation is from Hans Kelsen, *Vom Wesen und Wert der Demokratie* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1929). The English translation is taken from Arthur J. Jacobson and Bernhard Schlink, *Weimar: A Jurisprudence of Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 88.

51. See Pasquino, “Majority Rules in Constitutional Democracies.”

political and bureaucratic elite, which by the way is not enough. Next to the elite, voters indeed play an important role in representative governments, since elected officials are accountable to their constituencies.

4. *Accountability*. Competitive elections are considered the essential instrument to make a government *accountable* to the voters (a term that, as we saw, designates in general the *plurality* of them). *Accountability* is a tricky, polysemic term. In its less problematic and strict meaning—we speak now also of *vertical accountability*—it means that a public official elected *pro tempore*, in order to get his mandate renewed, has to go back to the electoral body and possibly be *reelected*. Accountability is the opposite of *tenure* and the opposite of sovereignty, in the classical sense of the term: the sovereign is not electorally accountable (since the most powerful section of the British Parliament is electorally accountable, I never understood clearly the British idea of parliamentary sovereignty).⁵² Accountability seems to guarantee a form of *limited power* based on *popular control*. Now, reiterating that popular control is a synecdoche for control by the majority/plurality of the voters, and recognizing that this control (the possibility to vote the government out) does exist,⁵³ we can raise, as already hinted, some doubts about the wisdom and rationality of such a controller. My point is simple and in a sense well known, but is not always taken seriously because of the dominant democratic ideology. The elected official, let me call him the incumbent, is rationally (in

52. An accountable sovereign seems a *contradictio in adjecto*; still, thanks to a better definition, one can try to escape contradictions. Maybe the British Parliament as an institution is sovereign, but the members of it are not, since they can lose their jobs (in the Commons).

53. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 272. Schumpeter wrote explicitly assessing the characters of his definition of the democratic method: "Sixth, it should be observed that in making it the primary function of the electorate to produce a government (directly or through an intermediate body) I intended to include in this phrase also *the function of evicting it* [*italics mine*]. The one means simply the acceptance of a leader or a group of leaders, the other means simply the withdrawal of this acceptance. This takes care of an element the reader may have missed. He may have thought that the electorate controls as well as installs. But since electorates normally do not control their political leaders in any way except by refusing to reelect them or the parliamentary majorities that support them, it seems well to reduce our ideas about this control in the way indicated by our definition."

order to be reelected) biased toward political *myopia*, meaning a short-run perspective (the possibility of being confirmed in his mandate at the next election; politicians think normally of the *next* election and mostly are not interested in the long term), and *partiality* (the interests of *his* constituency).⁵⁴ What accountable elections guarantee is that if, for *whatever* reason, the majority/plurality of voters do not like the policies enacted by the incumbent, they can force him to leave the governmental position. What is good about that is not very clear, except that the many are stronger than the few. This idea seems to be connected with a radical relativism that most of the supporters of democracy deny or are not aware of. Kelsen, as I discussed earlier, was aware of it and explicitly associated democracy based only on majority rule with relativism in the last chapter of his book on democracy.⁵⁵ Dworkin, because of a similar implicit understanding, rejected majoritarian democracy, since it is in conflict with his strong antirelativism.⁵⁶ Alternatively, the same idea of majoritarian democracy is connected, as I said, with the utilitarian perspective consisting in satisfying the largest number of preferences (independently, paradoxically, from their content—which seems again another form of relativism).⁵⁷

To put the argument presented in a slightly different way, one could say that competitive elections have the quality of being a mechanism of power control—a form of limitation of power alternative to the classical one of mixed government, where, in a pre-Hobbesian universe, *different parts of the city* controlled each other through sharing the

54. Speaking of the European Union in a recent interview for the *Guardian* (16 July 2015), Jürgen Habermas brought attention to a different, no less disturbing bias, the one between European integration and the national democracies of the member states of the European Union: “Only the government leaders assembled in the European Council are in the position to act, but precisely they are the ones who are unable to act in the interest of a joint European community because they think mainly of their national electorate.”

55. The title of the section is “Demokratie und Weltanschauung.”

56. See, for instance, Ronald Dworkin, “Introduction: The Moral Reading and the Majoritarian Premise,” in *Freedom’s Law: The Moral Reading of the American Constitution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 1–38.

57. I do not mention here the so-called epistemic theories of democracy, which in my opinion are based on unrealistic assumptions and serious misreading of Condorcet (see note 48).

exercise of political authority. It is a control in a minimalist form: in a political system where there are competitive elections, the incumbent knows that he can lose the election and that he has a reason to avoid abusing power—which boils down to not displeasing *his* constituency. This is what I have been thinking for a long time. Still, after more serious consideration—trying to understand why modern democracy is good and not why it is better than communism (a political regime that, with the exception of North Korea, has disappeared)—this argument started to seem to me pretty weak. It is apparent that elections can produce civil war rather than moderation; that the incumbent has an incentive to do whatever is needed to please his constituency (those who voted for him) in order to be reelected, which introduces a partiality in favor of a section of the voters; and that speaking of “control” is an ideological exaggeration. We should at most speak of “approval/disapproval.”

My general claim is that democracy is certainly a better system than that employed in a country like Saudi Arabia or the Soviet regime. But the Soviet regime no longer exists, and Saudi Arabia is not considered a model by any sensible person, except perhaps the local elites. So what is good about democracy remains a serious open question, to which in my opinion we have no clear satisfactory answer. To answer “competitive election,” which for sure implies freedom of political criticism and of association, seems not enough.

One should not forget, by the way, that Western political systems are mostly *constitutional democracies*. By this I mean that a significant number of collective binding decisions are taken away from the power of elected officials and attributed to institutions manned by people who are *not electorally accountable*. Constitutional/Supreme Courts, central banks, and independent administrative agencies are very important actors in contemporary political⁵⁸ decision-making in real existing democracies. This point is rarely highlighted in democratic theories, which shows that they are mostly archaic, incomplete,

58. By “political” I mean here decisions that affect the lives of the members of the community.

or just wrong.⁵⁹ Before trying to change the reality, we may need to change the theory.

5. *Legitimacy*. Elections may be considered to fulfill a different function: to provide or confer “legitimacy” to at least some of those—the elected officials—who govern us, the members of a given political community. This seems to me the most promising perspective for making sense of why at least political elites are interested in this mechanism of authorization. By this, I am coming back to the starting point of my remarks. This is the reason why I needed to start with the modern concept of political authority. In the absence of the idea of political equality (reintroduced after Athens and in a more limited version by Thomas Hobbes), political/governmental authority is exercised by those citizens who are naturally superior and fit to govern. When, with modern contractarianism, the natural character of the government disappeared and political authority started to be considered an “artifact,” the idea that some people could give orders to the members of the community (without being naturally superior) needed a justification. Authorization became at the same time the key and justification of authority. From this perspective, elections assume a significant role: as the modern mechanism of *authorization*, or, to use a more usual term, as the mechanism conferring *legitimacy* to the government. This is definitely good, when it works, for those who govern. I am suggesting that it may not be good enough for those who are governed.

59. At least outside the United Kingdom, which is still essentially a pure parliamentary democracy.

5

Revision, Reorganization, and Reform

Prussia, 1790–1820

KEITH TRIBE

THE IDEA OF STATE freedom arose to counter the adventurist plans of the Napoleonic world empire, the same idea for which the founders of the Prussian state had fought against Louis XIV. The cosmopolitical doctrines of armed revolution were countered by a national sensibility, enthusiasm for the Fatherland, Volksthum, and the homespun. Out of the struggle against the oppressive state power of Bonapartism a new and vital conception of the state emerged, locating the moral basis of the nation in the free development of personal powers. The great contradictions that collided here were faithfully reflected by the leading personages. On the one hand, a man who deluded himself with the thought that he alone was fate, that the nature of things was uttered and enacted by him alone. . . . On the other, a series of uncommon men, sharp and independent of mind, each a world apart, defiant and critical Germans. . . . Among these men there was one who, while not their ruler, was the first among equals: Freiherr vom Stein, the pathfinder of the era of Reform (*Zeitalter der Reformen*).¹

The published writings of Istvan Hont have an almost exclusive focus upon the eighteenth century, natural law, and the political economy

1. Heinrich von Treitschke, *Deutsche Geschichte im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, pt. 1, 4th ed. (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1886), 270. This is a reissue of the first edition of 1879.

of Smith and Hume, reflected also in his teaching in Cambridge from the later 1980s until his death in 2013. It would be easy to assume that he was simply a scholar of the European Enlightenment, the domain in which his reputation was made. But this focus existed because of a much wider intellectual commitment that has its origins in the Hont of the early 1970s, a Hungarian Marxist writing a thesis on David Hume and steeped in the theoretical and political legacy of Marxism. The particular nature of this legacy is today mostly forgotten; even for those now in their fifties it is a matter of historical curiosity, not of personal experience. Hont's intellectual turn away from the dogmas that marked his youth left him with a deep respect for the ideas that Marxism had traduced, and a scorn for the social, economic, and political historiography of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in thrall to the story of modernity that Marxism had put into circulation. He became an "eighteenth-century scholar" through these twin forces of attraction and repulsion. He followed a positive, and not a negative path; rather than exhaust his efforts in permanent critique, seeking to rewrite the history of post-Revolutionary modernity, he laid the foundations for such a history in his work on pre-Revolutionary thought.

Nonetheless, he retained a strong, if diffuse, interest in post-Revolutionary modernity, as the students in his Cambridge seminars would know. One of the projects he launched in the mid-1980s, "After Adam Smith," was intended as a counterpart to the *Wealth and Virtue* project: he wrote on Malthus, read extensively in contemporary theology, and encouraged me to review the writings of Friedrich List. The late trace of this interest in List can be seen in *Jealousy of Trade*,² although the early engagement with the domain of international relations is no longer so obvious. The "Commerce and Perpetual Peace" workshops that he organised in 2008 and 2009 sought a path that would bridge the hiatus created by the Revolution. For the meeting in July 2009 I returned to work I had done early in the 1980s, and drafted a review of Koselleck's *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*, seeking to

2. Istvan Hont, "Jealousy of Trade: An Introduction," in *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 146–54.

come to terms with a book that promised so much for an understanding of the political space between 1789 and 1848, yet delivered so little. As Istvan maintained, Koselleck had been hurried through the work for his habilitation by Werner Conze, and so the published book remained an unfinished project.

The problem that Koselleck took up in his book was the legacy of the French Revolution as represented by the French Revolutionary armies that broke like a wave across the older European order, their retreat leaving a jumbled political landscape that historians ever since have found hard to read. Republicanism, liberalism, reaction, democracy, the nation-state, the rise of working-class movements, social reform, industrialization and technology, urbanization, nationalism, capitalism, Bildungsbürgertum, and more have been pressed into service in a search to make sense of an eighteenth-century European legacy that turned into a global twentieth century riven by war and genocide.³ During Germany's Second Empire, historians reached back to the part played by Friedrich II in making Prussia the central political and cultural force among the German states, linking this to the creation of a unified Germany in 1871. It was in this context that the reconstruction of Prussia after its defeat in 1806 became Treitschke's "era of reform." In 1887, the Prussian Academy of Sciences initiated *Acta Borussica*, publishing from 1892 manuscripts, statutes, and memoranda detailing the political, economic, and administrative organization of eighteenth-century Prussia. Historians could then move beyond a conception of Prussian supremacy as the outcome of war and diplomacy to one in which Enlightenment virtues of bureaucratic rationalism could be conceived as the underlying order linking the Prussia of Friedrich II to the Germany of Wilhelm II.

Subsequently, this same story was reversed: it became an explanation for the German *Sonderweg*, the path leading from the accession of Friedrich in 1740 to the Unification of 1871, but also on to 1914, 1933, and 1945.⁴ The "era of reforms" now became a missed opportunity, a

3. This echoes a point about nineteenth-century historiography made by Istvan Hont in his introduction at the first Commerce and Perpetual Peace Seminar, King's College, Cambridge, December 2008.

4. Most forcefully exposed with respect to 1914 in Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1961). This entire line of argument con-

failure of premature modernization, its inspiration being not "progressive liberalism" but instead "reactionary modernism." Alexander Gerschenkron, who later became a historian of Soviet industrialization who laid emphasis on the disjointed development of modern economies,⁵ extended this idea to the world of political thought, suggesting in a study of German politics and Prussian values that, "It is perhaps not an altogether idle pursuit to look back to Nietzsche and Stefan George, perhaps to Wagner, Treitschke, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and even to Fichte and Hegel as the spiritual fathers of Nazism."⁶

Gerschenkron's book was reviewed the following year by Hans Rosenberg, a student of Meinecke who had written both his dissertation (1927) and his Habilitation (1933) on Rudolf Haym.⁷ Noting that Gerschenkron was a professional economist, he concluded that, "Dr. Gerschenkron's knowledge of political and social history is distinctly spotty and, on the whole, quite shallow. This accounts for many misleading oversimplifications, fatal misunderstandings, and factual inaccuracies. . . . Emotional bias plus muddled thinking is responsible for the alarming use of the word democracy and of undefined clichés such as "immature democracies," "semicomma democracies," "complete democracy," "democracy without democrats," "democratic strategy,"

cerning democracy and industrialization was forcefully demolished with respect to the 1848 revolution in David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Ullstein, 1980), published in English as *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

5. Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

6. Alexander Gerschenkron, *Bread and Democracy in Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943), 18.

7. Heinrich August Winkler, "A Pioneer in the Historical Sciences: Hans Rosenberg 1904–1988," *Central European History* 24 (1991): 4, 7. Rosenberg's Habilitation was published in 1933 under the title "Rudolf Haym und die Anfänge des klassischen Liberalismus." Rosenberg emigrated to the United States in 1935 and was appointed to Brooklyn College in 1938. William W. Hagen described Rosenberg's analysis of the *Sonderweg* as the "hinge" on which his analysis of Prussian absolutism turned. See William W. Hagen, "Descent of the *Sonderweg*: Hans Rosenberg's History of Old-Regime Prussia," *Central European History* 24 (1991): 24–50 at 31.

etc.”⁸ Rosenberg went on to publish in 1958 an account of the development of Prussia as a model bureaucratic state, with the specific difference that, “In the case of Germany, with her long tradition of obedience to authority, centralised power in the hands of self-interested groups unwilling to learn the rules of democratic cooperation was particularly tragic. The conservative heirs of the absolute monarchy share the responsibility for the rise and victory of mass dictatorships and twentieth-century totalitarianism.”⁹

During the later 1960s and the 1970s, Rosenberg’s approach to German history was received with special enthusiasm by younger historians who became identified with a new social history, and whose standard bearer remains Hans-Ulrich Wehler. Not only were such historians ideologically wedded to a Sonderweg thesis in which “late industrialization” was combined with an authoritarian political order, they were also hostile to the social history first developed at Heidelberg in the later 1950s by Werner Conze and others, from whose work the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* project sprang.

Conze’s student Reinhart Koselleck went on to write his Habilitation on the Prussian transition between the Allgemeines Landrecht of 1794 and the revolution of 1848, describing the aims of the reforms made in response to the Napoleonic conquest of Prussia as “The elimination of the rule of men over men, the dissolution of any kind of tutelage through the work of objective and lawful administration—this was the ideal goal of the reformers.”¹⁰

Claudia Langer, in turn a student of Koselleck, elaborated this idea in her book *Reform nach Prinzipien*, a study of the linkage of the Prus-

8. Hans Rosenberg, “Review of Gerschenkron, *Bread and Democracy in Germany*,” *American Historical Review* 50 (1944): 118. The weakness of Gerschenkron’s grasp of politics has not been so obvious to others: Daniel Ziblatt won the 2008 Sage Prize for the best paper in comparative politics presented at the 2007 APSA meeting, published as “Does Landholding Inequality Block Democratization? A Test of the ‘Bread and Democracy’ Thesis and the Case of Prussia,” *World Politics* 60 (2008): 610–641.

9. Hans Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy: The Prussian Experience 1660–1815* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), viii.

10. Reinhart Koselleck, *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution. Allgemeines Landrecht, Verwaltung und soziale Bewegung von 1791 bis 1848*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1975), 154.

sian Reforms to Kant's political philosophy.¹¹ Shortly after her book was published, the German Democratic Republic was absorbed into the Federal Republic, reigniting discussion of Europe's "German problem" but no longer explicitly connecting it to the Sonderweg thesis. Arguments over the Prussian origins of German power were now at a discount; the Prussian Reforms went out of fashion.¹² Langer's systematic linkage of the Reforms to Kantian political philosophy was left stranded by this shift in historiographical fashion; given the lack of general interest, the older idea of the Reforms as an instance of failed "bureaucratic modernization" survived,¹³ together with its corollary, that the Reforms prepared the ground for the bigger failure of German liberalism in 1848.¹⁴ This, essentially, is also the dominant thread running through Koselleck's own *Preußenbuch*, despite his initial orientation toward administration and law.¹⁵ The GDR variant of this

11. Claudia Langer, *Reform nach Prinzipien. Untersuchungen zur politischen Theorie Immanuel Kants* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1986). Most of this text was completed during the period 1972–1976 but only presented as a Heidelberg dissertation in 1984.

12. For an account of the *Preußenwelle* of the early 1980s that is relevant to the remarks made here, see Tim Blanning, "The Death and Transfiguration of Prussia," *Historical Journal* 29 (1986): 433–459. For an overview of the current historiography of this period, see Katherine Aaltestad and Karen Hagemann, "1806 and Its Aftermath: Revisiting the Period of the Napoleonic Wars in German Central European Historiography," *Central European History* 39 (2006): 547–579.

13. The "economic liberalism" of the reformers is still often taken as read from Brendan Simms's robust view that "The theory behind these measures [of Hardenberg's in 1810] was classic economic liberalism: the state should intervene only to ensure fair competition and the free play of market forces" to the more nuanced and detailed treatment of Christopher Clark, whose title for the chapter in which he presents the Reforms is "The World the Bureaucrats Made." See Brendan Simms, *The Struggle for Mastery in Germany, 1779–1850* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998), 79; Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom. The Rise and Downfall of Prussia 1600–1947* (London: Penguin, 2006), 312–344.

14. The first section of Barbara Vogel's edited collection of essays on the Reforms is entitled "Bureaucratic Modernisation—Questions and Perspectives in Studying the Prussian Reforms." See Barbara Vogel, ed., *Preußische Reformen: 1807–1820* (Königstein im Taunus: Verlagsgesellschaft Athenäum, 1980).

15. "Prussian officialdom consciously opted for Adam Smith and against Napoleon, so that the one could be used to expel the other. They accepted the challenge of the industrial revolution to avoid a 'French Revolution', seeking to arrive at the same goal. They unleashed a societal movement, gradually losing control over the direction it would take, ultimately losing all control once the social question became a constitutional question. It is one and the same movement which, initially led by the reforming state, then taken up by the new society, was

story—that the Prussian Reforms were part and parcel of the development of German capitalism—likewise lost traction after 1990.¹⁶

But the idea that one should consider the political language mobilized in a series of edicts, proposals, and administrative changes that only much later became known as “the Prussian Reforms” remains an attractive one. Setting loose these “Reforms” from the framework in which they have been judged to have “succeeded” or “failed” also dissolves any automatic link to the work of a group of “reformers,” introducing an instability between political language and administrative activity. Rather than evaluate the “Reforms” in terms of intentions and outcomes, I will highlight some of their more contradictory aspects, suggesting that the reorganization of the Prussian state drew on a language that was only in the process of being created, that of revolution, reform, and reaction, and by extension liberalism and conservatism.

There were several dimensions to the administrative and legal changes that followed the Prussian defeat in 1806. At the most general level, there was an internal struggle within the administration between a king, ruling with a “kitchen cabinet” of friends and favorites, and a somewhat incoherently organized ministerial bureaucracy that sought to replace “cabinet government” with “ministerial government.”¹⁷ This was a struggle that engaged all of the reformers—Stein, Hardenberg, Schön, Niebuhr—and it is a subtext that runs through all the edicts they issued. Indeed, the many memoranda written by Stein and Hardenberg are themselves so many instruments in this struggle for

finally directed against the old state of the Prussian Code. In sum, the Revolution fulfilled the entire Reform of 1807 to 1820, but beyond that it failed.” See Kosselleck, *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*, 14.

16. See, for example, Hartmut Harnisch, “Die kapitalistische Agrarreform. Ihre Bedeutung für die Herausbildung des inneren Marktes und die industrielle Revolution in den östlichen Provinzen Preußens in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts,” in Vogel, *Preußische Reformen*, 111–131, originally published as “Die Bedeutung der Kapitalistischen Agrarreform für die Herausbildung des Inneren Marktes und die Industrielle Revolution in den Östlichen Provinzen Preussens in der Ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts,” *Jahrbuch der Wirtschaftsgeschichte* Bd. 18.4 (1977), 63–82. Harnisch’s first four references are to Lenin’s *Development of Capitalism in Russia*, and the fifth is to *Capital*, vol. 1.

17. A concise sketch of this conflict is provided in Marion W. Gray, *Prussia in Transition: Society and Politics under the Stein Reform Ministry of 1808* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1986), 48–50.

control of state policy. Second, military defeat had highlighted obvious problems with the army, such as having three army chiefs of staff; military reforms by Scharnhorst and Gneisenau reorganized the Prussian army on a national basis and streamlined its direction. The third major element was represented by agrarian and industrial reforms related to the fiscal reforms necessitated by the levy imposed by the French. For the sake of brevity, I will confine my remarks here to this last group.

Central to the agrarian reforms was the abolition of "serfdom" on private estates, technically of *Erbuntertänigkeit*, or hereditary personal servitude. There were, however, many aspects to this, involving court jurisdiction, rights of movement and occupation, access to milling, and compulsory labor services. These last were not, however, an ancient institution but rather a modern one. The transformation of landed rule (*Grundherrschaft*) into manorial rule (*Gutsherrschaft*) in the sixteenth century had intensified the need for estate labor, and with it the significance of personal servitude. The burdens of labor service, which in England by the thirteenth century were being increasingly commuted into money payments, in Prussia had therefore become more intense during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as the demand from manorial estates for labor increased.¹⁸ By the early 1800s, hereditary personal servitude was already being dismantled on royal lands, and was approaching completion by 1807. As expressed in the 1799 decree dissolving labor services on royal lands in Pomerania, it was not enough that services be commuted into money or corn; the peasant must become a small independent landowner.¹⁹ When this arrangement was extended to private domain land, it was to render peasant

18. "The personal servitude of the peasants is thus the medium through which—for the lack of available workers—remaining peasants were compelled to work for the large capitalist manorial enterprises. . . . As we have seen, the beginnings of the capitalist enterprise lie not in the Middle Ages, but entirely in early modernity; but they lie further back than usually assumed, in the sixteenth and not in the eighteenth century; for English tenant farming had, just like our manorial estates, begun to develop in the sixteenth century." See Georg Friedrich Knapp, "Die Erbuntertänigkeit und die kapitalistische Wirtschaft," lecture in Dresden, January 3, 1891, in *Die Landarbeiter in Knechtschaft und Freiheit*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1909), 57, 62.

19. Georg Friedrich Knapp, *Die Bauernbefreiung und der Ursprung der Landarbeiter in den älteren Theilen Preußen*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1927), vol. 1, 96, 106.

property more accessible to taxation, since the peasant was no longer treated as a dependent of the manorial landowner.²⁰ When the edict abolishing personal servitude on private estates was promulgated on October 9, 1807, its title made it explicit that its purpose was to establish personal property in land, the better to be able to sell it. But there were many aspects to the process of Emancipation; not until 1810 did Hardenberg propose, for example, that the obligations of peasants to supply draught animals for use on estate land be abolished, along with a relaxation of the restriction of economic activity to a particular area. The express purpose of these and related measures was to sweeten the introduction of a series of new taxes. As it happened, the peasants got the new taxes but continued after all with the old impositions.²¹

As with the agrarian reforms, proposals to abolish the guilds and liberalize urban commerce were partial, contradictory, and chiefly motivated by the financial needs of the state. In a memorandum of September 11, 1807, from Altenstein to Hardenberg, it is stated that each individual should enjoy the "freest possible use of his personal powers, of his capital, of his hands and head," and that accordingly monopolies would be abolished and all guilds dissolved.²² Nonetheless, most craft occupations remained unchanged; where they decayed, this was caused by factors other than new legislation, and von Schön even went on to draft a defense of guilds as the basis for factory organization, arguing that guildmasters had long been doing what factories would be able to do on a large scale and so were best placed to bring this transition about.²³ Klein also notes a memorandum of December 31, 1810, from Königsberg city councillors that sought to suspend proposals for the liberalization of economic activity, arguing that it was incompatible with a monarchical and *ständisch* political order in which the con-

20. Ibid., 164.

21. Ernst Klein, *Von der Reform zur Restauration. Finanzpolitik und Reformgesetzgebung des preußischen Staatskanzlers Karl August von Hardenberg* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965), 31.

22. "Des Geh. Oberfinanzrats von Altenstein Denkschrift Über die Leitung des Preußischen Staats an S. des Herrn Staatsministers Freiherrn von Hardenberg," Riga, 11 September 1807, in Georg Winter, ed., *Die Reorganisation des Preussischen Staates unter Stein und Hardenberg*, pt. 1 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1931), 408, 409.

23. Gray, *Prussia in Transition*, 139–140.

cept of political citizenship was absent.²⁴ This argument for bourgeois constitutionalism was therefore raised against Reform proposals.

Klein is skeptical of the myths of "Reform," a skepticism that is not simply an attitude but is amply supported by archival sources and correspondence. He is very clear that the prime impetus for reform was the need to raise a large amount of money in the wake of military defeat, and he is able to demonstrate exactly how this imperative governed the drafting of measures, and the manner in which new rights were created and then undermined.

Whereas Gray deals with Stein, and thus largely with an early phase of memoranda and proposals, Klein deals exclusively with Hardenberg's efforts to convert legal and economic changes into cash. First and foremost, individual proposals were a response to both an internal and an external crisis: Prussia's existing money supply was barely sufficient to maintain internal trade, while substantial payments to France would make a difficult position impossible. Klein draws on unpublished drafts to demonstrate that Hardenberg had no particular plan other than devising a means of raising money that would antagonize the *Stände* as little as possible. Of course, any loans or taxes based on landed property would have to be raised by the *Stände* themselves, limiting the options available.

The first draft plan for the reform of state finances is dated March 5, 1809, in which Hardenberg outlines a scheme for a forced loan, a portion of which was credited to a national bank, then converted into bonds that could serve as a basis for the issue of paper money. This would solve the problem of internal money supply, while the other part of the forced loan would supply the cash needed to pay off the French *Kontribution*.²⁵ Since peasant land was to be included in this operation, a problem arose for their landlords, who would become responsible for peasant debt. The plans for freeing the peasantry from services in 1809 therefore originated in solving a problem for landowners and not primarily the peasantry. By contrast, the 1807 Riga Memorandum²⁶

24. Klein, *Von der Reform zur Restauration*, 109.

25. This plan for a bank is not Hardenberg's own but rather came from a paper by a Danzig merchant, Kabruhn, "Ideen eines Geschäftsmannes über die Staatsbedürfnisse und Geldmangel." See Klein, *Von der Reform zur Restauration*, 25–26.

26. Reprinted in Winter, *Reorganisation*, 302–363. See note 12, this chapter.

had been vague about the exact way in which peasants were to be emancipated; it was the financial problem that brought about proposals for mechanisms through which the peasants could become owners of their land. The 1809 Memorandum contains all the ideas that Hardenberg later proposed to the king as *Staatskanzler*: the foundation of a national bank based on landed property, the issue of paper money, and the imposition of a forced loan, although there is here no mention of an income tax.

Altenstein put forward his own financial plan in April 1810, Hardenberg savaged this and proposed his own plan at the end of May 1810, and this was in turn torn to pieces by Niebuhr almost a month later. Hardenberg's 1810 plan likewise proposed a national bank (modeled on the Bank of England) but based on a land tax, not directly on landed property. Hardenberg now no longer wanted the cash required for the *Kontribution* to be met from the forced loan, from which he could have expected 7 million taler, but from foreign loans of 8 million taler that domestic merchants and bankers wished to advance, provided this was covered within an agreed time by a matching cover from the state.

By contrast with the 1809 plan, Hardenberg no longer believed he could do without new taxes, and so he proposed an extension of the excise tax (*Akzise*)²⁷ to the countryside, the increase of rates on some articles, a stamp tax, and *Gewerbsteuer*, a form of business tax. The new taxes were therefore indirect taxes and not income taxes, since Hardenberg argued these would antagonize "public opinion," which, Niebuhr remarked, was no more than the interest of the land-owning nobility.²⁸ Linked to these measures was a proposal to call an assembly to explain the measures to the *Stände*, not to represent their views to the government.

Faced with concerted opposition, Hardenberg conceded that his May 1810 plan was unworkable, and in August the Tax Commission outlined a third plan, in which the speedy collection of money was emphasized. This governed the choice of measures: forced loans were

27. The *Akzise* was a tax on foodstuffs and other goods payable in towns, normally charged upon entry at the town gates.

28. Klein, *Von der Reform zur Restauration*, 28.

ruled out, and a *Klassensteuer* was proposed that would include non-propertied sections of the population. New taxes on consumption, luxury, and business, and a stamp duty, would, it was thought, raise twice the amount envisaged in earlier proposals. To sweeten the pill, Hardenberg proposed the abolition of a number of servitudes, the extension of the *Aksize*, the generalization of property rights, the abolition of *Patrimonialgerichtsbarkeit*,²⁹ and the creation of a consultative body for the nation. All of these measures were intended to grease the wheels of financial reform, as Hardenberg stated, "to render the burdens less noticeable, and so to appear as benevolent actions."³⁰ As it turned out, the final outcome was light on relief and heavy on new burdens.

The actual collection of taxes in the first four months of 1811 fell well below expectations, leading to a scaling back of the estimates and the introduction of new taxes, finally including an income tax in May 1812, which likewise failed to raise the expected amounts in turn led to further changes. By focusing squarely on the financial reforms, Klein clearly demonstrates the provisional manner in which reforms were drafted, revised, implemented, and then revised again, so that there was no clear thread running from conception to execution. The chief aim of all these reforms was to raise money; there were a variety of ways this could be done, varying the manner in which this or that social group was constituted and dealt with, but among whom the land-owning nobility retained a privileged position. Many of the landmark peasant reforms were a side effect of this financial imperative, and some of them were quickly negated by new burdens and obligations. Klein's related studies of commercial taxation and land reform show a similar picture: that the financial imperative that triggered the events known as the "Prussian Reforms" remained uppermost, and that many of the "liberal" measures associated with the Reforms were a side effect of this imperative and not part of a deliberate agenda of emancipation on the part of "Reformers." Only subsequently was the (mixed) outcome read backward into a story in which a "liberal initiative" foundered on the forces of reaction.

29. The authority of the estate owner to act as local magistrate.

30. Klein, *Von der Reform zur Restauration*, 31.

As a group, the Reformers are said to have been inspired by the example of England's commercial economy and specifically by the work of Adam Smith.³¹ In this sense, they are sometimes said to be liberals, although as far as England's commercial economy goes, these "liberal" ideas belonged more to the twelfth century than to the eighteenth. When in 1807 Stein raised the issue of representation in provincial assemblies as a counterweight to the bureaucracy, he advocated the participation of "all owners of significant property, so that they might be bound to the state with equal obligations and prerogatives."³² Gray records that Stein's personal copy of *Wealth of Nations* was "well-worn and profusely marked by the minister's own hand,"³³ but it is evident from Schön's own notes on Smith from Kraus's Königsberg lectures that his idea of what the book represented was very different from our own.³⁴

It also seems obvious that in some way, directly or indirectly, these reforms were a response to the French Revolution, but in fact the earlier phases of the Stein-Hardenberg reforms predate this particular counterconcept: those involved in the legislation do not usually make

31. Gray, *Prussia in Transition*, 56. "These young administrators were especially receptive to the new views of humanity and society which formed the basis of the liberal Weltanschauung. They idealized Great Britain and its society. They were schooled in Adam Smith's economic thought. As with Kant, the notion 'freedom' was central to their values, and they used the word in its new universal sense." On the following page, Gray writes of Stein and Hardenberg: "They admired the British system, and they criticized arbitrary and despotic government. Their ideal was a well-functioning government by Estates" (57). Later, she writes: "The two reformers in Riga [Hardenberg and Altenstein] were advocates of freedom in its new and universal sense. In application, they thought primarily of economic freedom which would benefit entrepreneurs. While calling for 'abolition of serfdom', Hardenberg did not think it necessary to destroy the institution of compulsory labor owed by peasants to landlords" (70).

32. "Des Ministers Freiherr vom Stein Denkschrift "Über die zweckmäßige Bildung der obersten und der Provinzial-Finanz und Polizeibehörden in der Preussischen Monarchie," Nassau, June 1807, in Winter, *Reorganisation*, 200.

33. Gray, *Prussia in Transition*, 57.

34. Schön's notes indicate that Kraus's discussion of Smith was mingled quite eclectically with contemporary German work, as his five-volume posthumously published *Staatswirtschaft* (1808–1812) suggests. See E. Kühn, *Der Staatswirtschaftslehrer Christian Jakob Kraus und seine Beziehungen zu Adam Smith* (Königsberg: R. Leopold, 1902). It is this eclecticism that makes it very difficult to determine exactly what Adam Smith represented to early nineteenth-century German readers.

use of the term “reform,” talking instead of “reorganization,” as reflected in the title of Winter’s collection of documents. The idea that “reform” was a means of forestalling revolution in a conservative sense—a means of preventing change—dates from some years later in regular use and so should not be used in that modern understanding for the events following the defeat of Prussia in 1806. Koselleck has argued that the French Revolution, while conceived by its contemporaries as a unique event—*einmalig sowie einzigartig*³⁵—also opened an unknown future of permanent transformation. It became a process concept that, while formally unitary, was open to quite variant definitions. Koselleck’s discussion of these variants opens up some important semantic oppositions, whose articulation belongs to a definite chronology that must be observed if we are not to be led astray by subsequent commentary and interpretation.

First among these counterconcepts was “evolution”: that the peaceful and rational organization of revolutionary change could be saved from the chaos into which the revolution quickly fell, while retaining the imperative for change. Koselleck cites Herder’s wish from 1792 for a “continuing, natural evolution of matters; no Revolution. Through the former, if proceeding unchecked, one can most safely forestall the latter.”³⁶ This was echoed in 1795 by Erhard, who suggested the possibility that constitutions would adapt themselves to different degrees of emancipation, preempting a genuine revolution: “In such a state there occurs through a wisely conducted evolution, what in other states occurs through revolution.”³⁷

This couple (revolution vs. evolution) was adopted by Kant in the *Streit der Facultäten*. Arguing that the French Revolution, even if it were to fail, was an event that demonstrated the possibility of human progress toward a better world, he suggested that the moral cause involved was composed of two elements: first, the unhindered right of every people to give themselves a civil constitution that they considered

35. Reinhart Koselleck, “Revolution IV.4,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, ed. O. Brunner, W. Conze, and R. Koselleck (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1984), vol. 5, 749.

36. Cited in Koselleck, “Revolution IV.4,” 749–750, from Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Ältere Niederschriften und ausgesonderte Stücke. Zweite Sammlung* (1792).

37. Cited in Koselleck, “Revolution IV.4,” 750, from Johann Benjamin Erhard, *Über das Recht des Volkes zu einer Revolution* (Jena: Christian Ernst Gabler, 1795).

right and just; and second, that such a right and just constitution would necessarily exclude wars of aggression and so would naturally be, at least in principle, a republican constitution. As a consequence, the absence of war would secure the prospect of “progress to the better.”³⁸ Taking up Erhard’s couple, Kant then argued that:

This is not a matter of a revolution, but (as Erhard states) of the evolution of a constitution founded upon natural law, which however wild struggle has not yet itself achieved—for internal and external war destroys all prevailing statutory order—but which however does lead to an aspiration for a constitution that cannot be warlike, that is, the republican constitution—whether this might be the state form, or only the manner of government, in that the state is administered by the unity of the head of state (a monarch) analogously to laws that the people would give themselves according to general legal principles.³⁹

Kant’s answer to his own question of how progress to the better was to be achieved was that it would come not upward from below but downward from above. Progress to the better would be achieved by the cultivation of moral beings, forming not only good citizens but citizens who strove for the Good. But if this movement were to come “from below,” it would founder on the belief that the cost of this cultural transformation, an educational process in the broadest sense, should be met by the state, while the state, preoccupied with the waging of war, had no resources to employ suitable teachers. By contrast, the entire machinery of cultivation (*Maschinenwesen dieser Bildung*) would lack all coherence if the state did not become involved and organize the education of its citizens on a considered plan, which in turn would mean that “the State would also from time to time reform itself, constantly moving towards the Better through evolution, not revolution.”⁴⁰

Hence progress would come about through the formulation of laws conforming to what the people would properly seek for themselves. As

38. Immanuel Kant, *Kants Werke, Bd. 7: Der Streit der Facultäten* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968), sec. 2.6, 85–86; H. S. Reiss, ed., *Kant’s Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 182.

39. Kant, *Streit der Facultäten*, sec. 2.7, 87–88; Reiss, *Kant’s Political Writings*, 184.

40. Kant, *Streit der Facultäten*, sec. 2.10, 92–93; Reiss, *Kant’s Political Writings*, 188–189.

elaborated in the *Metaphysik der Sitten*, it was only under laws that peace could be attained, securing the property of men living together in a rationally conceived social organization: "For what can be more metaphysically sublimated than this very idea [of universal and lasting peace] which . . . has the most proven objective reality. . . . The attempt to realise this idea should not be sought through revolution, in one bound, that is, through the violent overthrow of a previously existing flawed constitution . . . [it] must be sought and carried through by gradual reform according to definite principles, constantly approaching the highest political good, eternal peace."⁴¹

In his *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* article, Koselleck refers to this last usage, then makes a direct link to Hardenberg's 1807 Riga Memorandum,⁴² which talks not of evolution or reform but of "a revolution in the best sense, leading directly to the great goal of the improvement of humanity, through the wisdom of the government and not through violent impulse from within or from without—that is our goal, our guiding principle. Democratic principles in a monarchical government: this seems to me the most appropriate form of the present spirit. Pure democracy we will have to leave to 2440, if it is ever otherwise created for men."⁴³

Important here is that "revolution," "evolution," and "reform" could be used more or less synonymously. Around the turn of the century—between Kant and Hardenberg—"evolution" and "reform" differentiated between the two senses contained within the concept of "revolution" during the 1790s: as a naturally unfolding process (evolution) and as an organized event (reform). It was only subsequently that "revolution" came to imply a necessarily violent alteration of historical course. Revolution/evolution and revolution/reform, much less revolution/restoration, had not yet become counterconcepts. But importantly, by the time the Prussian Reforms had become the object of

41. Immanuel Kant, *Kants Werke, Bd. 6: Die Metaphysik der Sitten* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968), 355; Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 491–492.

42. Koselleck, "Revolution IV.4," 750.

43. "Des Ministers Freiherr von Hardenberg Denkschrift Über die Reorganisation des Preußischen Staats, verfaßt auf höchsten Befehl Sr. Majestät des Königs," Riga, 12 September 1807, in Winter, *Reorganisation*, 306.

historical commentary, much later in the nineteenth century, this understanding had indeed become irrevocably attached to the sense of “revolution,” such that “reform” became a peaceful avoidance of revolutionary change and not, as is clear in Kant, the true way in which progress toward eternal peace could be secured.

This point is obscured by Koselleck, since he does not strictly observe the relevant chronology. By the time the Prussian Reforms had run to their end, with the death of Hardenberg in 1822, Prussia had entered the *Restaurationszeit*; in fact, it could be suggested that the winding down of the reforms matched the chronology of the formulation of “revolution” as the counterconcept of restoration. Koselleck tends to draw quite indiscriminately on sources from the 1820s to the 1850s when discussing the emergence of our modern understanding of “revolution,”⁴⁴ but he does in passing cite a remark by Pölitz from 1823: “the majority, if not all, revolutions could have been avoided through timely reforms.”⁴⁵

Pölitz had emphasized that the source of any reform should be the legislature, not the mass of the people, from which he concluded that all reforms that had been initiated and effected “from below” were arbitrary and contrary to law.⁴⁶ Reforms could not therefore be confused with revolutions: “Reforms are initiated by lawful state power, with the aim of developing, rejuvenating and securing the inner life of the state; revolutions by contrast either disrupt lawful state power, or violently overthrow it. Reforms connect the better and new that has become necessary to the timeworn that had previously existed, they thus have a historical foundation; revolutions usually destroy the entire previously-existing foundation of the inner life of the state.”⁴⁷ Revolution now represented a threat to be avoided, not a misguided attempt to reach a goal that reform could better achieve and secure.

44. Koselleck, “Revolution IV.4,” 752–753. Starting with a quotation from Arnold Ruge in 1838, he moves quickly through to the 1848 National Assembly, and then to Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*, where he argues that “evolution” has ceased to be a counterconcept to “revolution” but is now the path of economic development leading necessarily to revolution.

45. Karl Heinrich Ludwig Pölitz, *Die Staatswissenschaften im Lichte unserer Zeit, Th. 1: Das Natur- und Völkerrecht, das Staats- und Staatenrecht, und die Staatskunst* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1823), 537.

46. *Ibid.*, 532.

47. *Ibid.*, 536.

Koselleck, however, looks forward to the 1848 Frankfurt Parliament rather than note that the relationship of revolution and reform as articulated in 1807 by Hardenberg has undergone a radical change.

