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978-0-521-17493-0 - The History of Political Thought in National Context

Edited by Dario Castiglione and Iain Hampsher-Monk

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## THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT IN NATIONAL CONTEXT

In this volume a distinguished international team of contributors characterises the nature of, and recent developments in, the history of political thought in their respective countries. The essays scrutinise not only the different academic histories and methodological traditions on which the study of the history of political thought has drawn, but also its relationship to cultural and political debates within nations. This collection represents a major contribution to the history of ideas, in which political thought has always been central, whilst reflecting the disciplinary tensions – and national differences – of what remains a ‘borderline’ subject, located at the intersection of history, politics and philosophy. The different national characteristics taken on by political discourse, and the complex relationship these characteristics have to the aspirations of the discipline itself, are considered in these wide-ranging essays, which cover the history of political thought in the UK, the USA, France, Germany, Italy, Central and Eastern Europe.

DARIO CASTIGLIONE is Senior Lecturer in Political Theory at the University of Exeter. His main research interests are in the history of political philosophy and constitutional theory. His recent publications as editor include *Shifting the Boundaries: Transformation of the Languages of Public and Private in the