At stake here is an understanding of "Reform" in the few years from the later 1790s to 1815, subsequent to which "restauration" and "reaction" became the order of the day and recast the distinctions that had hitherto existed. "Reform" had entered the German language from the French, being a *Fremdwort* that for much of the eighteenth century was linked to theological matters and hence to the idea of "reformation," illustrated by Spener and Franke writing of the "reformation of the Reformation," the process of renewal that they saw as the means for the realization of their ideals.⁴⁸ Not until the arrival of a new conception of "revolution" did "reform" take on a different alignment. This occurred earlier in Britain than in Germany; speaking in the House of Commons in 1790, Henry Flood declared, "I am no friend to revolutions [referring to 1688] because they are an evil: I am, therefore, a friend to timely reform, and for this reason, that it renders revolutions unnecessary."⁴⁹ But this usage is not reflected in Burke's contemporary *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, where he writes of the "science of constructing a commonwealth, or renovating it, or reforming it."⁵⁰ Burke's *Reflections* was translated into German and published in 1793, and while Gentz translated Burke's "All the reformations we have hitherto made"⁵¹ with "Reformen" rather than "Reformationen," it was the latter term that remained dominant in Germany during the mid-1790s.⁵²

Most importantly, the identification of events beginning in 1806 as the "Prussian Reforms" is a description invented much later, and not systematically used by contemporaries. "Reform" does occur in the 1810 Financial Edict,⁵³ but besides "regeneration" it was "reorganisation"

48. Eike Wolgast, "Reform, Reformation," in Brunner, Conze, and Koselleck, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 5, 332.

49. Cited in Wolgast, "Reform, Reformation," 342.

50. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 152.

51. *Ibid.*, 117.

52. Wolgast notes that Schlözer first presented a theoretical discussion of the concept of reform as a counterconcept to revolution in his 1793 *Statsrecht*, but like Kant's usage, this was not immediately widespread. See Wolgast, "Reform, Reformation," 343–344.

53. Referring to a "gänzliche Reform des Abgaben-Systems." See Wolgast, "Reform, Reformation," 345.

that was the most used term, Scharnhorst referring in 1809 to a “complete reorganisation of the army,” for example, and not to “reform” of the army.⁵⁴ The sense of “renewal” that was employed here was also detached from the past, unlike older (fifteenth and sixteenth century) usage of the term “reformation,” where there was an implicit idea of a return to a past, better state. Where the concept of “reform” was used, this was treated not as a general process but rather as something that was conducted with regard to specific problems—Hardenberg and Altenstein talked of reform of finances, in education, integration of Jews—in respect to specific areas of activity, not an all-encompassing idea.⁵⁵ Not until midcentury did the Prussian Reforms become an era, a distinct set of policies articulated by identifiable individuals, with Treitschke’s usage being generally adopted. And only after 1815 did German writers begin discussing reform in the sense of a counterconcept to revolution. Society was now in motion and undergoing progress, while political institutions were static. This created a basic tension that had to be eased through reform to keep it from leading to revolution. In this sense, Pölitz developed in *Die Staatswissenschaften im Lichte unserer Zeit* what he subsequently⁵⁶ called the “three political systems of recent times”—Reform, Revolution, and Reaction:

- Reform: gradual development and refinement and assistance extended to the government and administration of a state, serving to balance the abstraction of future expectations against the rigidified concretion of past privilege.
- Revolution: the violent reconstruction of the prior foundations of domestic state life and of the entire organism of the state.⁵⁷
- Reaction: the intentional hindering of progress of the better in the public life of state and people, and the destruction of the same, so as to set in its place that which was already superseded and corrupt.⁵⁸

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid., 346.

56. In Karl Heinrich Ludwig Pölitz, *Jahrbücher der Geschichte und Staatskunst* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1828), no. 1, January.

57. “Umbildung der bisherigen Grundlage des innern Staatslebens und der gesamten Staatsorganismus.” See Pölitz, *Staatswissenschaften*, pt. 1, 537.

58. “Absichtliches Hindern des Fortschritts des Bessrn im öffentlichen Volks- und Staatsleben and das Vernichten dasselben, um an dessen Stelle das

As Wolgast points out here, reaction is in this sense repristinization, reverting to the original meaning of *reformare*, except that in the meantime it is set in a new temporal frame in which this involves a deliberate turn against an anticipated future. Pölitz's conception of the "three political systems of recent times" was quickly adopted, and the debate that he sparked was reviewed in Friedrich Murhard's article in Rotteck and Welcker's *Lexicon*: "Reformen (politische)."⁵⁹

As already suggested, Koselleck's account of "Prussia between reform and revolution" is primarily oriented toward the manner in which the Prussian Reforms laid the groundwork for the events of 1848 and reflects a belief that the Stein-Hardenberg Reforms represented "an answer to the French Revolution."⁶⁰ However, he begins his account with the Prussian Code of 1794, suggesting that this provides an armature around which later socio-legal developments might be spun and hence suggesting a reading of the title of his book in terms of an option between reform and revolution rather than a chronology of the movement from the one to the other. While he never really developed the former approach, it remains true that consideration of the Prussian Code of 1794 does present a way into the language of the "Reforms" so that they can be viewed in terms of the political language that they mobilized rather than that into which they were later assimilated. Here this can only be outlined as a promising pathway, but a pathway worth identifying nonetheless.

In 1746, Friedrich II directed that "a German general legal code based simply on reason and the constitutions of our territories" be prepared, "so that a degree of law might be established in the land, and innumerable edicts abolished."⁶¹ This was therefore to be a body of law written in German and subordinate to provincial law but including Roman Law in the materials to be systematized. Friedrich went on in 1749 to draft a treatise that described the composition of a complete

bereits Veraltete und Untergegangene zu setzen." See Pölitz, *Staatswissenschaften*, pt. 1, 542.

59. Carl von Rotteck and Carl Welcker, eds., *Staats-Lexikon oder Encyclopädie der Staatswissenschaften* (Altona: Hammerich, 1842), vol. 13, 594–620—the discussion of Pölitz follows 604.

60. Koselleck, *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*, 12.

61. Hans Hattenhauer, "Einführung in die Geschichte des Preußischen Allgemeinen Landrechts," in Hans Hattenhauer, ed., *Allgemeines Landrecht für die preußischen Staaten von 1794*, 11–39.

Code of Law as “the masterpiece of human understanding in the sphere of *Regierungskunst*,” and this was quickly followed by Cocceji’s draft *Projekt des Corporis Juris Fridericiani*, bringing the existing Roman Law into a “natural order and proper system,” identifying the link between each element and the principles of reason on which it drew, deleting all detail and fictions inapplicable to the German state, and subordinating all statutes and legal arguments to certain law. This project was quickly overtaken by the Seven Years’ War, and it was only much later that Friedrich returned to the same aspiration.

However, during the 1750s, von Carmer,⁶² later Justizminister in Silesia, began regularizing and simplifying legal cases involving peasants and their lords, seeking also to render the courts more independent of the landowners, with the aim of shortening proceedings. An initial attempt to bring this to the attention of the king failed, but a particular example of legal chicanery in Küstrin during 1779 drew Friedrich’s attention to von Carmer’s efforts, and he was as a consequence appointed chancellor. Importantly, he took with him to Berlin his assistant Carl Gottlieb Svarez,⁶³ and one year later they were also joined from Breslau by Ernst Ferdinand Klein.⁶⁴ Svarez and Klein became members of the Berlin Mittwochsgesellschaft, a closed society limited to twenty members that met in the homes of its members. Three of Svarez’s presentations to the society survive, and they are all dedicated to the theme of the law and Enlightenment. Also surviving among his papers are the lectures he gave to the crown prince (later Friedrich Wilhelm III) during 1791 and 1792.

An order in April 1780 created the framework for the creation of a codified body of German law for Prussia, excluding thereby the

62. Johann Heinrich von Carmer (1721–1801) studied law in Halle and Jena (1739–1743) and entered Prussian service in 1749, becoming Regierungsrat in Oppeln in 1750 and Direktor in 1751. In 1763, he was made President der Regierung in Breslau, then in 1768 Justizminister and Supreme President of all Silesian Regierungen.

63. Carl Gottlieb Svarez (1746–1798) studied law in Frankfurt an der Oder (1762–1765), entered state service in Breslau, and died in Berlin.

64. Ernst Ferdinand Klein (1744–1810) studied law in Halle, where he claimed to have read Montesquieu. In private practice, he came to the attention of von Carmer and joined the Prussian state service. In 1791, he left Berlin to become director of the University of Halle.

Roman Law that had been part of Cocceji's project. Work on preparation of a code continued through the later 1780s, and this was finally published as the *Allgemeines Gesetzbuch* in 1791, intended to come into force on June 1, 1792. But opposition from Woellner and the *Stände* undermined this, so that the *Allgemeines Landrecht*, the revised version of the *Allgemeines Gesetzbuch*, was not published until 1794. This did initially remain subsidiary to local customs and observances, but in 1814 it was introduced with primary validity in all of the old Prussian territories except Cleves. It was not, however, applied to the new territories, while French Law remained in force in Neupommern and the Rhineland. But while the *Allgemeines Landrecht* codified an essentially *ständisch* society, henceforth *ständische* distinctions appeared to derive from the *Allgemeines Landrecht* rather than existing before it; privileges were no longer political rights owed to individuals by virtue of their rank but simply rights as established in the Code.⁶⁵

The Code opens with a definition of the person,⁶⁶ followed by a specification of personal rights, beginning with the "domestic society" of husband, wife, children, and servants, and defining *Stände* as follows:

Persons who, by virtue of birth, endowment or occupation enjoy the same rights in civil society constitute a social rank of the state.

Members of each *Stand* have, as such, taken individually, particular rights and duties. (pt. 1, sec. 1, paras. 6, 7)

The *Stände* were therefore subordinated to the state but enjoyed varying rights and duties as legal persons; hence there were no citizens, only members of the *Stände*, whose status and rights were circumscribed by law. The effect of this becomes obvious only in the second part. Having defined "societies" simply as unions of several members of the state for the pursuit of common ends (pt. 2, sec. 6, para. 1), this is

65. Gerd Kleinheyer, "Aspekte der Gleichheit in den Aufklärungskodifikationen und den Konstitutionen des Vormärz," *Der Staat* 19, no. 4 (1980): 9.

66. A legal personality, since a *Mensch* is a person insofar as he enjoys particular rights in civil society. See Hattenhauer, *Allgemeines Landrecht*, pt. 1, sec. 1, para. 1, 55 (henceforth cited in text as pt. 1, sec. 1, para. 1).

followed by a specification of the *Stände* and their separate elements, beginning with the *Bauernstand*:

The *Bauernstand* includes all those living in the countryside who are directly involved in cultivation and agriculture; to the extent that they are not excluded from this Stand by birth, office, or special rights. (pt. 2, sec. 7, para. 1)

Furthermore, for any kind of employment beyond agriculture, permission had to be sought. The granting of permission did not, however, alter "*Stand* and personal relationships" (pt. 2, sec. 7, para. 4). The peasant was responsible for the cultivation of his land; he could be compelled by the state to do so, and if any peasant persistently failed to do so, then the piece of land could simply be transferred to someone else. *Bauern* are simply assumed to be subjects (*Unterthanen*); it was not a question of how any one person could be defined as a subject, for here the *Allgemeines Landrecht* is completely silent. The question was rather who could own subjects:

Only the owners of knights' estates can as a rule have subjects; and exercise rule over them (*herrschaftliche Rechte über dergleichen ausüben*). (pt. 2, sec. 7, subsec. 3, para. 91)

Subjects in turn owed their lords "loyalty, respect, and obedience," services and dues. Nonetheless, beyond the estate to which they were linked, subjects were viewed "as free citizens of the state in their affairs and exchanges":

Hence the earlier relationship of personal servitude, a form of personal slavery, does not apply to the subject living in the countryside. (pt. 2, sec. 7, subsec. 4, para. 149)

They could acquire property and rights, and defend them in court if necessary. On the other hand, the very next paragraph states that:

They may not leave the estate to which they are attached without the approval of the landowner. (para. 150)

In return, this landowner could not sell or exchange them with a third party against their will.

The eighth section concerns the *Bürgerstand*, defined as anyone not belonging to the nobility or the peasantry. This is an exceptionally long and involved section,⁶⁷ covering all aspects of urban economic activity and listing all kinds of occupations, together with their associated rights and duties.⁶⁸ The very length of this section is suggestive of the *Polizeiordnungen* of the mid-eighteenth century, which, in their ambition to be comprehensive, sought to capture all possible aspects of economic life in their regulations. Indeed, the examples cited here convey, in startling clarity, how far the Prussian bureaucracy was detached from arguments about liberty and equality not only in France but also in Britain and the United States. The *Allgemeines Gesetzbuch* of 1791 had treated the household as the basic element of civil society. As modified in 1794, the *Allgemeines Landrecht* has a section on Marriage and Family Law, although, as we have seen, the household was still defined as a community of husband and wife, children, and servants.

On the other hand, the *Allgemeines Landrecht* did not define *Einwohner*, *Mitglied*, *Untertan*, or even *Bürger des Staats*. It was only in the course of the Reforms that these were defined, related to breaches in *ständisch* and regional rights made in three key areas: the army (in 1808, general conscription was addressed not to subjects of the king but subjects of the state); administration (the separation of the judiciary and administration and the abolition of *Patrimonialgerichtbarkeit*), and the economy. Together with *ständisch* occupational restrictions, personal servitude was removed, although *ständisch* privileges remained. Read against the provisions of the *Allgemeines Landrecht*, however, one should perhaps hesitate to treat Stein and Hardenberg as avatars of liberalism.

Marion Gray suggests that if Stein had in fact remained in office long enough to see his efforts through to completion, post-Reform

67. There are 2,464 paragraphs in this section, followed by a section on the nobility, defining the manner in which a person acquired the status, and the obligations associated with the status.

68. For example, "Apothecaries have the exclusive right to prepare and dispense medicines and poison" (para. 456); "Whoever has trade in goods or exchange as their prime occupation is called a merchant" (para. 475).

Prussia would have looked very much the way it actually turned out, in part because the short-term decisions made by Stein and his colleagues undermined what is usually taken as their long-term strategy.⁶⁹ The larger point that can be made here is that the real novelty of the "Prussian Reforms" lies in the clarity with which they articulate a new *modus operandi*, of reformism as state policy, as part of the internal struggles of a state apparatus. First, a group of insiders argues forcefully that institutional change is necessary given the disarray in contemporary conditions; second, they formulate new arrangements into an agenda that proposes particular remedies; third, they seek to implement their agenda by forming alliances with some of the actors involved, since no significant change in the allocation of power and resources is ever going to make headway against generalized opposition; and fourth, a new configuration of power and resources results, the provisional and contingent character of which itself prepares the way for further waves of "reform." "Reform" thus becomes an unending political process, in part because in selecting targets and forming alliances "reformers" attach themselves to changes that are in any case already happening; this is after all the only certain guarantee of "success." "Success" and "failure" therefore become rhetorical figures: a reform is "successful" if the language of reform can be validated by an outcome whose conditions were already present; it is "unsuccessful" if for some reason these conditions either are misunderstood or remain unfulfilled. Reformers present themselves as embattled innovators; they succeed precisely because they give expression to changes that would in all likelihood happen sooner or later; and their language makes sense of these changes, such that the "success" of any given "reform" is largely the outcome of the fit between language and circumstance.

69. Gray, *Prussia in Transition*, 12.

6

Liberty, Autonomy, and Republican Historiography

Civic Humanism in Context

MICHAEL SONENSCHER

La liberté est généralement comprise d'une manière négative, comme l'absence de contrainte; mais ce n'est là qu'une face subordonnée; l'homme est vraiment libre quand, affranchi des impulsions partielles qui l'entraîneraient et lui feraient perdre son équilibre, il sait tout dominer et maîtriser par sa force centrale, en se guidant dans ses actions d'après le principe unique du bien. Alors il acquiert la détermination propre, l'autonomie dans ses actes; c'est réellement *lui* qui agit, c'est son moi supérieur, élevé par le principe du bien à sa plus haute puissance, qui juge avec calme, sans être préoccupé d'une vue exclusive ou d'un intérêt égoïste, en choisissant ce qui est le plus conforme à l'ensemble des rapports auxquels l'action s'applique.¹

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1. The epigraph is from Heinrich Ahrens, *Cours de droit naturel, ou de philosophie du droit, fait d'après l'état actuel de cette science en Allemagne* [1838], 6th ed. (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1868), 117: "Liberty is generally understood in negative fashion, as the absence of constraint. But this is simply a minor aspect of the concept. Man is truly free when, once emancipated from partial impulses which might constrain or make him lose his balance, he can dominate and master things by the use of his own central powers and can guide his own actions according to the one principle of the good. Then, he has a capacity for self-determination and for autonomy in his actions. It is really *he* who acts. It is his higher self, lifted to its highest power by the principle of the good, which judges calmly, with no partiality or

*I Hannah Arendt, Hans Baron, and the
Atlantic Republican Tradition*

The last quarter of the twentieth century saw the publication of a number of influential studies of republican thought and republican politics both as they had been conceived in the past and as they were intended to be conceived in the future. Although it had several precursors (and one of the aims of this chapter is to suggest that it actually had several more), the starting point of this republican revival was the appearance in 1975 of J. G. A. Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment*.² As its subtitle—*Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*—indicated more fully, Pocock's book was designed to reconstruct a body of political thought that he called variously "civic humanism," "civic republicanism," or, more capaciously, "the civic tradition" as it was transmitted from fifteenth-century Florence to eighteenth-century America. In this compound concept, the adjective carried as much weight as the noun. Together, they referred to a loosely egalitarian set of economic arrangements, a relatively open array of political institutions, a high level of individual political motivation, and a common capacity for collective action, which, once joined together in both theory and practice, produced the unusual synthesis of morality, citizenship, and liberty that was involved in making the idea of a government of laws, not men, a synonym for the concept of a republic. Although, according to Pocock, this way of thinking about politics had

egoistical interest, in choosing what conforms most to the totality of relationships to which an action applies."

2. J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975; 2nd ed., 2003). For a fascinating examination of the process of its gestation, see the "Introduction" by Richard Whatmore to the third edition, published in Princeton Classics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), vii–xxii. Henceforth, references to the first or second editions will be abbreviated as Pocock, *MM1* or Pocock, *MM2*. Despite substantial differences in range and depth, two of the most significant precursors were Zera S. Fink, *The Classical Republicans: An Essay in the Recovery of a Pattern of Thought in Seventeenth-Century England* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1945), and Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958). On civic republicanism as an alternative to natural jurisprudence, see Jean-Fabien Spitz, "Locke et *praeterea nihil*? La réception du révisionnisme républicain," *Les Cahiers de Philosophie* 18 (1994–1995): 213–243.

its origins in the thought of Aristotle in Athens and Polybius in Rome, it was given its most elaborate and conceptually sophisticated expression in the political thought of Niccolò Machiavelli, James Harrington, and the several generations of largely British, but also American, political theorists who, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, came to be known as Old Whigs or Commonwealthmen. In this guise, civic republicanism amounted to a long-forgotten alternative both to the rights-based or utility-oriented theories of politics associated with the works of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Bentham and to the critical political theories of Kant, Hegel, and Marx. Civic humanism cut across these ideological silos and, at the same time, appeared to offer a level of analytical and historical purchase on the relationship between ideas and contexts that was not usually available in the then prevailing versions of the history and historiography of political thought. On Pocock's terms, the Atlantic republican tradition had as much to do with property, money, agriculture, and trade as with mixed government, constitutional provisions, legal entitlements, and the separation of powers. But, unlike many of the causal claims found in more conventional twentieth-century historiography, the interplay between the various components of this type of political language was usually intentional and multidirectional, because in this tradition this was how politics was understood. This concern with agency, Pocock emphasized, was one reason why the subjects of virtue, choice, and civic responsibility loomed so large in republican political thought. In this rendition of civic humanism as a combination of the real and the ideal, or the physical and the moral, the concept seemed to supply a link between history and the history of political thought, and in non-historicist, non-positivist, non-teleological ways.

This chapter has several aims. The most immediate is to try to show that civic humanism, the civic tradition, and civic republicanism were, in reality, new names for what was once called autonomy. It is important to emphasize, however, that both the change of nomenclature and the attendant shift of historical focus are not designed to invalidate the other set of names.³ Instead, they are designed to add to

3. In this sense, bringing the concept of autonomy into the historical picture throws a different (but concurrent) light on the putative emergence of liberalism from

and develop the range of subjects that, in Pocock's wake, have been shown to have a bearing on the history and historiography of both the civic tradition and the broader history of political thought. Setting autonomy alongside the civic tradition also helps to throw new light on the parallel discussion of individualism and communitarianism that developed after the publication of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* in 1971. It is well known that Rawls attributed some of the philosophical foundations of his book to the thought of Immanuel Kant.⁴ It is less obvious that something like the same intellectual genealogy also applies to the Atlantic republican tradition. Somewhat surprisingly, it seems to follow that both Rawlsian rights-based—or individualistic—political theories and non-Rawlsian republican—or communitarian—political theories had common intellectual origins. Reconstructing the story of their convergence and divergence would probably add up to a book. Here, the initial point of this chapter is simply to supply the missing historical context in which the concepts of civic humanism, the civic tradition, and civic republicanism were first given their content and shape.

This context had little in the first instance to do either with fifteenth-century Florence or with seventeenth-century England and more instead to do with late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Germany and Switzerland and, more specifically, with the political thought of the men and women associated with what, between 1789 and 1815, came to be labeled romanticism, idealism, or, sometimes, liberalism. The labels themselves are not particularly important. Here, they can be taken simply as markers of a type of late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century political theory in which the concept of autonomy was associated with a historical vision centered primarily on the subjects of state formation and state building but also on the assortment of political, military, economic, institutional, financial, moral, or aesthetic preconditions that these subjects seemed to require.

republicanism described in Andreas Kalyvas and Ira Katznelson, *Liberal Beginnings: Making a Republic for the Moderns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

4. For this characterization, see, famously, Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self," *Political Theory* 12 (1984): 81–96, reprinted in Shlomo Avineri and Avner de-Shalit, eds., *Communitarianism and Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 12–28.

All these topics and subtopics were often grouped together at that time under the broader rubric of *civilization* or *Bildung*, indicating a process of progressive development that was taken to be particularly pertinent to the moral and political possibilities of the present.⁵ It is important to emphasize at the outset, however, that the idea of progressive development did not refer to something linear. It referred instead to the more problematic subject of the ancients and the moderns and, more specifically, to the question of why both the theory and, possibly, the practice of autonomy were, apparently, peculiar to the moderns. In this context, the concept of autonomy was designed to build on what was living—and jettison what was dead—in the multiple intellectual legacies that Europe had inherited both from two hundred years of state building and from the more immediate events of the French Revolution. Here, the key initial figures in these conceptual developments were Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant. For Rousseau, the subject of political right was a “great and useless science,” while for Kant the leading exponents of modern natural jurisprudence were simply “sorry comforters.”⁶ In what emerged from their combined intellectual legacies, the concept of autonomy was to the natural jurisprudence of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries what the concept of civic humanism would become to the liberalism or Marxism of the twentieth century. It was, in the first instance, used critically. But it was also used in ways that were oriented toward the present, not the past. Just as, according to the most eloquent author of the republican revival, Quentin Skinner, there was once liberty before liberalism, so in the earlier iteration there were once citizens before states, particularly in the representative and sovereign senses of the term.⁷ In both cases, the claim was designed to revive a previously

5. On the concept of civilization, see R. A. Lochoire, *History of the Idea of Civilization in France: 1830–1870* (Bonn: Röhrscheid, 1935), and, more recently, Bertrand Binoche, ed., *Les équivoques de la civilisation* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2005).

6. On these assessments, see Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 209. Although he did not present it in this way, Tuck’s book could be described as the best existing historical account of the origins of the concept of autonomy.

7. Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). See also Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty*

forgotten moral and political tradition and, by doing so, to modify or correct a hitherto unchallenged, but currently questionable, set of political priorities and expectations.

Substituting autonomy for republican concepts of liberty not only helps to supply the missing historical context in which the concept of civic humanism initially took shape but also helps to clarify, mainly historically but also analytically, several of the conceptual resources on which republican historiography has usually relied. The first is a distinctive concept of liberty and a strong emphasis on the merits of certain types of mixed or balanced government as the means to maintain the more altruistic implications of this way of thinking about liberty. The second is an equally distinctive concept of personality.⁸ The third, however, is a rather more nebulous concept of the type of social and institutional setting required to enable liberty and personality to flourish. Here, substituting the concept of autonomy for the concept of civic humanism helps to make it clear that the setting in question was likely to be federal in character and that the underlying source of its internal unity and integration was as likely to be fiscal as it was moral. As will be shown, the point was made particularly powerfully by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, first in his *Social Contract* and then in the description of a federal system of government that formed the core of his posthumously published *Considerations on the Government of Poland*. After Rousseau, a federal system not only seemed able to combine the small size and face-to-face politics of a republic with the scale and scope of a state but also seemed to offer a number of ways of

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For a helpful discussion of the concept of neo-Roman liberty, see Clifford Ando, "A Dwelling beyond Violence: On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Contemporary Republicans," *History of Political Thought* 31 (2010): 183–220.

8. On liberty, see, classically, Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" [1958], reprinted in Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 166–217, and, by contrast, Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). For recent ways into the subject of the self, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Udo Thiele, *The Early Modern Subject: Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity from Descartes to Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

thinking about the relationship between economics and politics that were not readily available in established theories of more unitary political states, whether royal or republican. Reassigning the concepts of liberty, personality, and a political federation to the original early nineteenth-century context in which these concepts first acquired their distinctive content and shape not only makes it easier to capture rather more of the conceptual core of the civic tradition than is available from even the most sophisticated amalgamations of the thought of Aristotle, Polybius, Machiavelli, and Harrington but also helps to throw more light on the relationship between the republican tradition and the various types of historical (or proto-historicist) speculation that began with Montesquieu and Rousseau, continued in Scotland with Hume and Smith, were developed further in Germany with Kant, Schiller, Fichte, and Hegel, and came to a kind of climacteric in the early nineteenth-century discussions of ancient and modern liberty now associated with the thought of Benjamin Constant and Germaine de Staël.⁹ From this perspective, many of the key concepts associated with the Atlantic republican tradition were actually established on the European mainland before and after the French Revolution. In this sense, the American founding was more of a beginning than an ending, because the real intellectual history of the civic tradition, both in Europe and in the United States, unfolded over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Pocock himself provided several indications of the intellectual origins of his approach to civic humanism. One of the clearest, but also one of the least discussed, was the thought of Hannah Arendt.¹⁰ "In terms borrowed from or suggested by the language of Hannah Arendt," he wrote in the first edition of *The Machiavellian Moment*, "this book has told part of the story of the revival in the early modern West of the ancient idea of *homo politicus* (the *zoon politikon* of Aristotle), who affirms his being and his virtue by the medium of political action, whose closest kinsman is *homo rhetor* and whose antithesis is the

9. For an initial way in, see Biancamaria Fontana, ed., *The Invention of the Modern Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

10. See, however, Mira L. Siegelberg, "Things Fall Apart: J. G. A. Pocock, Hannah Arendt, and the Politics of Time," *Modern Intellectual History* 10 (2013): 109–134.

homo credens of Christian faith." As Pocock put it in a further elaboration:

Following this debate into the beginnings of modern historicist sociology, we have been led to study the complex eighteenth-century controversy between *homo politicus* and *homo mercator*, whom we saw to be an offshoot and not a progenitor—at least as regards the history of social perception—of *homo creditor*. The latter figure was defined and to a large degree discredited by his failure to meet the standards set by *homo politicus*, and eighteenth-century attempts to construct a bourgeois ideology contended none too successfully with the primacy already enjoyed by a civic ideology; even in America a liberal work ethic has historically suffered from the guilt imposed on it by its inability to define for itself a virtue that saves itself from corruption; the descent from Daniel Boone to Willy Loman is seen as steady and uninterrupted. But one figure from the Arendtian gallery is missing, curiously enough, from the history even of the American work ethic: the *homo faber* of the European idealist and socialist traditions, who served to bridge the gap between the myths of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. It is not yet as clear as it might be how the emergence of this figure is related to the European debate between virtue and commerce; but because industrial labor in America conquered a wilderness rather than transforming an ancient agrarian landscape, *homo faber* in this continent is seen as conquering space rather than transforming history, and the American work force has been even less willing than the European to see itself as a true proletariat. The ethos of historicist socialism has consequently been an importation of transplanted intellectuals (even the martyr Joe Hill left word that he 'had lived as an artist and would die as an artist'), and has remained in many ways subject to the messianic populisms of the westward movement.¹¹

Behind the ornate typology—*homo politicus*, *homo rhetor*, *homo credens*, *homo mercator*, *homo creditor*, *homo faber*—and its bearing on European politics and American exceptionalism lay a distinct, but also quite well known, philosophy of history that, Pocock also indicated, was an adaptation of Arendt's moral and political thought. Its prime

11. Pocock, *MMI*, 550–551.

concern was with the divided character of modern humanity not only among nations, states, or cultures but, more poisonously, among the multiple obligations imposed on modern individuality, along with their equally poisonous twentieth-century outcomes. As Pocock explained in the second (2003) edition of *The Machiavellian Moment*, he had been “preoccupied as a historian with the dialogue between ancient and modern liberty,” and, he continued, this meant that it was “unsurprising that the recent political philosopher whose work has the greatest resonance for me should be the late Hannah Arendt.” This, he wrote, was why they had both written accounts of what he described as “the history of a phenomenon” that had occurred in the eighteenth century, when, as Arendt had put it in her most influential book, *The Human Condition*, in 1958, “the social rose up against the political, and the image of human action was replaced by that of human behavior.” For Pocock, this meant that the analytical core of *The Machiavellian Moment* was an examination of what, historically, had been involved in this switch from an “image of human action” to an image of “human behavior.” “This formula,” he commented, “is deeply illuminating,” although, he added, it did not mean “as Harvey Mansfield, a Straussian for whom history is subservient to philosophy, has wrongly supposed—that I have selected Arendt’s as a philosophy whose work I may convert into history; the life of the mind is neither as simple nor as muddled as that.”¹² As Pocock repeatedly stated, his concern was with the history of political languages and not, as was the case with both the Straussians and Hannah Arendt, the history of political philosophy.

Pocock’s description of the analytical core of *The Machiavellian Moment* as an adaptation of what Arendt had called a switch from an image of action to an image of behavior was put more directly by Arendt herself in *The Human Condition*. The subject of her book, she wrote, was simply what Aristotle had called a political way of life or, she explained, “an autonomous and authentically human way of life,” because, in contradistinction to the activities associated with labor or

12. Pocock, *MM2*, 573. For further echoes of Arendt, see J. G. A. Pocock, “Between Machiavelli and Hume: Gibbon as Civic Humanist and Philosophical Historian,” *Daedalus* 105 (1976): 153–169 (especially the characterizations of Rousseau on 155 and 156).

work, it was “independent of human needs or wants.”¹³ Unlike labor or work, a political way of life, in this interpretation, was one that was freely chosen. And, as Arendt went to some lengths to explain, it could be freely chosen not primarily because of the relative absence of externally generated constraints but also, or mainly, because of the *presence* of a type of individual personality that made a choice a deliberate act. Ancient slavery might have had something to do with the idea of a political way of life, but slavery itself was not peculiar to ancient Athens in anything like the sense that, according to Arendt, a political way of life had been. Autonomy, or what Arendt called “an authentically human way of life,” presupposed a capacity to choose, not merely an opportunity to choose.¹⁴ On her terms, this was why autonomy was not simply freedom, or even liberty, but something that could be associated with “an image of human action.” Here, the image mattered as much as the action. The key to the concept of autonomy was that the image preceded the action, so that the starting point of the action came from within or, as Arendt put it, came independently of human needs or wants. This was the concept of liberty that was grafted onto the idea of a civic tradition. Liberty construed as autonomy had a self-conscious or reflexive dimension that was not visible in other conceptions of liberty. It meant that politics had to go hand in hand with the imagination because it was the imagination that, under certain conditions, was the motivating force of political life. Modern politics, from this perspective, started with the self.

Arendt’s conceptual vocabulary allowed Pocock to integrate the concept of civic humanism, a concept that had been coined by the great historian of Renaissance Florence Hans Baron, into a broader narrative centered on the idea of a republic as the locus of a distinctive combination of citizenship and autonomy. Here, it was the civic quality that

13. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* [1958], 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 13. On some of the analytical and practical difficulties involved in the claim (but not with reference to Arendt), see Hallvard Lillehammer, “Moral Testimony, Moral Virtue and the Value of Autonomy,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 88 (2014): 111–127.

14. For a more analytical discussion of the subject and a more critical evaluation of the concept of autonomy, see Raymond Geuss and Martin Hollis, “Freedom as an Ideal,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 69 (1995): 87–112.

turned both the word and the concept of a republic into something more than a simple English translation of the Latin *res publica*, or its various French, Italian, or German equivalents.¹⁵ As Pocock later indicated, Baron's intellectual formation was quite similar to Arendt's. He was, Pocock wrote, "among the last great exponents of the German historical school, for whom history was the movement towards the freedom of the individual in the life of the state." This meant, as with Arendt, that freedom was virtually synonymous with autonomy and, as Pocock later put it, that this version of freedom presupposed "a move into history, itself defined as the self-determining existence of states and their citizens in secular time."¹⁶ On this premise, civic humanism was Baron's version of autonomy, but one that seemed to entail a closer relationship between states and their citizens than the original concept of autonomy had implied. It was this relationship that helped to add a more strongly republican hue to the equivalence between autonomy and civic humanism. Republics, Pocock argued, did not fit into the various theological and legal cultures—or their attendant idioms of political legitimation—that had developed in Europe after the fall of the Roman empire. This meant that the old Christian or Stoic concepts of natural law had no real purchase on what made a republic distinctively republican. Unlike a monarchy or an empire, Pocock claimed, a republic like Florence "was not timeless, because it did not reflect by simple correspondence the eternal order of nature; it was differently organized and a mind which accepted republics and citizenship

15. In this sense, the notion of a republic implied by this concept was less generic than the one used in David Wootton, "The True Origins of Republicanism: The Disciples of Baron and the Counter-example of Venturi," in *Il repubblicanesimo moderno: l'idea de Repubblica nella riflessione storica di Franco Venturi*, ed. Manuela Albertone (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2006), 271–304. The best examination of Baron's thought can now be found in Martin A. Ruehl, *The Italian Renaissance in the German Historical Imagination, 1860–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 34–37, 49–51, 224–252, 254–260. For related discussions, see Rocco Rubini, *The Other Renaissance: Italian Humanism between Hegel and Heidegger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 272–285; and David Weinstein and Avihu Zakai, *Jewish Exiles and European Thought in the Shadow of the Third Reich: Baron, Popper, Strauss, Auerbach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

16. J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999–2015), vol. 3, *The First Decline and Fall*, 154. It is important, however, to note Pocock's own reservations about Baron's thesis at 179–180. I am grateful to Tom Pye of King's College, Cambridge, for pointing me toward them.

as prime realities might be committed to implicitly separating the political from the natural order." Politics, in a republic, took their legitimation from the republic, not from nature, God, or any other putatively timeless entity. This, Pocock wrote, in a passage as redolent of Arendt as of Baron, meant that a republic, or in this case the Florentine republic, "was more political than it was hierarchical; it was so organized as to assert its sovereignty and autonomy, and therefore its individuality and particularity."¹⁷ Republican civic life, as a result, was grounded on a level of historicity that, in this late medieval setting, was simply unavailable elsewhere. From this perspective, Baron's account of the Florentine republic's struggle for survival in *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* not only provided an elegantly economical account of how historicity, civic humanism, and republicanism came to be connected but also supplied an explanation of how the component parts of a distinctively republican language of politics, with its concerns with citizenship, virtue, and patriotism, were able to travel from Florence to England and then, at the end of the eighteenth century, to the United States of America.¹⁸ Florence was not simply a republic; it was a republic that had been forced to rely on a mixture of civic commitment and military prowess to maintain its political and territorial integrity. These were the ingredients that became the key components of a tradition that came to span centuries and continents. As Pocock put it in *The Machiavellian Moment*, again in language redolent of Arendt, "Montesquieu could reiterate Machiavelli's acknowledgement that civic virtue was self-contained and secular, identical neither with the Christian communion, nor with a social morality founded on purely Christian values. But as the citizen became less like the saint, his civic personality required a *virtù* less like his soul's capacity for redemption and more like the autonomy of Aristotle's megalopsychic man or—in the period that concerns us—the *amour de soi-même* of Rousseau; and this morality required a foundation less spiritual and

17. Pocock, *MMI*, 53.

18. Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955).

more social and even material."¹⁹ Ultimately, the foundations of this type of civic personality consisted of arms, land, and inheritance.

*II Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi and the Early
Nineteenth-Century Origins of Civic Humanism*

Baron himself identified a number of precursors of the concept of civic humanism. He did so most fully in an essay published in 1960, five years after the appearance of *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*. Interestingly, it was entitled "The Limits of the Notion of 'Renaissance Individualism': Burckhardt after a Century" and was designed to show why, in his *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Burckhardt had been entirely indifferent to anything remotely like civic humanism. Since, according to Baron, Burckhardt "judged life and culture from the position of individualistic, nineteenth-century liberalism," he had failed to grasp "that delicate balance between unusual stimulation and unusual violation of individual privacy typical of civic life in city-state societies."²⁰ Put crudely, individualistic, nineteenth-century liberalism ruled out the concept of civic humanism. But, according to Baron, many of its ingredients had been as available to Burckhardt as they had been to himself. They were to be found, he wrote, firstly in Adam Ferguson's *History of Civil Society* of 1767; secondly in Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi's multi-volume *Histoire des républiques italiennes du moyen âge*, which was first published between 1809 and 1819; and finally in Paolo Emiliani Giudici's *Storia delle belle lettere in Italia* of 1844.²¹ Together, Baron

19. Pocock, *MM1*, 463. As Pocock put it earlier in an Arendtian paraphrase of Machiavelli, "success was a function of *virtù* and *virtù* was a matter of the autonomy of personalities mobilized for the public good." See Pocock, *MM2*, 213.

20. Hans Baron, "The Limits of the Notion of 'Renaissance Individualism': Burckhardt after a Century" [1960], reprinted in Hans Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism: Essays on the Transition from Medieval to Modern Thought*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), vol. 2, 173. Burckhardt, in Baron's rendition, was what Hobbes, in later renditions, would become to republican liberty.

21. Baron, "The Limits," 168–170. Sismondi also appears briefly, but purely illustratively, in Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 1:23.

claimed, they amounted to a prehistory of civic humanism, which Burckhardt had chosen to ignore.

The second book was the most significant of the three because it formed a bridge between Ferguson's concern with modern political stability and Giudici's later concern with modern political culture. More explicitly than the others, its concern was with the subject of ancient and modern liberty, the subject that formed the context, and supplied the problem, in which the modern concept of autonomy took shape. Although, according to Baron, neither Ferguson nor Sismondi supplied anything more than "the seeds of an interpretation that intimately connects psychological and intellectual change with a citizen's political life" and Sismondi himself had "condemned the Quattrocento as the period of tyrants too passionately to search for any survival of *liberté politique* after the fourteenth century," Sismondi's aims were, in reality, quite similar to those that Baron would adopt over a century later (interestingly, Frederick C. Lane, another great historian of Renaissance Italy, made the same use of Sismondi's history and also coupled it with the thought of Hannah Arendt in an article published in 1966).²² Just as the concept of civic humanism was designed to indicate a forgotten third way between the several versions of twentieth-century liberalism and socialism, so the earlier idea of autonomy was a deliberate alternative to the various versions of natural jurisprudence to be found in the late eighteenth century and, in particular, to the sharp divergences within them over the now largely forgotten subject of sociability.²³ The concept of autonomy helped to push the questions of

22. Baron, "The Limits of the Notion of 'Renaissance Individualism,'" 170, and n13. On Lane, Sismondi, and Arendt, see Frederick C. Lane, "At the Roots of Republicanism," *American Historical Review* 71 (1966): 403–420 (specifically 411, n21). On Ferguson and his rather different political concerns, see Iain McDaniel, *Adam Ferguson in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Roman Past and Europe's Future* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Iain McDaniel, "Philosophical History and the Science of Man in Scotland: Adam Ferguson's Response to Rousseau," *Modern Intellectual History* 10 (2013): 543–568.

23. On the later search for a third way, see Quentin Skinner, "The Empirical Theorists of Democracy and Their Critics: A Plague on Both Their Houses," *Political Theory* 1 (1973): 287–306. For Pocock's own version of the same idea, see J. G. A. Pocock, "Between Gog and Magog: The Republican Thesis and the Ideologia Americana," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48 (1987): 325–346. For a more skeptical approach to the same line of thought, see John Dunn, *Western Political Theory in*

whether sociability was natural or artificial, and whether its underlying motivation was fundamentally self-centered or altruistic, largely off the theoretical map. Autonomy was individualistic but was not necessarily selfish; it highlighted human dignity but also made rather less of human benevolence. Until then, the word “autonomy” itself had been used mainly as an adjective, to refer, for example, to the condition of a province, municipality, or corporation that belonged to something external, like a state, a kingdom, or an empire, but was still entitled to govern itself. Something autonomous was, in short, free but not sovereign. The concept began to be used to refer to what Arendt would later call “an autonomous and authentically human way of life” in the two generations spanning the period between the publication of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile* and Benjamin Constant’s famous public lecture on ancient and modern liberty in 1819. As is well known, this semantic shift was largely the work of Immanuel Kant, and, since it involved a shift of emphasis from a condition to a capacity, it presupposed an interest in the self, or a concept of personality, that would become one of the hallmarks of German idealist philosophy.

In contradistinction to Arendt’s later usage, Kant carried over many of the original connotations of the concept of autonomy from its initial association with a condition to its later association with a capacity.²⁴ In Kant’s usage, autonomy entailed being free but did not have to entail being sovereign. The central feature of his version of the concept was the idea of the self as both the subject and object of an act. It was this idea that was the basis of the difference between what Kant

the Face of the Future (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), and, more recently, John Dunn, *Setting the People Free: The Story of Democracy* (London: Atlantic, 2005). On sociability, see particularly Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2005), 39–45, 159–184.

24. On autonomy, see Jerome B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Natalie Brender and Larry Krasnof, eds., *New Essays in the History of Autonomy: A Collection Honouring J. B. Schneewind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Ben Colburn, *Autonomy and Liberalism* (London: Routledge, 2010); Piero Aimò, Elisabetta Colombo, and Fabio Rugge, eds., *Autonomia, forme di governo e democrazia nell’eta moderna e contemporanea* (Pavia: Pavia University Press, 2014). On Kant’s usage, see Charles Larmore, “Kant and the Meanings of Autonomy,” *International Yearbook of German Idealism* 9 (2011): 3–21.

was also the first to call “negative” and “positive” liberty.²⁵ “The will,” he wrote in his *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* of 1785, “is a kind of causality belonging to living beings insofar as they are rational, and *freedom* would be the property of this type of causality for it to be efficient, independently of any foreign causes *determining* it.” It was, in other words, a type of freedom that was independent of any external causal agency and was therefore “negative” because, Kant explained, defined in this way, it did not supply any “insight into its essence.” But, he continued, it still pointed toward a “richer and more fruitful” concept of freedom that was instead “positive.” This type of freedom not only involved being independent of the laws of physical necessity (negative liberty) but was also the cause of its own effects. “What else,” Kant wrote, “can freedom of the will be but autonomy, that is the property of the will to be a law to itself?” It was also, he stated, “the formula of the categorical imperative and is the principle of morality, so that a free will and a will subject to moral laws are one and the same.”²⁶

In Kant’s version of the concept of liberty, duty was therefore self-imposed, and the limits on individual liberty were internally, not externally, generated. It was an idea that was prefigured in Rousseau’s concept of a social contract. “This formula,” Rousseau had written in his *Social Contract*, “shows that the act of association includes a reciprocal engagement between the public and private individuals, and that each individual, contracting with himself so to speak, finds himself engaged in a double relation, namely towards private individuals as a member of the sovereign and toward the sovereign as a member of the state.”²⁷ To contract with himself, as Rousseau put it, the con-

25. On the terms, see Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty.”

26. Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* [1785], in *Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, ed. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, 4th ed. (London: Longmans, 1889), sec. 3, paras. 78–79, 65–66. See also Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary Gregor and Alan Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 94–95. For helpful commentary, see Stephen Darwall, *Honor, History, and Relationship: Essays in Second-Personal Ethics II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 228–232.

27. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract, or Principles of Political Right* [1762], in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Collected Writings*, ed. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, 13 vols. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1990–2010), vol. 4, bk. 1, chap. 7, 139–140. On Rousseau and autonomy, see Richard

tractor had to have a capacity to imagine several selves but still know that all these different selves were in reality the same person. The intellectual ramifications of what was involved in this type of awareness, especially in the various versions of idealist philosophy that began to proliferate in the German-speaking parts of Europe during the period straddling the French Revolution, are well known. Here, what matters are both the concept of personality that accompanied this awareness and the related question of the range of economic, social, institutional, or aesthetic conditions that allowed this type of awareness to develop. Together they formed the basis for a range of early nineteenth-century claims about the similarities and differences between ancient and modern liberty.

The subject formed the analytical core of Sismondi's *Histoire des républiques italiennes du moyen âge*.²⁸ "Occupied from morning to

Velkley, "Transcending Nature; Unifying Reason: On Kant's Debt to Rousseau," in *Kant on Moral Autonomy*, ed. Oliver Sensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 89–106; Frederick Neuhouser, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Origins of Autonomy," *Inquiry* 54 (2011): 478–493; Andrew Levine, *The Politics of Autonomy: A Kantian Reading of Rousseau's Social Contract* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1976).

28. For parallel interpretations, see Adrian Lyttelton, "Sismondi, the Republic and Liberty: Between Italy and England, the City and the Nation," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17 (2012): 168–182; Helena Rosenblatt, "Sismondi, from Republicanism to Liberal Protestantism," in *Sismondi: Republicanisme moderne et libéralisme critique*, ed. Béla Kapossy and Pascal Bridel (Geneva: Slatkine, 2013), 123–143; Francesca Sofia, "La città di Sismondi: Genesi, apogeo e decline di una riflessione costituzionale," *Scienza & Politica* 23 (2015): 263–278. See also Nadia Urbinati, "Republicanism and the French Revolution: The Case of Simonde de Sismondi," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 73 (2012): 95–109; Nadia Urbinati, "Simonde de Sismondi's Aristocratic Republicanism," *European Journal of Political Theory* 12 (2013): 153–174. See also Urbinati's "Introduction" on "The transformation of republicanism in modern and contemporary Italy" to the above-mentioned special issue of the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17 (2012): 145–148. For an earlier indication of the conceptual continuity from Sismondi to Pocock, see Jacques de Saint-Victor, "Sismondi entre républicanisme et Risorgimento," *Revue française d'histoire des idées politiques* 30 (2009): 253–277 (esp. 259–260). For an earlier overview, see Roberta Di Reda, "Sismondi e la storia della libertà," in *Scritti in Ricordo di Armando Saitta*, ed. Giorgio Caravale (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2002), 264–278. More recently, see Mauro Moretti and Ilaria Porciani, "Italy's Various Middle Ages," in *The Uses of the Middle Ages in Modern European States*, ed. R. J. W. Evans and Guy P. Marchal (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 177–196; Ian Wood, *The Modern Origins of the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 84–93, 119–120.

night with old chronicles, and from evening to morning in dreaming about them, while leaving, as far as it is in my power, the horrible age we have had the misfortune to be born in to live entirely in the middle ages, and reading nothing modern except German books (because I am beginning to learn the language by myself)," Sismondi informed one of his friends in 1806, "I am busy having my book printed."²⁹ The combination of the "old chronicles" and the "German books" would eventuate in a claim that came to be widely shared within the Swiss, French, British, Italian, and German circles to which Sismondi belonged, namely that modern liberty was the outcome of a peculiar fusion of the originally separate institutions, arrangements, and cultures of the Germans and the Romans, the North and the South, and their respective evaluations of the significance of what was either individual and separate or collective and shared. In this sense, the type of liberty implied by the claim was something unprecedented. It was different from them all and, at the same time, the outcome of them all.

"Two qualities above all others seem to be required to make men able to conquer liberty," Sismondi wrote in the concluding section of the first volume of his *History*, "individual strength and social strength." The two qualities, he continued, "have different origins and seem to have arisen from almost diametrically opposed principles. Few nations have been fortunate enough to join them together in a happy equilibrium."³⁰ Individual strength consisted of confidence in one's

29. "Occupé d'après le matin jusqu'au soir de vieilles chroniques, et depuis le soir au matin à y rêver, sortant autant qu'il dépend de moi du siècle mauvais où nous avons eu le malheur d'être nés pour ne vivre que dans le moyen âge, ne lisant rien de moderne que des livres allemands (car je commence à apprendre seul cette langue) . . . enfin m'occupant de l'impression de mon livre." Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi to Auguste Duvau, 25 September 1806, in Liana Elda Funaro, *Mes deux patries*. Minime aggiunte all'epistolario del Sismondi," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 160 (2002): 555–588.

30. "Deux qualités paraissent requises avant toutes les autres pour rendre les hommes capables de conquérir la liberté: la force individuelle et la force sociale. Ces deux qualités ont une origine différente, et paraissent naitre de principes presque opposés; il a été donné à peu de nations de les réunir dans un heureux équilibre." See Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi, *Histoire des républiques italiennes du moyen âge*, 16 vols. (Paris, 1809–1819), vol. 1, 417. On Sismondi's *Histoire*, see the introduction by Pierangelo Schiera to the Italian translation of Sismondi's *History of the Italian Republics, or The Origin, Progress, and Fall of Italian Freedom* (London:

own resources, constancy in the face of personal danger, scorn for a foreign power from the moment that it began to appear to be unjust, and a determination to be guided solely by one's own conscience and judgment. These, Sismondi wrote, "are the qualities and virtues of a savage." They were, more immediately, the qualities of the Germanic peoples responsible for the fall of the Roman empire. "It was with this kind of spirit," Sismondi continued, "that the inhabitants of Germany and Scandinavia established themselves in the south. They brought with them their independence and, when they formed nations, they were never prepared to resolve to give them ties that were strong enough to keep them united. Their principles were inclined to produce naturally what they did, in fact, produce: the free-spirited pride and, at the same time, lack of union to be seen in every knight and in the belief of every conqueror that, to remain free, it was necessary to become a prince."³¹ Social strength, on the other hand, originated in towns—and towns, Sismondi pointed out, "the creation of polished peoples, existed only in the south." Whereas independence was the principle underlying individual strength, social strength relied on "the total sacrifice of the individual to the society of which he is a part."³² This self-abnegation was, however, based on an initial conviction that the common good was the individual good, which meant in turn that the type of altruism it produced was more a matter of calculation—or awareness of relative advantage—than a purely disinterested assessment.

As Baron would notice, the combination of individual and social strengths that formed the analytical framework of Sismondi's description of the fusion of North and South amounted to something like a

Longman, 1832), published as Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi, *Storia delle Repubbliche italiane* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1996), ix–xcvi.

31. "C'est avec un pareil esprit que les habitants de la Germanie et de la Scandinavie s'établirent dans les pays méridionaux; ils portèrent avec eux leur indépendance; et lorsqu'ils formèrent des nations, ils ne surent jamais se résoudre à leur donner un lien assez fort pour les maintenir unis: leurs principes mêmes devaient naturellement produire ce qu'ils produisirent en effet, la fierté libre de tous les chevaliers, mais en même temps leur désunion, et l'opinion des conquérants, que, pour demeurer libres, il fallait devenir princes." See Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 1, 418.

32. "La force sociale réside dans le sacrifice entier de l'individu, à la société dont il fait partie. Cette abnégation de soi-même est fondée, il est vrai, sur une première conviction, que le bien de tous est le bien de chacun." See Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 1, 418–419.

prefiguration of the concept of civic humanism. "In this social union," Sismondi wrote, "there was something more noble than a contract between private interests; the association was an association of virtues, not egoisms." The result was a version of liberty in which neither the individual nor the community took precedence. Instead, the extremes of individual heroism on the one side and calculating collectivism on the other were both subordinated to the virtue of altruism. "The peoples of the North," Sismondi explained, "knew liberty, but had no patriotism, while those of the South had patriotism, but no liberty." These limitations, he continued, meant that "both remained strangers to the highest of all human virtues, the sacrifice of oneself. The former did not owe this type of sacrifice to anyone, while the latter did not have enough virtue to do so." Northern heroism was entirely personal, while southern heroism relied on identifying a prior object of sacrifice before it could find the requisite level of courage. Only when the two sets of qualities were combined was genuine self-sacrifice possible. "Thus," Sismondi observed, "in the great remaking of nations, both the North and the South supplied the virtues specific to each. The conquerors supplied the energy, the conquered, the sociability."³³

The most important implication of this comparison between the ancients and moderns was that, despite the continuity of names and, more superficially, of values, the modern version of liberty was not the same as its ancient counterpart. Here, too, the initial idea came from Rousseau. Just as his version of a social contract was predicated on the idea of a divided self, so his version of the foundations of modern politics presupposed an ability to create an imaginative equivalent of ancient politics, but under later conditions of private property, economic specialization, and social interdependence. For all the eloquence of his

33. "Il y a donc eu, dans l'union sociale quelque chose de plus noble qu'un contrat entre les intérêts privés; ce sont les vertus, non les égoïsmes, qui s'associent. . . . Les peuples du Nord ne connaissaient que la liberté sans patrie; ceux du Midi avaient une patrie sans liberté. Les uns et les autres restaient étrangers à la plus haute des vertus humaines, au sacrifice de soi-même. Les premiers ne devaient ce sacrifice à personne; les seconds n'avaient point assez de vertus pour le faire. . . . Dans le Midi, le but des sacrifices fut trouvé avant le courage de les faire. . . . Ainsi dans la grande refonte des nations, le Nord et le Midi donnèrent les vertus qui leur étaient propres. Les peuples conquérants apportaient l'énergie, les peuples conquis, la sociabilité." See Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 1, 419–420.

descriptions of Sparta and Rome, Rousseau was quite clear that the dispositions and arrangements underlying ancient politics no longer applied. This was self-evident with monarchies. It was simply wishful thinking, Rousseau wrote, to imagine that the modern French monarchy could be turned into a polysynody along the lines proposed by the early eighteenth-century political reformer Charles Irénée Castel, abbé de Saint-Pierre. "Did he seriously think that any of this could have any effect under the aegis and forms of a monarchical government?," Rousseau asked dismissively, "And, after citing the Greeks, the Romans and even some moderns who had ancient souls, does he not admit that it would be absurd to base the constitution of the state on maxims that are extinct?"³⁴

Importantly, however, the same absence of continuity also applied to republics. As Rousseau emphasized repeatedly, the modern age was an age of industry, in which the slave-based economies of the ancient republics had no real relevance. This fact was illustrated particularly fully by his own city of Geneva. Although it contained extremes of wealth and poverty, the ease of most of its inhabitants, he noted in 1758 in his *Letter to d'Alembert*, "is more owing to constant labor, to economy, and moderation, than to positive riches." Without "lands to support us," its people depended "entirely on our industry," supplying themselves with necessities "merely by denying themselves superfluities." This was the modern condition. "Go to the suburb of St Gervais," Rousseau continued, "and you imagine you see all the clockwork in Europe. Proceed thence to the Molard, and the low streets (*rues basses*), and you see such an appearance of wholesale trade, namely bales of goods in heaps, hogsheads scattered about confusedly, and the

34. "Pensait-il sérieusement que rien de tout cela pût réellement influencer dans la forme d'un Gouvernement monarchique? et, après avoir cité les Grecs, les Romains, et même quelques modernes qui avaient des âmes anciennes, n'avoue-t-il pas lui-même qu'il serait ridicule de fonder la constitution de l'État sur des maximes éteintes?" See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Jugement sur la Polysynodie*, in *The Political Writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, ed. C. E. Vaughan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), vol. 1, 421. Thanks to Christopher Brooke for reminding me of the whole passage rather than the truncated (and therefore misleading) version cited in Patrick Riley, "Rousseau, Fénelon and the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau*, ed. Patrick Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 93, n19.

fragrant odor of spices, as to fancy yourself in a sea-port. At the pasture ground (*Pâquis*) and the springs (*Eaux-Vives*), the bustle and noise of the manufactures of printed calico and painted linen seem to transport you to Zurich."

"Manual labor, employment of time, vigilance, and rigid parsimony," he concluded, "these are the treasures of the citizens of Geneva."³⁵ Under these conditions, ancient politics did not apply. "The people of antiquity," Rousseau wrote in his one direct intervention in Geneva's politics, the *Letters from the Mountain* (1764), "are not proper models for modern policy." In the republics of the ancient world, slavery allowed those who were free to have the time to govern themselves. But the modern division of labor required "other maxims" and other political arrangements.³⁶ "Among the Greeks," Rousseau wrote in the *Social Contract*, "all the people had to do, it did by itself; it was constantly assembled in the public square. It lived in a mild climate, it was not greedy, slaves did its work, its chief business was its freedom." But a modern political society like Geneva no longer had these attributes

35. "Genève est riche, il est vrai; mais quoiqu'on n'y voie point ces énormes disproportions de fortune qui appauvrissent tout un pays pour enrichir quelques habitants et sèment la misère autour de l'opulence, il est certain que, si quelques Genevois possèdent d'assez grands biens, plusieurs vivent dans une disette assez dure et que l'aisance du plus grand nombre vient d'un travail assidu, d'économie et de modération, plutôt que d'une richesse positive. Il y a bien des villes plus pauvres que la nôtre où le bourgeois peut donner beaucoup plus à ses plaisirs, parce que le territoire que le nourrit ne s'épuise pas, et que son temps n'étant d'aucun prix, il peut le perdre sans préjudice. Il n'en va pas ainsi parmi nous, qui, sans terres pour subsister, n'avons que notre industrie. Le peuple Genevois ne se soutient qu'à force de travail, et n'a le nécessaire qu'autant qu'il se refuse tout superflu. . . . Visitez le quartier de St-Gervais; toute l'horlogerie de l'Europe y parait rassemblée. Parcourez le Molard et les rues basses, un appareil de commerce en grand, des monceaux de ballots, de tonneaux confusément jetés, une odeur d'Inde et de droguerie vous font imaginer un port de mer. Aux Pâquis, aux Eaux-Vives, le bruit et l'aspect des fabriques d'indienne et de toile peinte semblent vous transporter à Zurich. . . . Les bras, l'emploi du temps, la vigilance, l'austère parcimonie, voilà les trésors du Genevois." See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à M. d'Alembert sur les spectacles*, in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, 5 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1959–1995), vol. 5, 85, translated in Rousseau, *Collected Writings*, vol. 10, 320.

36. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettres écrites de la montagne* [1764], ed. Alfred Dufour (Lausanne: L'Âge d'homme, 2007), 257. I have used the translation given in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Letters Written from the Mountains*, published in *The Miscellaneous Works of Mr. J. J. Rousseau*, 5 vols. (London: T. Becket and P. A. de Hondt, 1767), vol. 4, 315–316.

(Rousseau called them “advantages”). “Your harsher climates,” he commented, “make for more needs, six months of the year you cannot stay out on the public square, your muted languages cannot make themselves heard in the open, you care more for your gain than your freedom, and you fear slavery less than you fear poverty.”³⁷

As was also the case with many other early nineteenth-century political theorists, especially in Switzerland and the German-speaking parts of Europe, Sismondi's politics echoed these Rousseauian themes. Modern liberty had different origins and attributes from its ancient counterpart. “The first liberal institutions,” Sismondi wrote, “were brought from the North to the degenerate Romans.” But modern liberty had traveled in the opposite direction. The “liberal principles” on which it was based, Sismondi wrote, had moved as if under the aegis of “an invisible hand” from the South to the North, starting in Italy and Spain in the Middle Ages before proceeding to Switzerland and Germany in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and finally to England and France in more recent times. “This inverse movement,” Sismondi added, “from the South to the North, in the development of the republican system is a very noticeable and constant phenomenon.”³⁸ This, notwithstanding Baron's later assessment, was why the history of the Italian republics in the Middle Ages mattered to posterity. Modern liberty, on Sismondi's terms, had medieval, not ancient, origins, just as its original, pre-classical template was not Roman, or even Greek, but Etruscan (Leonardo Bruni, the main protagonist of Baron's civic history, also started his own history of Florence with a highly positive

37. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Of the Social Contract*, in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and other Later Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), bk. 3, chap. 15, 115. For further examples, see Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (published posthumously but written mainly at the same time as the second *Discourse*), in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and other Earlier Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), esp. chaps. 9, 10.

38. “Le premières institutions libérales avaient été apportées du Nord aux Romains dégénérés. Ce mouvement rétrograde, du midi au nord, est un phénomène constant et très remarquable. En Italie, nous avons vu Naples, Gaète, Amalfi, et même Rome, précéder toutes les autres villes. . . . Cependant les villes de l'Allemagne et de la Suisse ne commencèrent à connaître la liberté que dans les dernières années du douzième siècle, celles de la France et de l'Angleterre acquirent plus tard encore les droits des communautés.” See Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 1, 416–417.

description of the Etruscans, who, he wrote, were ruled by the “equal will and authority of all its twelve peoples”).³⁹ As Sismondi announced at the very beginning of the whole huge book, government was the primary cause of the character of peoples, and the Etruscan government had been federal. Unlike the Romans, he continued, the Etruscans valued liberty above power and glory. Their government promoted moderation and prized benevolence, not conquest. They were a “free nation” who relied on their “federal bond” both for defense against foreign aggression and as a “guarantee to their own passions from the distraction of ambition and the drunkenness of success.”⁴⁰ It was a fairly transparent allusion to more recent French imperial policies under the aegis of Napoleon Bonaparte.

III Ancient and Modern Liberty

The more general point, however, was that modern liberty was the product of two historical sequences. The first consisted of the long drawn-out destruction of liberty after the Roman conquest of Etruria. The second consisted of the equally long drawn-out revival of liberty after the Germanic conquest of Rome. And, as Sismondi also emphasized, the second sequence was the inverse of the first.⁴¹ The first sequence centered on collective goods, particularly citizenship and the ability of citizens to choose their rulers and hold them to account, while the second centered on individual goods, particularly those required for individual well-being (*bonheur*). The two sequences meant that the gradual erosion of common goods opened up a space for the

39. Leonardo Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, ed. and trans. James Hankins, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001–2007), vol. 1, bk. 1. Thanks to Iain McDaniel for this item of information.

40. Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 1, iii–iv. For initial ways into late eighteenth-century Etruscan studies, see Arnaldo Momigliano, “Ancient History and the Antiquarian,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13 (1950): 285–315; Melissa Calaresu, “Images of Ancient Rome in Late Eighteenth-Century Neapolitan Historiography,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58 (1997): 641–661; Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy* (London: Routledge, 2009), 128–160.

41. On this, ultimately Montesquieuian, idea, see Istvan Hont, “Adam Smith’s History of Law and Government as Political Theory,” in *Political Judgement: Essays for John Dunn*, ed. Richard Bourke and Raymond Geuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 131–171.

gradual emergence of individual goods. This in turn meant that there was no simple continuity from the ancients to the moderns or any viable possibility of simply imitating ancient arrangements under modern conditions. Modern liberty, in fact, was more like natural liberty. It was, in the first instance, "purely defensive" or "entirely negative" because its underlying principle was to protect or preserve, rather than to create. Where ancient liberty was bound up with citizenship, modern liberty, Sismondi emphasized, was simply the means used by governments to allow them to meet the objective for which they had been established, namely "the wellbeing (*bonheur*) of all." Modern liberty was, therefore, what was required to enable all the members of the association to secure a range of specifically individual goods, namely their "persons, honor, property and moral sentiments." From this perspective, "the political rights of citizens" were no longer the source of liberty, as had been the case with the ancients, but instead were one of its safeguards. This, according to Sismondi, was why modern political rights included the right to freedom of the press, the right to free debate in political assemblies, and, finally, the right to petition. These various "prerogatives" were not part of what he called "civil liberty" but were instead "arms placed in the hands of the people to defend it."⁴²

Modern political rights existed to enable individuals to pursue individual goods. Peculiarly, however, none of them had existed in the Italian republics of the Middle Ages. There was no free press, no free speech, and no right to seek public redress. Their emergence, however, was an unintended outcome of republican civic life. It had to be remembered, Sismondi pointed out, "that in republics the same men could be seen in a double guise and with a double character, first as ruled and then as rulers." The same type of alternation, Sismondi continued, did not apply today:

Today, when we make an assessment of liberty we try to identify what it might be for the ruled. Until our age, however, it was more usual instead to try to identify what it might be for the rulers, and this active liberty, this liberty that is made up entirely of sovereign prerogatives which, at first sight, have less to do with the wellbeing

42. Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 16, 371–372.

(*bonheur*) of individuals than with their security, happens instead to have a charm for them that cannot be equaled. It is an intoxicating drink, the nectar of the gods, and once a mortal has tasted it, he disdains all human nourishment. At the same time, however, he finds a new strength and a new virtue within himself; his nature is changed and, in taking his seat at their table, he feels himself to be the equal of the immortals.⁴³

The Italian republics of the Middle Ages therefore formed a historical junction between the erosion of the collective rights of the ancients and the consolidation of the individual rights of the moderns. The “system of liberty of former times” could be represented, Sismondi continued, by three fundamental axioms that were taken to be “the expression of the political rights of the nation considered as a body, rather than those of each individual in his relationship to it.” No republic, he emphasized, had taken them more seriously or observed them more devoutly than the Italian republics of the Middle Ages.⁴⁴ The first axiom was that “all authority exercised over the people emanates from the people.” Sovereignty belonged to the people or the community and meant that “the leaders of the people knew that all their authority came from those who had to obey them for a time and knew too that it would return to them.” The second axiom was that “the authority of the delegates (*mandataires*) of the people reverts to the people after a specified time; no mandate from the people is irrevocable.” No power, in the Italian republics, was a hereditary power. Even when the republics became more aristocratic and power was restricted to a narrow circle of ruling families, such as the Medici, Bentivoglio, or Baglioni, “no citizen, how-

43. “Mais il faut se souvenir que dans les républiques les mêmes hommes se présentent sous un double aspect et avec un double caractère, d’abord comme gouvernés, et ensuite comme gouvernants. Aujourd’hui pour estimer la liberté, nous cherchons en quoi elle consiste pour les gouvernés. Jusqu’à notre siècle, au contraire, on cherchait en quoi elle consistait pour les gouvernants; et cette liberté active, cette liberté toute composés de prérogatives souveraines, qui au premier coup d’œil semble devoir contribuer beaucoup moins au bonheur des individus que leur sécurité, se trouve au contraire avoir pour eux un charme que rien n’égale. C’est une boisson enivrante, c’est le nectar des dieux: une fois qu’un mortel en a goûté, il dédaigne toute nourriture humaine; mais aussi il trouve en lui-même de nouvelles forces et une nouvelle vertu, sa nature est changé; et en s’asseyant à leur table, il sent qu’il s’égale aux immortels.” See Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 16, 386.

44. Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 16, 386–387.

ever powerful he might be, was held to have rights independent of those of the republic." The final axiom was that "whoever exercises an authority emanating from the people is responsible to the people for the use to which he has put it." To maintain this obligation, all the republican constitutions of Italy housed laws that were similar to the Florentine provisions for a *diviétto* and a *sindicato*, meaning a term of ineligibility for office in the case of the former and, in the case of the latter, a judicial inquiry into all outgoing magistrates who had held financial or legal office. The "entire Italian system of liberty," Sismondi asserted, "was represented by these three axioms." They made the Italian republics freer than the Hanseatic and Imperial cities of Germany, the Swiss cantons, the Dutch corporations, and even, perhaps, the republics of antiquity. "The goal of all these various republics was solely to guarantee the sovereignty, not the security, of their citizens. They did not think of protecting the citizen from the government but set out instead only to create governments that fully represented the people and, in some sense, were identical to them. Then, after setting them up, they abstained, with blind and unlimited confidence, from setting any limits on the exercise of their power."⁴⁵ Paradoxically, promoting collective sovereignty led to individual liberty.

The result of this emphasis on common goods, Sismondi claimed, was that despite the formal absence of modern political rights, the citizens of the Italian republics enjoyed their practical equivalents. In this sense, the civic dimension of republican political life was the real source of modern liberty. "Thus," Sismondi wrote, "although civil liberty as it is understood today was neither known nor defined; although it was not surrounded by any of the guarantees that seem to be most necessary to it, it was respected more fully in the Italian republics than in any other European state. Each citizen could believe himself to be

45. "Les unes comme les autres n'avaient eu pour but que de garantir la souveraineté, non la sûreté des citoyens; les unes comme les autres n'avaient point songé à protéger le citoyen contre le gouvernement, mais à créer un gouvernement qui représentât bien complètement le peuple, qui fut en quelque sorte identique avec lui; les unes comme les autres, après l'avoir constitué, s'étaient abstenues, avec une confiance aveugle et illimitée, de poser aucunes bornes à l'exercice de son pouvoir." See Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 16, 387–388, 390–392, 393–395.

secure in the enjoyment of his life, his fortune and his honor. He did not fear that arbitrary restrictions would be imposed on his industry. Each of his faculties could develop freely. Every career leading to fame and fortune was open to his activity and talents."⁴⁶ But the republican and almost democratic form of these governments "contributed less to the security of the citizen than to the progress of his virtue and the entire development of his soul." The city-states of Italy allowed talent to flourish and ability to shine. "This emulation," Sismondi wrote, "which does not exist under despotic governments and, in modern representative governments, is available only to a very small number of people, was common to the whole mass of the people in the Italian republics. The speed at which all the magistracies and councils were completely renewed, meant that in a very short space of time all the citizens were called upon to influence public affairs."⁴⁷ The apogee of this state of affairs occurred in Florence, "where, out of some 80,000 inhabitants, two or three thousand citizens filled, in rapid rotation, all the highest offices of state, with a wisdom, dignity and firmness that was able to give the republic a standing that was infinitely superior to its resources of population and wealth."⁴⁸ This, as Sismondi had an-

46. "Aussi [*sic*], quoique la liberté civile, telle que nous l'entendons aujourd'hui, ne fut ni connue ni définie, quoiqu'elle ne fut entourée d'aucune des garanties qui paraissent lui être le plus nécessaires, elle était mieux respectée dans les républiques italiennes, que dans aucun autre état de l'Europe; chaque citoyen se croyait assuré dans la jouissance de sa vie, de sa fortune, de son honneur; il ne craignait point que des restrictions arbitraires fussent imposées à son industrie; chacune des facultés qu'il sentait en lui, avait un libre essor; toutes les carrières qui menaient à la fortune étaient ouvertes à son activité et à ses talents." See Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 16, 399.

47. "Cependant la forme républicain et presque démocratique du gouvernement, contribuait moins à la sécurité du citoyen qu'au progrès de sa vertu et à l'entier développement de son âme. . . . Cette émulation, qui n'existe pas dans les gouvernements despotiques, qui, dans les gouvernements représentatifs modernes, est le partage d'un très petit nombre de personnes seulement, était dans les républiques italiennes commune à la masse entière du peuple. La rapidité avec laquelle s'opérait le renouvellement absolu de toutes les magistratures, de tous les conseils, appelait dans un fort court espace de temps tous les citoyens, à leur tour, à exercer leur influence sur la chose publique." See Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 16, 400.

48. "Or, dans l'histoire du monde entier, rien peut-être ne donne l'idée d'une plus grande diffusion des lumières, de la raison, des connaissances politiques, morales, administratives, du courage civil, de l'ouverture et de la justesse d'esprit, que le spectacle qu'offrait Florence, lorsque, sur quatre-vingt mille habitants que contenait cette ville, deux ou trois mille citoyens occupaient, par une rotation rapide, toutes les premières places de l'état, et alors même conduisaient leur gouvernement avec tant

nounced at the very beginning of the whole book, was why, for the period of their duration, the history of the Italian republics of the Middle Ages “had the most marked influence on Europe’s civilization, trade and political balance.”⁴⁹

“The liberty of the ancients, like their philosophy,” Sismondi wrote at the end of his final volume (published in the same year that Benjamin Constant delivered his more famous lecture on the same subject), “had virtue as its goal. The liberty of the moderns, like their philosophy, proposes no more than wellbeing (*bonheur*).” The obvious inference was to find ways to combine the two. This, Sismondi continued, was why “the legislator should no longer lose sight of the security of the citizen and the guarantees that the moderns have made into a system. But he should also remember that it is important to find ways to promote citizens’ greater moral development.” Peace and security had to be reinforced by completing “the moral education of citizens” so that, “by multiplying their rights, by inviting them to share in sovereignty and to redouble their interest in public affairs, they would come to know their duties and acquire a desire and an ability to fulfil them.”⁵⁰ Sismondi did not give this goal the name of “civic humanism,” but its reliance on a shared commitment to individual rights, civic responsibility, and political participation was surprisingly similar to the political system that Hans Baron was to describe a century or more later.

de sagesse, avec tant de dignité, avec tant de fermeté, qu’ils lui assuraient, entre les états de l’Europe, une place infiniment supérieur à la proportion de sa population ou de sa richesse.” See Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 16, 402–403.

49. Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 1, xiv.

50. “La liberté des anciens, comme leur philosophie, avait pour but la vertu; la liberté des modernes, comme leur philosophie, ne se propose que le bonheur. La meilleure leçon à tirer de la comparaison de ces systèmes seraient d’apprendre à les combiner l’un avec l’autre.

Loin de devoir s’exclure mutuellement, ils sont faits pour se prêter un appui réciproque. L’une des espèces de liberté paraît toujours être la route la plus courte et la plus sûre pour arriver à l’autre. Le législateur, désormais, ne doit plus perdre de vue la sécurité des citoyens, et les garanties que les modernes ont réduites en système; mais il doit se souvenir aussi qu’il faut chercher encore leur plus grand développement moral . . . et c’est en multipliant leurs droits, en les appelant au partage de la souveraineté, en redoublant leur intérêt pour la chose publique, qu’il leur apprendra aussi à connaître leur devoirs, et qu’il leur donnera en même temps et le désir et la faculté de les remplir.” See Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 16, 405–406.

One reason for the similarity was that both made considerable use of Machiavelli. As Baron indicated, it was Sismondi who supplied a link between Machiavelli's political thought and the concept of civic humanism because, as Sismondi noticed, it was Machiavelli himself who had first made a comparison between the ancients and moderns. He did so at the beginning of the third book of his *Florentine History* in the context of describing the causes and effects of conflict between the people and the nobility both in Florence and in Rome. "The ineradicable hostility which naturally exists between the people and the nobles," Machiavelli wrote, "is caused by the one wishing to rule and other to resist, and from this follows all the evils which arise in cities." But, he continued, the effects of these evils were still radically different. In Rome, conflict was settled by discussion, while in Florence, it was ended by fighting. In Rome, conflict ended in constitutional change, while in Florence, it ended with the death or exile of many citizens. In Rome, conflict favored grandeur, but in Florence it favored servility:

The victories which the people of Rome thus obtained over the nobles assisted in the advancement of the city herself, because the people became eligible to assist the nobles in the administration of the empire, the army and the laws and, all being animated with the same spirit, the city grew in valor and increased in power. But in Florence, when the people overcame the nobles, these latter were deprived of power for ever; and in case they wished to regain power it was necessary for them, not only to assume the behavior, spirit, and mode of living of merchants, but also to appear as such. Hence followed those changes in coats of arms and names of families to which the nobles submitted in order to give the appearance of belonging to the people. Thus disappeared all valor in arms and gallantry of spirit which are the distinguishing characteristics of the nobility, whilst in the people they could never be kindled for they had never possessed the qualifications.⁵¹

The lesson that Sismondi drew, which he set out in the fourth volume of his *Histoire des républiques italiennes*, was that the difference between the two outcomes was best explained in terms of the relationship between property and the theory of mixed government.

51. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine History* [1521–1525], trans. W. K. Marriott (London: J. M. Dent, 1909), bk. 3, 99–100.

In setting out his explanation, Sismondi rehearsed Machiavelli's comparison but changed its historical and political orientation.⁵² The difference, he argued, between the rising and falling trajectories that Machiavelli had described was an effect of the distribution of landed property in the Roman and Florentine republics. Under the Roman republic, no single sector of society had monopolized landownership, because, in its early years, republican Rome had been something like a meritocracy.⁵³ The opposite, however, was the case after the Germanic conquest of Rome. Then, the land had become the exclusive possession of Rome's northern conquerors, leaving the indigenous populations as serfs or slaves. In one sense, Sismondi observed, the resulting situation was rather like the one extolled by the modern French economists or Physiocrats (here, he singled out Adam Smith's French translator, Germaine Garnier, as the type of economist he had in mind) and their principle that only the landowners were the true owners of a country. This, by implication, was why Machiavelli had been right. For all its inequalities, the Roman republic could accommodate an agrarian in ways that the landed monopoly built into feudal society could not. But, Sismondi emphasized, the economic and social dependence generated by this landed monopoly was not the only effect of the fall of the Roman empire. Equally, if not more, damaging was the unstable mixture of moral and material qualities that the monopoly brought in its wake. In themselves, wealth and virtue were distinct. Even the economists, Sismondi pointed out, did not assume that landed property alone was a sufficient basis of the social order. For all its productive capabilities, landownership seemed to presuppose a long-standing respect for rights, along with equally long-standing hopes of future prosperity, memories of past efforts, and the local affections often involved in a settled way of life. Landownership was also bound up with

52. The passage from Machiavelli is cited in Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 4, 171–172. Apart from the passage cited in note 52, this and the next two paragraphs summarize the argument of vol. 4, 152–174.

53. "Ce grand peuple, dont la gloire illustre encore l'Italie, dut ses conquêtes et ses vertus au gouvernement qu'il eut dans son premier âge, à une aristocratie naissante, qui, en raison de ce qu'elle était nouvelle, ne pouvait être fondée que sur la prééminence du mérite, et qui, loin d'avilir les ordres inférieurs de la nation, leur donnait du ressort, par les efforts même qu'elle faisait pour les soumettre." See Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 1, vi–vii.

the pride, independence, and benevolence usually associated with a form of wealth that was relatively immune to the vagaries of fortune and human caprice. But all these moral qualities were humanly, not property, generated and, as Sismondi emphasized, were a product of the peculiar synthesis of the individual and northern and the collective and southern that gave rise to the culture of the moderns. From this perspective, the significance of the Italian republics of the Middle Ages was that they were the starting point of the long struggle to disentangle wealth from virtue so that both could play their separate parts in the same political society.

This was the promise of mixed government. There had, of course, been a mixed government in Rome. But there, the collectivity took precedence over individuality. In a different sense, this, too, had initially been the case under the feudal despotism that followed the fall of the Roman empire. But the gradual revival of industry and trade allowed the towns to escape the all-encompassing domination of landed property. In doing so, however, the rising bourgeoisie (not, of course, a term that Sismondi used) broke free of the nexus of wealth and virtue that was the basis of the domination of the landowners. Where, he argued, the class struggle in the ancient world (again, not a term Sismondi himself used) was, for a long time, attenuated by a common allegiance to Rome and an attendant recognition of virtue as independent of wealth, class conflict in the modern world had no comparable normative boundary to limit its ferocity. Instead, the intensity of conflict between the overlapping categories of landowners and non-landowners, nobles and commoners, or rural knights and urban burghers broke the hold of the ideologies of both ancient Rome and medieval feudalism. In place of the old Roman allegiance to the republic, the Italian republics of the Middle Ages housed an array of allegiances, whether to a clan, a trade, or a neighborhood. And, in place of the old feudal nexus of wealth and virtue, the merchants and artisans of the Italian republics came, gradually, to endorse a number of more highly differentiated versions of the relationship between property, morality, and the right to rule. The result was something like the Renaissance. As Sismondi stressed, the combination of political conflict and its modern outcome was particularly marked in late thirteenth-century Florence:

Political passions create more heroes than individual passions and, although the connection is not directly obvious, they also make more artists, poets, philosophers and scholars. The century whose history we have just surveyed is proof. In the midst of the convulsions of its civil wars, Florence renewed architecture, sculpture and painting; she produced the greatest poet that Italy can yet boast; she restored philosophy to its place of honor; she gave an impetus to the sciences that was followed by all the free cities of Italy and she made it possible for barbarism to be followed by the ages of the fine arts and taste.⁵⁴

On these terms, the fusion between northern and southern liberty that gave rise to what Sismondi took to be the peculiarly modern capacity for altruism began in the thirteenth century in Florence.

For Sismondi, only a mixed system of government could house the resulting range of moral and material qualities. "There is never, and there cannot be, a free government unless it is mixed," he wrote in the same survey of thirteenth-century Italy in which his examination of Machiavelli's *Florentine History* appeared. This, he went on to explain, meant "a government in which no part of the nation could become all powerful; no part could be invested with sovereignty; no part could be oppressed or stripped of all political rights and any share in supreme power." In this form of government, with "the balance maintaining liberty," there could never be "a power in the state able to violate the social contract with impunity." This, in turn, meant a political society where there was "sovereign power, but no sovereign other than the nation itself, because only it brings together all the rights of sovereignty." The nation certainly encompassed all social classes. But popular involvement in politics did not entail complete political equality, because every society housed real and unavoidable differences in talents, wealth, and birth. Mixed government made it possible

54. "Les passions politiques font plus de héros que les passions individuelles; et quoique la connexion ne paroisse point immédiate, elles font aussi plus d'artistes, plus de poètes, plus de philosophes, plus de savants. Le siècle dont nous venons de finir l'histoire, en est la preuve. Au milieu des convulsions de ses guerres civiles, Florence a renouvelé l'architecture, la sculpture et la peinture; elle a produit le plus grand poète dont encore aujourd'hui puisse se vanter l'Italie; elle a remis la philosophie en honneur; elle a donné une impulsion en faveur des sciences, qui a été suivie par toutes les villes libres d'Italie, et elle a fait succéder à la barbarie les siècles des beaux-arts et du goût." See Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 4, 173–174.

to prevent any conflation of these differences with full sovereign power. Allowing those distinguished by their knowledge to exercise political sovereignty meant exposing a republic to the speculative political experiments that had been the bane of the French Revolution. It was also, as Adam Smith had shown, why the landed interest could not be the supreme interest, just as Machiavelli had shown in his *Florentine History* that the same applied to the moneyed interest. This, Sismondi explained, was why “the secret of legislation is to establish a national guarantee for liberty, by preserving the rights, privileges and influence on society of every class, every order and every individual, in proportion to their respective interests.” The nation, or in this case Florence, transcended them all. Here, the key to republican liberty was popular involvement in politics and the “political passions” that they produced. “In the conflicts between the citizens, first with the nobility and then with the people,” Sismondi observed, “civil liberty was certainly frequently violated.” This, he continued, meant that:

The rights that men sought to preserve by the social contract and whose guarantee was even the sole aim of their association were forgotten more than once. But, while civil liberty succumbed amidst this disorder, democratic liberty still remained. This latter consists not of guarantees, but of powers. It does not secure nations peace, order, economy or prudence, but is instead its own reward. For the citizen who has once known it, it is the sweetest of pleasures to shape the destiny of his fatherland, to have a share of sovereignty and, above all, to place himself directly under the law and recognize no other authority than those created by the law. This way of stepping outside of oneself in order to live and feel in common and become part of a greater whole is what elevates men and makes them capable of the greatest of things.⁵⁵

55. “Les droits que les hommes se sont réservés par le contrat social, et dont la garantie a même été le seul but de leur association, furent plus d’une fois méconnus; cependant, au milieu de ce désordre, tandis que la liberté civile succombait, la liberté démocratique restait encore. Celle-ci se compose, non de garanties, mais de pouvoirs; elle n’assure aux nations ni le repos, ni l’ordre, ni l’économie, ni la prudence; mais elle est à elle-même sa propre récompense. C’est pour le citoyen qui l’a connue une fois, la plus douce des jouissances, que d’influer sur le sort de sa patrie, d’avoir part à sa souveraineté, surtout, de se placer immédiatement sous la loi, et de ne reconnaître d’autorités que celles que lui-même a créées. Cette manière

Evidence of this common capacity (and evidence, too, that this volume of Sismondi's *History* was written in 1809, after Kant, Schiller, Hegel, and Schelling) was the Florentine republic's civic architecture. "The first of the fine arts to be reborn in Italy in the Middle Ages was architecture," Sismondi wrote immediately after this description of the moral and psychological effects of democratic liberty,

Since imitation is not its goal, and architecture rises above created objects to represent the ideal forms of abstract and symmetrical beauty as men conceive of these forms, it is the one of all the fine arts that bears the most direct imprint of its age and which best reveals the grandeur, energy or pettiness of both the nation in which it flourished and the men who perfected it. It is the art that is best able to do without the legacy of preceding generations and is most able to compensate, by ingenuity (*génie*) and strength of will, for those intricate tiny secrets, manipulations and procedures needed by all the others which have to be studied and learned before it is possible to create. The pyramids of Egypt, coming before the perfection of all the other arts—even the mechanical arts—convey, over a distance of several thousands of years, a measure of the strength and magnificence of a people who, without such monuments, would seem to be purely fabulous. Florence's imposing dome, and a hundred other equally sumptuous buildings erected by the Italian republics in the thirteenth century, similarly preserve the memory of those free and generous peoples to which history has, until now, not yet done justice.⁵⁶

de sortir de soi pour vivre en commun, pour sentir en commun, pour faire partie d'un grand tout, élève l'homme, et le rend capable des plus grandes choses." See Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 4, 157–158, 160–162, 163–166, 171–172, 172–173.

56. "Le premier des beaux-arts que l'on vit naître en Italie dans le moyen âge, ce fut l'architecture. Comme l'imitation n'est point son but, et que l'architecture s'élève au-dessus des objets créés, pour représenter les formes idéales de la beauté symétrique et abstraite, telle que l'homme les conçoit, c'est de tous les beaux-arts celui qui porte le plus immédiatement le caractère du siècle, et qui fait le mieux connaître la grandeur, l'énergie ou la petitesse de la nation où il a fleuri, de l'homme qui l'a perfectionné. C'est l'art qui se passe le mieux de l'héritage des générations précédentes, et qui sait le mieux suppléer par le génie et la force de la volonté, aux petits secrets, aux petites manipulations, aux petites observances nécessaires dans tous les autres, et qu'il faut avoir étudiées avant de commencer à créer. Les pyramides des Égyptiens, antérieures au perfectionnement de tous les autres arts, et même des arts mécaniques, ont transmis à la distance de plusieurs milliers d'années, la mesure de la force et de la magnificence d'un peuple qui, sans de tels monuments, nous paraîtrait peut-être fabuleux. Le dôme imposant de

The architecture of the thirteenth century, Sismondi concluded, was "entirely republican."⁵⁷ It was civic humanism in all but name.

Harrington's political thought also played a part in Sismondi's *History*. Here, however, it was used to highlight the difference between landed and moveable property and, by extension, to emphasize the extent to which the rise of commercial and industrial property made the need for a new version of an agrarian redundant. On Sismondi's terms, the analytical framework supplied by Harrington's famous claim about the relationship between the balance of property and the balance of political power in the structure of a commonwealth was used to argue that the variety of economic activities and occupations that had developed in the Italian republics in the Middle Ages meant that the Harringtonian argument did not really apply to modern economic and social conditions. Nations in which property was distributed fairly equally, Sismondi observed, could have highly developed forms of agriculture but still have little trade and few of the arts. This had been the condition in ancient Italy, as well as ancient Greece, and could still be seen in modern North America, where property was still distributed roughly in proportion to the size and resources of individual families. There was, Sismondi wrote, "a sort of *territorial balance*, as Harrington called it, a balance that contributes to maintain American liberty." But, he continued, it was a balance that the Americans did not need, because they had "accumulated quantities of capital, commerce, the arts and the means to live in independence both for the poor and the rich."⁵⁸ This was also the message of the history of the Italian republics of the Middle Ages. As that history helped to show, trade and manufacturing industry were as compatible with individual and collective liberty as a territorial balance. From this perspective, the real key to the difference between the ancients and the moderns was the Middle

Florence, et cent édifices également somptueux, qui furent fondés dans le treizième siècle par les républiques italiennes, conserveront également la mémoire de ces peuples libres et généreux, auxquels l'histoire, jusqu'à présent, n'a point rendu justice." See Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 4, 174–175.

57. Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 4, 175. On this aspect of Sismondi's thought, see also J. B. Bullen, *The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 50–57.

58. Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 1, 59–60 (the italics are in the original).

Ages and, more substantively, the economic, institutional, and cultural legacy of the long struggle by the inhabitants of Italy's medieval republics to break free of either imperial or papal power. In this sense, Harrington's insight referred to a pre-feudal, pre-Germanic Italy. The foundations of modern politics, in keeping with Rousseau's earlier analysis of Geneva, were post-feudal, urban, and commercial.

Importantly, Sismondi stressed, this was because the Italian republics of the Middle Ages were equipped with a range of institutional and individual resources that made liberty in a medieval Italian setting both like and unlike liberty in republican Rome. The first of these resources was the guilds, with their origins in industry and trade. The second was the part played by the guilds, most famously in Florence, in urban government. Together, the social composition and electoral entitlements of the guilds gave industry and trade a level of status and power that overshadowed the nexus of landed property and military prowess that was the hallmark of the feudal system. The result, Sismondi emphasized, was a radical and durable transvaluation of values. In Florence and Siena, he wrote, it was necessary to practice a trade or an art to take part in the administration of the community. In Pisa, whenever a private family was found guilty of disturbing public order, its name was added to the list of nobles as a permanent punishment for violating the law. In Pistoia, ennoblement was a punishment for a crime, while in Modena, Padua, Bologna, Brescia, Genoa, and "every free town," any family whose name was added to the register of nobles was excluded from public office. In Florence, a noble family was rewarded for good conduct by having its name transferred to the register of *bourgeois*.⁵⁹ In this sense, and in contradistinction to republican Rome, urban industry, not landed property, was the basis of both a flourishing civic life and, intermittently, of intense civic conflict, just as it was, according to Sismondi, with modern politics.

IV The Federal Foundations of Modern Politics

On Sismondi's terms, the foundations of modern politics were also federal. In part, this was because only a federal system was a viable

59. Ibid., vol. 4, 57, 100, 167–168; vol. 5, 339–340.

alternative to the unitary territorial states whose rise had been responsible both for the demise of the Italian republics of the Middle Ages and for the long cycle of territorial consolidation, state building, and imperial expansion that culminated in the wars of the French Revolution and the age of Napoleon. In part, too, it was because only a federal system could be compatible with liberty and, at the same time, could accommodate the many different types of inequalities that the modern age had inherited from the accumulated legacies of its ancient, feudal, and republican pasts. As one of Sismondi's early readers put it, power was territorial and state-based, but industry was global and federal.⁶⁰

Like Germaine de Staël and the other members of the Coppel group, Sismondi was highly critical of the system of political representation envisaged by Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès. Political representation, he argued repeatedly, had to involve direct elections rather than the complicated system of gradated elections that Sieyès, echoing Rousseau, had proposed.⁶¹ Here, a federal system and the relatively large number of different types of electoral procedure that a federal system could house would reduce the risk of reiterated conflict between majorities and minorities that was built into a more unified electoral system. Although, as Sismondi emphasized, the first Italian republics were federal in character, it was still not the case that either the Etruscan confederation or later political associations like the Lombard League were truly federal systems of government. In a sense, the whole history of the Italian republics in the Middle Ages was itself an illustration of the difficulties involved in establishing a genuinely federal constitution. This, Sismondi argued, was because "the concept of a federal constitution is one of the most refined and most abstract ideas that the study of political combinations has been able to produce." It was therefore hardly surprising that "peoples who were

60. The claim was made by Augustin Thierry after quoting the passages from Sismondi listed in footnote 58. See his review of Antoine Louis Claude Destutt de Tracy, *Commentaire sur l'Esprit des lois de Montesquieu*, in *Le censeur européen* 7 (1818): 191–260 (256–258 for the claim referred to here).

61. On the division between Sieyès and the Coppel group over the subject of elections, see Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge: Public Debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 352.

barely civilized"—as had been the case with the members of the Lombard League—had not been able to establish something corresponding to "the idea that we form of a federal republic, whose central government manages external relations and maintains dignity."⁶²

It was this separation of external from internal affairs that Sismondi took to be the hallmark of a truly federal constitution. In this type of system, the initial properties of small-scale republics—their "democratic liberty," patriotism, and capacity for "enthusiasm" on the one side and their proficiency in the arts and commercial resourcefulness on the other—would be reinforced by a permanent central government with sole responsibility for managing a purely defensively oriented foreign policy. "If one follows the history of every federation," Sismondi observed, "there is not one that was not born when it was essential to repel an oppressor's attack and not one that did not triumph over an adversary equipped with infinitely superior numbers and strength. The kings of Macedonia were defeated by the Achaeans, the duke of Austria by the Swiss, Philip of Spain by the Dutch and George III by the Americans." Federations were born when free peoples faced foreign invaders. "There, where liberty reigns", Sismondi explained, "is love of country the great principle of strength. Never is this love more passionate; never does it move the soul more profoundly than when the fatherland is enclosed within tight limits and the boundaries of the same walls display the cradle of your childhood before your eyes," This was the setting in which "enthusiasm, whose power is far superior to that of a government, however strong it takes itself to be, unites separate states and supplies a center of action, a center of power, to a cluster of republics usually depicted as being so weak."⁶³ Sismondi repeated the claim a generation later in his *Etudes*

62. Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 2, 187.

63. "C'est une circonstance singulièrement favorable pour constituer un gouvernement fédératif, que celle où une invasion redoutable menace un peuple libre. Là où règne la liberté, le grand principe de force, c'est l'amour de la patrie; et jamais cet amour n'est si passionnée, jamais il remue l'âme plus profondément, que lorsque la patrie elle-même est renfermée dans d'étroites limites. . . . Il faut se défendre, il faut vaincre, il faut repousser l'invasion, il faut briser le joug du despotisme; l'enthousiasme, dont la puissance est bien supérieur à celle d'un gouvernement, quelque forte qu'il prétende être, unit les états séparées, et donne un centre d'action, un centre de puissance à cet assemblage de républiques qu'on

sur les constitutions des peuples libres. On their own, he wrote, republics were “naturally bellicose.” Federal states, on the other hand, usually lacked the potentially unlimited capacity for command associated with a powerful central authority, both because of the discussions and divisions among their members and because of the resulting weakness of their capacity for executive action. Federal systems were therefore primarily defensive.⁶⁴ The lack of unity at the center, coupled with the intensity of patriotic allegiance to their constituent parts, made them particularly suitable vehicles for self-preservation.

A federal state, and a matching federal system of government, also limited the risks of both centralized and decentralized power. Centralized power, particularly if it involved a royal government and a capital city, magnified the dangers of political conflict and raised the level of risk associated with botched economic or social reform. In these conditions, if a centralized government were to fail, everything could fail. Decentralized government, on the other hand, particularly when it was accompanied by democratic decision-making, magnified the dangers of political division and increased the risk of recurrent translations of economic and social inequality into rigidly stratified, but still nominally democratic, majorities and minorities. If a decentralized government were to fail, democratic decision-making could become civil war. A federal system, Sismondi argued, both in his early history of the Italian republics and in his late *Etudes sur les constitutions des peuples libres* (1836), contained enough of a mixture of centralization and decentralization to limit both types of risks. As he wrote in the latter work, the primary element of a federal system was a municipality or *commune* because it was the type of intermediate agency that supplied the difference between a representative sovereign state on the one hand and

représente comme si faible. . . . Que l'on parcoure l'histoire de toutes les fédérations, on n'en trouve pas une qui ne soit née au moment où il fallait repousser l'attaque d'un oppresseur; pas une qui n'ait triomphé d'adversaires infiniment supérieurs en nombre et en forces. Les rois de Macédoine furent vaincus par les Achéens, le duc d'Autriche par les Suisses, Philippe d'Espagne par les Hollandais, George III par les Américains.” See Sismondi, *Histoire*, vol. 2, 184–186.

64. Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi, *Etudes sur les constitutions des peuples libres* [Paris, 1836] (Brussels: Société Typographique Belge; A. Wahlen, 1839), 292–293, 297.

a democracy on the other.⁶⁵ In this sense, a federal system was rather like an artificial version of Montesquieu's concept of monarchy, but with an elected, institutional hierarchy instead of a property-based, social hierarchy. A federal system would consist of a network of de facto political institutions whose relatively small size and social integration made them suitable settings for collective decision-making and collective action. Inversely, however, a federal system would also contain a network of national or federal officials whose existence would give a local presence to the central government. Since these officials would be accountable to the central government rather than the local government, they would give the network of municipalities a framework that would keep the network itself intact.⁶⁶

Part of the point of Sismondi's history of the Italian republics was that their internal and external arrangements had not been designed, either by a constitutional theorist or by a constituent assembly. From this perspective, republican history was also civic history, because it could supply a broader and more varied range of examples and arrangements than any more considered process of constitutional design. "We have nothing to say," Sismondi wrote a generation later in his *Etudes sur*

65. "Qu'on ne cherche point dans les essais qui suivent, ces règles générales d'après lesquelles tant de jeunes gens, à peine sortis de l'université, se sont crus en état de donner à leur pays, à tous les pays, des constitutions. . . . Nous disons avant tout: Etudiez les faits, les circonstances, l'esprit du peuple et ses souvenirs, puis passant en revue l'élément démocratique, le monarchique, l'aristocratique, nous avons cherché ce qu'on pouvait attendre, ce qu'on pouvait craindre de l'emploi de chacun. . . . C'est alors qu'une seule nous a paru sûre, la fédération; car lorsque l'ordre social a éprouvé une de ces convulsions violentes qui détruisent l'habitude de l'obéissance et du commandement, qui font disparaître pour chacun l'idée du droit et de la légitimité du pouvoir, il y a guère que la commune qui recouvre sa vitalité, et ce n'est guère que les hommes qui se connaissent, et qui se confient les uns dans les autres, qui peuvent aussi poser les bases d'un nouveau pouvoir social." See Sismondi, *Etudes*, 31–32 (also 279–280, 290–291).

66. "Une des conséquences de la réunion d'un grand nombre de communes en une seule nation, c'est que la décision de ces communes ne peut plus être définitive. Au sein de chacune d'elles doit se trouver toujours le représentant de l'autorité centrale, pour que l'intérêt du tout national ne soit jamais sacrifié à celui de ses parties. Le maire du prince peut être ou ne pas être le même personnage que le maire du peuple; mais la présence du maire du prince, son autorité et l'intervention continuelle du pouvoir central dans le pouvoir communal, sont nécessaires pour qu'il y ait identité de législation, d'administration, de droits, d'une extrémité de l'empire à l'autre." See Sismondi, *Etudes*, 82–83.

les constitutions des peuples libres, "about the constitutions of these federations; chance almost as much as necessity will lead them to be born and will dictate the conditions of the association." He then continued:

The social elements, the indestructible elements will, as has been said, be the municipalities. But we should not conclude from this that confederations will only consist of towns or communes. Local interests, economic relationships, shared laws, religion, language, manners and, above all, the history and memory of past glories give a gathering of men or population the feeling that they form a single people. That people can be large or small; it can be contained in a valley, like the Uri, or in a town, like Basel, or occupy a powerful district, like Berne, or a duchy like the Italian states, or a kingdom, like Spain. All that it needs is life, unity, political organization, love of its independence and individuality to be fit to become a member of a confederation. The tendency in every civilization is to unite and if there was to be a confederation today, it would be made up of states that are far more considerable than those that formed alliances in the middle ages. But this should still mean no symmetry, no rounding up of one state at the expense of another and no ambition to make states for the union rather than make the union for the states.⁶⁷

Only later, once it had come into being, would the various members of the federation, "applying the principles of social science to themselves," begin to adjust their different internal arrangements and, as

67. "Nous n'avons rien à dire sur la constitution de ces fédérations; le hasard presque autant que le besoin les fera naître, et dictera les conditions de l'association. Les éléments sociaux, les éléments indestructibles, avons-nous dit, sont dans les municipalités; nous n'en concluons point cependant qu'il n'y ait de confédérations que celles des villes ou des communes. Des intérêts locaux, des rapports économiques, la communauté de lois, de religion, de langage, de mœurs, mais surtout l'histoire et ses souvenirs, et la gloire passée, donnent à un assemblage d'hommes ou de populations le sentiment qu'ils forment un seul peuple. Ce peuple peut être grand ou petit, il peut être contenu dans une vallée, comme celui d'Uri, ou dans une ville comme celui de Bâle, ou occuper un district puissant comme celui de Berne, ou un duché comme les états d'Italie, ou un royaume comme ceux de l'Espagne. Il suffit qu'il ait vie, unité, organisation politique, amour de son indépendance et de son individualité, pour qu'il soit propre à devenir membre d'une confédération. La tendance de toute civilisation est de réunir, et s'il, se formait aujourd'hui une confédération, elle se composerait d'états bien plus considérables que ne l'étaient ceux qui s'alliaient au moyen âge. Seulement point de symétrie, point d'arrondissement des uns aux dépens des autres, point de prétention à faire les états pour l'union, au lieu de faire l'union pour les états." See Sismondi, *Etudes*, 297–298.

Sismondi put it, “try to balance its constitution in order to set the preservation of every interest in harmony with the rights of all.”⁶⁸ In this sense, the initial, externally oriented union that was the original feature of a federal system would gradually give way to something more integrated, even if the primary distinction between the external responsibilities of the federation and the internal responsibilities of its constituent parts would remain intact.

The broader implications of this distinction between the external responsibilities of the federal government and the internal concerns of its constituent parts formed the analytical starting point of Sismondi’s approach to the subject of political economy.⁶⁹ Given the initial distinction, the key problem in political economy was to prevent the outside from leaking into the inside or, more concretely, to prevent external competition from undermining the social and political cohesion of the states below the federal government. It is well known that Sismondi clashed repeatedly with several of his contemporaries, notably Jean-Baptiste Say and, more mutedly, David Ricardo, on both the nature of the problem and the type of solution that it implied. At first sight, these disagreements, with their focus on prices, productivity, and consumption, seem to have little to do with civic humanism or the Atlantic republican tradition. But, in the context of the parallel that Sismondi set out to draw between the Italian republics after the fall of the Roman empire and Europe after the projected fall of the French empire, the distance between the civic and economic dimensions of a post-imperial system begins to look less considerable. Many of the debates between Sismondi and his contemporaries were connected to the question of how these two dimensions were best articulated. But, independently of the many answers that these debates produced, the perspective on free states presented in the *Histoire des républiques italiennes du moyen âge* indicates that the real starting point of the republican revival in the history and historiography of European political thought was not so much the early fifteenth-century

68. Sismondi, *Etudes*, 298.

69. On this aspect of Sismondi’s thought, see Thomas Hopkins, “Sismondi on the Problems and Promise of International Trade,” in Kapossy and Bridel, *Sismondi*, 99–121; Letizia Pagliai, *Il dilemma di Vilna: Sismondi e la cultura economica europea* (Florence: Edifir, 2012).

crisis of the Florentine Renaissance at the hands of Giangaleazzo Visconti as the early nineteenth-century crisis of the European state-system at the hands of Napoleon Bonaparte.

The twentieth-century version of republican history began with a focus on a temporally specific historical situation and the conceptual transformations that it helped to generate. In Baron's rendition, civic humanism began in Florence early in the fifteenth century. Over time, however, this contextual focus grew more blurred. As Pocock noted in 2003 in the "Afterword" to *The Machiavellian Moment*, Baron had been disappointed by his (Pocock's) reluctance to adopt his "critical chronology," with its strong emphasis on Florence's war with Giangaleazzo Visconti as the setting in which, as Pocock put it, "the identity of liberty with active citizenship" occurred. "It was enough for me," Pocock noted, "to affirm that ideas of active citizenship were formulated by Florentines, that they could be said to have rested on the ideal of the *zōon politikon* expressed by Aristotle, and that they had come to be identified with the possession of arms by the citizen." With this as his starting point, he could then, as he put it, "go on with Baron, and well beyond him, in showing how the history of Rome, Florence, England, Europe, and civil society in general had come to be rewritten in terms of the rise and fall of armed and active citizenship."⁷⁰ Between 1975 and 2003, however, both the geographical origins and analytical focus of the history changed considerably, largely under the influential aegis of Quentin Skinner. As Skinner showed, mainly in the light of his work on Machiavelli, the starting point of Pocock's history was actually Rome, not Greece, and the key political values of the republican tradition owed more to Cicero and Livy than to Aristotle. It was, as Pocock acknowledged, "a distinction of real theoretical importance," because it also gave rise to a shift away from the idea of armed and active citizenship toward a new emphasis on the Roman law concept of a free individual, meaning someone not subject to another's will, as the fundamental republican value. Republican liberty, as Skinner initially called it, was less a matter of armed and active citizenship than an effect of the Roman law concept of non-domination.⁷¹ Yet despite these geographical and

70. Pocock, *MM2*, 555.

71. *Ibid.*, 557.

analytical revisions, the broad sweep of republican historiography has not been visibly affected. Whereas Pocock took Baron's Florentine history back to Greece, Skinner and, subsequently, Philip Pettit have carried Pocock's history westward to Rome and forward toward the twenty-first century.⁷² Over the years, republicanism has begun to look like one of those timeless concepts, like liberalism, nationalism, or conservatism, whose meaning starts to float somewhere beyond the realities of historical understanding when the vocabulary in which it was once couched has been cut loose from its historical moorings.

These moorings were both fiscal and federal. The second, it is important to add, was required to offset the first. Here, too, Sismondi provided an explanation. He argued that the unitary states that had grown up since the Renaissance were locked into what the wars of the period of the French Revolution had shown to be a catastrophically self-defeating competition. Modern states had permanent defense forces and professional legal and administrative systems, all requiring funds. Each state was therefore forced to find ways to broaden and deepen its tax base to maintain its relative position. Each state, by extension, was bound to succumb to the pressure to match the economic assets underlying each other's tax base. Once, in the middle of the eighteenth century, this type of speculation had centered on agriculture and, more specifically, on the likelihood that the mid-eighteenth-century vogue for agricultural improvement would result in longer wars and more severe trade blockades.⁷³ For Sismondi, at the beginning of the next century, the dynamics of competitive economic cloning threatened to encompass every industry in every territory, turning Europe's Renaissance-generated drive toward prosperity and culture into the cause of an escalating sequence of vicious trade cycles and growing economic and social polarization. It was this prospect that lay behind

72. Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). For a discussion of some of the problems involved in this historiography, see Daniel Kapust, "Skinner, Pettit and Livy: The Conflict of the Orders and the Ambiguity of Republican Liberty," *History of Political Thought* 25 (2004): 377–401.

73. On this speculation, see Istvan Hont, "Correcting Europe's Political Economy: The Virtuous Eclecticism of Georg Ludwig Schmid," *History of European Ideas* 33 (2007): 390–410; Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge*, 190.

not only his objection to Jean-Baptiste Say's claim that, put schematically, supply would create its own demand but also, and more positively, his insistence that fiscal states also had to be federal states.

As with so much else, the initial idea came from Rousseau. It followed from Rousseau's endorsement, in book three of the *Social Contract*, of Montesquieu's remark that "liberty, not being the fruit of every climate, is not accessible to all peoples." The "more we consider this principle established by Montesquieu," Rousseau commented, "the more we perceive its truth."⁷⁴ This, he explained, was because the long-term survival of liberty was determined by the relationship between government expenditure, the fiscal system, and the distribution of income. The key variable here was the distribution of income. In cold, inhospitable environments, Rousseau argued, considerable labor would be needed to enable individual households to produce enough wealth for there to be a taxable surplus. In warm, fertile environments, however, the opposite would be the case. There, natural endowments, rather than human labor, would be the prime source of the government's revenue, allowing it to adopt tax policies that were more readily compatible with its own interests rather than those of the governed. If, however, producing a taxable surplus called for considerable effort, as was probable in a colder climate, then the likelihood would be that the per capita contribution of each household would be small. This would mean that large numbers of people would have to contribute to produce the total taxable surplus. The existence of this broad tax base would make it more difficult for a government to adopt partial fiscal policies on the one hand while helping to generate a widely shared interest in public affairs on the other, and this in turn would supply the motivation needed to maintain governmental accountability. On these terms, Rousseau emphasized, a fiscal state would also be a free state, because the combination of a widely distributed tax burden and a high level of governmental accountability

74. "La liberté n'étant pas un fruit de tous les climats n'est pas à la portée de tous les peuples. Plus on médite ce principe établi par Montesquieu, plus on en sent la vérité." See Rousseau, *Social Contract*, bk. 3, chap. 8, 181; Rousseau, *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, 414; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social*, ed. Robert Derathé (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 236.

would make it easier to maintain the equality that was the most easily identifiable marker of the general will.

Sismondi's political and economic thought echoed this Rousseauian logic. The combination of political independence and commercial interdependence of the Italian republics of the Middle Ages made their economies varied and their divisions local. The large number of fiscal systems that they housed also made them a real historical laboratory for studying the relationship between local institutions, fiscal policy, and economic specialization. Federal systems, as the Italian example seemed to indicate, could contain a wide variety of local institutions, electoral systems, and fiscal policies that, in conjunction, appeared to offer a way for the more highly integrated states of modern Europe to escape from the self-defeating mimicry of competitive economic cloning. Within a federal system, some states might favor welfare payments, others might offer tax breaks or promote discretionary consumption to stimulate particular economic activities, while yet others might encourage voluntary service "to fill the hours," as Sismondi put it in his *Nouveaux principes d'économie politique*, "which the progress of industry has allowed them to economize on work."⁷⁵ Policy variations like these, he argued, were the way to keep production and consumption in balance and, within a federal structure, were less exposed to the need to adopt any single set of fiscal, social, or political requirements. This was the real significance of the history of the Italian republics. The mixture of philosophy, politics, and economics that it involved was not peculiar to Sismondi. "Even in those states that have been in existence for a long time," wrote his friend and political ally Benjamin Constant in 1814 in *Of The Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation and Their Relation to European Civilization*, "and whose unification has lost the odium of violence and conquest, we observe the patriotism that springs from local differences, the only genuine patriotism, reborn from its own ashes as soon as the hand of power loosens its grip for a moment. The magistrates of the smallest communes pride themselves on embellishing them. They keep up

75. Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi, *Nouveaux principes d'économie politique, ou de la Richesse dans ses rapports avec la population* [1819], 2 vols. (Paris: Delaunay, 1827), 2: 440–441.

their ancient monuments with care. There is, in almost every village, some erudite man who likes to retell its rustic annals and who is listened to with respect. The inhabitants enjoy everything that gives them the appearance, even if deceptive, of forming a nation and of being united by particular ties."⁷⁶

As Constant added in the larger, but unpublished, *Principles of Politics*, from which he extracted this passage, patriotism of this kind had to be the basis of "the kind of federalism which seems to me useful and possible to establish among us."⁷⁷ Although he did not call it civic humanism, the concept was there in all but name. Without what he called "a new form of federalism," the combination of centralized government, individual self-interest, and the purely negative liberty of the moderns would, Constant wrote, lead individuals to "detach themselves from a fatherland they can nowhere see." Patriotism required a *patrie*, and it was this local and regional patriotism that had to be the basis of a new type of federal system. "Variety," Constant concluded flatly, "is what constitutes organization; uniformity is mere mechanism. Variety is life; uniformity death."⁷⁸

With different degrees of emphasis, this type of concern with a new type of political system—one that could accommodate both positive and negative liberty and both centralized and decentralized power—formed the analytical core of the thought of the circle of early nineteenth-century political thinkers to which Sismondi belonged. Although, after Isaiah Berlin, it has become usual to associate Constant and, more generally, the political thought of the Coppet group with the idea of nega-

76. Benjamin Constant, "Of the Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation and Their Relation to European Civilization," in Benjamin Constant, *Political Writings*, ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 76.

77. Constant, *Political Writings*, 254.

78. Ibid., 76–77. See also the final part of Constant's lecture "Of the Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns," in Ibid., 326: "The danger of modern liberty is that, absorbed in the enjoyment of our private independence, and in the pursuit of our particular interests, we should surrender our right to share in political power too easily." The federal dimension of *De l'esprit de conquête* is emphasized by Denis de Rougemont in his "Introduction" to the edition published in 1980 (Lausanne: Editions Pierre-Marcel Favre), 22–24. On Constant as a critic, rather than an advocate, of modern individualism, see, helpfully, Bryan Garsten, "Religion and the Case against Ancient Liberty: Benjamin Constant's Other Lectures," *Political Theory* 38 (2010): 4–33.

tive liberty, or even “the order of egoism,” the opposite was actually the case. “You say, rightly, that one is as free here as in a republic,” wrote Germaine de Staël from Pisa in 1816 (“the *most dull place* that the imagination can contemplate”). “Certainly, if liberty is simply something negative, there is no harm in this; but where is the emulation? Where is the motivation for distinction among men?”⁷⁹ As with the idea of civic humanism in the following century, modern politics required something different from what, in this case, had been associated earlier with both royal and republican rule. The way that its component parts were articulated is certainly likely to have changed between the age of Sismondi, Constant, and Staël and the time of Baron and Arendt, but the component parts themselves had been largely identified long before they came to be associated with the Atlantic republican tradition. “Man, because of his personality, is an end in himself and cannot be treated as a thing or a means,” wrote one early nineteenth-century German student of liberty before liberalism, “Personality is the basis of his capacity for rights. This truth had already been grasped by Roman law which made the *caput*, or legal capacity, derive from the quality of being a person and, viewing slaves as things, denied them any right.”⁸⁰ In one dimension, the implications of this way of thinking centered on private property and the division of labor. In another, they centered on state finances, taxation, and government expenditure. In a third, they centered on *amour-propre* and the assortment of imaginative and emotional capabilities, like *perfectibilité* and *identification*, that Rousseau bracketed

79. “Vous dites avec raison qu’on est aussi libre ici que dans une république; certainement, si la liberté est une chose négative, il ne s’y fait aucun mal quelconque; mais où est l’émulation? où est le mobile de la distinction dans les hommes?”

Germaine de Staël to the Countess of Albany, 20 December 1816, cited in Saint-René Taillandier, *Lettres Inédites de J. C. L. de Sismondi, de M. de Bonstetten, de Madame de Staël et de Madame de Souza à Madame la comtesse d’Albany* (Paris: Lévy, 1863), 350 (the jibe about Pisa is from an earlier letter, at 349). On Berlin, Constant, and negative liberty, see Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” 166–217. On Constant and the “order of egoism,” see Dunn, *Setting the People Free*, 124ff.

80. “L’homme est, par sa personnalité, but en lui-même et ne peut être traité comme chose, comme moyen. C’est le caractère rationnel qui confère à l’homme sa dignité. La personnalité est la raison de sa *capacité* de droits. Cette vérité était déjà saisie par le droit romain, qui faisait dériver le *caput*, ou la capacité en droit, de la qualité de personne, et qui, regardant les esclaves comme des choses, leur refusait tout droit.” See Heinrich Ahrens, *Cours de droit naturel* [1838], 4th ed. (Brussels: Méline, Cans et compagnie, 1853), 270.

together with patriotism and a *moi commun*. In a fourth, they centered on electoral systems, political accountability, and the many different ways of binding rulers to ruled. Together, as with Sismondi, they amounted to a claim about liberty as a compound of both the ancient and the modern, and particularly as a way of thinking about human association beyond the confines of political societies and sovereign states. Civic humanism, as it came to be construed in the twentieth century, was a late echo of this claim. It was a concept that had as much to do with the idea of a *Genossenschaft* in Germany, pluralism in Britain and the United States, or *associationisme* in France as it has come to have with the moral and political thought of Machiavelli and Harrington.⁸¹ Reconstructing a fuller version of the story means starting with the concept that gave both Arendt and Baron their moral and political cue, namely the early nineteenth-century concept of autonomy. It also means stepping back, at least in the first instance, from the precipice lying putatively at the end of the teleological slide from autonomy, to historicism, to nihilism that, after the First World War, political thinkers as otherwise different as Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss claimed the concept had helped to create.⁸² Reconstructing the history and the successive articulations of its major analytical components—the self, the state, and the economy—from the time of Sismondi, Constant, and Staël to that of Baron, Arendt, and beyond promises to throw a great deal more light not only on the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century political thought but also, and more particularly, on the still largely unexplored intellectual hinterland from which both rights-based and republican political theories emerged.

81. On these subjects in nineteenth-century political thought, see, helpfully, David Runciman, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For two earlier but still illuminating monographs, see Rupert Emerson, *State and Sovereignty in Modern Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1928); Georges Gurvitch, *L'idée du droit social. Notion et système du droit social: histoire doctrinale depuis le xvii^e siècle jusqu'à la fin du xix^e siècle* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1932).

82. On Strauss on autonomy, see Robert B. Pippin, "The Modern World of Leo Strauss," *Political Theory* 20 (1992): 448–472, and, for a helpful recent assessment, Michael Schlie, "Words without Desire: Strauss, Hegel, and Political Violence," *Review of Metaphysics* 66 (2013): 519–544. On Schmitt, see Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism* [1919], trans. Guy Oakes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986).

7

Millennium and Enlightenment

Robert Owen and the Second Coming of the Truth

GARETH STEDMAN JONES

"SOCIALISM" ORIGINATED not as a new conception of politics or a new theory of economics but as a new "science" of human nature, a replacement or at the very least a radical redefinition of Christianity.¹ The primordial and most enduring ambition of "socialism" was to displace not the state but rather the Church. What came to be called "socialism" belonged neither wholly to the Left nor to the Right but drew on both. It was neither conservative nor reactionary, but could be hierarchical, inegalitarian, or despotic. It was in part libertarian, even antinomian, but neither liberal nor democratic. Its ambition was to provide at once the science, ethics, and sometimes the religion of a new social order.

In France, "socialism" aimed not to continue or extend the Revolution but rather to bring it to a conclusion. The Revolution would be ended through the discovery of a new "spiritual power": in the shape of a new science. But socialism did not originate exclusively in France. From the earliest surveys, which appeared in the 1830s, "socialism" was universally recognized as deriving not only from Fourierism and

1. On the relationship between socialism or communism and religious reform, see G. Stedman Jones, "Introduction," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin Classics, 2002), 8–10, 74–84, 140–145.

St. Simonism in France but as much from Owenism in Britain.² What, then, was the family resemblance between the “socialism” that emerged from the aftermath of the Revolution in France and the Owenite “socialism” created in the very different political and religious circumstances of late Georgian Britain?

Robert Owen was born in the remote Welsh border town of Newtown, Montgomeryshire, in 1771.³ Originally apprenticed as a draper’s shop assistant in London, by the age of nineteen he had moved to Manchester and entered the cotton trade. A small but successful venture in cotton spinning led to his appointment as manager of a large spinning mill, soon followed by promotion to a partnership. During his twelve-year stay in Manchester, his rise was meteoric. Accepted among Manchester business circles, he was elected to the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society and frequented the Unitarian Manchester College, where he allegedly encountered Coleridge as well as followers of the scientist and dissenting minister Joseph Priestley. At the age of twenty-eight, he and his partners acquired the large Clydeside New Lanark mills from wealthy Glasgow merchant David Dale. In 1800, Owen married Dale’s daughter, Caroline, and began to manage the mills. Within ten years, he had built up a European reputation by combining steady and substantial profits with a radically innovative approach to management based on the principles of “jus-

2. The articles of Louis Reybaud on “Les Socialistes modernes,” a survey of the thought of St. Simon, Fourier, and Owen, first appeared in *Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1836 and 1838. They were published in book form in 1841 together with a study of Auguste Comte. See Louis Reybaud, *Etudes sur les Reformateurs ou Socialistes Modernes* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1841).

3. On Owen’s life, see Robert Owen, *The Life of Robert Owen, Written by Himself, with Selections from His Writings and Correspondence* (London: E. Wilson, 1857); Lloyd Jones, *The Life, Times and Labours of Robert Owen*, ed. W. C. Jones (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1890); Frank Podmore, *Robert Owen: A Biography*, 2 vols. (London: Hutchinson, 1906). For general studies of Owenism, see J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America, the Quest for the New Moral World* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969); Gregory Claeys, *Citizens and Saints: Politics and Anti-politics in Early British Socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium, from Moral Economy to Socialism, 1815–1860* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987); Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium, a Study of the Harmony Community* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Virgao, 1983).

tice and kindness." Feted by government ministers, members of the royal family—especially Queen Victoria's father, the often indebted Duke of Kent—and visiting foreign dignitaries from the Tzar of Russia downward, Owen attributed his success not just to benevolence and philanthropy but also to the truth of his "new view of society," based on a new science of "the formation of character." Thereafter, throughout the rest of his long life—he died in 1858—he never tired of exploring every opportunity, however untimely or incongruous, to demonstrate the truth of this new "science" to the world.

While the "sciences" of St. Simon and Fourier had been designed to end the crisis produced by the Revolution in France, Owen, in the decade from 1812 to 1822, applied his own newfound principle with increasing boldness to the solution of the problems of industrial Britain during the French wars and after. From 1812 to 1817, the immediate object of his preoccupations passed from crime, through the misery of factory children, to the increase of pauperism and the problem of postwar unemployment. The increasingly radical solutions he proposed for these disorders started with a new national system of education, proceeded through fiscal reforms and factory legislation, and culminated in a national and indeed global network of villages of cooperation in 1817. All of these proposals were, supposedly, applications of his new principle of the formation of character, first set down in 1812 and 1813 and fully published in 1816 in *A New View of Society*.

According to the *New View*, man is born with a desire to obtain happiness and is also endowed with faculties that enable him to "receive, convey and compare" ideas. The ideas themselves come from outside: "The knowledge which man receives, is derived from the objects around him, and chiefly from the example and instruction of his immediate predecessors."⁴ Because of the passivity and plasticity of the infant mind, "any general character from the best to the worst, from the most ignorant to the most enlightened, may be given to any

4. Robert Owen, *A New View of Society, or, Essays on the Principle of the Formation of the Human Character, and the Application of the Principle to Practice* (1813–1816), in *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, ed. Gregory Claeys, 4 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1993), vol. 1, 70.

community, even to the world at large, by the application of proper means.”⁵ Thus “the reasoning faculty may be injured or destroyed during its growth by reiterated impressions being made upon it of notions not derived during its growth from realities.”

In fact, Owen claimed, “All men are . . . erroneously trained at present, and hence the inconsistencies and miseries of the world.”⁶ In particular, individuals were subjected to the fundamental error “that they form their own individual characters, and possess merit or demerit for the peculiar notions or opinions impressed on the mind during its early growth.”⁷ Man’s ignorance of his own nature, the belief that he himself rather than outside circumstances was responsible for his character, in turn led him to devise laws and “social arrangements” on the basis of these mistaken notions. From such errors, man could only be delivered by true knowledge. Man’s pursuit of happiness only took selfish and destructive forms because the circumstances of which he was a product had formed him in this belief.

At different stages of his career, Owen emphasized the destructive effects of different laws and social arrangements. In the *New View*, he concentrated on education and punishment; in his analysis of the growing influence of trade and industry, he emphasized the selfishness, greed, and deceit in which merchants were trained, and the corresponding brutishness of their operatives. He went on to attack the malevolent doctrine of individual interest and the association of happiness with wealth that was encouraged by the economists. Later on, he attacked the stunting effect of repetitive specialized work and the division of labor. He also broadened his attack to property, and to the Christian view of marriage, as fundamentally harmful institutions that alienated man from his neighbor. There was no inconsistency in these variations in the objects of his attack, for all were equivalent as social arrangements based on false notions, at variance with observation of the facts, and contrary to the laws of nature. This was why, from 1817 onward, Owen maintained a constant assault on what he

5. Owen, *A New View*, vol. 1, 33.

6. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 70.

7. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 71.

considered to be the principal source and bulwark of these false notions, the established religions of the world.

Owen also believed, however, that history would now take a new direction, for knowledge of the science of “the influence of circumstances” was itself a new circumstance. “When these truths are made evident, every individual will necessarily endeavour to promote the happiness of every other individual within his sphere of action; because he must clearly and without doubt, comprehend such conduct to be the essence of self-interest, or the true cause of self-happiness,”⁸ for, as he later wrote, “the laws of God or of Nature are . . . all calculated to make man a social being; to unite him most cordially with all his fellows; to destroy all anti-social feelings; and to prevent the existence of opposing feelings or interests.”⁹

Unlike St. Simon or Fourier, Owen, a successful manufacturer, understandably began by stressing his success as a practical man whose theory had derived from experience and practical experiment. He spoke originally in the name of a new “principle” rather than a new science. Nevertheless, it was not long before he declared himself to be the founder of a new science, and his claim for the importance of this science was quite as emphatic as anything to be found on the other side of the English Channel:

The discovery of the distance and movements of the heavenly bodies—of the time piece—of a vessel to navigate the most distant parts of the ocean—of the steam engine which performs under the easy control of one man the labour of thousands—and of the press, by which knowledge and improvement may be speedily given to the most ignorant of all parts of the earth—these have indeed been discoveries of high import to mankind; but important as these and others have been in their effects on the condition of human society, their combined benefits in practice will fall short of those which will be speedily attained by the new intellectual power which men will acquire through the knowledge of “the science of the influence of circumstances over the whole conduct, character and proceedings

8. Ibid.

9. Robert Owen, *The Book of the New Moral World*, pt. 2, in Claeys, *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. 3, 89.

of the human race." By this latter discovery, more will be accomplished in one year for the wellbeing of human nature, including without any exception all ranks and descriptions of men than have ever yet been effected in one or in many circumstances.¹⁰

Applying his science to the analysis of the postwar depression in Britain, Owen declared the age to be one of "crisis." Until the beginning of the French Wars, Britain had been essentially an agricultural nation and relatively harmonious. The lower orders "were generally trained by the example of some landed proprietor and in such habits as created a mutual interest between the parties."¹¹ However, this rough balance between restricted wants and restricted knowledge had been upset by the inventions of science, which had led to an extraordinary rise in the importance of trade, manufacturing, and commerce. "This change has been owing chiefly to the mechanical inventions which introduced the cotton trade into this country and to the cultivation of the cotton tree in America," Owen declared.¹² The result was a huge increase in productive power, which was unaccompanied by a scientific knowledge of the requisite new social arrangements necessary to distribute the new wealth. The traders and manufacturers had been left to themselves. But, according to Owen, "The governing principle of trade, manufacture and commerce is immediate pecuniary gain, to which on every scale every other is made to give way. All are sedulously trained to buy cheap and sell dear; and to succeed in this art, the parties must be taught to acquire strong powers of deception."¹³ The result was the spread of individualism, the decline of social affections, the productive powers of the country throttled by an antiquated medium of exchange, technological unemployment, underconsumption, and poverty in the midst of plenty. Owen saw his science as the complement in the social sphere to the inventions of Watt and Arkwright in the mechanical and chemical spheres. The science would show how men could be trained "to act in union" not

10. Robert Owen, "Report to the County of Lanark," in Claeys, *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. 1, 309.

11. Robert Owen, "Observations on the Effect of the Manufacturing System," in Claeys, *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, in SW, vol. 1, 114.

12. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 111.

13. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 113.

simply for war but also “for the attainment of pacific and civil objects.” Like Condorcet, St. Simon, and Fourier, Owen made no distinction in principle between the science of nature and that of society. Advances were equally possible in both spheres. To those who were skeptical about the transformation that would be brought about by the discovery of the “science of the influence of circumstances,” Owen argued that, “Even they must be conscious that the time is not long passed when their forefathers would have deemed it far more improbable that the light cloudy mist that they saw arise from the boiling of water could be so applied, by human agency, that under the easy control of one of themselves, it should be made to execute the labour of thousands.”¹⁴

Who, then, would be displaced by this new science? Since, in Owen’s thinking, the dissensions of “class, sect and party” and the false principles of law and religion all stemmed from ignorance, the sources of antagonism were not particular governments or classes in their day-to-day practice but rather those who produced or reproduced the theories on which such practices were based. These were the closet theorists (i.e., the political economists), the lawyers, the learned, but above all, the priests. Since government and governed, oppressing classes and oppressed, were all victims of the same false assumptions, Owen appealed over the heads of the different theorists to the most enlightened in every class. It is certainly true that, at different stages in his life, Owen entertained more hopes from one social group than another—in the post-Napoleonic period, the crowned heads of Europe; in the 1830s, the enlightened middle class, trade unionists, and cooperators. But even in 1848, he could still appeal within the same preface without distinction to the Red Republicans in France and to Queen Victoria. To accuse Owen of political naivety is to ignore the logic of his new science.¹⁵

14. Owen, “Report to the County of Lanark,” vol. 1, 311–312.

15. See the sections of the “Preface” entitled “To Her Majesty, Victoria, Queen of the British Empire, and to her Responsible Advisers” and “To the Red Republicans, Communists, and Socialists of Europe,” in Robert Owen, *The Revolution in the Mind and Practice of the Human Race; or, the Coming Change from Irrationality to Rationality* (London: E. Wilson, 1849), xii–xxviii. The charge of political naivety was made by Edward Thompson: “Owen simply had a vacant place in his

Where to place Owen on a political map was as much a conundrum for his contemporaries as it has been for subsequent historians. His place as a founder of "socialism" in any pantheon of the Left has always depended on a charitable disregard of most of what he wrote or said. Owen never disguised the fact that his supposedly global plan for "villages of cooperation" started life as a solution to the postwar rise in pauperism and crime. It was a scheme for dealing with "the poor and working classes," who were "surrounded by circumstances that necessarily entailed misery on them and their posterity" and if "allowed to continue" would "further demoralise and violently subvert the whole social system." "To prevent this catastrophe," he stated, "it became absolutely indispensable that their habits be changed."¹⁶ At the same time, his promise to William Wilberforce, to whom *A New View* was dedicated, and to the various members of the royal family and high aristocracy who lined up in its support, was that his plan would "effectually relieve the manufacturing and labouring poor from their present deep distress, without violently or prematurely interfering with the existing institutions of society."¹⁷ Therefore, it was not surprising that William Cobbett contemptuously denounced the ostensibly universal plan as one of "parallelograms for paupers."¹⁸

Owen shared neither the radicals' diagnosis of postwar distress nor their faith in a political remedy. According to Owen, the problem was not the result of the national debt and the level of taxation. "Were every shilling of your national debt and taxes removed tomorrow," he wrote, "and were the government wholly unpaid for its services—in a very few years either this or some other country must suffer more than you now experience."¹⁹ Nor did he believe that any benefit would accrue from manhood suffrage. On the contrary, as he argued in 1817, "should greater liberty be now given than the British Constitution

mind where most people have political responses." See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), 783.

16. Robert Owen, "Letter published in the London Newspapers of July 30th, 1817," in Claeys, *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. 1, 166.

17. Ibid.

18. Cited in Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 782.

19. Robert Owen, "New State of Society Address," in Claeys, *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. 1, 203.

can with safety afford to all its subjects, the lives and properties of the well-disposed and the safety of the state would be put to imminent hazard." Therefore, he continued, "until better training, more useful knowledge and productive constant employment shall be given to the poor and the working classes, no really intelligent person could venture to give more freedom to such a population as ours has gradually become than the British Constitution in its ordinary state now admits."²⁰

Not surprisingly, the radicals of 1817 denounced the cooperation plan as a scheme to reintroduce feudalism or even as a government-inspired plot to divert the pressure for parliamentary reform. Hazlitt best captured the incongruity of Owen's proposals and their apparent support. *A New View*, he wrote, was simply a new edition of Godwin's *Political Justice*, a reissue of the principles of 1793 but now "under the patronage of the nobility, the gentry, Mr. Wilberforce, and the Prince Regent, and all those who are governed, like these great personages, by no other principle than truth, and no other wish than the good of mankind!" Loyal booksellers and newspapers now puffed as "extremely practical, practicable, solid, useful," as "good," a work "which proposes no less than to govern the world without religion and without law, by the force of reason alone!" Hazlitt believed Owen's schemes were tolerated only because they were "remote and inapplicable." "Neither the great world nor the world in general care anything about New Lanark, nor trouble themselves whether the workmen there go to bed drunk or sober, or whether the wenches are got with child before or after the wedding ceremony, " he stated. But, he concluded, "let the good which Mr. Owen says he has done in one poor village be in danger of becoming general—let his plan for governing men by reason, without the assistance of the dignitaries of the church and the dignitaries of the law, but once get wind and be likely to be put in practice, and his dreams of elevated patronage will vanish."²¹

Owen's position did not change. But radical criticism gradually diminished in the face of Owen's sheer longevity and the consistency with which he pursued his aim to build "the new moral world." These

20. Ibid., vol. 1, 202.

21. William Hazlitt, *Political Essays*, 1819 (Oxford: Woodstock, 1990), 103.

remained basically unchanged despite the virtual loss of his fortune in the community of New Harmony in Indiana in the 1820s, his tireless involvement in the Equitable Labour Exchange and the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union in the early 1830s, his founding of the Association of All Classes and All Nations, yet another attempt to build a community in Queenwood in Hampshire in the 1840s, and his new enthusiasm for spiritualism and call for state-assisted communities in the 1850s. As befit a great “utopian,” in old age it was his equability and his “benevolence” that was emphasized. Karl Marx, not usually a kindly critic, attending Owen’s eightieth birthday tribute at John Street on May 18, 1851, remarked that “despite his *idée fixes*, the old man was ironical and endearing.”²² Engels, writing about Owen in 1880, described him as “a man of almost sublime, childlike simplicity of character, and at the same time one of the few born leaders of men.”²³ This image of the great-hearted “utopian” also suited English Fabian critics writing around the turn of this century, although somewhat greater emphasis was placed on Owen’s impracticality. Engels had argued that Owen’s communism was based on “a purely business foundation” and “maintained this practical character” throughout.²⁴ But Frank Podmore, in his classic biography of 1906, emphasized that Owen’s greatness was not that of a good businessman but that of a “prophet.”²⁵

Where then had this “utopian socialism” come from? Robert Owen left no record of what he read and rarely mentioned the sources of his ideas. His son, Robert Dale Owen, did not consider his father an attentive or systematic reader, and Harriet Martineau further disparaged attempts to trace Owen’s intellectual genealogy with her quip that Owen never thought differently of any book for having read it.²⁶ As a result, Owen was only assigned to the vaguest of traditions, with little or no attempt to trace his precise antecedents. Engels thought that

22. Karl Marx to Friedrich Engels, 21 May 1851, in *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1982), vol. 38, 360.

23. Friedrich Engels, “Anti-Duhring Herr Eugen Duhring’s Revolution in Science,” in *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels* vol. 25, 249.

24. *Ibid.*, 250.

25. Podmore, *Robert Owen*, vol. 2, 644.

26. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 108, 197; vol. 2, 570, 641.

Owen had adopted "the teaching of the materialist philosophers," but he mentioned no names. Podmore, on the basis of no particular textual evidence, considered him a prophet "in the tradition of Rousseau" with a gospel of "the essential goodness of human nature." Even J. F. C. Harrison, in his pathbreaking study *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America* (1969), added little on Owen's strictly intellectual prehistory. Like previous commentators, he considered Owen's ideas unoriginal and repetitive.²⁷ His interest was in the social history of Owenism as a multifaceted movement expressing the different hopes and tensions invested in its ideas of association in industrializing Britain and of agrarian community in the newly constituted American republic.

Only in the last fifteen years has a serious attempt been made to look behind the faded image of Owen as a good-hearted and gently beaming philanthropist in a dusty gallery of "utopians" and examine the sources of his thought. By far the most substantial contribution to this investigation has been made in two books by Gregory Claeys, *Politics and Anti-politics in the Thought of Robert Owen* and *Money, Machinery and the Millennium*. Claeys's most distinctive emphasis is on the political theory of Owenism. In contrast to those like Edward Thompson, who argued Owen's incapacity to think politically, or those like Edward Royle, who stressed his conservatism,²⁸ Claeys wants to stress alongside what he acknowledges as a millennial "anti-political" strain a political stance derived primarily from the republican and civic-humanist tradition depicted by John Pocock. Indeed, Claeys considers this republican strand, once separated from its antipolitical impulses, to be Owen's most important and lasting contribution to socialist and democratic theory,²⁹ for Claeys maintains that Owenism was the missing link between eighteenth-century republicanism and nineteenth-century Marxism or social democracy. For him, the problem was not the lack of an Owenite politics but rather: "how did socialism, itself partly the offspring of the popular radical reform

27. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, 83–87.

28. Edward Royle, *Victorian Infidels: The Origins of the British Secularist Movement, 1791–1866* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974), 44.

29. Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 6–7.

movement, depart so far at some points from the radical interpretation of the parliamentary ideal that its own commitment to this ideal often failed to be evident even to some socialists, and seemed utterly non-existent to many radical critics?"³⁰

Claeys maintains that the Owenite "ideal polity" derived from three sources: natural jurisprudence, Quakerism, and republicanism.³¹ Owen's reliance on natural jurisprudence is indicated by his assumption of the natural peaceableness and sociability of man derived from seventeenth-century thinkers Grotius and Pufendorf, together with an optimistic gloss added in the early eighteenth century by Shaftesbury emphasizing man's natural capacity for benevolence. The Quaker element was most obviously discernible in Owen's adoption of a constitution that assigned different functions to different age groups, a plan espoused by seventeenth-century Quaker John Bellers, from whom Owen claimed also to have derived his idea for villages of cooperation. The Quakers, like other radical nonconformist sects, had preserved forms of egalitarian and democratic practice dating from the seventeenth-century revolution. During those years, Quakerism had stood not only for a polity without soldiers, lawyers, or priests but, more remotely recalling its sixteenth-century Anabaptist roots, a society without buying and selling. As a movement that rejected coercion or a priesthood, Quakerism provided one of the archetypes of a polity reliant solely on moral suasion—self-discipline produced by the reciprocal moral gaze—so often discussed in radical circles in the last two decades of the eighteenth century.³²

Lastly, and forming the linchpin of Claeys's argument, there was the contribution made by classical republicanism to Owenite politics. The starting point here is Pocock's suggestion that nineteenth- and twentieth-century socialism represented "a futile attempt to uphold the integrity of the classical conception of the autonomous unspecialised citizen."³³ During the eighteenth century, the defining feature of the

30. Ibid., 14.

31. Ibid., 23, pt.1, chap.1 passim.

32. Ibid., 45.

33. Ibid., 50. See also J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 502; John G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time*:

republican critique had been a preoccupation with an ancient conception of civic virtue and its corruption by all those features of Whig modernity—the national debt, the funding system, the stock market, and the growth of luxury—that prevented or corroded the full political participation of an independent citizenry. Early in the eighteenth century, pictures of ancient virtue were drawn not simply from Greece and Rome but also, in the patriarchal version of republicanism espoused by Bolingbroke and at points apparently adopted by Owen, from “the superior native American tribes . . . uniformly exhibiting the hardy, penetrating, elevated and sincere character which was at a loss to comprehend how a rational being could desire to possess more than his nature could enjoy.”³⁴

With the success of the American Revolution, invocation of the ancient republic was generally replaced among radicals by an acceptance of the principles of representative democracy, most clearly articulated in the writings of Tom Paine. In this context, socialism, it is argued, represented an attempt to revive the classical model, starting with Godwin’s critique of radical conceptions of public virtue and political independence and his rejection of parliamentary reform as a goal.³⁵

Given Owen’s known contacts with Godwin between 1813 and 1818, the years of the composition of most of *A New View*, this political stance developed into an Owenite, and subsequently Marxian, suspicion of parliamentary government in the name of a fuller form of political participation. Such a position was in turn reinforced by a parallel critique of the modern division of labor and the accompanying degradation of work found in the writings of Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, and John Millar. Owen took over these criticisms in his polemic against political economists in *The Social System*.

Claeys’s interpretation is important, the first to provide a systematic analysis of the provenance of hitherto neglected political assumptions embedded within Owen’s thought and in a larger sense a bold

Essays on Political Thought and History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 103.

34. Owen, *A New View*, vol. 1, 83.

35. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 33–34.

attempt to construe socialism as one variant of the classical republican tradition. Owen certainly shared a republican suspicion of "a fondness for essentially injurious luxuries among a numerous class of individuals who formerly never thought of them."³⁶ As a result of the manufacturing system, "ere long, the comparatively happy simplicity of the agricultural peasant will be wholly lost among us."³⁷ In *Harmony*, there would be no frivolous pursuit of fashion, "with regard to dress, an object upon which so large a share of the industry of civilised states is now so uselessly and injuriously expended, the members of the community having once ascertained the best materials and the form best adapted to the health of the wearer, will have no disposition to introduce afterwards any of the frivolous, fantastical and expensive varieties that may be current elsewhere."³⁸ Similarly, Owen echoed the characteristic eighteenth-century republican concern about the effect of the division of labor on the ability to bear arms, and at New Lanark, he established a militia. Some of his complaints about the spirit of the age sounded stereotypically republican. While the laws and customs of Lycurgus had "formed man into a model for martial exploits," now he was "trained to be an instrument of despotism" and "where the law and custom of Athens trained the young mind to acquire as high a degree of partial rationality as the history of preceding times records, man is now reduced, by a total change of laws and customs, to the lowest state of degradation."³⁹

But there is a difference between drawing on republican ideas and forming part of a republican tradition. In classical republicanism, according to Pocock, time was cyclical, a repeated oscillation between virtue and corruption. The paradigmatic shifts in political life had been those between monarchy and republic or between republic and empire, as they had first been analyzed by Sallust, Livy, Cicero, and others. Participation in the *res publica* was the supreme good. Virtue and patriotism were synonymous terms. The republic meant self-government by a male citizenry acting according to laws of its own

36. Owen, "Observations on the Effect of the Manufacturing System," vol. 1, 112.

37. Ibid.

38. Robert Owen, "Address Delivered by Robert Owen of New Lanark," in Claey's, *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. 2, 70.

39. Owen, *A New View*, vol. 1, 83.

making and performing a spectrum of functions without differentiation or exemption. In the eighteenth century, republican criticism focused on abuses of executive power as the result of new forms of bribery and corruption following the financial revolution in the wake of 1688.⁴⁰ Commercial society, it was thought, also threatened the balance of the constitution through the weakening of the independence of the citizen by changes in the division of labor. Most worrying to republicans, for whom the supreme test of citizenship was the willingness to bear arms, was the possibility of despotism opened up by the delegation of national defense to a standing army.⁴¹ Finally, even writers like Adam Smith, who defended the advance of commercial society and who in his famous encomium of the modern pin factory praised its increase of productivity, warned against the dangers of the minute subdivision of productive tasks found in modern manufacturing.⁴²

Unsurprisingly at a time when the country was engaged in a major European war, Owen in *A New View* discussed his provision of a militia at New Lanark. But it was not until the 1820s that he also began to complain about the tendency of the modern division of labor to "mutilate . . . the character of man, to reduce him in fact to a small fraction of an intelligent human being."⁴³ Similarly, Owen showed little interest in the directly political concerns of republicans. As Claey's himself admits, Owen, like Godwin, considered "patriotism" to form part of the old immoral world. In the new dispensation there would be but "one language and one nation."⁴⁴ Owen set little store by political participation, virtue, or independence, as a radical or republican tradition understood these terms.

According to Owen, the form of government was a secondary issue. Indeed, in modern conditions, it was irrelevant. What mattered was public opinion, "the genuine voice of the public." "It is a mistake,"

40. On republican or civic humanist criticism in the eighteenth century, see Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, chaps. 13–14.

41. On the militia question, see John Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue* (Edinburgh: Donald, 1985).

42. Adam Smith, *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. G. Stigler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), bk. 1, 8–9, bk. 5, 302–303.

43. Robert Owen, *The Social System*, in Claey's, *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. 2, 78.

44. Cited in Claey's, *Citizens and Saints*, 56.

Owen told the radicals, “to suppose the existing government possesses a power independent of the genuine voice of the public. It has been for several years solely governed by that voice.”⁴⁵ The priority therefore was not to change the form of government but rather to devise “effective means” whereby the people might be trained “as human beings intended to be rational ought to be trained.” Looked at from this angle, Owen added, “despotic governments were frequently found to be better than what were called democratic.”⁴⁶

There is no evidence—certainly contemporary radicals saw none—that Owen’s criticism of representative government hinged on its inferiority to the ancient republican notion of citizenship. Insofar as there is evidence of a nostalgia in Owen’s writings, it is for a somewhat paternal, even patriarchal, political form, an idealized landlord community, or for the simple forms of government used by the native American tribes.⁴⁷ Furthermore, although Godwin sometimes wrote admiringly about the virtues of the ancient Romans, it is difficult to believe that ancient republicanism inspired Godwin’s critique of radicalism. His principal objection to the democratic legislative assembly was its disregard for the right of private judgment and the fictive character of its apparent legislative unanimity.⁴⁸ But, as Hegel argued, such a right and its corollary—rationally based and freely given individual consent—was not classical but Christian, indeed Protestant in origin. It was a great achievement of the modern world and the main reason

45. Owen, “New State of Society Address,” vol. 1, 202.

46. “Proceedings of the Third Co-operative Congress,” cited in Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 72.

47. According to Owen’s “Observations on the Effects of the Manufacturing System,” written in 1815, “not more than thirty years since . . . [the poorest] were generally trained by the example of some landed proprietor and in such habits as created a mutual interest between the parties, by which even the lowest peasant was generally considered as belonging to, and forming somewhat of a member of a respectable family.” See Claeys, *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. 1, 114. A similar nostalgia about simple and unacquisitive societies is evident in his portrayal in *A New View of* “the superior native American tribes” who “roamed fearlessly through their trackless forests, uniformly exhibiting the hardy, penetrating, elevated, and sincere character, which was at a loss to comprehend how a rational being could desire to possess more than his nature could enjoy.” See Claeys, *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. 1, 83–84.

48. On the centrality of the right of private judgement in Godwin, see Mark Philp, *Godwin’s Political Justice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 10–19.

why any attempt to recreate the ethos of the classical *Polis* would be dangerously misguided.⁴⁹

Perhaps a better way of measuring the distance between Owen and a more obviously republican position might be to compare his position with that of another contemporary, who really did possess a sharp, even tragic, sense of the incompatibility between a republican heritage and the new industrial phase of commercial society. This was Sismondi, whose first critical reflections on the new shape of industry belonged to the same postwar years as those of Owen.

Sismondi was born in Geneva, revered the memory of Rousseau, and became a close student of Adam Smith. After publishing a largely Smithian treatise on political economy in 1803, Sismondi devoted the next decade to a fourteen-volume history of the medieval and Renaissance Italian city-republic.⁵⁰ It was in the years after 1815 that Sismondi developed his increasingly acute sense of the incompatibility between his republican ideals and the emerging shape of the new system of manufacturing. He was particularly impressed by the slump following the flooding of the European market by machine-made British textiles. Unlike Say, Torrens, or Ricardo, he did not attribute this glut to an exceptional downturn in an unusually bumpy inventory cycle produced by the transition from war to peace. Instead, like Owen, he focused on the dangers of overcapacity and overproduction inherent in the new steam-powered and machine-based methods of production. Like others, he was astonished at the potential of an industry now apparently capable of undercutting the high-skill, low-cost textiles of the Hindus and of conquering the markets of the world.⁵¹

49. "In the states of antiquity the subjective end was entirely identical with the will of the state; in modern times however, we expect to have our own views, our own volition and our own conscience." See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 260, 283.

50. For Sismondi's role in the discussion about the international crisis of the postwar economy, see Gareth Stedman Jones, "*Industrie*, Pauperism and the Hanoverian State: The Genesis and Political Context of the Original Debate about the 'Industrial Revolution' in England and France, 1815–1840" (working paper, Centre for History and Economics, 1997).

51. Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi, *Nouveaux principes d'économie politique ou de la richesse dans ses rapports avec la population*, 2 vols. (Paris: Chez Delaunay, 1819), vol. 1, 339.

In his *New Principles of Political Economy* (1819) and elsewhere, he expressed his fears about the political and social dangers of the new system of manufacturing. Given the scale of the system of production, entrepreneurs looked no longer to the national market but instead to the world market; uprooted rural workers were attracted to the new centers of manufacturing only to find their livelihoods now at the mercy of violent oscillations in wages and employment and to an ever greater likelihood of being displaced by machines.⁵² Cut adrift from agriculture and unapprenticed to any trade, such operatives found themselves increasingly threatened by pauperism—abandoned to the parish by employers unwilling to sustain them through periods of unemployment. Sismondi revived the Latin term *proletarii* to describe this new, rootless, and increasingly sullen group of workers embittered by their plight and effectively without a country. He highlighted the danger to the state represented by this swelling class lacking in property, education, religion, or patriotic spirit.⁵³ He now doubted the wisdom of the abolition of guilds and trade societies during the French Revolution and castigated the social irresponsibility of a new breed of employers legitimated, he feared, by the newly sanctioned ethos of *laissez-faire*.⁵⁴ At the same time, however, he continued to profess himself a follower of Adam Smith. He urged a number of remedial measures, but his overall analysis was pessimistic. He could see no way in which a republican form of government could coexist with the new system of production.

A comparison between Owen and Sismondi is instructive not simply because there was a certain affinity between their analyses of the crisis of the postwar economy but also because they apparently

52. The incompatibility between republicanism and the new mechanized form of commercial society was highlighted by Sismondi's claim that in these new circumstances, the division of labor could benefit the entrepreneur without benefiting society. See Sismondi, *Nouveaux principes*, vol. 1, 370, 374.

53. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 368; vol. 2, 262.

54. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 401. In his *History of the Italian Republics*, Sismondi laid particular weight on the economic regulation used by the guilds of the medieval Italian communes to prevent the growth of extremes of fortune. See Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi, *A History of the Italian Republics, being a View of the Origin, Progress and Fall of Italian Freedom* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown & Green, 1832).

discussed their respective diagnoses at Madame de Staehl's house at Coppet in 1818.⁵⁵ Unsurprisingly, Sismondi could not accept Owen's remedy. He could only recommend limited measures designed to preserve the integrity of the polity and alleviate the plight of the new class of workers. Owen, on the other hand, was in possession of a new "science" that at one stroke would transform the world. He was about to inaugurate the millennium.

When Owen later laid the foundation stone of the Queenwood community building in 1839, it was inscribed C.M.—Commencement of the Millennium.⁵⁶ This was meant literally. At the end of Owen's most systematic treatise, *The Book of the New Moral World* (1842), there is a "Recapitulation," which is worth quoting at length. It is subtitled "Nature Vindicated; or the Second Coming of the Truth":

The First Truth, given through the spirit of the most advanced mind in former periods of the history of humanity, declared, "that to make the population of the world wise, good and happy, there must be universal charity, and universal kindness—men must be trained to love one another as they love themselves, and then there will be peace and good will towards men", and not before.

This is the announcement of the First Great Truth to Mankind.

But the causes which continually prevented the creation of universal charity, of universal kindness,—which kept men ignorant, wicked and miserable,—which made men hate or dislike each other, and maintained war and ill-will among the human race, were hidden until now in impenetrable darkness; and, much more, the *causes* which can alone create universal charity and universal love, make men wise, good and happy, and ensure forever, peace and good-will among mankind.

The Second Coming of Truth is to announce this all-important knowledge to the human race.

This knowledge is contained in this book.⁵⁷

55. See Robert Owen, "The Life of Robert Owen," in Claeys, *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. 4, 228. For Sismondi's view of Owen, see Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi, *Nouveaux principes*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Chez Delaunay, 1827), vol. 2, 374–375.

56. For the history of the Queenswood Community, see Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*.

57. Owen, *The Book of the New Moral World*, vol. 4, 405–406.

In contrast to the secular and humanist thrust of republicanism, the advent of Owen's science had not been a purely human achievement. Providence had played a large part in its timing, for "the history of humanity shows it to be an undeviating law of the Great Ruler of the Universe that man shall not prematurely break the shell of ignorance, that he must patiently wait until the principle of knowledge has pervaded the whole mass of the interior, to give it life and strength to bear the light of day."⁵⁸ The imminence of change had been signaled "by the extraordinary events of the present times," for it was the way of providence that out of evil should come good. "Even the late ruler of France (Napoleon), although immediately influenced by the most mistaken principles of ambition, has contributed to this happy result, by shaking to its foundation that mass of superstition and bigotry," Owen wrote.⁵⁹

The moment of the great change was also quite precise. On August 14, 1817, at the City of London Tavern, Owen announced that "on this day, which will be stamped indelibly on the memory of future time you shall be compelled to join the standard of Experience . . . and by thus acting, the world will be speedily relieved from the overwhelming mental slavery in which it has heretofore been held fast bound."⁶⁰ "The Dominion of Faith ceased. . . . Now from henceforth Charity presides over the destinies of the world. Its reign, deep-rooted in principles of Demonstrable Truth, is permanently founded," he added. The change would "come like a thief in the night," "No man knows whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth."⁶¹ Moreover, its triumph was certain. Governments would be compelled to adopt it. Once Owen's "all-pervading principle" had been propounded, no "human power" could "impede its rapid progress."⁶²

According to Owen, the triumph of the science of the influence of circumstance would ensure that man "will become a reasonable and

58. Owen, *A New View*, vol. 1, 61.

59. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 36.

60. Owen, "Address delivered at the City of London Tavern on Thursday, August 14, 1817 and published in the London newspapers of August 15, 1817", in Claeys, *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. 1, 184.

61. Robert Owen, "Development of the Plan for the Relief of the Poor," in Claeys, *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. 1, 226–227, 231.

62. Robert Owen, "Outline of the Rational System of Society," in Claeys, *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. 2, 210.

consequently a superior being." Just as Fourier believed that all evil in the world emanated from one source, disobedience of God's one law of passionate attraction, for Owen the idea that "each forms his own character" was "in fact the origin of evil upon the earth." "Errors—gross errors—that have been combined with the fundamental notions of every religion" had led to sectarian religious differences.⁶³ Slight differences of environment had led to "an opposition of *feeling* as well as of seeing. . . . Hence, from differences of opinion on notions of *sect*, arise the evils and miseries of human life, which, more than all other atmospheres of class, party, and of country, has in every age separated man from man, and made him a wretched and degraded being," Owen explained.⁶⁴ Another of its results had been "to individualise mankind and to create self-interest, from which immediately sprung the institution of private property, an ever-fertile source of *disunion* and misery." Private property in turn produced "inequality of condition—exclusive arrangements, intended to benefit a few at the expense of many."⁶⁵ Not only the projected "villages of cooperation" but "paradise itself" would be poisoned if "one single particle of religious intolerance, or sectarian feelings of division and separation" were to gain access.⁶⁶ Conversely, future man "will be taught facts only. These will enable him very early in life to understand clearly how his character and the character of his fellow creatures have been formed and are forming."⁶⁷ "When these great errors shall be removed, all our evil passions will disappear; no ground of anger or displeasure from one human being towards another will remain; the period of the supposed Millennium will commence, and universal love prevail," Owen told the inhabitants of New Lanark.⁶⁸

Despite Owen's repeated fulminations against all the religions of the world, it is not difficult to locate the tradition of discourse from

63. Owen, "New State of Society Address," vol. 1, 207.

64. Owen, "Letter published in the London Newspapers of August 9, 1817," in Claeys, *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. 1, 176.

65. Owen, *The Social System*, vol. 2, 63.

66. Owen, "New State of Society Address," vol. 1, 207.

67. Owen, "Letter published in the London Newspapers of August 9, 1817," vol. 1, 180.

68. Owen, "Address Delivered to the Inhabitants of New Lanark," in Claeys, *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. 1, 130.

which Owen's new "science" had emerged. Owen's diagnosis of the obstacles to human emancipation, his providential sense of the laws of nature and of the significance of his "science," his conception of "Truth," and his millennial conception of the future of mankind were all clearly recognizable modifications and reformulations of a discourse that eighteenth-century historians have entitled "rational dissent."⁶⁹

But rational dissent itself is only comprehensible as an offshoot of a distinctly Protestant form of millenarianism. During the centuries before the Reformation, orthodoxy set the millennium outside history in the life of the Church. Thereafter, unlike in France, where secular history was rarely imbued with providential meaning, renewed attention was directed toward the prophetic books of the Bible. The Reformation meant some connection with secular time had to be introduced. If anti-Christ represented the present and past of the *false* Church of Rome, for orthodox divines the millennium had now been inaugurated with the establishment of the Church of England. But since for many the millennium could only begin with the destruction of anti-Christ, and since anti-Christ still ruled in Rome, the millennium henceforth belonged to the future.⁷⁰

It was in this context that a Baconian interest in the sciences of nature became intertwined with the study of "last things," for during the Commonwealth, when the millennium was thought to be imminent, great importance was attached to the prophecy of Daniel 12:4 that during the time of approaching apocalypse, "knowledge shall be increased." This represented the beginning of an association between science and millennial thinking that would last for another two centuries.⁷¹

From the time of Foxe in the 1580s, the millennium was also closely associated with England's mission as the chosen Protestant

69. See especially Knud Haakonssen, ed., *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

70. On the general relationship between Protestantism and Millennialism in post-Reformation Britain, see W. H. Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1978), chaps.1–4.

71. See David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 108ff.

nation. The end of anti-Christ, therefore, first meant the defeat of Spain and then, from the end of the seventeenth century, the fall of France. The influx, in the early eighteenth century, of Camisard refugees fleeing from the persecution of Louis XIV strongly reinforced this identification of the anti-Christ with the French enemy. Therefore, it was not surprising that the French Revolution should from the beginning be associated with the study of "last things." As Wordsworth expressed it in his *Excursion*:

With Promises the Hebrew Scriptures teem:
the glowing phrase
Of ancient inspiration serving me,
I promised also,—with undaunted trust
Foretold, and added prayer to prophecy.

In the eighteenth century and, in particular, in the years between the 1780s and the 1830s, the use of prophecy, whether by reference to the fulfillment of things foretold or through the anxious scanning of signs of the times for clues about the coming millennium, was by no means confined to unhinged enthusiasts or Edward Thompson's "poor stockinger" or "deluded follower of Joanna Southcott."⁷² It was a far more general idiom employed by all sides in theological debate. Revelation, as John Locke had argued, was not a once and for all occurrence but rather an unfolding process.⁷³ Each new event could possess theological significance, and arguments for the progressive fulfillment of prophecy as a reply to deism were constantly reiterated by thinkers as diverse as Isaac Newton, Joseph Butler, David Hartley, and Joseph Priestley. Indeed, the rise of irreligion was itself often interpreted as a sign of the approach of the last days.

Whether a true Reformation had been accomplished through the establishment of the Anglican Church also remained a contentious issue during the three centuries that followed the Elizabethan settlement. For those who perceived the Anglican Church still to be heavily contaminated with Catholic practices or beliefs, anti-Christ could refer not

72. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 12.

73. This idea from Locke was developed to its furthest extent by Lessing in his *Education of the Human Race*. See Henry E. Allison, *Lessing and the Enlightenment* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966).

just to Rome but to all ecclesiastical establishments. This became the position not only of organized dissent but of many within the Church, including Newton and Hartley, who maintained the corruption of the Christian message by all ecclesiastical establishments.⁷⁴

At the beginning of the Restoration, the argument against the Church turned on the acceptance of Anglican liturgy and the 1662 Prayer Book. This marked the beginning of organized dissent.⁷⁵ But in the course of the eighteenth century, dissent came to encompass not only positions on ritual and Church government but also basic tenets of Christian belief. Furthermore, the threat now no longer came solely from Catholicism but instead also from deism and irreligion. Therefore, in order to defend Christianity, both the liberal latitudinarian tendency within the Church and the moderate presbyterian wing of dissent placed an increasing emphasis on the use of reason. In part, this meant an emphasis on the study of natural philosophy and history in conjunction with biblical study as a way of resolving central religious questions. In part, it meant applying rational scrutiny to the Bible itself. In 1712, such an approach resulted in an attack on the biblical basis of belief in the Trinity by Samuel Clarke, a leading latitudinarian and associate of Newton.⁷⁶ The ensuing controversy encouraged the growth of a liberal rationalist tendency, both inside and outside the Church. Eventually, in the early 1770s, the failure both to relax the conditions of Church membership inscribed in the Thirty Nine Articles and to relieve the civil disabilities imposed on dissenters by the Test and Corporation Act led to the formation of the

74. See, for example, David Hartley's comment at the end of his *Observations on Man*: "'Bodies politic' like natural bodies tended to destruction. Civil and ecclesiastical powers would fall together. If the Church of Rome was 'Babylon the Great', all the rest have copied her example, more or less . . . and this impurity may be considered not only as justifying the application of the prophecies to all the Christian Churches, but as a natural cause of their downfall." Cited in Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, 38.

75. See R. K. Webb, "The Emergence of Rational Dissent," in Haakonssen, *Enlightenment and Religion*, 12–42.

76. Samuel Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: James Knapton, 1712). See also Frederick C. Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defence of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), chap. 7.

Unitarian Church, henceforth the most concentrated expression of the views of rational dissent.⁷⁷

What then are the reasons for connecting an avowed deist and anti-Christian like Owen with the millenarian vision of Christianity found in rational dissent? First is a comparison of Owen's view with that of Unitarian minister and celebrated chemist Joseph Priestley, one of the foremost advocates of rational dissent in the late eighteenth century and a thinker whose combination of millennial optimism and scientific rationalism seems most to anticipate Owen. Research has not revealed any direct contact between Priestley and Owen, but Owen was certainly well acquainted with some of Priestley's followers at Manchester College in the 1790s at a time when his theory was first taking shape.⁷⁸ Second, Owen, as is now well known, was in close contact with Godwin between 1811 and 1818, the years in which he announced his discoveries.⁷⁹ A link between Godwin and Owen has always been assumed, but it was not until recently that the extent of Godwin's own dependence on the assumptions of rational dissent, particularly in the first two editions of *Political Justice*, were noted. Finally, and this is the strongest argument for treating Owen's position as a reworking of rational dissent, an examination of Owen's texts reveals his dependence on a set of basic assumptions about the millennium, truth, politics, determinism, and moral perfectionism very similar to those that had structured Priestley's work.

Priestley's interest in science was not simply a continuation of the Baconian, Newtonian, or liberal Anglican interest in natural philosophy. It was the result of a sharp reaction against the voluntaristic Calvinism of his youth. In that creed, God's only comprehensible

77. On the connections between religious and political radicalism in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, see Martin Fitzpatrick, "Heretical Religion and Radical Political Ideas in Late Eighteenth-Century England," in *The Transformation of Political Culture—England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century*, ed. Eckhart Hellmuth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 339–372. See also Peter N. Miller, *Defining the Common Good: Empire, Religion and Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

78. See Podmore, *Robert Owen*, vol. 1, 55–59.

79. Between 1813 and 1818, Owen made "about fifty visits" to Godwin. See Gregory Claeys, "Introduction," in Claeys, *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. 1, xxiii. See also Peter H. Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 310–312.

attribute had been his power; nature was simply the product of his arbitrary will. This voluntarism went together with a belief in ideas of predestination, atonement, and the natural depravity of man.

Priestley's science was therefore a way of reintroducing and comprehending the *rationality* of the divine will. God was reconnected with his creation, and nature and man were shown to be the expression of one coherent divine order. Everything in the world, including man himself, emanated from the divine in a single causal chain.⁸⁰

This emphasis on the rationality of God helps to explain the importance Priestley attached to the "necessarianism" of David Hartley and to his doctrine of the association of ideas, put forward in 1749 in his *Observations on Man, His Frame, Duty and Expectations*, for Hartley's determinism and his associationist doctrine were considered a scientific refutation of the voluntarist assumptions of Calvinist theology. Association was, as one of its admirers put it, "a law of the soul in a sense analogous to that in which gravitation is said to be a law of matter."⁸¹ Against man's willful propensity toward evil, encapsulated in the doctrine of original sin and heavily underscored in Calvinist theology, Hartley, building on Locke, argued that sensation was the sole original source of ideas and that complex ideas, even those of morality or beauty, arose from the clustering or combination of simple sensations through association. Association thus provided a ladder from sensuality to spirituality, "generated necessarily and mechanically" and ultimately leading to "theopathy . . . the pure love of God." It was thus "a most glorious apparatus for . . . enlarging the comprehension of the human mind, and raising us to the highest pitch of perfection and excellence."⁸²

Association could be made the foundation of a theory of progress, for it meant that "children may be formed and moulded as we please" and

80. See J. G. McEvoy, "Enlightenment and Dissent in Science: Joseph Priestley and the Limits of Theoretical Reasoning," *Enlightenment and Dissent* 2 (1983): 47–67.

81. Anonymous [John Gay], *An Introduction towards an Essay on the Origins of the Passions* (London: R. Dodsley, 1741), 42. Cited in Spadafora, *Idea of Progress*, 143.

82. David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, His Expectations*, 2 vols. (London: J. Leake and W. Frederick, 1749), vol. 1, 497–498. Cited in Spadafora, *Idea of Progress*, 156.

that men's minds are improvable.⁸³ Therefore, by building on beneficial associations solely derived from "facts" and by avoiding those that were "false," a new form of education could be devised that would remove the seeds of irrational conflict and open the way to the perfectibility of men. Although no longer dependent on the details of Hartley's argument, this formed the basis of Owen's proposal in *A New View*. Rather obliquely, Owen acknowledged this debt, saying: "It was probably the anticipation of superior minds having knowledge of this doctrine and of the practice to which it would eventually lead that gave rise to the expectation of the millennium upon earth,"⁸⁴ for Owen, like Hartley and Priestley, connected necessarianism with the advent of the millennium.

Millennial theories are conventionally considered to be of two kinds: "postmillennial" or "meliorist," in which man inaugurated the millennium through his own efforts and Christ only returned to earth for the Last Judgment at the end of the thousand years; or "premillennial," in which Christ returned around the beginning of the millennium, which would be inaugurated by great apocalyptic events, culminating in the downfall of anti-Christ. It is often suggested that the postmillennial perspective was more optimistic, gradualist, and reformist, and more liable to secularization, since the millennium would merge imperceptibly with worldly progress. Conversely, premillennialism has often been judged gloomy, literalist, withdrawn from the world, or revolutionary and apocalyptic, and therefore much more resistant to secularization.⁸⁵

But Priestley, Price, and other rational dissenters, and Owen after them, did not concur with either of these views. Priestley possessed an optimistic picture of social and scientific progress, pointing to "the astonishing improvements that have been made in all the branches of real knowledge in little more than two centuries."⁸⁶ Improvements in food, housing, and machinery were removing the worst evils from the

83. Hartley, *Observations*, vol. 2, 453–454.

84. Owen, *The Social System*, vol. 2, 68.

85. For a discussion of the distinction, see Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, 21ff.

86. Joseph Priestley, "Preface," in *Discoveries relating to Vision*, in *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley, LL.D. F.R.S. &c. with Notes, by the Editor*, ed. John T. Rutt (London: George Smallfield, 1817–1832), vol. 25, 367.

earth and had produced forms of civil government far better than those known to the ancients. But, as for Owen, progress was not solely a human project but was part of a divine plan in which the deity was "ever bringing good out of evil and gradually conducting things to a more perfect and glorious state." Indeed, although God had ordained that mankind "should be as far as possible self-taught," man was powerless to bring about the millennium on his own, especially since according to Priestley's necessarian perspective, mankind remained "the passive and blind instruments of their own felicity."⁸⁷

What humanity could do was to cooperate with the divine plan for the arrival of the millennium by removing all obstacles to the truth. Writing of "experiments on air," Priestley argued, "this rapid progress of knowledge . . . will, I doubt not, be the means under God, of extirpating *all* error and prejudice, and of putting an end to all undue and usurped authority in the business of religion as well as of science."⁸⁸ All religions should be tolerated, and church and state should be separated. Religious establishments were objectionable, since they used their association with civil power to enhance their authority; they thus inhibited "candour," the term used by rational dissenters to describe how honest citizens reach agreement and hence the truth without the distortion and corruption introduced by power. Scientific progress flourished best where there was a free exchange of ideas.⁸⁹

If the priority was to hasten the millennium by removing all obstacles in the way of truth, politics had to be judged simply according to its contribution toward this end. The best form of government was that which most effectively assisted progress toward "the end of all things." The type of government, republican or otherwise, would, however, be a matter of decreasing concern, for as truth and morality advanced, the sphere and tasks of government would diminish. Godwin's loose confederation of parishes was only an extrapolation

87. See Joseph Priestley, "Lectures on History," cited in Spadafora, *Idea of Progress*, 249, 250.

88. See Simon Schaffer, "Priestley's Questions: An Historiographic Survey," *History of Science* 22 (1984): 152–183.

89. Priestley's argument is set out clearly in his "Essay on the First Principles," in *Priestley: Political Writings*, ed. Peter Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1–129.

from this process of moral perfection accompanied by the withering away of government.⁹⁰

Otherwise, as Priestley claimed, "as dissenters we have no peculiar principles of civil government at all."⁹¹ Priestley, like Richard Price and James Burgh, and Owen afterward, was uneasy about universal suffrage; the poor were uneducated and liable to be corrupted.⁹² Nor was he at all precise about what form of government, if any, would exist once the millennium arrived and anti-Christ was overthrown. It could be inferred that there would be no church establishments, no costly ceremonies or standing armies, that truth would flourish, and that prejudice would disappear. But if the millennium entailed the uncontested reign of Christ, political speculation would presumably be unnecessary.

In Owen's writings, as will already have become clear, many of these assumptions reappear, but shorn of their explicitly Christian reference. Like Priestley, Owen was relatively indifferent to the form of government, skeptical about democracy, and distrustful of the capacity of the poor for political participation without a prior reform of education.⁹³ Also like Priestley, he accorded human agency only a partial role in inaugurating the great change.⁹⁴ Finally, like Priestley, Owen showed little more than a pro forma interest in the constitutional details of millennial government, for the functions of government would be largely residual. As he told the inhabitants of New Lanark, "When these great errors shall be removed, all our evil passions will disappear; no ground of anger or displeasure from one human being towards

90. See William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 611.

91. Rutt, *Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley*, vol. 22, 354.

92. John Seed, "Rational Dissent and Political Opposition, 1770-1790," in Haakonssen, *Enlightenment and Religion*, 165.

93. "Until better training, more useful knowledge and productive constant employment shall be given to the poor and working classes, no really intelligent person could venture to give more freedom to such a population as ours has gradually become than the British constitution in its ordinary state now admits." See Owen, "New State of Society Address," vol. 1, 202.

94. See Owen, *A New View*, vol. 1, 37, on the contribution made by "the extraordinary events of the present times," especially the role of Napoleon: "Has not Providence in its superior wisdom intended that these gigantic and otherwise uncontrollable measures of Napoleon should in their consequence produce a general good far to outweigh their partial and temporary evils, can ignorance itself suppose they would have been permitted?"

another will remain; the period of the supposed Millennium will commence, and universal love prevail."⁹⁵

How, then, is Owen's proximity and yet dissociation from the millennial Christianity of rational dissent to be interpreted? One solution is suggested by the idea of "natural supernaturalism," a term borrowed from Thomas Carlyle and brilliantly deployed by literary critic M. H. Abrams to describe how "the characteristic concepts and patterns of Romantic philosophy and literature" were "a displaced and reconstituted theology, or else a secularised form of devotional experience."⁹⁶ This could mean, as Proudhon complained, the impossibility of escaping religious language and concepts.⁹⁷ But this can hardly apply to Owen, whose resort to biblical language was constant and deliberate. Alternatively, and this was the main emphasis in Abrams's account of the romantics, the phrase referred to a poignant attempt "to save the overview of human history and destiny, the experiential paradigms and the cardinal values of their religious heritage."⁹⁸ But Owen's use of biblical cadences and narratives was not preservative. As in the case of ancient republicanism, it is difficult to insist on an elegiac or nostalgic strain in Owen's thought in the face of the overweening optimism of his new "science."

Another account might set Owen straightforwardly in a story about secularization. It is generally agreed that the modern idea of progress has been derived from a secularization of Christian eschatology. Precisely how and when this transformation occurred remains a matter of dispute, but in an influential study of this transition in England, Ernest Tuveson argued that the crucial turning point occurred in the late seventeenth century and was the result of a combination between revived millennialism and the new science. Based on a study of Boyle, More, Burnet, Whiston, and others, Tuveson contended that between the 1650s and the 1730s a providential and biblical timeframe and view of the world was replaced by a

95. Owen, "Address Delivered to the Inhabitants of New Lanark," vol. 1, 130.

96. M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1973), 65.

97. *Ibid.*, 66.

98. *Ibid.*

stress on experimental knowledge and the regularity of the laws of nature.⁹⁹

Serious doubt has been cast both on the timing and the direction of Tuveson's supposed transition. It has been pointed out that in England until well into the first half of the nineteenth century, scientific inquiry and millennial expectation appear to have advanced in parallel.¹⁰⁰ There was as yet no perceived conflict between religion and the sciences of nature; indeed both Hartley and Priestley believed that natural science led to a deeper acceptance of revealed religion.

Owen, by contrast, at first sight does seem to exemplify precisely the transition that Tuveson described. His "true religion" derived from "the everlasting and unchanging laws of nature," and he was happy to put his proposals to experimental test: "Let then the principles of the new system be fairly tried in practice, as an experiment of the deepest interest to mankind and let their truth or falsehood be proved by the result."¹⁰¹ According to W. H. Oliver, he shared "the rationalist utilitarian temper of the late eighteenth century" and its persistent habit of allegorizing the biblical images of anti-Christ, Armageddon, and Millennium into social and intellectual manifestations of decline, crisis, and recovery.¹⁰² Just as the dissenters broadened the Anglican definition of anti-Christ from the pope to all ecclesiastical establishments, so Owen in turn extended it to all religions. Similarly, he enlarged the dissenter conception of the original purity of Christianity into the original purity of human nature. In the "new society," all would be instructed "by close and accurate attention to all existing and proveable facts," and Owen underlined the point by adding to the famous passage from Corinthians "charity believeth all things" a creedal health warning derived from the new science—*only*, he added, "when demonstrated by facts, but nothing that is distinctly opposed to the evidence of our senses."¹⁰³

99. Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1972).

100. See, for example, Spadafora, *Idea of Progress*, 108–115.

101. Owen, *The Social System*, vol. 2, 82.

102. Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, 177–178.

103. Owen, "Development of the Plan for the Relief of the Poor," vol. 1, 227.

Nevertheless, for all its ostensible obeisance to fact and experiment, Owen's "science" cannot be treated as an attempt to replace a religious worldview by a secular social science, nor can it be understood as a secular view of the world made more palatable through resorting to some familiar religious imagery. This can be illustrated not simply by reference to the role of providence in the advent of the new science but also in the conception of "truth" that the new science had achieved. Truth meant the discovery of what is objectively right (the new moral world) and what is objective in the relation between things (the natural world). Truth is singular. As Owen put it, "They become conscious that there can be no discrepancy in truth; that one truth, of necessity, can never be opposed to another truth. . . . Consequently, the universe is one great truth, and that every fact is a part, and a necessary part, to form that one great truth, which is alone the essence of all power and knowledge."¹⁰⁴

Owen almost certainly derived this notion of the truth from Godwin. But this absolute and singular idea of Truth, found in Godwin and Holcroft, was, as Mark Philp has shown, a thinly disguised inheritance from rational dissent.¹⁰⁵ What it implicitly referred to was God's purposes both in nature and ethics. Such a conception helps to explain why although Owen, following Godwin, insisted very strongly on "the liberty of private judgement," the millennium would mean the triumph of one indivisible Truth, physical and moral, recognized by all,¹⁰⁶ for in that realm, "Charity, assisted by Demonstrable Truth and Sincerity, was to preside as the active agent over the whole dominions of the New State of Society." No wonder George Holyoake, one of Owen's more independent-minded disciples, complained that "an audience of English communists who eschew praise and blame, are as free from animation as Egyptian mummies. They are very obliging

104. Robert Owen, "The New Religion," in Claeys, *Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. 2, 180.

105. Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice*, 35–36.

106. On the right of private judgement, see Owen, "Address Delivered to the Inhabitants of New Lanark," vol. 1, 126, but mark also Owen's assumption that there could be "no difference of opinion among those who are permitted to think for themselves, and who have been taught to observe facts with attention, and to reason accurately from those facts," cited in Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 126.

but very mute. Truth and falsehood, right and wrong are received by them with the same respectful attention."¹⁰⁷

Lastly, the proximity of Owen's new "science" to the millennium of rational dissent helps to clear up an ancient puzzle about his theory, this time expressed by Marx. In his Third Thesis on Feuerbach, written at the beginning of 1845, Marx stated, "The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that the educator must himself be educated." And when Engels published these theses in 1886, he put in brackets after "the materialist doctrine" the name Owen.¹⁰⁸ If this criticism was directed at Owen, however, it had been no ordinary philosophical oversight on Owen's part, for "the materialism" to which Marx referred was both theist and teleological. Man was God's creature: "Omniscience in the creator and the existence of the smallest portion of independent power in the created are irreconcilable."¹⁰⁹ Man's progression, however, was part of God's purposes: "That power which governs and pervades the universe has evidently so formed man, that he must progressively pass from a state of ignorance to intelligence."¹¹⁰

It was no doubt this divinely directed drive from ignorance to intelligence that ensured in Owen's case that "causes over which I could have no control, removed in my early days the bandage which covered my mental sight."¹¹¹ Owen's appropriation of the language of the Bible's prophetic books was not a metaphorical aid to a proposal of social reform or a concession to the religious sensibilities of his following; it was taking possession of what he considered to be rightfully his, for Christianity and all the other religions of the world had failed to discover what he and the "science of the influence of circumstance" could now proclaim. His therefore was "The Second Coming of the Truth."

107. Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 139–140.

108. Karl Marx, *Friedrich Engels*, vol. 5, 7.

109. Owen, *The Social System*, vol. 2, 96.

110. Owen, *A New View*, vol. 1, 36.

111. Owen, "Address Delivered to the Inhabitants of New Lanark," vol. 1, 131.

8

Identification and the Politics of Envy

RAYMOND GEUSS

IN 1844, Marx was living in Paris, and for his own edification he wrote a series of texts that in some sense represent his first theoretical breakthrough in coming to a new understanding of the society in which he was living. These texts remained unpublished during his lifetime but have since come to be known as the “Economic-philosophical manuscripts (of 1844).” In an often-cited passage of one of these texts, he discusses what he calls “crude and thoughtless communism” (*der rohe und gedankenlose Communismus*).¹

This text reads:

[“Der noch ganz rohe und gedankenlose Communismus will,”] *alles vernichten . . . , was nicht fähig ist, als Privateigentum von allen besessen [zu] werden; er will auf gewaltsame Weise von Talent etc. abstrahieren. Der physische, unmittelbare Besitz gilt ihm als einziger Zweck des Lebens und Daseins; die Bestimmung des Arbeiters wird nicht aufgehoben, sondern auf alle Menschen ausgedehnt; das Verhältnis des Privateigentums bleibt das Verhältnis der Gemeinschaft zur Sachwelt. . . . Dieser Communismus—indem er die Persönlichkeit des Menschen überall negiert—ist eben nur der konsequente Ausdruck des Privateigentums, welches diese Negation ist. Der allgemeine und als Macht sich konstituierende Neid ist die versteckte*

1. Karl Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte. 1844, Marx-Engels-Werke*, bd. 40, Ergänzungsband. 1. Teil (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1990), 534.

Form, in welcher die *Habsucht* sich herstellt und nur auf eine andere *Weise* sich befriedigt. Der Gedanke jedes Privateigentums als eines solchen ist *wenigstens* gegen das *reichere* Privateigentum als Neid und Nivellierungssucht gekehrt, so daß dies sogar das Wesen der Konkurrenz ausmachen. Der rohe Communist ist nur die Vollendung dieses Neides und dieser Nivellierung von dem *vorgestellten* Minimum aus. Er hat ein *bestimmtes begrenztes* Maß. Wie wenig diese Aufhebung des Privateigentums eine wirkliche Aneignung ist, beweist eben die abstrakte Negation der ganzen Welt der Bildung und der Zivilisation, die Rückkehr zur *natürlichen* Einfachheit des *armen*, rohen, und bedürfnislosen Menschen, der nicht über das Privateigentum hinaus, sondern nicht einmal bei demselben angelangt ist.

["The still rather crude and thoughtless communism wishes,"] to destroy *everything* which is not capable of being possessed as *private property* by all; it wishes to abstract in a *violent* way from talent, etc. Physical, immediate possession is for this type of crude communism the only goal of life and existence; the category *worker* is not transformed-and-done-away-with (*aufgehoben*) but extended to apply to everyone; the relation of private property remains the relation of the community to the world of objects. . . . This form of communism, by negating the *personality* of the human being everywhere, is precisely nothing but the consistent expression of private property, which is this negation. The envy which forms part of this form of communism, an envy which is universal and has constituted itself as a power, is the hidden form in which greed takes hold and satisfies itself, and it does so merely in a different way from the way in which such greed satisfies itself in current forms of society. The thought implicit in any instance of private property as such is envy and the desire to flatten things down, *at least* as turned against any *richer* instance of private property, so that this ever constitutes the essence of competition. The crude communist is only the full-blown form of this envy and of the desire to flatten everything down to some merely *imagined* minimum. He has a *specific limited* measure. This apparent transformation/abolition of private property is not genuine appropriation of it. How little this is the case is indicated by the fact that this crude communism abstractly negates the whole world of culture (*Bildung*) and civilisation, by its return to the *natural* simplicity of the *poor*, crude, human being who has only few needs, a human being who is not beyond private property, but who has not yet even reached that stage.

By crude communism Marx seems to mean a modern equivalent of the kind of social and political regime that, following Aristotle's discussion in the *Politics*, was traditionally ascribed to Plato's *Republic*² and is usually expressed by the formula "community of goods, women, and children" (ἐκεῖ [scilicet, in Plato's *Republic*] γὰρ ὁ Σωκράτης φησὶ δεῖν κοινὰ τὰ τέκνα καὶ τὰς γυναῖκας εἶναι καὶ τὰς κτήσεις) as Aristotle puts it (*Pol.* 1261a). This Aristotelian version of Plato is written from the traditional male perspective, so the tacit assumption is that communism means equal use of goods (*by all the men in the community*), equal (sexual) access to women (*for all the men*), and equal disciplinary control of children (*and women by all the men*). Given Plato's views about the equality of men and women, his version of community would have a different structure from that described by Aristotle.

The Greeks, of course, had no concept of a right and so, a fortiori, nothing like the notion of a modern property right, but if one tries, however, to imagine an analogue to Plato's version of an ancient community using the modern discourse of property rights, one gets something like: each (adult) member of the society has an equal common *ownership right* to all the goods produced, and parallel equal access, control, and use rights to all other adult members and children. Marx claims this means that the society as a whole has a relation to all objects that is like the relation that in the nineteenth century an individual owner had to objects that were his private property. Marx's characterization of this as crude communism already indicates that he does not see it as an especially attractive way of organizing society. In fact, he says that it, as it were, exhibits in an even more intense and concentrated form some of the moral deformations of our society associated with the institution of private property. It is, as he says, a "universalization" of private property, not an overcoming of it.

Marx claims that a proper, properly humane form of society would not simply reproduce the mechanisms of private property while universalizing and equalizing them. It would not be structured around the legal fixation of an absolute right to use or abuse, merely redistributing the participation in the exercise of such rights equally throughout

2. See Peter Garnsey, *Thinking about Property: From Antiquity to the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

the population, but would find some way of allowing people to have access to and be able to use what they needed without recourse to such an abstract framework of rights. How exactly a society like that would be organized, if not around property rights to labor power and its products, is extremely difficult to say, and Marx gives us practically no help, because of his opposition to utopian speculation, but still that seems to be a different question from the one at issue here.

Marx's own view, of course, is that absolute or abstract egalitarianism is incoherent because people in fact are all different, and any attempt to make them the same along one dimension will simply increase their difference along some other dimension. To think that there are two opposing views called Egalitarianism and Anti-egalitarianism makes sense only if one misunderstands the nature of the concepts of equal and unequal. These are not substantive, categorical concepts like blue or wet or sharp, which designate some feature of the world, but they are what Kant calls concepts of reflection, which locate something specifically *on a particular scale*, and no scale has any absolute priority. The choice of one scale rather than another is a pragmatic (or political) decision. Two things are not just equal in the way they can be blue or sharp but must of necessity be equal *in some respect*, and whether we call them equal or unequal depends completely on the respect in which we choose to compare them. With sufficient ingenuity, *anything* can be described as a state of equality or inequality, depending on the dimension along which the comparison is being made. The British NHS is "equal" because everyone gets free health care but unequal because those who are more frequently ill get more care than those who are not. The chaotic, pay-as-you-go forms of health care available in the United States can also be described as equal to the extent to which those who can afford it get the same level of care more or less everywhere, and as unequal because some people who need it get treated and others do not. Describing anything as equal or unequal per se is pointless, cognitively completely empty, but also highly misleading: it has the *appearance* of being substantive but only because some particular scale of comparison is singled out, usually tacitly, as the only one relevant, and all other scales are ignored. What this means is that an ideal of absolute equality is not merely unreachable but literally incoherent, because there is no naturally or absolutely given standard or respect with

reference to which one *must* compare them. Or rather, there is one such standard and that is complete identity, but this is politically completely irrelevant, if not incoherent. Political proponents of absolute equality do not mean that every person should be identical to himself or herself, or that society as a whole should be equal in the sense of being identical to itself, because that isn't an ideal but rather something that is in any case true of every society no matter what its internal structure. The illusory temptation to absolute egalitarianism is one that arises in a society dominated by private property, because in such a society there *does* seem to be *one* designated yardstick or dimension for comparison that in fact overrides all others, and that is the amount of private property one owns. Thus there arises the illusion that all one would need to do would be to equalize ownership of private property. Crude communism draws the egalitarian conclusion from that illusion, and if one could get rid of property, one would also pass outside the realm in which egalitarianism would even seem to make any sense.

In addition to giving a description of what he takes this crude communism to be, Marx also gives a further diagnosis of it relative to a characteristic set of emotions associated with it. The form of reductive egalitarianism that the crude communist preaches and of which, if he is actually honest and authentic, he is an instance, Marx says, is nothing but the full establishment of universal envy as a power. Even this envy, Marx holds, has a capitalist form because it is pain that results specifically from the observation that another has more property than I do (not from the fact that he or she is handsomer, quicker on their feet, or more intelligent than I am). The poor take it very much amiss that the rich possess more than they do, and the imposition of egalitarianism in the form of a restriction of ownership to an equal share in collective property, and the denigration of anything that cannot thus be shared and possessed equally, is thus the revenge of the have-nots against the haves. It is, I think, important to see that two strands come together here. One is a claim about the role of envy, and the second is the idea that envy "becomes established as a power" in society. I think these are actually intended to be two slightly different things. To "become established as a power" need not be a throwaway remark, because much of Marx's early social theory is Hegelian in inspiration and thus is obsessed with the issue of how

human powers (in the widest sense) come to establish themselves as separate institutions. Thus, from a sufficiently global point of view, the police in a certain society are, roughly speaking, nothing more than a structured way in which the forces and powers available in that society are deployed to ensure order of a certain kind. The police, that is, have no access to some supernatural or occult source of extra power; whatever power they have is a power humans in the society grant them. On the other hand, the whole point of having something like a police system is that these powers are lodged in a separate institutional structure in a way that makes them not immediately under the direct control of those over whom they are exercised. Politics, as we usually understand it, is par excellence the realm of such an institutionalization because it has to do with the attempt to wield, resist, evade, or influence the power of that great separate institution, the state. One of Marx's claims, as we know, was that the state as a separate institution would wither away, and he often expresses this by saying that *politics* will cease. This doesn't mean that there will be no more conflicts of power, merely that they will not take a specifically political form. In other words, they will not take the form of a struggle for control of the state apparatus. So the act of taking control of part of the state apparatus, such as the police, is merely a preparatory and transitory part of a revolutionary process. The real revolution, Marx holds, starts afterward, when people begin to develop forms of social interaction that replace those associated with that particular institution, which we today call "state," and render any form of state regulation of social and economic life superfluous. It should be obvious, he thinks, that there is no way in which we might say what such rules will look like. Totally new conditions will require innovations in our modes of behaving toward each other, and our ways of regulating such modes that cannot be anticipated. Utopian speculation, therefore, is pointless. I want to suggest, then, that "*der sich als Macht konstituierende Neid*" means not merely that envy will be a powerful motivation for people but also that envy will be congealed, as Marx thinks many human powers have come to be congealed, into an institutional form and will become part of the political structure of the radically egalitarian state as it exists under crude communism. In such a society, if it could become a stable and

relatively enduring one (something one has good reason to think Marx would think highly unlikely), taking a Stradivarius away from a gifted violinist will not be something in need of special explanation.

This line of argument from envy to egalitarianism is, as far as I know, original to Marx. In the ancient world, there is a similar line of argument in books 1 and 2 of Plato's *Republic*, but the apparent similarity makes the differences even more striking. Thus Glaukon, at the beginning of book 2 of the *Republic*, speaks of the canons of "justice" in distribution as arising as a kind of rational compromise. Everyone would really like to take or get assigned as much as possible, but each rationally fears that some stronger person will *also* want to take as much as possible, and thus in a free-for-all they will end up with little or nothing. So they agree on equal shares for all. Note that envy plays no role in this construction. The reflective preference the weak have for having equal shares for all rather than allowing the strong to have more is a perfectly *rational* preference, based on fear of what otherwise would occur. If I know I am weak, of course, I prefer for all to have equal shares rather than to be dominated by the strong. Rational fear is, however, one would have thought, a completely different emotion from envy.

The purported connection of envy and egalitarianism is one that would have a long history after Marx, mostly of course in the form of appropriation by figures on the political Right who were keen to reject some *specific* demand for a particular kind of equality for specifiable reasons.³ Usually this takes the form of claiming that envy was a kind of anthropological invariant, which cannot be abolished, and the necessary persistence of which would make any form of egalitarianism impossible. This, of course, is multiply irrelevant to Marx; first of all, he nowhere asserted or implied that envy could be abolished, although he thought the form it took could be transformed. Marx thought that the envy that comes to be universalized in crude communism has its origin in the particular extreme form of envy generated by individual property relations in a capitalist society, but this, too, in no way implies that there could be any form of society in which no envy at all occurred. Marx's basic criticism of capitalism, after all, was that it

3. See Helmut Schoeck, *Der Neid* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Alber, 1964).

subordinated diverse individuals in their variable manifold richness under repressive abstract categories, such as money or mere notional units of homogeneously conceived labor time. So he was against the rigid domination of these categories over human life, not against the fluid play of natural human emotions; he was against envy generated, if one wishes to put it that way, by artificial differences in wealth, social status, and political power, not against the envy of one man against another for being quicker and more reliable at doing mental arithmetic, or of one woman against another who can run faster or is more charming, more witty, or more intelligent than she is. What is wrong with capitalism, Marx says in the passage from the “Philosophic-Economic Manuscripts” cited at the beginning, is that it abstracts from real “talents” and replaces them with abstract symbolic differences calibrated finally in monetary terms. Second, Marx in any case did not take egalitarianism as a positive social ideal, because he thought that, as such a general ideal, it would be incoherent. Marx would be perfectly happy and could perfectly consistently grant the merits of various *specific* equalities, but in each case he would be arguing for a specific equality in a specific dimension of human life for a particular reason. Thus, it makes sense for all the runners in the race to be equal with respect to their starting time, because we want to discover which one can run quickest over a given distance, and we can tell that most easily if they all start together. Yet, it is easily imaginable that in some situations—say, in a situation in which very young children compete in running against adults—assigning different starting points to different children would count as providing equal chances.

Up to this point, I have assumed that the notion of envy was clear enough for us to take it for granted, but is it really so clear what we mean by envy and exactly how it comes into this discussion? Envy seems to be a complex emotion with a rather obscure genesis and a number of historically highly variable forms. Despite this, there would seem to be at least two properties that something would have to exhibit for us to call it envy. First, envy is a human emotion involving three variables. Paradigmatically, I envy you *because* of some property that I take you to have and that for the purposes of discussion is assumed to be some kind of good, or I envy you *in some respect*: I envy Mary her green thumb, Victoria her fluency in Russian, and

Adelaida her way with cats; I envy Teddie his complete inattentiveness to his environment; I envy Michael his library. So there is a subject of envy, in this case me; a person who is the object of envy, Michael; and finally a good that is the cause of envy, Michael's library. This tripartite structure of two persons and some good is part of the basic framework that must be given before one can begin to consider whether one is confronting a case of envy. Second, envy must be some kind of painful, negative, or distressing emotion. If I am pleased that you have some good, for instance, I might admire you, or, if you are a close relative with whom I identify in an especially strong positive way and you have achieved something good, the emotion I feel might not be envy but rather, for instance, pleasure or pride.

One traditional analysis that proceeds in this way is that which Aristotle gives in the *Rhetorica*, in which he defines an emotion that he calls φθόνος as being distressed (λύπη) because someone else has good fortune or is well off (εὐπραγία),⁴ where presumably being well off can encompass either what are sometimes called goods of fortune such as possessions, valued objects, or wealth; physical or psychological properties such as swiftness of foot; a persuasive manner or social relations such as having many friends, social position, or winning contests; and finally positive states of soul such as courage, satisfaction with one's life, and so on. I will assume all of these can be referred to as instances of εὐπραγία.⁵

This seems at least to be moving in the right direction, although there are two queries that immediately arise. First, does one really wish to speak of envy as such a passive state of being affected? Do I really envy you if I am merely distressed by your good fortune? Don't we actually use envy in the full-blown sense only when we are not merely distressed but this distress moves us to some positive act of hostility? Not that we necessarily act on the hostility, but feeling the distress is not in itself enough. The schema that I envy you if I am pained by your good fortune seems to cover a number of different

4. Aristotle, *Rhetorica*, ed. by W.D. Ross, Oxford Classical Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 1387b23.

5. For discussion of envy in general in ancient philosophy, see Ernst Milobenski, *Der Neid in der griechischen Philosophie* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1964).

kinds of cases that it seems to me important to distinguish. First, there are cases in which you have some good fortune that pains me, so I wish you did not have that good fortune. You are my enemy, and it pains me to see that you enjoy such ruddy good health; I wish you dead, or gravely and painfully ill, or at any rate not in such a state of enjoying such visible and uninterrupted robustness. Here one might say that in cases like this I might say "I begrudge you your good health" (*mißgönnen*) but I would not really say "I envy you" unless I was in poor health myself. So, one might claim, there is a comparative element in envy that is essential to it. Let's then call the first kind of case begrudging envy and the second case, where the comparison between your good fortune and my lack of good fortune is constitutive, negative envy. However, I also in everyday life repeatedly say that I envy people when I by no means wish that they did not have the good fortune I lack. I can say (and have said) "I envy Michael his library," meaning that he has a stock of books that is definitely much larger and in some respects better chosen than mine, including rare works it would be very difficult for me to acquire. This good fortune of his pains me, because I would like to have such a library and do not, but I do not wish that he did *not* have that library. Rather I am *pleased* for him, but I wish I had one like that, too. The comparative element in this is important, as it was in the second case, but this is a kind of positive or constructive envy. In addition, we can nowadays use the term envy in a full-blown way but also metaphorically, as a form of mere politeness, as an exaggeration, or as a kind of joke. So I may really and vividly envy a person who has been a long-standing rival and accomplishes something I have tried in vain to achieve, but I may also say (perfectly truthfully) to the taxi driver that I envy him his detailed knowledge of the geography of London. I don't mean by that even that I would myself prefer to know the city better than I do, because I don't finally care *that much* about the geography of London. I am certainly not in any serious sense pained by my lack of knowledge or his superior state of knowledge. To say I envy him his knowledge of London is not false—knowing London is something I fully recognize as a good thing; a world in which no one had this knowledge would be lacking something. Nevertheless, I can't honestly say that I feel deprived or pained by my relative ignorance—although it is a good, it is

not *that* important to me. This is at best a mere shadow of real envy. Actually, this kind of envy looks very much like a case of rather disinterested admiration, which is usually taken to be something like the opposite of envy.

A second question about Aristotle's analysis arises with regard to the *reasons* for which one is pained. To say that I am distressed, in the sense either of simply being made sad (the weaker, more passive case) or being made hostile (the more active case), by your good fortune does not seem sufficient as an account of envy at any rate if one thinks that such an account should allow us to distinguish envy from some other phenomena. If I am distressed by your good fortune but that good fortune consists in occupying the only source of water on the island, then my distress is more likely to be a kind of fear rather than envy. I am distressed because I fear what that good fortune means for me: I am suddenly at your mercy. Aristotle, as usual, is analytically useful here because he does pay attention to the *reasons* for which I feel pained and/or hostile, specifically mentioning that envy is to be distinguished from fear. That is, if I am your neighbor and know that for years you have wanted to build an addition to your house that will have the effect of overshadowing my garden but have not been able to do this because of a lack of cash, the news that you have come into an inheritance will not fill me with glee. Still, it would seem odd to say in this situation that I envied you your good fortune. Rather I am disturbed because I *fear* the consequences of that good fortune for me. The reference to the effect on *me* is not essential to this argument. If I have sufficient imagination, I can be pained by the thought that a developer in Italy has had the good fortune to acquire funding and licenses to build on a historically significant or especially beautiful site, even if I will never be in a position to visit that site myself. This, too, is not really envy but rather fear about bad consequences resulting from what is for someone else a stroke of good fortune.

At this point, Aristotle makes a further instructive distinction by referring to a distinction that he posits between three slightly different terms in Greek for forms of pain at another's good fortune.⁶ The

6. See David Kostnan, "Nemesis and Phthonos," in *Gestures: Essays in Ancient History, Literature, and Philosophy Presented to Alan L. Boegehold on the Occasion*

first is a set of related terms that are frequently used in a wide variety of contexts in Homer but by the fourth century seem to have become slightly archaic: the verb νεμεσᾶν, the verbal noun τὸ νεμεσᾶν, and the noun νέμεσις. This is usually translated as indignation or righteous anger. The second is the term that is usually translated into English as envy: φθόνος. The third set of terms is associated with ζῆλος, usually translated as something like emulousness.

The distinction between the first two of these is that τὸ νεμεσᾶν really has to do with quasi-moral disapproval, as Aristotle puts it (*Rhetorica* 1387a): εἰ γάρ ἐστι τὸ νεμεσᾶν λυπεῖσθαι ἐπὶ τῷ φαινομένῳ ἀναξίως εὐπραγεῖν [“For if we assume that being indignant is being distressed at a faring well that seems to be undeserved”]. Νέμεσις seems originally to have been the emotion a person feels toward another when the other shamelessly goes beyond the bounds of what is appropriate or decent. The gods feel it when humans get above themselves, and Aristotle then claims that it is the correct name for the emotion I feel toward you if I have a morally tinged disapproval of the fact that you have enjoyed some undeserved good fortune. This, Aristotle says, distinguishes it clearly from φθόνος (that is, from what we call envy), because φθόνος completely lacks the quasi-moral dimension of νέμεσις; in envy, in contrast to νέμεσις, notions of what is warranted, appropriate, deserved, or merited play no role. Aristotle writes [*Rhetorica* 1387b23]: εἴπερ ἐστὶν ὁ φθόνος λύπη τις ἐπὶ εὐπραγίᾳ φαινομένη τῶν εἰρημένων ἀγαθῶν περὶ τοὺς ὁμοίους, μὴ ἵνα τι αὐτῷ, ἀλλὰ δι’ ἐκείνους. [“Envy is a certain distress caused by the fact that some other people like oneself seem to have done well with respect to the aforementioned goods. The subject envies these others not because he or she wants the goods in question for himself or herself but because *they* have them.”]

I envy you merely because you possess some good, have some stroke of good fortune, or are signally well off, regardless of whether that is deserved or not, and even if I do not myself wish to have the particular good or benefit you enjoy. So if you cheat to win the race

of His Retirement and His Seventy-Fifth Birthday, ed. Geoffrey W. Bakewell and James P. Sickinger (Oxford: Oxbow, 2003), 74–87; David Kostnan and N. Keith Rutter, eds., *Envy, Spite and Jealousy: The Rivalrous Emotions in Ancient Greece* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003); Robert A. Kaster, *Emotion, Restraint, and Community in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 84–103.

against me and I am hostile to you *because* you cheated, that is righteous indignation (νέμεσις), but I may envy you your success even if you didn't cheat, because (as we would say) I begrudge the fact that *you* won. To be sure, we may surmise, acts of hostility that are properly thought of as instances of envy may for various reasons try to sanitize themselves by presenting themselves as expressions of indignation, but that does not show that there is no difference between the two. This is all perfectly compatible with Aristotle's theory, provided that one admits that there are some cases of genuine νέμεσις and that not everything that presents itself as indignation is really envy.

Aristotle, however, also distinguishes envy from zeal or emulation (ζῆλος) (*Rhetorica* 1388a32): εἰ γάρ ἐστιν ζῆλος λύπη τις ἐπὶ φαινομένη παρουσίᾳ ἀγαθῶν ἐντίμων καὶ ἐνδεχομένων αὐτῷ λαβεῖν περὶ τοὺς ὁμοίους τῇ φύσει, οὐχ ὅτι ἄλλῳ ἀλλ ὅτι οὐχὶ καὶ αὐτῷ ἔστιν. ["For if emulousness is a certain distress caused by the fact that some other people who are by nature like themselves seem to possess certain valued goods, which it is possible for people to acquire. People are emulous not because someone else has these goods but because *they* don't have them, too."]

This distinction, too, is conceptually clear enough. In emulation, I am pained when you get some good because I want that good myself; in envy, I might or might not want the good you have myself, but the point is that I do not wish *you* to have it. This is an exceedingly important aspect of the Aristotelian approach. In envy, I am focused on the person I envy, not on the good that he, she, or they have, which is not, of course, to say that the good involved is completely irrelevant (as it might be in the case of mere irrational or, as we say, blind hatred). I begrudge that you have that good or that you are doing well, even if I don't aspire to have that particular good myself. This deeply nonconstructive aspect of envy—what I really want is for you *not* to have the good—is one of the reasons this emotion has such bad press in Aristotle and others. What I really want is not to attain or possess the good you have, or indeed any discernible objective good, but that *you* do not fare well.

One final aspect of the analysis remains. Aristotle is clear that I envy only those whom I perceive to be like me. How much like me, and in which respect(s)? This has been a highly controversial claim, but it does not seem to be simply one of those Aristotelian throwaway remarks, a comment to which he has given no thought, because it re-

curs several times in his writings and indeed in other ancient works. The idea might seem intuitively to be something like this. The peasant in a society in which social hierarchies are taken seriously may *hate* the aristocrat, and might even zealously wish to emulate the aristocrat, having the goods the aristocrat has, but strictly speaking, he doesn't *envy* the aristocrat. Once social hierarchies break down, and once the Christian message of universal moral equality has had time to percolate throughout society, the way is open for *universal* envy, but that is because in such societies *everyone* is construed as like or equal to all others. Envy makes sense only among equal competitors in the *same* game. So I have to make a twofold imaginative leap. I need to have activated a rather complex kind of identification: the completely bald, yet strangely simian, creature in front of me makes bizarre noises that I can just barely recognize as a language but that I do not understand, and it gesticulates wildly. It is tattooed in various places, has pins stuck through its face, and has doused itself in a scent I find repellent. Only by taking a huge identificatory leap can I conclude that this young man from East London or this Tory Minister is really like me, a human being and cocitizen of the European Union and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In addition to this, I must imaginatively construe the two of us as being engaged in some kind of competitive project in which we are rivals. Similarity means some kind of equality, and to be a competitor or rival means there is some kind of common framework within which comparative loss and gain, or advantage and disadvantage, can be calculated. These are also two ways in which envy is different from simple hatred. I can hate almost anyone, and perhaps it is even possible to hate nonhuman entities, but I envy only those humans who are sufficiently like me to be some kind of rival or competitor. I hate enemies, but a competitor is not per se my enemy. In fact, there is some evidence that certain Greek thinkers thought envy was particularly closely connected to friendship, that it was a particular perversion of friendship or of a relation much like friendship.⁷

Recall, too, that what really irked Julius Caesar's opponents was his *clementia*. One might think that clemency just meant kindness,

7. Milobenski, *Der Neid*.

a relaxed tolerance, or forbearance in the face of error or miscreance, and hence that it was a human virtue, but in the context of the politics of the Roman republic, however, *clementia* was much more ambiguous than this would suggest. The reason is that it could be thought to be a virtue that was associated with pretensions to kingship. To be clement was to exercise a free choice vis-à-vis someone who was in one's power, and to be fixedly and universally clement could be construed as being or claiming to be above the fray, as a king was constitutionally. An aristocrat in the Roman republic was supposed to take the others *seriously*, engage and compete with them on roughly equal terms, and *not* be above the battle with them. Too much clemency expressed the wrong attitude, as if one did not consider an opponent a possible threat or competitor.

At the end of the Roman Civil War, one of Caesar's great adversaries, the arch-Republican Cato, committed suicide rather than surrender to him. On this occasion, Caesar is reported to have said “Ὡ Κάτων, φθονῶ σοι τοῦ θανάτου• καὶ γὰρ σύ μοι τῆς σωτηρίας ἐφθόνησας”⁸ [“Cato, I envy you your death because you envied me my sparing of you”]. Here, instead of envy, we would probably say begrudge in the second part of this (although Caesar uses the same word in Greek for both): Caesar envied Cato because Cato has begrudged Caesar the opportunity of showing clemency to Cato. That is, Cato knew that Caesar would *not* kill him but would spare him, and that this would be seen as yet another instance of Caesar's clemency and would thus contribute to consolidating Caesar's pretension to be above the fray. Caesar thinks that this pretension is justified because he deserves the status he claims, so for him Cato's refusal even to be put in a position in which it might be thought that he could possibly accept Caesar's clemency is merely an instance of envy on Cato's part: sparing Cato was a good (because it was an expression of Caesar's superiority), and Cato was distressed at the thought that Caesar might have that good. Cato's own views about this are not recorded, certainly not as pithily as Caesar's, but we can assume that, if they had been recorded, and if he had been

8. Plutarch, *Vita Caesaris*, in *Vitae parallelae*, vol.II/Fasc.I, ed. by Claes Lindskog, Konrat Ziegler, Hand Gärtner (Leipzig: Teubner, 1993), lxxii.

speaking Greek rather than Latin,⁹ he would have denied the charge of envy and said he felt not φθόνος but νέμεσις, since he thought Caesar's airs of superiority were unmerited—or, in any event, ought not to be in any way recognized or tacitly acknowledged in a republic. Caesar, in the first part of his statement, admits that he is pained by the fact that Cato possesses a good, namely the good of refusing to allow himself to be treated as a person toward whom it would be in any way possible to show clemency, just as in modern English we usually say that I envy someone some good if I *lack* that good. Not, of course, that I necessarily want that good myself, but I don't want you to have it. In Aristotle's analysis of the Greek expression, there is no such implication. I usually envy you if I am distressed at your good fortune when I am less fortunate, but I can in principle speak of envy if I am pained at your success *even if I am equally fortunate myself*. Here, of course, Caesar is in a situation in which either the broader Greek sense or the narrower English sense would apply. Cato *has* the good fortune of a death that demonstrates irrefutably that he was a man of a certain kind; Caesar, even if he at the moment has a firm sense of his own superiority, has not yet had the opportunity to show this by granting clemency and seeing it accepted by Cato. Nor can he even (yet) show his equality to Cato by a similarly appropriate death.

This example shows that in the discussion up to now we have abstracted to some extent from one final important aspect of situations in which we speak of envy. We have treated the things that are the objects of envy—health, intelligence, possessions—as if they were nonpositional goods. My state of health is not directly dependent on your state of health; you could have a large library, and that in itself would not prevent me from building up an equally large one. Not all goods that are objects of envy have this property. If you are healthy, that in no way prevents me from being healthy, but if you are the winner of the race, I, of necessity, am not.¹⁰ Reputation, status, and social standing, however, are all positional goods. To have the standing

9. The Latin word "*invidia*" unfortunately seems to have been used for both what the Greeks called "*nevmesis*" and for what they called "*phthonos*." See Kaster, *Emotion, Restraint, and Community*, 84–103.

10. I note that positionality is something completely different from the comparative dimension of certain kinds of envy, which was discussed earlier.

of being the uniquely best (at anything or in any respect), for instance, implies that all others are less good. Once the social world is fully monetarized, positionality becomes a basic property of social life and the way is open for a massive expansion of the realm of envy. Beyond a certain point, one cannot compete with others about one's respective health, but there is always more money to be made, and how much you make determines my position.

It is easy to see how envy can disrupt politics and render all forms of social cooperation very difficult. If I envy you, that means that I wish you ill and do not wish you to have some good, even if I do not want that good myself. This, of course, can put a serious spoke in the possibilities of smooth human cooperation and will do so if there are no stronger countervailing motives. One line of thought that has been tempting to many is the idea that if we are cooperating constructively we should in general be willing to change our society in those ways that will increase our welfare. To increase our welfare in turn seems plausibly interpreted as meaning to act so that the welfare of the individuals who constitute our group is improved. In particular, it seems irrational to refuse to do something that will increase the welfare of any one member of the group if that can be done in such a way that it does not decrease the welfare of any other member. Increasing the welfare of at least one member while not decreasing the welfare of any other is sometimes called moving in the direction of Pareto-optimality and is described as a minimal condition of economic, and thus also of political, rationality.¹¹

Suppose, then, that everyone in some state of society—call it state A—earns between €1,000 and €5,000 a month of disposable income, with the exception of a tiny fragment of the population, who are disabled or have been exceptionally unlucky. In this state, some people might envy others or begrudge them their good fortune in various dimensions. I might envy you your fluency in Russian or might dislike you intensely and begrudge you your health, your musical abilities, or even the fact that you earn the minimum €1,000 a month. Now compare state A to another state, B, in which a handful

11. Rawls never really seems to understand the implications of giving the kind of centrality he does to Pareto-optimality.

of people each earn €1,000,000 a month while everyone else still earns €1,000. In this view, state B is thought to be more rational. If you are one of the people who will earn €1,000,000 in state B, and I envy you in Aristotle's sense, I am not likely to support a shift from state A to state B, even though in B I am no worse off. I might even be unwilling to move from state A to a possible state C in which I earn €2,000 while you take in €1,000,000. This might, if one looks at it in a sufficiently detached way, seem irrational or even perverse. By refusing an extra €1,000, I seem to be cutting off my nose to spite my face, as they say.¹² Of course, I might be envious or spiteful, but the impression that this is the *only* explanation for my refusal to move is incorrect and results from a characteristic underspecification of the situations in question. Marx would have said that the situations are described "too abstractly." In other words, it is *assumed* that the *only* thing relevant here is the simple quantitative amount of money available to each person in each of the various scenarios. Now what, Marx would ask, does this difference in level of monetary income *mean*? What will be its systematic effect on society? *If*, and this is a *big* if, it simply means the amount of money available to each person for purposes of personal consumption, if the money is used merely for buying wine, taking a trip, or making merry with one's friends, that is one situation. However, in our society, money means *power*. To have €30 more in your pocket than I have in mine means you are able to buy a better bottle of wine than I can, and that you drink a better bottle of wine than I do will have no effect, except perhaps on my feelings (if I envy you). But to have several thousand times more money than I do in a society where money will buy almost anything means something rather different. For instance, it might mean you are able to send your children to a private school, thereby draining good teachers, who are a scarce resource, from the state sector. Or it might mean that you can have private medical insurance or visit a private hospital, thereby contributing to the establishment of a two-tiered system of health care, with all the negative social consequences that would have. Or you might even be able to make significant contributions to funding particular political

12. Medea is the classic case from the ancient world.

campaigns that, if successful, could change the conditions of life, or you could exercise influence on politicians in some other way. It might mean that you could buy a factory or a quasi-monopoly on some scarce resource or a newspaper or a radio station, like Rupert Murdoch or Silvio Berlusconi. Exercising the power and influence that possession of huge amounts of money can buy in modern societies is an altogether different matter than having a higher level of consumption, so as long as differences in income are connected in this way with differences in *power*, it is by no means so obvious that I am being envious rather than rationally fearful if, all things considered, I prefer not to give you that differential power over me. In contrast to proper envy, I may not be focused on you, the specific person, or have any negative attitude toward your level of consumption *per se*. Rather, it is reasonable for me to fear *any* person who has an amount of wealth or power that threatens the health of society. Equally, it might be right for me to have righteous indignation toward those who undeservedly have an especially high level of consumption. Given the lack of clarity about what—if anything—constitutes desert here, there could be constant grounds for disagreement, unless one empties the concept of desert of its meaning and its ability to provide independent justification by simply *identifying* what someone deserves with what he or she ends up with in the chaotic lottery that is the economic life of most modern societies. Neither rational fear nor righteous indignation is a form of envy.

Envy is both painful and nonconstructive, and thus it is understandable that it has had very bad press. As a consequence, to attribute some political initiative to envy is usually a canny strategy, if the attribution can be made to stick. The haves will thus have a strong motivation to attribute envy to the have-nots. The fact that the haves even bother to formulate this criticism of the have-nots means that the haves realize that they in some sense *need* some kind of cooperation from the have-nots. Even if what is at issue are not differences in relative power, as discussed earlier, but mere relative levels of consumption, it isn't generally clear why the have-nots should not strive to get as much consumption as possible by whatever means they can employ. After all, greed is not in itself a terribly attractive property either, and yet it is accepted as a necessary and legitimate motor of

our economic activity. If the have-nots adopt a principled strategy of obstruction or noncooperation with the haves and this strategy results from envy, what exactly is wrong with that? Is envy so much less attractive than greed? In addition, in many situations, systematic intransigence, which could look very much like a form of the politics of envy, might well result in a bargaining advantage for the have-nots. In that case, why would such a policy not be perfectly rational?¹³

I merely note that if one takes the ancient distinction between envy and indignation (φθόνος and νέμεσις) seriously, the have-nots could always in principle claim that they were motivated not by envy but by indignation, since in fact most of the most extreme forms of economic differences between agents in our society are the result of completely accidental factors, such as being born the child of someone who is wealthy or being accidentally at the right place in the financial markets at the right time, and are not the result of anything that could be counted as merit or desert. This line of argument is not open to Marx, to be sure, because he has an extremely extensive battery of various arguments, which there is no time now to expound, against taking merit or desert particularly seriously as cognitive substantive categories rather than as mere ideological constructs. Still, although Marx would not have taken seriously the view that the poor are indignant rather than envious, because this would require one to have a concept of merited and unmerited economic success and for Marx no such concept is available, we might wish to disagree with him on this. Surely, we might argue, *sometimes* agents with great ruthlessness and a quickness to deploy low animal cunning are very strikingly successful. One might not morally approve of such personal qualities or find them particularly attractive, but that is a different matter. Why do they not constitute a clear concept of economic desert? Such individual cases are, of course, highly publicized by the powers-that-be in our society, because they reinforce the idea that there is some sense in which merit (of a kind) is rewarded. However, these cases seem to be individual exceptions and in fact are often explicitly presented as such exceptions. *Whatever* merit might mean,

13. See Richard Raatzsch, "Wohlhabende, denkt nach!" (unpublished manuscript).

by no stretch of the imagination could the only son of a billionaire be said to have merited his inherited wealth, and in fact accidents, including the accidents of birth, are pretty clearly, as Hayek saw, the key to the prosperity or misery of most people.

How, then, can we deal with this emotion in the political realm? There is every reason to believe that the solution envisaged by crude communism will not work, because it is a commitment to the pursuit of a task that is finally incoherent. If one assumes that envy could be abolished if only the mirage of truly complete egalitarianism was reached, this initiates a diabolical cycle in which envy refocuses itself on increasingly minor advantages, and it is tempting to think that the remedy for every failure is a search for yet further dimensions of human life that have not been equalized. Envy, however, turns out to be very sensitive to a number of imaginative constructions: I must identify certain people as sufficiently like me to be possible objects of envy, I must construe them as rivals or competitors, and these boundaries are not at all fixed in reality. Modes of imaginative identification, however, are notoriously difficult to control. So the project of abolishing or even reliably channeling envy into nontoxic directions doesn't seem very promising. In principle, this still leaves intact Marx's early proposal for a depoliticization of envy, but to accept that in its full-blown form requires one to take on board the idea that politics, including, of course, the whole state apparatus, could wither away. Envy (in its various forms) will surely be with us for the foreseeable future, and although we can hope to try to manage the forms of imaginative identification (both positive identification and negative identification) so as to control the worst excesses of envious action and insulate the political realm against envy as much as possible, there are probably very narrow limits within which this is possible. Realistically we should not expect to be able to create a totally envy-free politics, and forms of political thought that abstract from the phenomenon of envy have lost touch with reality. Nevertheless, not every political project that might in some way look like an expression of envy, and that powerful economic groups have an interest in presenting as being motivated by envy, really is envy rather than rational fear or righteous indignation.

9

Commerce, Credit, and Sovereignty

The Nation-State as Historical Critique

J. G. A. Pocock

I

IN CHAPTER 7 of *Jealousy of Trade*—"The Permanent Crisis of a Divided Mankind: 'Nation-State' and 'Nationalism' in Historical Perspective"—Istvan Hont focuses on a moment in the history of "the nation-state" as both concept and phenomenon. This moment occurs early, and crucially, in the history of the French Revolution and is the moment at which the Abbé Sieyès pronounces that sovereignty over the land and resources of a territory already organized as a "state" must be vested in "the nation" rather than "the people," a distinction Hont shows was important in the subsequent history of the Revolution and its empire. From this moment, he proceeds to the history of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries in Europe and a planet increasingly Europeanized and globalized. This history was dominated by wars between and revolutions within states and empires organized as "nations" and fueled, ideologically and emotionally, by "nationalism," a set of terms, and realities, which he shows (as do others) were developing during an eighteenth century that was itself dominated by "jealousy of trade."

In this chapter, I wish to explore, in directions not necessarily taken by Hont, what I term “the history of ‘the nation-state’ as concept and phenomenon.” The moment defined by Sieyès’s pronouncement is of major theoretical and practical importance, but Hont does not of course suggest that it was then that “the nation-state” came into being as either concept or phenomenon. Both “states” and “nations” were already supposed to exist; that is, the words or their equivalents were in use in several if not all European languages, and ways of thought and writing already existed that associated them and presented them as active in defining one another. The term “nation-state,” however, is another matter. It was not in use in Sieyès’s time—electronic research will inform us when it first appeared and how and where it spread—though the phenomena indicated by it, and by “nationalism,” have been shown to have existed in the eighteenth century and to have been promoted in various ways by “jealousy of trade.” We cannot use it, however, in ways unaffected by the significances it has come to bear in the last half-century or so—though Hont’s intention is certainly not to promote these indiscriminately, if at all—during which it has become something of a buzzword we use without altogether controlling it. Hont selected a moment at which the two words “nation” and “state” were brought into an association having revolutionary significance, the consequences of which he proceeded to trace into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We live and write at a time when the conjoint term “nation-state” is used, largely and imprecisely, to indicate a period in Euro-global history that we are enjoined to consign to a past and therefore to associate an uncriticized diversity of perceived historical phenomena with the coming into being of that which we are now to dismiss. In particular, a wide range of nineteenth- and twentieth-century historiography is now condemned as “nation-state historiography” on the assumption, often justified, that its authors could conceive of history only in nation-state terms. And we are enjoined to write the history, even of those periods in which “nation-states” may be said to have been coming into being and exercising sovereignty, in terms that diminish their sovereignty and even their reality. There has been room here for imprecision of thought, some of it ideologically driven.

Hont showed the concepts of “nation” and “state” coming together at a particular moment and in a particular historical context. In this chapter, I would like to elaborate the contextuality of that moment, so as to look past the particular act intended and performed by Sieyès into a further problematic presented by “jealousy of trade” to Europeans thinking about their situation in the eighteenth century. My intention will not be to criticize Hont’s narrative but rather to add other contexts in which it may be situated, so as to enlarge our understanding of what we may be doing when we employ the term “nation-state”, and what actors and actions we may enroll in the historical narratives we—following some of them—may now be constructing. In multiplying the contexts in which “nation,” “state,” and other terms may appear or have appeared, I will be attempting to lessen the imprecision with which “nation-state” has been used and at the same time rob it of some of the ideological force it has derived from that imprecision. My arguments will not be without ideological consequences, but I take this opportunity to say that I am not engaging in ideological debate with Hont; I do not see that he was saying anything with which I have any sort of disagreement. I am seeking to enlarge his narrative in ways that may increase our understanding of it.

II

Eighteenth-century Europe was equipped with several macronarratives, bringing its history as their authors saw it down to a recent past if not a present, and serving to legitimate its changing values. The predominant narratives of its governing structures began with the Rome of the senate and people (imprecisely termed the republic), proceeded through Rome’s acquisition of an empire greater than it could sustain without transformation into an insecure military monarchy, and culminated in the collapse of that empire into rule by its own barbarian mercenaries. This had been accompanied, through divine or secular agency, by the rise to power of the Christian church—Gibbon’s “triumph of barbarism and religion”—and the Roman papacy’s attempted renewal of a western empire with which it later fell into competition. The victors in this struggle were, briefly,

the Italian city republics, and more lastingly the territorial monarchies of Spain, France, and England, the ancestors of the principal states down to the late eighteenth century to which the name "nation-state" later came to be applied. The great schism of the Protestant Reformation led to the era of the Wars of Religion, so destructive as to threaten the fabric of civil society itself, and in the course of emergence from these wars to the perceived threat of "universal monarchy," first Spanish and later French. The combination of these two nightmares played a role in the eighteenth-century (or "Enlightened") historical memory comparable to that which the world wars and the nuclear threat play in our own. The difference lies in the ways in which they and we have perceived the emergence from the nightmare past.

The solution deemed to have been found was that of Europe as a plurality of states (typically monarchies), each possessing the sovereignty necessary to control religious dissent, pay and maintain armies that acted as its permanent instruments, and conduct relations with its neighbor states that included war but could be concluded by treaties. This is why "the foundations of modern political thought," laid down between 1400 and 1700, are held to consist of the formation and elaboration of the idea of the state. To jurists and theorists of international relations, it appeared crucial that sovereigns existed in relation to one another in the "state of nature," meaning the alternatives of peace or war; as late as 1776, the American Declaration of Independence was among other things a declaration of war, coupled with a promise of peace and friendship when the necessary conditions were met. More than a century earlier, the Treaties of Westphalia (1648) came to possess historiographic status as the moment when a system of states superseded a condition of religious war, in its turn looking back to the medieval conflicts of empire and papacy. It was followed, however, by a period in which alliances between states were thought necessary as resistance to the threat of a French or Franco-Spanish "universal monarchy," and the Enlightened historians—Voltaire, Robertson, Montesquieu, and by implication Gibbon—wrote in the benign afterglow of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), which was held to have established the European state system on a firmer footing. Historians rather than jurists, they emphasized the social and cultural

conditions that the European states shared and that enabled them to conduct even their wars as members of a civilized community. These included Enlightenment—meaning the will to subject disputatious religion to the imperatives of civil society—a community of “manners,” *mœurs* or *mores*, arising from society as an encounter between civilized beings rendering each other “polished” or “polite,” and, as the necessary substratum of all these conditions, commerce, meaning the constant exchange of goods, first material and afterwards moral. Europe was depicted as a “republic” or “commonwealth” of sovereigns held together by a *doux commerce* in all these senses, so that even war and religious faith might be controlled by society and be rendered its instruments.

This was the “Enlightened utopia” of 1713–1789, the vision of Europe as a system of material and cultural exchange between states that could be thought of as “nations” because the concept of nationhood was valuable though not central to the characteristics that made them a civilization. A basic assumption was that “commerce” was conducted between the inhabitants of “states,” “realms,” or “commonwealths (*res publicae*)” where sovereignty was strong enough to maintain laws that protected the property of the subject. Whether this required that the sovereign’s authority be “absolute” was a huge and dangerous matter of dispute, around which much history came to be written but which did not endanger the plurality of sovereignties of which a civilized order consisted. The historians who regarded this plurality as the telos of their narratives commonly carried them as far as the conquest of the oceans and the discovery of the Americas, as a moment at which the foundations of plurality had been laid. They did not carry their narratives through, though they clearly envisaged, the Wars of Religion or the struggles against universal monarchy. Their religious preoccupation led them to emphasize “the progress of society” as the emergence of Europe from the medieval order that had followed the ancient, and the struggles between authority, religion, and law that ensued were normally left to the authors of national histories such as the French and English, since France and England were where they had occurred. The emergence of “nation-state history” precedes by some centuries the moment at which Hont sees Sieyès as opening the door into modernity.

III

The era between Utrecht and Revolution, however, was not one in which the Enlightened states of the *ancien régime* conducted their wars under the moderating control of *jus belli ac pacis* and *raison d'état*. The commerce on which their utopia was founded was global, not only intra-European, and the era is that of the “second Hundred Years’ War” between Britain and France, fought on the continents and oceans for empire in North America and India. It has recently been shown how this war cycle, fought between national and mercantile economies, entailed mobilization of national energies and national imaginaries, and—especially but by no means exclusively in France—led to the promotion of national hatreds in which the dehumanized Other became a means to the increasingly emphatic definition of the Self.¹ This was made easier because the wars increasingly were fought beyond Europe, outside the field in which the assertion of a common culture and history aided that of a *doux commerce* that could civilize the conduct of war itself. The French and the English could accuse one another of waging war by means savage enough to render the other party savages, guilty of importing savagery into Europe itself; if there was no peace beyond the Line, the Line itself failed to protect the zone of civility.² “Nationalism” as an attribute of “the nation-state” may therefore be said to have flourished well before Sieyès’s revolutionary redefinition of the latter term, though should we find that the term itself was not predominant before Sieyès’s time (or even during it), we would have to recognize that it was coined by subsequent ideologues and historians, not by those whose thoughts and actions we interpret by applying “nation-state” to them. The question of when this term came into use is not, I believe, dealt with in Hont’s

1. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); David Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

2. See the outcry over the incident of 1758, when the British seized French ships without a declaration of war, in *The Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon*, ed. John Murray (London: John Murray, 1897), 153; J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999–2015), vol. 4: *Barbarians, Savages and Empires*, 298.

chapter. Let us then continue to use it, but in cautious awareness that it is we who use it.

The conduct of “the second Hundred Years’ War” beyond Europe as well as within it—there are historians who will always insist on the primacy of affairs in Europe—had profound consequences for the stability and self-images of the states waging the war. The emphasis of any narrative leading to the moment of Sieyès’s pronouncement must fall on the period separating the peace of 1763, which terminated the Seven Years’ War, from that of 1783, which terminated the War of American Independence. In 1763, France ceased to exercise effective empire in either North America or India, while the British national debt was increased to an extent whose consequences had much to do with the subsequent revolution in Britain’s North American colonies. In 1783, France had the satisfaction of witnessing and bringing about the end of a British empire of settlement in America but not of an empire of extraction in India, while the indebtedness of the French state increased to the point where the machinery of that state itself came so close to collapse as to necessitate the national consultations that became revolution in 1789. Hont’s King’s College colleague Michael Sonenscher has maintained that the subject of French political debate had become nothing other than the question of what new state structure could assume the burden of the bankruptcy of the old,³ and I have maintained that Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* are built around his perception of the National Assembly’s answer to the same question.⁴ Hont depicts Sieyès as the prophet of a national will creating a “nation-state” total and revolutionary enough—it is these characteristics that the word “national” must denote—to reconstitute a polity that the bankruptcy of state has deprived of all will and meaning, and we must therefore investigate the relation between such terms as “national debt” and “public credit”

3. Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge: Public Debt, Inequality, and the Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

4. J. G. A. Pocock, “The Political Economy of Burke’s Analysis of the French Revolution,” in J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History: Essays on the History of Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), chap. 10, 193–212.

and the ideas of “state” and “nation” in European history during the years preceding the Revolution.

The most notable literary response to “the crisis of the seaborne empires” occurred in the genre of historiography with the *Histoire philosophique et politique du commerce et des établissements des Européens dans les deux Indes*, published in 1772 and revised in 1780, under the name of the Abbé Raynal, its promoter and editor but not its principal author, a role now ascribed to Denis Diderot. This work has the status of a classic of anti-imperialism (or, as we now say, anticolonialism) but is also to be considered under its self-chosen title as a philosophic history of commerce.⁵ As such, it exhibits a deep ambivalence toward its subject, opening as it does with a paean of praise of commerce as the source of all that is civil in society but proceeding through a series of all the evils that commerce has done since navigation exposed Asia, Africa, and the Americas to exploitation by the Europeans. It is thus the first global history that we have. As recent work has shown, this ambivalence can be thought of in two ways: as a problem generated in history or as a problem in political theory.⁶ The two may interact but can be treated separately.

It is easy to see the former approach as predominant in the *Histoire des Deux Indes*, as Raynal’s work is generally known. It is the tragedy of the history he and Diderot relate that the Europeans made their way by sea around Africa to India, and across the Atlantic to the New World, at a moment—the end of the fifteenth century—when they were still at least half barbarous (the more so as they were Portuguese and Spanish) and had discovered neither Enlightenment nor the principles of commerce. Hence the appalling destructiveness of their impact on American societies, the brutal economies of extraction they set up, the reliance on massive importations of African slaves, and the impoverishment of their own societies, unable to enrich themselves through capital investment. There followed, under Dutch, English, and more recently French leadership, a less barbarous commerce, still

5. I have attempted a survey of it under this character in *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 4, pt. 4: “The Crisis of the Seaborne Empires,” 227–328.

6. Anoush Terjanian, *Commerce and Its Discontents in Eighteenth-Century French Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

reliant, however, on slave labor and—more significantly still—the installation of company monopolies, especially in India, which were producing the unnecessary wars and the ruinous public debts visible from the age between 1763 and 1783. Here the *Histoire* presents a double face. On the one hand, it serves Vergennes and the *ministère de la marine* by promoting a Franco-Spanish alliance aimed at undoing the British universal monarchy of the seas. On the other hand, it presents monopolistic commerce as corrupting and subverting the economies of the European commonwealth of states and calls for a general adoption of Enlightened values as a remedy. It does not, however, attain the status of a proto-revolutionary document, though it may have done much to promote such a mentality. There is no blueprint for a new political economy or new state structure, such as began to appear in France during the 1780s; Diderot died before the Revolution, and Raynal took the first opportunity to disown it. Their work is relevant to, but not part of, the origins of “nation-state” and “nationalism” as traced by Hont. It emphasizes the role of debt in producing the crisis to which they appeared as answers, and there is one important sense in which it continues to maintain the role of the state in generating a free economy. There can be no true global commerce, we are told at one point, until there are states outside Europe able to engage actively in trade, but we should not expect to see Indian or Chinese ships sailing to European ports, because they are still governed by oriental despotism, under which the subject is not master of his property. Raynal and Diderot were upholding the necessity of the state to maintain law and liberty, and it is relevant that some of the English in Bengal were studying Hindu and Muslim law in search of its preconditions there. They arrived at many wrong answers, but they had asked the question.

IV

In search of ambivalence toward commerce as a phenomenon in political theory, we may refer to Montesquieu's dictum that commerce “adoucit les mœurs barbares [mais] corrompt les mœurs pures.” This belongs to the first half of the century, before the crisis confronted by Diderot and Raynal, and like much political theory of the time, it

entails a theoretical or “conjectural” history of society. The barbarian—who may or may not be identical with the savage—has, if he is not a mere hunter-gatherer, a strong sense of his own possessions, and with it of his self and his honor in the state of nature, but has not yet developed a capacity for exchange with others whose property and rights he must learn to respect. As, probably through agricultural labor, he acquires a surplus, which he begins to exchange with others, he becomes capable of the state of society, and as this comes about, his passions are moderated (*adouci*) through friction (*politesse*, derived from the verb *polir*) with others like himself, with whom he develops a capacity for sympathy. We are in a universe where manners (*mœurs*) count for even more than laws, and this has come about, for theorists moral and political, as the increased role of commerce lays emphasis on the individual as transactor even more than as proprietor. But the productivity that develops with agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce leads to an irreversible tendency to produce surpluses greater than there is need to consume, expend, or exchange, and it is this (known as “luxury”) that “corrompt les mœurs pures.” The most frequent term for this in the eighteenth century was “corruption” in a political sense. It was held to have destroyed the pre-commercial republic of Rome—there were fuller explorations of this arising from the morals and politics of arms—and in some other ways to be threatening the commercial states and republics of modern Europe. This thought would in the end lead to a questioning of the relations between commerce and nationality, “nation-state” and “nationalism,” but with Montesquieu we are still at some distance from the point where that begins to happen. What he seems to be saying is that in the social state based on exchange, *mœurs* are already less than *pures*, which means that politics and morals have a quarrel with history, in which alone they can exist but in which they can never be free from corruption. Diderot, and of course Rousseau, would develop this paradox in several ways.

To understand it, we have to take account of the continuing strength in eighteenth-century thinking of the concept of “ancient liberty,” in which man became fully human in proportion to his (the gender choice is deliberate) becoming and remaining a citizen, asserting his autonomy by engaging in political decision-making with

his equals. The principal threat to this ideal was held to be luxury—there were others that do not concern us here—in which the temptations of consumerism led man to forget his obligations and lose his liberty with his virtue (*virtus* or *virtù*). As an ideal of “modern liberty” took shape in commercial society, it was recognized that there was an alternative moral and social life for man (and even woman), based on productivity and exchange, commerce and manners, and by the post-Revolutionary time of Benjamin Constant, it could be argued that “ancient liberty” threatened “modern liberty” by subjecting social freedom to Spartan discipline. Earlier, Adam Smith had argued that the ancient republic was impossible in commercial society because in the latter men had many other things to do besides governing themselves and could depute others as their representatives. There remained, however, the problem of autonomy: could I be free if my freedom were exercised for me by another? And from Montesquieu to Rousseau there can be traced the recognition that modern freedom was purchased at a moral price. “Corruption,” Gibbon once remarked, was “the infallible symptom of constitutional liberty.”⁷

As we already know from the history of the “second Hundred Years’ War,” it was the problem of national debt that brought the paradox of commerce to a head. In English history, if also in French history, the phenomenon was older than the “jealousy of trade.” William of Orange’s enrollment of the British kingdoms in the wars against the “universal monarchy” of Louis XIV compelled them not only to begin consolidation into “the Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland”—which incidentally cannot be accurately defined as a “nation-state”—but to begin financing a permanent army and navy by instituting a national debt secured by future revenues, stock in which became a commodity capable of exchange and speculation. There arose—as has been exhaustively studied⁸—the specter of a society ruled by its creditors and

7. Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David P. Womersley, 3 vols. (London: Penguin, 1996), vol. 1, 775.

8. Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development, and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*,

speculators in its credit, in which all property was mortgaged and all autonomy and very nearly all personality with it, and there existed the possibility of a bankruptcy of the totality of society (to which the term “nation” was increasingly applied). Among the more radical applications of this set of fears to the structure of political philosophy stands David Hume’s essay “Of Public Credit,” a work from the early 1750s, with the frightening if still speculative conclusion that either “the nation”—how are we to interpret Hume’s choice of this word?—“must destroy public credit, or public credit must destroy the nation.”

Hume imagined a world in which the value of every object was reduced to its efficacy in maintaining an economy of debit and credit. Since the matter depended on confidence, and confidence on speculation, the object was reduced to fantasy and carried the proprietor—now transformed into a speculator—with it. The relations between social beings were reduced to fantasy, and none could survive that were the product of experience in society. These Hume termed “natural” relations, and it is interesting that he seems to have had in mind those based on hierarchy and deference, in which the less well informed trusted their social superiors to supply them with the information necessary to form their own judgments. Hume, we may want to say, was still a man of the *ancien régime*, but it is worth noting that if he thought a society of orders was necessary to the being of a “nation,” it was still a “nation” that must be preserved if “public credit” was not to destroy it.⁹ Hume was supplying a conservative and historical answer to the problem of *anomie* posed by public credit; Sieyès was supplying a revolutionary answer to the same challenge. The “nation destroyed by public credit” must reassemble itself around nothing but its will, divorced from the structures destroyed, and hard to distinguish from its “general will.” It is worth noting that this is very nearly how Edmund Burke would see matters in his *Reflections*. The historic nation had been brought to the edge of destruction by public debt, and

with a New Introduction by Richard Whatmore (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

9. David Hume, “Of Public Credit,” in David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 349–365, esp. 358 (“Adieu to all ideas of nobility, gentry, and family”), 360–361 (“either . . . or . . .”).

a new will divorced from its previous structures was being brought into being to reconstitute it. Whereas Sieyès saw this as revolutionary, however, Burke saw it as the continuation of the same destructive agency. The Revolution was the work of an extensive and dissatisfied “monied interest,” backed by the uprooted classes it had created and by new and “electric” means of communication among crowds, replacing the French equivalent of Hume’s “natural relations” rooted in past history.¹⁰

V

We have arrived at an ambivalence between two equally valid, closely related, but formally opposed uses of the term “nation-state.” The usage with which the term “nationalism” is more easily associated is that to be found in chapter 7 of *Jealousy of Trade*. It presents the “nation-state” as a revolutionary phenomenon, responding to the corrosive effects of a near-global expansion of capital employed by the state and transforming it. The term is both revolutionary and historicist; it announces the appearance of a “general will,” by which a “nation” responds to the historical forces that have destroyed its former self and declares itself capable of employing them to give itself a new being. The “nationalism” associated with it is essentially that of nineteenth-century philosophies presenting the national state, in particular the German, as the master of history, its own and that of others; the *Idee* that we find, in noble but disastrous form, behind the outset of the First World War, and in utterly degenerate form behind that of the Second World War. But if we explore the histories of the terms “state” and “nation,” and especially of how they were employed in eighteenth-century debate over the impact of “commerce” and “credit” in political thought and historiography, we find—and are not much surprised to find—the word “nation” being used very differently to denote state and society in the forms that were subverted by debt first and revolution second, and therefore to advance prerevolutionary and antirevolutionary readings of their own significance.

10. Pocock, “Political Economy of Burke’s Analysis,” 207–209.

There is clearly a complex and contestatory history to be written of this family of terms, in which "nation-state" itself makes a late appearance. Whatever its origin and first appearance, we know it best as a term of art, coined in the twentieth century to review the history to which it is applied and in the twenty-first to proclaim that history's obsolescence.

The era 1713–1789, that of the "European republic of states," may be thought of as having been succeeded by an era of great states, empires, wars, and revolutions, lasting from the French Revolution of 1789 to the dissolution of the Soviet Union almost exactly two centuries later. This era may be designated by the term "modern," leaving open the possibility of "early modern" as an epithet for the era preceding it and "post-modern" for that in which we currently live: (Needless to say, it is possible and desirable to use all three terms with much greater sophistication.) The last or present era, though very recent, is thought of as one of extremely rapid globalization, in which all forms of human activity are conducted in ways that transcend, or transgress, the defined territories of states and threaten to render obsolete their sovereignty, autonomy, identity, and history, together with the sense of the personal self as defined by its membership and participation in them. There has arisen a widespread and active ideology of this phenomenon, in which "globalization" is presented in much the same terms, whether it is evaluated positively or negatively. It is described as having a history consisting first of the rise of the "nation-state" to historical primacy and then of its supersession, and this history, it is vital to note, is retrospectively extended to include the "early modern" period as well as the "modern." The states coming into being to form the "Utrecht commonwealth" are designated "nation-states," and their history, extending back through the early modern to the late "medieval," falls under the rubric of "nation-state history" (or historiography), to which it is now important to propose alternatives that certainly modify it and may be intended to replace it. To the historian, modification, complication, and contestation are always desirable; replacement, however, may look like an ideological move in political thought and action.

To enter this field is almost unavoidable for the reader of *Jealousy of Trade*, but it raises questions that have little directly to do with

that work's seventh chapter. Sieyès (who does not invent or promote the term "nation-state") appears at a revolutionary moment at which "early modern" is being transformed into "modern"; he employs the term "nation" in ways that help us see how "nation-state" might become dominant, but to apply the term (or the term "nationalism") to the history of states before the moment of revolution is to employ it in ways other than those he directly asserts. It is therefore possible to inquire how (and when) "nation-state" and "nationalism" came to be applied by historians to the early modern and late medieval periods, what were and are the consequences of doing so, and whether the application was and remains desirable. To make this inquiry is not to review Hont's conduct of his clearly different inquiry but to increase our understanding of the context in which he wrote and we read it.

The question may now be asked: were the states making up the "commonwealth of Europe" nation-states? Or rather, since they defined themselves in national terms, does that make them "nation-states" as this term has subsequently been developed? And in what senses, if any, did they promote or rely on "nationalism" as that term has been or is used? In *British Identities before Nationalism*, Colin Kidd has forcibly argued that premodern perceptions of "identity" were not dependent on "nationalism" in the modern sense, and even that "identity" has acquired a number of "modern" meanings that may render its use inappropriate in the early modern period.¹¹ It would seem that he has in mind the postmodern tendency to suggest that a collective identity or "self" cannot be constructed without hostility to a perceived "other" and that both constructions are equally insecure; "identity" is therefore something that was and is dangerous to claim. Though Kidd is right to resist this ideologically based assertion, the phenomena to which it points are of course extremely common, and he is questioning only the thesis that they are universal and inseparable. Premodern "identities" were based on common loyalties to a king, church, and law, but a late medieval "nationalism" is perhaps to be found in the notion of "custom" as we find it set out in the late fifteenth century in Fortescue's *De Laudibus Legum Anglie*.

11. Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Here “customs” are usages unreflectively evolved over time by communities that may be as large as “nations” (the English), and over time they become habits strong enough to become a “second nature,” almost impossible to change and defining that nation as what it has been, is, and must be. Fortescue proceeded to affirm that the customs of the English did more to constitute their “second nature” or identity than the customs of the French did theirs, since, he claimed, they had more continuity and had survived more changes of dynasty. Here of course is a case of the creative opposition of Self to Other, but before condemning it as an “invention of tradition,” we do well to ask the following questions: How long does it take to invent a tradition? How many people does it take to imagine a community? There are cases in which the process of invention and the thing invented become hard to distinguish, but more immediately, it could be pointed out that “customs” were not created by the people alone and that a king and his sovereignty were necessary before one could speak of the customs of a nation in the sense of a kingdom. Here one entered into dialogue, dialectic, and contestation, and it was certainly possible for the early modern historical intelligence to see the history of a nation as the continuing contest between sovereigns and laws, a contest that could be variously narrated and was unlikely to be finally concluded. Here of course one finds oneself writing in Anglo-British terms; there was no moment of revolution in the modern sense of the word, and none in which “nation” could be used as Sieyès uses it.

The states composing eighteenth-century Europe—the French and Anglo-British monarchies in particular—are those to which the epithet “nation-state” is most frequently applied, and used in such a way as to suggest that their histories can no longer be written in the terms that it requires. Before proceeding to investigate this criticism, it is worth noting that their early modern histories, and the historiographies that arose to record them, were not simple celebrations of national unities but records of complex contestations for authority, frequently extending into religious, civil, and ethnic wars. There were conflicts between sovereigns and churches, sovereigns and nobilities and bourgeoisies, sovereigns and systems of law, and in some cases—the Spanish and Anglo-British in particular—between the several ethnic groups and their customs and the composite rather than “national”

monarchies the sovereigns were trying to construct and maintain. The concept of a "nation-state" may certainly be used, but it seems most often to denote one variable among several: a "people" constituted and given identity by a system of law upheld by a sovereign. This construct tends to dominate the history of political thought, because it was a, if not *the*, normal way of depicting an effective early modern monarchy and therefore was sometimes applied in cases it described inadequately. When in the writings of Thomas Hobbes, for example, do we hear of a Leviathan seeking to be the mortal god of several commonwealths at once? It was not an uncommon situation, and there is room for the criticism of "nation-state" as a concept that oversimplifies historical reality.

Even in the case of a "nation-state" simplex, a commonwealth composed of a single people, defined by a single law and sovereignty continuous throughout its history, there was room, in fact need, for a history of contest and contested meanings. Had the kings made the laws, or were they the expression of the nation's customs? Did they set limits to his authority, or had they acquired the force of law from him? These debates were conducted in the nation's "political thought," but they were also recorded in its historiography as having gone on in its history, and the "nation-states"—the French and British monarchies especially—generated in the early modern period sophisticated historiographies that might seek to settle the debates one way or another but also related them as having gone on and perhaps still doing so. The most renowned of the early modern historians were not necessarily or uniformly writing history through any single set of historical or political blinkers, but it was commonly the case that it was a specific state or nation whose history was being related. If that of another appeared in the story, it did so contingently, as more or less well understood. The English did not know Scottish history, and the great historians of Enlightenment Scotland thought it more important to know English and European history as a context in which Scottish was to be understood. They did not, however, think of "European" as a context in which "English" was in its turn to be drowned in universality.

In the early modern period of the history in which "nation-states" were formed, it is necessary to consider historiography as one of

several modes of “political thought,” and both it and political thought as we usually employ the term were intensely contestatory and employed “government,” “law,” “nation,” and “church” as concepts contestable and contested in both “political thought” and historiography. Each mode of thinking developed—from different sources—a conceptual vocabulary of its own, to be used alongside the more universal vocabularies available to it, and the former were shaped within the territories and histories of spatially and temporally finite political systems. They came to possess implications and intimations that were silently taken for granted, because they were familiar to those who had long been using them and therefore strange to those who had not. Some of them became “national” vocabularies and languages of discourse, and to pass from one to another was to enter a language world that remained to be learned. They coexisted with other language worlds, cosmopolitan and claiming to be universal, and interacted with them, and the problems this coexistence presented to the contemporary were much the same as those it still presents to the historian. The contemporary, more than the historian, was able—and often obliged—to define his allegiance and identity in terms of a particular language world whose history he inhabited, but he possessed means of awareness that this world coexisted with others, and further that this world was capable of debating its own politics and identity, and with them his own identity and allegiance in a multipolitical and multilinguistic universe.

I am asserting that “the nation-state,” as we see it shaping itself in early modern discourse, possessed means of debating its own historic identity and of seeing itself as both contested and contextualized, and therefore should not be thought of as invariably asserting an absolutely sovereign Self against a world of existentially incompatible Others. This of course very often occurred, and it is possible to see Sieyès’s assertion of the “nation” as presaging a “modern” world of terrible conflicts along these lines. But I am raising the question of what the “early modern” universe of European political discourse was like and how its history should be written along the “postmodern” lines we now see as called for. I am also asking how far we should carry the assertion that the contestable sovereignty of the “nation-state” (a postmodern term?) should be dismissed from history in the

light of what we now know and feel about the beginnings of our own globalized and “postmodern” world. We are called on—very rightly—to review our understanding of “early modern” Europe and Eura-merica in the light of the international, and transgressive of national boundaries, relations between individuals and social groups that went on in that period and history. It has been proposed that we need a *Foundations of Modern International Thought* to supplement the *Foundations of Modern Political Thought* presented thirty-five years ago, and indeed we do need this, to supplement our understanding of how thought went on both then and now.¹² Since our thinking is shaped by globalization, we benefit by studying both thought that was not so shaped and the same thought as it may have been so shaped after all. What we have to avoid in doing this is the hidden agenda of depoliticization by which we are certainly surrounded. To veer for the moment into neo-Marxism, the market does not much like stable identities, since they impede its power to sell us new identities tomorrow and newer ones the day after that, and both the friends and the enemies of global commodification are disposed to magnify its power over us. This disposition has taken the form of a denial that any continuous political society (for which read “nation-state”) possesses the power to shape, or fail to shape, its history then or to understand it now. We are now informed that the English civil war was not English but British,¹³ that the crisis of seventeenth-century England was not English but European,¹⁴ and that the revolution of 1688–1689 was shaped within Dutch history as well as English.¹⁵ So indeed it was, but we are not well informed as to whether Dutch historians see their

12. David Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

13. An extensive body of literature, culminating in the conclusion that the English Civil War was part of the War of the Three Kingdoms, was initiated by Conrad Russell, *The Fall of the British Monarchies, 1637–1642* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991). See Brendan Bradshaw and John Morrill, eds., *The British Problem, c. 1534–1707: State Formation in the Atlantic Archipelago* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996).

14. Jonathan Scott, *England's Troubles: Seventeenth-Century English Political Instability in European Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

15. Jonathan Israel, ed., *The Anglo-Dutch Moment: Essays on the Glorious Revolution and Its World Impact* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

history as shaped by English or conclude that it lacked, or lost, the capacity to shape itself. And “European history” has been known to become a means of denying that any of the nations of “Europe” has had, or should have any longer, the capacity in question.

The question is becoming whether there still exists a center of political decision, surrounded by participants whom it provides with identity by constituting them as its citizens, that is spatially and temporally finite, and has a measure of control over the contexts within which it has its being. If these conditions are more or less met, the center—now a community—has a history and a historical existence, and can exert autonomy by examining and debating the conditionality of its autonomy. If it can *cogitare* whether or not it *fuerit*, then it *est* as well as *fuit*. *Fuimus Troes*, however; we may find not only that we are no longer what we have been but that what we have been no longer has any relation with what we are becoming. This is what we fear from globalization: the incessant and immediate supply of new contexts over which we have no sovereignty. The historian, whose role in liberal culture has been the provision of contexts in which to understand what we have been and are, is threatened by a generative force that makes nonsense of what he has been doing. The cautiously conservative response he may offer is the affirmation of continuities of contestation, in which we continue to debate how and whether the record of past actions by agents who can be identified enters into, and goes toward shaping, the present and future world, in which things happen in ways that deprive them of agents and their contexts. This is why it is of some use to know that “the nation-state,” while too often a means of affirming the Self against the Other, was also a means of perceiving itself as contestable and contextual, affirming its identity by questioning how far it has had it.

For my essays on British history, see J. G. A. Pocock, *The Discovery of Islands: Essays on British History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

10

Why We Need a Global History of Political Thought

JOHN DUNN

WHO CAN PRESUME to think for a first-person plural as broad as the world's human population? And how can it possibly be true that much of that beleaguered multitude needs anything as etiolated, pretentious, and elaborate as a history of political thought, whatever its scope?

How can it be true that anyone beyond the ranks of those who choose to live off it needs any kind of history of political thought at all? Human beings need fresh air, clean water, enough food, shelter, safety, and, perhaps more metaphorically, hope. To assert a human need for any sort of history, still more a history as intricate and uningratiating as a history of political thinking, sounds strained or hysterical; a bombastic rhetorical flourish, not a potentially valid argument. It cannot be literally true that those who will shortly die because other and less disputable needs are comprehensively unsatisfied need an intricate and refined intellectual construction that could do nothing to rescue them in time. The need for a global history of political thought, where it is a real need and not a hopelessly absent possible good of inherently questionable utility, is plainly for that portion of the world's population with real and practical hope in time. It is a need not for Frantz Fanon's

*Damnés de la Terre*¹ but for the as yet uncondemned, those with a future, especially a future in the longer term, which is still in some measure open. Those fortunate enough to be in that position need it principally to enhance their political judgment,² to see better what politics now means for them in practice, to sharpen their awareness of the stakes they hold in it, and to assess more alertly what they can do to secure those stakes. They need it to extend their vision and deepen their insight into what those stakes really are and to recognize belatedly how far they reach beyond short-term consumer gratifications and amenities or the satisfaction of immediate distastes or enmities.

To claim that anyone has ever needed a global history of political thinking is not a way that Istvan Hont would ever have chosen to put it, and, as with so many other judgments, it was always hard to express the thought in a way he could begin to accept. It was, nevertheless, a conviction he presupposed throughout the third of a century over which I knew him, and one I think I learned in the end from him: from the way he thought, the questions he asked and went on and on asking, and the themes that preyed on his mind until he died.³ The assumption itself came from his intimate family connection with the exercise of political power in postwar Hungary, from its radical exposure to the political failure of Marx's intellectual legacy, and from the grimness that failure fastened on the country in which he was born and the lives his parents lived there. Istvan took the political and intellectual failure of Marxism very personally because that failure lay at the center of those lives and haunted the privileged setting in which he grew up and learned to think. He saw it as a failure at the very

1. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1965).

2. Richard Bourke and Raymond Geuss, *Political Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

3. You can trace the preoccupation and the judgment that developed from it throughout his work in the English language, published and as yet unpublished, most conveniently for the present from Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), to Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), and Istvan Hont, "Adam Smith's History of Law and Government as Political Theory," in Bourke and Geuss, *Political Judgment*, 131–171, though there will, mercifully, be more to come.

highest level, the view from a very lofty mountain over all the kingdoms and republics of the earth. Certainly no rival vision, less planetary in scope, shallower in chronological depth, and less voracious in its intellectual and political aspirations, ever struck him as remotely serious. When he measured David Hume and Adam Smith, or Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant, against Marx, as he endlessly did, what he valued in each of them was a margin of skepticism and intellectual reservation that, even if Marx himself may have intermittently felt it,⁴ had long vanished from his intellectual and political legacy by the time it reached Budapest on the tanks of the Red Army. Istvan grew up with a fierce will to understand why human societies come out in the shape they do; why the political choices made for, through, and by them are often so formidably destructive; and why, over the centuries and across the world, human efforts to make sense of those outcomes have proved so ineffectual. He deployed a brutal critical intelligence on the efforts of others to address those intimidating questions, and a visceral contempt for the self-deception and fatuity of much they took for an answer, not least in privileged and pretentious intellectual settings. His was not a modest vision, but he paid a high price for the condescension it sometimes conveyed in the still greater ferocity with which he turned his critical powers on his own efforts to take in this immense vista.

But why should anyone suppose that we (whoever we think we are) do need a global history of political thought today—especially given that there is no realistic prospect of that need being satisfied in the reasonably near future and considerable conceptual obscurity over what could count as satisfying it even in principle? (Humans can, of course, and not infrequently do, have needs with no realistic prospect of satisfaction, but there is little profit in their dwelling on them morosely.)

My argument is that we do now face such a need across the world, that the imperative to satisfy it is increasingly urgent and only very partially academic, and that we therefore need to recognize it promptly and set ourselves to trying to learn how better to meet it.

4. David McLellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 457. Marx's motto, in the parlor game of Confidences, was *De Omnibus Dubitandum*.

The need has two elements, one more weighty, but also more contentious, than the other. Its first and less pressing element concerns principally (perhaps exclusively) those with a prior interest in the history of political thought in particular places at particular times. It becomes more acute, virtually everywhere, as we move toward the present and seek to gauge what that present will mean for the future. It can be coherently denied by anyone with a resolutely antiquarian (future-indifferent) interest in relatively distant portions of the past that, even under close scrutiny, appear to have sustained a high degree of insulation from their contemporary counterparts elsewhere in settings where the denizens thought and felt very differently. A sealed and purposefully parochial understanding there would not cease to appear parochial when viewed from elsewhere in space or time. But it would not necessarily be confused or insufficient on its own terms, but merely different and correspondingly distant.

The acuteness of this element of the need at this point in time comes from the growing density and intensity of practical and imaginative interaction between notionally discrete human populations, naturally reflected in their more self-conscious ratiocinations over what is occurring in the human world and at stake in those interactions, and how it is appropriate to respond within and to them. While human populations were never fully insulated from one another within the epoch in which it makes sense to think of a potentially recoverable history of political thinking anywhere, it is plain that all of them have for some time been undergoing a process of at best semivoluntary deinsulation, which still appears to be accelerating. Contemporary political reflection has no option but to register that deinsulation as best it can and offer an interpretation of its character and implications, however clumsily or dishonestly it may sometimes do so.

Political thinking anywhere in the world today is (as it always has been) irretrievably contextual. It takes its coordinates from the setting in which it finds itself (whatever knowingly externally derived elements it may bring to bear on that setting). Today that setting is ever more unmistakably a global context. Contemporary political thought at this point is therefore global in scope whether by recognition and affirmation or by inattention or denial. A parochial understanding of a deinsulated parish cannot be cognitively self-sufficient

and must be at least inadvertently underinformed and confused. Incomprehension is simply the absence of understanding, in this respect the overwhelmingly dominant condition of mankind.

The intensifying *professional* need for a global history of political thinking today arises from changes in the subject matter that historians of political thinking must seek to understand. It is a real epistemic need, not an unconstrained imaginative choice of where to direct their attention within it. The price of failing to satisfy it must be a sustained (and still growing) failure to grasp many of the most significant aspects of that subject matter.

The second element of the need for a global history of political thinking is neither academic nor professional but immediately political. Just how widely you judge it to run will depend on how you conceive the political division of labor across the world today. In a notionally democratic state like Finland, the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan, or India, the need extends, again at least notionally, across the entire demos. That sounds like a strident claim, but its sober realism is clearly evinced by the drastic choices made in 2016 by the peoples of Britain and America.

To see how the need arises, you must first consider where the more painful threats to the security of human populations, practical and imaginative, today come from. It would be absurd to try to list those sources of hazard comprehensively, since that would inevitably omit some and distract from the central argument. But it is worth distinguishing three types of sources. The first, classically, is the inherent displeasure of exchange between the massively unequal, the logic of any historical capitalism, which now conspicuously pervades the world. Few can still have wholly failed to register this aspect of the world in which we have come to live, though we continue naturally to vary extravagantly in taste about how we conceive what it means or judge it wise to respond to it. If this were the sole source of hazard and mutual antipathy within and between human populations, it might, under careful enough scrutiny, make a conclusive case for the current political need to comprehend human efforts to understand politics as a partially cumulative global process. But by itself the recognition of that logic would still provide a weak basis for persuading anyone not already convinced of that need to see those efforts as cumulative in

bulk or global in scope over time for at least one simple reason: that we still are apt to presume that we at least already possess a residue of political thinking of unmistakably parochial provenance that focuses on just that process and provides a uniquely adequate and authoritative understanding of it. On that presumption, those who subscribe to this structure of understanding already know the principal truths about this all-engulfing process, and perhaps even know in some sense what to do about it (a judgment that has always somewhat beggared credulity), and all that is therefore required politically is that the human population of the world should somehow register and absorb that knowledge, coordinate their assessment and repertoire of action accordingly, and respond with all due alacrity to the prescriptions it implies.

The immediacy and urgency of the need to comprehend the history of human political thinking, on a global scale and as an intensifying process of global interaction, rests on two further familiar sources of hazard and mutual antipathy within and between human populations: ecological and religious (or, if you prefer, civilizational). At present, we tend to see the first of these principally as a source of extrinsic hazard and the second (alas) primarily as a source of antipathy. But that perception must be largely mistaken in the case of ecology, since this directly implicates the discomfort and provocation inherent in exchange between the massively unequal, and is certain to aggravate them remorselessly.

Why should registering the depth and character of our ecological exposure in any sense at all demand from us a recognition of the history of political thinking on a global scale and as a global process? Is not our ever-deepening ecological exposure a raw biological challenge to be met, if it can be met at all, not by iterating our imaginative pasts but by comprehensively reconstructing them to focus as effectively as we can on the challenge to our survival: *salus generis humanae suprema lex*? There is certainly something to be said in favor of that train of thought, at least as immediate political persuasion. (There are also, of course, some peremptory things to say against it—for instance, that whatever we ought to do, we *must* not do that.) But the principal reason for rejecting it in this context is that human populations quite certainly will not accept it and almost certainly could not: that it is politically impracticable in the first instance, just not feasible. Thomas Hobbes himself did not suppose that human beings

characteristically focus so exclusively on their own preservation, and there is no reason whatever to believe that even he wholly regretted their failure to do so—in some contexts, yes; in others, no.

The ecological challenge poses in the most drastic form the question of what human beings have good reason to do. In the practical organization of the human world today, there are two strongly rationalizing traditions of interpretation of how to answer that question. If either provided a compelling and general answer to the question, the appropriate strategic response would register, for those to whom it assigns agency, what action it prescribes (and reassure those it assigns to passivity that the agency in question is appropriately and reliably allocated). The first of these two traditions is the tradition of market rationality, the second that of *raison d'état*. Each tradition, injudiciously, is also apt to ascribe to itself the status both of prescribing what should be done and who should do it and of describing accurately what is already being done and predicting more or less reliably and specifically what will in fact be done.

Both give interpretations, among other things, of how to specify the goals of human life. The tradition of market rationality presumes that humans do, must, and in some sense also should take their goals directly from their own susceptibilities and personal judgment of market opportunities, and that it is impertinent, sinister, and almost certainly futile for any other agency to demur or seek to stand in substantially for them at any point. Any element of that complex of judgments and presumptions, taken on its own and deployed with due care, might provide an idiom for thinking fluently and accurately. But the impacted doctrine as a whole (and the habits of mind and patterns of sentiment it foments) is one that no competent reader of Plato, Confucius, or whoever wrote either the Koran or the Pali Canon could entertain for a moment. For the present, insofar as anything vaguely coherent could be said to do so, and in the teeth of its disparate, dispersed, and melodramatically disunited surviving rivals, the tradition of market rationality more or less rules the world, but no one without a protracted training in economics can ever quite believe it true. And probably, under close interrogation, not many of them believe it either.

The tradition of market rationality is less than compelling as a diagnosis of the goals that human beings have, and still less persuasive in its assessment of the goals they should have. But it has not come

close to ruling the world by accident. Its pervasiveness and potency have both been won by its striking comparative advantages against antecedent competitors contesting its suzerainty from the outset or rivals that came into existence to dispute its entitlement to that suzerainty. It has won the commanding heights it now occupies in increasingly open combat and, until very recently, had long done so with growing apparent ease. However wide that imaginative and practical ascendancy now seems, it remains intellectually mistaken, and politically and ecologically suicidal, to leave it unmolested in command of those heights.

The tradition of *raison d'état*, by contrast, is not a theory of the goals human beings have. It can afford simply to bracket most such theories without anxiety as being irrelevant to its own concerns. Still less is it a theory about the goals human beings should have, an issue on which it has little temptation to pronounce. Instead it covers what still remains the privileged format in which human populations must monitor the threats that face them (and, more selectively, the opportunities open to them) and concert their powers to avert the former and seize the latter. It specifies that it is states that pursue (and that it is wholly appropriate that they should pursue) what are in a measure both the interests of the state itself and the more pressing interests of the individuals who compose it, if necessary at the expense of flouting what would otherwise be emphatic prohibitions on permissible conduct. The current privileging of this format is a function of the present institutional architecture of the human world. It reflects, however hazily, a prior judgment on the relative efficacy of leaving human societies in their more diffuse and dispersed earlier formats to identify and pursue such goals as occur to their denizens and the latter severally happen to choose. Whatever else they have been or always will be, states are also a rectifying strategy for selecting from and organizing human goals in order to realize an appropriate subset of them more reliably and effectively than they could otherwise be attained.⁵ That is the core intuition behind the state as an idea, and its

5. John Dunn, *The Cunning of Unreason: Making Sense of Politics* (London: HarperCollins, 2000); Quentin Skinner, "A Genealogy of the Modern State," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 162 (2008): 325–370.

very partial realization has been a major factor in extending the idea as widely as it has since reached and lending it the degree of concrete reality it has now assumed. Within these processes, the relation between what is advertised or approved and what is in fact going on is never transparent. Even with states, the determinants of their actions, and the determinants of the actions of those who decide those actions, cannot be fully captured by construing a few simple motive forces—relative grandeur, relative safety, relative power, or relative wealth, either for states themselves or their personal masters or mistresses. Even wealth, certainly power, still more evidently grandeur, and, perhaps under sufficiently careful consideration, even safety always lie to a considerable extent in the eye of the beholder. The conception of states as instruments for leaching subjectivity out of human collective agency and replacing it by pure practical rationality (even if the latter conception actually made sense) is a pitiful attempt to deny the obvious. Unless we reinsert the views, sentiments, and purposes of the great mass of beholders emphatically into our picture of what has been and is going on in the shaping of the conduct of states, we have no hope whatever of getting our minds around this.⁶

There are close ties between these strategies of analytical and practical exclusion and the vicissitudes of the modern professional social sciences when these are viewed as practices guaranteed to prove able to apprehend the human past and present, and predict the human future, through eliminating human subjectivity as an identifiable causal site within it. Insofar as there is anything to human history but free-floating rational choosing by individual humans, markets and states are by far its most potent current contributors. In conflict or uneasy collaboration, they remain our sole supraindividual facilities of any tensile strength for equipping us to see what to do, let alone enabling us to get it done. The plethora of other volunteers eager to provide this service simply reinsert one or another element of human evaluation into the crimped space of personal judgment without any

6. This bears directly on the conception of state legitimacy. See John Dunn, "Legitimacy and Democracy in the World Today," in *Legitimacy and Criminal Justice: An International Comparison*, ed. Justice Tankebe and Alison Liebling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7–18.

obvious authority to make the judgments better than individuals can make them for themselves, and with no authority whatever to make them against their settled judgments. Transnational corporations, for example, undeniably make a lot of world history nowadays. But they do so on behalf of a comprehensively opaque series of tradeoffs between those who supposedly own them, those who actually run them, and the states that still in many respects dictate the terms on which they are permitted to trade and bank their profits. It is hard to see how anyone could view that as a unified structure of authorization or a dependable heuristic for any possible interpretation of the human good. Much the same, skeptically considered, would also hold good for the appreciably older category of Church.

My thesis, to put it bluntly, is that the modern social sciences, between them, equip us very poorly to understand what is going on in the human world (a fairly open truth of experience), and that what prevents them from better doing so, over and above human frailty, the inherent limits of human cognitive powers, and the particular internal obstacles to their individual success, is that they have conscientiously crippled themselves for the purpose in one fundamental respect: by incapacitating themselves to take the measure of human comprehension and experience of politics. In that sense, the case pressed here is a case for seeing a global history of political thinking as a partial epistemic remedy for an epistemic wound that modern academia has inflicted on itself.

Just what could such a history offer to offset the myopia of economic or political realism as the social sciences now articulate them? Among other factors, it could readily equip itself to focus on and gauge the weight of the complex of elements patently capable of generating and aggravating conflict, which the late Samuel Huntington identified twenty years ago with some *éclat* as civilizational.⁷ Many of these elements have long been seen mainly as religious, as they very largely still are by most living human beings. Religion and civilization are not categories that can bear much weight, but neither states nor markets yet show much sign of being equipped to understand, let alone

7. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

handle, the proliferating conflicts that clearly issue from them, however incompletely either category captures what causes those conflicts to occur.

My proposal is very simple, even if the prerequisites for implementing it as yet are well over the edge of anyone's screen. It is that we need to learn to recognize in its full plurality the developing dispersion of human evaluations of how to live individually and in interaction with one another, and recognize their shaping role in generating the extraordinarily complicated practical predicament in which all of us now find ourselves, or, viewing the matter from another angle, that, taken together, we simply *are*.⁸ To do so, we need to follow as closely as

8. There has been by now a very wide range of attempts to expand the horizons of Western awareness of the political thinking of societies elsewhere, none very clear in their overall purposes or especially convincing in the methods they employ or appear to presuppose. Contemporary academic practice discourages frankness on each of these issues, and especially on both simultaneously. See also the variety of approaches adopted by authors in *Political Theory* 42, no. 1 (2014), and the mass of secondary literature from the last few decades cited there: Michael Freeden and Andrew Vincent, eds., *Comparative Political Thought: Theorizing Practices* (London: Routledge, 2013); Andrew March, "What Is Comparative Political Theory?" *Review of Politics* 71 (2009): 531–565; Andrew March, *Islam and Liberal Citizenship: The Search for an Overlapping Consensus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Antony Black, "The Way Forward in Comparative Political Thought," *Journal of International Political Theory* 7, no. 2 (2001): 221–228; Frank Godrej, *Cosmopolitan Political Thought: Method, Practice, Discipline* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought: Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002); Yuri Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009); Yuri Pines, *The Everlasting Empire: Traditional Chinese Political Culture and Its Enduring Legacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Leigh Jenco, "What Does Heaven Ever Say? A Methods-Centered Approach to Cross-cultural Engagement," *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 4 (2007): 741–755; Leigh Jenco, *Making the Political: Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shih-Zhao* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Stephen C. Angle, *Human Rights and Chinese Thought: A Cross-cultural Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Joseph Chan, "Moral Autonomy, Civil Liberties and Confucianism," *Philosophy East and West* 52 (2002): 281–310; Joseph Chan, "Democracy and Meritocracy: Toward a Confucian Perspective," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 34 (2007): 179–193; Roxanne Euben, "Comparative Political Theory: An Islamic Fundamentalist Critique of Rationalism," *Journal of Politics* 59 (1997): 28–55; Roxanne Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Roxanne Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Fred Dallmayr, "Beyond Monologue: For a Comparative Political Theory," *Perspectives on Politics* 2 (2004): 249–257; Fred Dallmayr, ed.,

we can the pathways those evaluations have taken to the point at which they now converge: that same predicament in each of those two senses—the setting of our lives and the identities from and for which we live them. That tempestuous journey has not been a history of thinking or feeling solely, or even principally, about politics. But however muted the presence of what we now think of as explicitly political at earlier points along the varied pathways toward the global present, the point at which they now converge, and some of the more potent mechanisms that have led them to come together are intractably political in our sense, and the challenge they present to us, whatever other dimensions it may also have, is unremittingly and brutally political. That, whatever else, was the message of 9/11 in all its horror. It is the challenge to decide continuously what we should do in one another's increasingly emphatic presence and in the face of the huge disparities in our powers, life chances, and allegiances. It is a very old challenge in form, if endlessly fresh in substance. To grasp that predicament and judge how we have good reason to respond to it, we must first understand it as being constituted by the stumbling, intensely hazardous political processes that have led us here. Any offer of solace

Comparative Political Theory: An Introduction (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Diego A. Vacano, *The Color of Citizenship: Race, Modernity and Latin American/Hispanic Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Hiroshi Watanabe, *A History of Japanese Political Thought, 1600–1901* (Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2012); Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, eds., *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Michelle L. Browers, *Democracy and Civil Society in Arab Political Thought: Transcultural Possibilities* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006). None of these interpreters starts off from classical social anthropology's extended effort, now largely abandoned, to chart the political understandings, in their own terms and within the entire framework of their lives, of distant and unmistakably very different societies across the globe. Such works include Meyer Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, eds., *African Political Systems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940); Meyer Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945); E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1950); Darryl Forde, ed., *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954); Fredrik Barth, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans* (London: Athlone, 1959); Edmund Leach, *The Political Systems of Highland Burma* (London: G. Bell & Son, 1964). Compare Anastasia Piliavsky, ed., *Patronage as Politics in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). It is clear that this approach will be a necessary complement to any centered on historical sequences of presumptively authoritative texts.

or spiritual composure that comes from elsewhere and fails to register this huge, diffuse avalanche of experience and the grim, blood-spattered shambles in which it has so often ended and still in many settings conspicuously remains, whatever individual existential appeal it may carry, must fall short. It must be either confused or in bad faith. It is humans who have formed that avalanche and made that shambles. To see what to do now, they need not merely take in the fact that they have done so but grasp why they have done so—what has led them to do so, why they have judged as they have judged, and what sober hope even now they retain of learning to judge better.

None of this gives any real sense of what such a global history of political thinking would actually consist in, or even what components it principally requires. Still more plainly, it gives no hint whatever on what forms it may in the end felicitously assume. I make no claim to know how to answer the last question and presume no conception of a definite telos for a global history of political thinking. The two most widely, almost globally, admired political intellectuals of the last half century, John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, each in some sense went in quest of such a telos.⁹ But neither in the end quite supposed themselves to have found it, and Rawls at least appears to have felt himself, if anything, further away from doing so at the end of his journey than much earlier in its course. Perhaps the last historical figure who in some understandings really did believe that he had done so was Hegel.

There would be no point in setting out to trace a largely uncharted and vastly complicated process if we already believed that we knew what it signified in its totality. The reason we need so urgently to set out to follow these tracks now is precisely that none of us has the least reliable assurance of already knowing anything of the kind: neither where we have traveled so far nor still more unmistakably quite where we have now reached. The point of retracing the journey is not to trace its course with pleasure, dutiful guilt, or cringing shame but to recognize and fully take in where we now are. Then and only then can we

9. Paul Weithman, *Why Political Liberalism? On Rawls's Political Turn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Thomas Pogge, *John Rawls: His Life and Theory of Justice*, trans. Michelle Kosch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

try to judge anew what we should now do, severally and together, about being there and not somewhere very different.

To retrace these steps, we first need to know where and when we ourselves (in our existing understandings) must begin: where, from our point of view, it has for the present led. But to try to do so at all, we also need to decide just what it is that we are trying to trace¹⁰ and where those traces must lie. Until we have decided those, we could scarcely know what to look for. But here we are surely better circumstanced already. We can draw on the cumulative historiographies of every extant human community that still identifies itself in time (many of them at least attempting to appropriate the historiographies of older communities no longer extant). We must focus particular attention on the epoch where those historiographies unmistakably collide, incessantly and across more and more of the world.¹¹ Within each community and the broader civilizational matrix in which it has taken shape, and through which it continues to define itself, we need to follow its story backward toward what it construes as its own beginning.¹² Besides looking backward through the history of every human grouping that sees itself as emerging and forming itself in time, we also need to look more proxi-

10. For the criterial difficulty here, see, for example, Dunn, *The Cunning of Unreason*; Michael Oakshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975).

11. Black, "The Way Forward"; Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Browsers, *Democracy and Civil Society*; Benjamin I. Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964); Max Ko-wu Huang, *The Meaning of Freedom: Yan Fu and the Origins of Chinese Liberalism* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2008); Jeremy Grieder, *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution 1917–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970); Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*, 3 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958–1965); Thomas A. Metzger, *A Cloud Across the Pacific: Essays on the Clash between Chinese and Western Political Theories Today* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2005); Thomas A. Metzger, *The Ivory Tower and the Marble Citadel: Essays on Political Philosophy in Our Modern Era of Interacting Cultures* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2013); W. Theodore de Bary, *The Great Civilized Conversation: Education for a World Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Watanabe, *A History of Japanese Political Thought*; Vacano, *The Color of Citizenship*.

12. See especially John G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957); John G. A. Pocock, *The Discovery of Islands: Essays in British History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Compare Rogers M. Smith, *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

mately at the intensified interactions between communities shaped in very different civilizational matrices over the last few centuries. For Huntington, more alarmingly, we need to inspect these interactions with special care over the last few decades, the stage by which modern thinkers had hoped to put the fears of the Cold War and still more those of the Dark Ages far behind them.¹³

For some time to come, within this new voyage of discovery, there would inevitably be a degree of imaginative tradeoff between these two perspectives, with the long retrospect through the experience of each particular community reinforcing, and even imposing, a degree of imaginative parochialism, and the focus on the recent past fostering a hastier, and almost certainly inadvertently chauvinistic, interpretation of the content, if not the basis, of the enforced encounter. But in the longer run, the walls partitioning the parish histories would begin to crumble, and the vision of the encounter would decenter insistently and raise quite novel questions of its own. For the present, the local, parochial, or national historiographies will continue to center, as they always have, on self-assertive *Just So Stories*: how we Romans got our values, why the British have such exquisite political taste, why China is the only real civilization, and so on. Where rewritten drastically, these stories will be so perforce either at the behest of alien empire or by presumptively cosmopolitan import of equally alien sophistication garnered elsewhere. But, with time, the insistent juxtaposition of innumerable parish histories will dissipate the local plausibility of virtually all of them, without supplanting them with a unified imperial higher truth best apprehended from elsewhere.

The focus on the recent past can scarcely be parochial at any point, if viewed from the receiving end, whether what enters is seen predominantly as intrusion, pollution, cross-fertilization, or even, at the limit, erasure. The historiographies here trace the impact, at gunpoint or in eager quest to augment domestic firepower, of a plethora of categories, long emanating exclusively from the West and forcing their way in more or less at pleasure: state, constitution, empire, democracy, citizenship, revolution, representation, accountability, law, and even, in

13. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations*.

some sense, market. The intrusion of these categories is always an exercise in translation (a linguistic process) and equally invariably an aspect of the struggle to understand the predicament their users face in this bewildering variety of situations, the opportunities it presents to them, and the threats that it poses to at least some others. It is also always in part an imposition of power. Many have tried to capture the arrival of these categories in innumerable settings across the world, including all the most conspicuously momentous: China, India, Japan, Turkey, Egypt, Brazil, Mexico, Iran, South Africa, and even in a sense the United States. Some of these historiographies are already highly sophisticated. But, for the present, they continue to have two very different surfaces, one esoteric and unflinchingly parochial (*Nihon-jinron*—the study of the intractable Japaneseness of Japan from an implacably Japanese point of view, or the Anglo-Saxon elective affinity with liberty so celebrated by Britain's nineteenth-century historians¹⁴), and the other inescapably biased in favor of the source of importation and the presumptive enhancement furnished by its arrival. This is an exciting area to work in, and many have already begun to do so to very good effect.

The simplest and most immediately practicable element in the transformative enterprise I seek to recommend would draw those endeavors together and carry through a carefully considered assessment of what they have so far shown. That at least we could do already out of resources we already have, and do simply by trying (though, of course, we might not initially do it all that well). It is now imperative to make that effort with real energy and in considerable haste. The stakes in making headway are political at least as much as academic. What we face is a dramatically aggravated version of the problem that Hobbes picked out three and a half centuries ago and that very evidently cannot be handled effectively by the cool, single-minded rationalizing formula that he hoped, somehow, to impose on his fellow subjects.¹⁵ We are all emphatically subjects. What we need now to dis-

14. John Burrow, *A Liberal Descent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

15. Quentin Skinner, *Philosophy and Rhetoric in the Political Thought of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Noel Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002); Jeffrey R. Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas*

cover is how to handle the relations between our several subjections in ways that recognize and take the full measure of their mutual presence. Unless it ends very nastily indeed, that process of discovery can only be a very long haul.

This perspective raises three further questions, two narrowly academic but one with obvious practical implications. The first concerns the relationship between the potential products of a global history of political thinking so conceived and the dominant method in contemporary analytic political philosophy, a still largely Anglophone intellectual enterprise. Because no one has yet attempted the task of juxtaposition and interrogation I am trying to demarcate, no one can yet have reliable intuitions on what would come out of it. What is clear at the outset is that any results it yields, whatever their degree of conceptual resolution, are most unlikely to correspond to those that arise from applying the method of reflective equilibrium to materials drawn exclusively from within a single civilization at a given point in time, let alone the far more restrictive imaginative and conceptual space from which most of our own individual perspectives so audibly derive. If we needed clearer conceptions of what to aim at and try to do solely to put shape into our own individual spiritual lives, that might not much matter. If shape mattered more than content, it might even prove an advantage. But since, in fairly evident and practically pressing ways, we also (and more urgently) need them to guide us in interaction with all the others we affect and who can also affect us, it has come to matter very greatly. Since many of the latter, in the still precariously United Kingdom and increasingly across the entire OECD world, are also now fellow citizens, we need the lessons of this new inquiry not only to enhance our judgment of the preconditions for our own physical safety but to pursue the minimal dialogue with those fellow citizens that living in a democracy requires of all who do. That need is especially acute where the only long-term prospect for reasonable physical safety with one another in the settings where we

Hobbes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Ioannis Evrigenis, *Images of Anarchy: The Rhetoric and Science in Hobbes's State of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

must now live requires us to learn to conduct that dialogue less clumsily, less deafly, and with altogether better grace.

What range of materials are certain to play against each other in these practically converging stories? The story itself is bound to remain openended. Not only will we never know we have reached its end, but no one could ever know anything of the kind. What is certain to feature consequentially and pervasively within it are at least the ways in which authority, power and right, person, self and community, and all the more explicitly political categories through which our existing political world is publicly formatted in every human grouping of any scale and continuity with which we interact. That is vastly more than most domestic histories of political thinking would care to take on. But this potentially barely controllable widening of the agenda underlines just how parochial the bulk of our existing historiography of political thinking inadvertently but intractably remains: national in context, still predominantly national in sensibility (which may be inevitable and arguably even desirable¹⁶) but also in preoccupation.¹⁷ There is something more than overwork in the agenda even for existing professional craftsmen and craftswomen.

What that history most requires, however, is not a scholastic history of texts or intellectual genres and their fate over a time and space¹⁸ but a history of the interactive fates of humans themselves. It must be a history of the ways in which human beings have understood and experienced their lives together, judged the opportunities open to them and the dangers pressing on them from inside their own communities and beyond, and sought to grasp where those dangers and opportunities have come from, why they have done so, and why they continue to do so. Causal attribution must lie at the center of the

16. For the historiographical implications of this recognition, see, for example, Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution*; Pocock, *The Discovery of Islands*; J. G. A. Pocock, *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

17. Dario Castiglione and Ian Hampsher-Monk, eds., *The History of Political Thought in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

18. See also, for example, David Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1–13.

quest to comprehend politics anywhere,¹⁹ but that quest can only set out from the evaluative horizons of the human beings who must live there together across the world.²⁰ That is not the way historians of political thought have practiced their discipline. However far they have judged it wise to look in attempting to grasp their chosen subject matter, they have privileged insistently in their vision of it a succession of elaborate texts, all of which in one way or another claimed or asserted a degree of cultural, social, or political authority. They have prioritized texts over life and have treated texts predominantly, and all but inevitably, not as a record of life but as a site of presumptive authority over it. In the end, that has proved as true of those who insisted on the primacy of historicity in the struggle to recapture meaning²¹ as of those like Leo Strauss,²² who sought a kind of intellectual camaraderie with lofty counterparts, or even superiors, very distant from themselves in space and time.

By vocation, historians tell stories in a language to an imagined audience. A global history of political thought, very plainly, is a story yet to be told. No one is yet in a position to discern even the shadowiest of its outlines. But what we can already see clearly is that it is a story we must train ourselves to listen to with ever closer attention. From its outset, the historiography of the West has reached well beyond sad stories of the deaths of kings.²³ To take in their vast subject matter, historians of Western political thought have long faced the

19. This judgment (Dunn, *The Cunning of Unreason*) is, of course, contentious. See also Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980).

20. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations*.

21. See especially Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 1–40; Skinner, *Philosophy and Rhetoric*; Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975); Pocock, *Political Thought and History*.

22. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

23. John Burrow, *A History of Histories: Heroics, Chronicles, Romances and Inquiries from Homer and Herodotus to the Twentieth Century* (London: Allen Lane, 2007); John Dunn, "Seeing in and through Time," in *The Western Time of Ancient History*, ed. Alexandra Lianeri (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 307–314; Geoffrey Hawthorn, *Thucydides on Politics: Back to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

need to translate from many languages into their own (Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, Dutch, German, English, Russian). A global history of political thought must stretch very far beyond this. Eventually, by stipulation, it must take in every language still on earth, and aspire to do so in symmetrical and equal terms. That goal is a regulative ideal, not a practical proposal. But the issue of language is salient enough already, and the exigencies of translation are becoming increasingly discomfiting. It is no longer hard to see how urgent it has become to equalize the terms on which the history of Western political thought is written in Chinese with those on which the history of Chinese political thought is written in any Western language. As the terms begin to equalize, it will matter ever more that the audience that needs to hear this global tale is every one of us.

To see the historical contours of human political reflection as I claim we now need to is less an expression of personal intellectual taste than a political judgment in its own right, and one deeply inimical to current intellectual fashion and habituation within Western academia. It assumes that the purely practical difficulties that human beings find in living unmurderously with one another issue as much from what they find offensive and frightening in one another²⁴ as from collisions in their material interests reliably identifiable by criteria independent of cultural allegiance or susceptibility, or in principle perhaps even of species membership.

What would this keener mutual awareness and enhanced acquaintance with one another imply for the political responses of those who attained it? Would it make for better mutual understanding and warmer mutual sentiments? Or would it lead instead, as Huntington tends to suggest,²⁵ to even nastier and more destructive clashes on a scale little narrower than the Cold War, fueled by yet more vindictive passions from far longer ago?

Understanding other humans is not invariably ingratiating. Acquaintance is not necessarily either agreeable or reassuring. Few of us

24. John Dunn, "The Grounds for Toleration and the Capacity to Tolerate," in *Natural Law and Toleration in the Early Enlightenment*, ed. Jon Parkin and Timothy Stanton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 201–209.

25. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations*.

would be more inclined to trust Himmmler or Saddam Hussein if we understood better what moved them to act as they did. A global history of political thinking is no short and gentle path to world peace and universal siblinghood. But however long and painful the path proves, there is no gentler and less demanding route to follow. Incomprehension may be sedative,²⁶ but it can never be reassuring, even if it proves less alarming for an interval than recognizing just how bad things are. The wager on understanding has its own built-in braking mechanisms. It leads not compulsively toward credulity but instead soberly toward a cognitively focused and rationed trust. It does not maximize trust as a passion (a practice with some hazards even in marriage). Instead, it tries to optimize trust as a strategy, and trust as a strategy is still the most benign element in the traditions of political agency across the communities of the world.²⁷ That is the direction in which we need to go and the pathway we need to follow. My contention is that a global history of human political thinking, with all its vagaries, obsessions, and incoherences dutifully acknowledged, is an indispensable navigational aid in finding and following that path; not our only star and compass but a source of eminently practical insight for which reason as a generalized human capability or the apparatus of game theory in all its intricacy cannot possibly substitute.

What we need to learn from that history, to view the matter epistemically, is how far we *can* trust one another, now and in the future: how far trust as an orientation and a practice fits the way the human world really has been, still is now, and is likely to remain. More practically envisaged, the lesson we need to draw from it is how far we can enhance our existing resources of well-founded trust, reasonably hope to build ampler and more extensive practices of trust together into the distant future, and do so throughout without finding ourselves lethally betrayed (the twin of trust is betrayal), or if you prefer the idiom of game theory, how far we can do so without turning ourselves into hopeless suckers. All that speaks to the political benefits

26. John Dunn, *Breaking Democracy's Spell* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

27. John Dunn, "Trust and Political Agency," in *Interpreting Political Responsibility: Essays 1981–1989* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), 26–44.

of such a global history, or at worst the fantasized point of attempting to forge one: the swelling story of who we are, what we have come from, and where we for the present find ourselves. This political hope may seem extravagant, and the epistemic obstacles to moving toward it simply and obviously insurmountable. The only way to meet that kind of sober skepticism would be to implement the project: to learn and write that astonishing history. That could only be a vast collaborative enterprise, mustering the labor and intelligence of many thousands of active inquirers.²⁸ Above all, and to a very large degree, it could only be the work of time.

My claim is merely that such an effort, fumblingly, myopically, largely unself-aware, began as far back as the Axial Age,²⁹ and that the material dynamics of the world in which we live have accelerated it vertiginously and will go on doing so unless and until we trigger irreversible catastrophe. This is a form of comprehension with which we can no longer afford to dispense.

It is hard to imagine what that history will prove to be like, either in form or flavor. There is plenty to fear in that regard: a booming, buzzing confusion, an endless centrifugal dissolution of every provisional moment of illusory comprehension, a cacophony of mutually unintelligible tongues, Babel's fallen Tower, stretched out over the desert sands, as far as the human eye can see. But my own assumption, perhaps ingenuous and certainly painfully culture bound, is that such a history, if only we can learn to write it, can and will carry a powerful redemptive charge, that it will on balance aid us in the formidable task of living unmurderously together on an ever more bewildering scale. That expectation goes to the deepest issues in the human sciences: the ultimate character and implications of the sorts of understanding that human beings can have of one another on any scale whatever. My assumption is in effect a Wager on the Hermeneutic, set within a material conception of what it is that forms human collective

28. A hint of the sort of collaborative venture that will be required is provided by the editors' contributions to Joanna Innes and Mark Philp, eds., *Re-imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britain, Ireland, 1750–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

29. See, for example, Antony Black, *A World History of Ancient Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

life. It assumes the practicality of extending mutual comprehension among human beings and projects that assumption on to infinity. Plainly, the comprehension will always thin out as you move further away from its human location, the individual persons who strain to achieve it. The Wager on the Hermeneutic is the bet that despite that inevitable and permanent process of thinning out, it simply is true that human understanding of one another over time and space can and should accumulate, and that its accumulation is one of the greatest (indeed perhaps the *single* greatest) human good.

That has probably been the deepest premise behind the building of the culture to which we in the West belong, and its sources, rather evidently, were ultimately and very distinctively religious. But whether the premise is in the end valid and whether the Wager can and will succeed do not depend any longer on the religious intimations that launched it on the world. They depend on whether we and our successors can and do validate it in practice and vindicate it by what we set ourselves to try to do.³⁰ In my judgment, that is not a task that Western academia today is shouldering with the courage, clarity of mind, or resolution that it requires. The role I am invoking for the history of human political thinking across the globe may well appear stupefyingly arrogant, and not just alarmingly unsophisticated but helplessly naïve. To put it so frankly is to throw caution to the winds. But it is what I believe and what, however nervously and diffidently, I always have believed. It has shaped the work I have tried to do for nearly half a century, and putting it more frankly to myself has helped me greatly

30. The political implications of this hope are as obscure today as they have ever been in the history of the species. They are also more urgently pertinent for the species as a whole than they have ever been before. It may be that they have already sealed our collective death warrant, but we could scarcely have good reason to act as though that were true if we already knew it to be so, and that is not something we yet have any warrant for believing. See John Dunn, *Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Dunn, *The Cunning of Unreason*; Dunn, *Breaking Democracy's Spell*. The hope itself certainly does not warrant the St-Simonian assurance that human association across the globe will ineluctably generate the institutional basis and the interactive attitudes that would equip it to govern human lives together across the world peacefully and benignly. For the sad history of the fate of that hope in the century that followed, see Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), and for the hope itself see especially 96–98.

over the last year or two to nerve myself to recognize the sort of task I have so far failed to undertake and now certainly must. To say so in a memorial volume for a great departed scholar, who was in some ways quite austere, may be gauche. At least it sets his achievement on the scale where I believe it belongs.

It was the chance to work with Istvan Hont for over a third of a century that showed me how to join back together my own efforts to grasp two very different sorts of phenomena: how political thinking took shape in Europe and how the threats to the lives humans must live with one another have been changing across the world. It was the steely intelligence, driving intellectual ambition, and restless energy that drove his own work that gave me the nerve to go on straining to see quite what that conjunction now means. It is an overwhelming debt. Politics everywhere across the world is both the challenges set by that intersection and the frail resources we can find to meet them. The history of political thinking can and should range far and wide, but in the end all it can offer is an inventory of those resources and a vision of where they have come from. My claim is that by now we need those resources direly all across the world and also need to recognize that they have come from right across it.

The most important consequences of political ideas in action over at least the last five centuries have come, by espousal or resistance, through the spread of models of state building, regime transformation, and social and economic reconstruction and reorganization. Since at least the epoch of the American and French Revolutions, it has become natural, and often even conventional, to see these as the main drivers of world history. During the Cold War, the scale of human risk at stake made it perverse or obtuse to dispute this.³¹ The subsequent quarter of a century has crushed the transformative dream of socialism so comprehensively that the mocking aegis of Friedrich Hayek has convinced many that the only durably compelling political ideas demonstrate conclusively the certainty of human ineffectuality as collective actors and loci of shared continuing pur-

31. Paul Bracken, *The Command and Control of Nuclear Forces* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982).

pose.³² The much longer and more disparate period before 1980 unmistakably refashioned the political, economic, and social destinies of vast populations on five continents by adopting or repudiating ideas associated with Karl Marx.³³ In one way of looking at the matter, it was above all conceptions of economic organization that carried the real weight in these huge tectonic shifts. It was Istvan Hont's genius to see so steadily throughout that this perceptual effect must in the last instance be illusory, since the vehicles for the contending models of economic organization were always states or states in the making, and the purposes behind their deployment political projects and their adepts.³⁴ Jealousy of Trade is the articulation of an all too human emotion and purpose, and its key bearers have not been individuals trading on markets but rather the states that have made and remade the world in which we all must now live through their struggles to master one another.³⁵

32. Andrew Gamble, *Hayek: The Iron Cage of Liberty* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996); Jeffrey Friedman, ed., "Hayek: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," *Critical Review* 25, nos. 3–4 (2013–2014): 275–529; Alec Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983); Dunn, *The Cunning of Unreason*. Compare, over longer timespans, the extensive literature on mercantilism. See Peter Hall, ed., *The Political Power of Economic Ideas: Keynesianism across Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); David A. Baldwin, *Economic Statecraft* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Peter Clarke, *The Keynesian Revolution in the Making 1924–36* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

33. Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon, 1966), but see also Barrington Moore, Jr., *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (White Plains, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1978); Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); John Dunn, *Modern Revolutions: An Introduction to the Analysis of a Political Phenomenon*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); George Lichtheim, *Marxism: A Critical Study* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961); Arno J. Mayer, *The Furies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe, 1789–1848* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875–1914* (New York: Pantheon, 1989); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848–1875* (New York: Vintage, 1996); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991* (New York: Vintage, 1996); Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010).

34. Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*. Compare John Dunn, ed., *The Economic Limits to Modern Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

35. Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*.

Acknowledgments

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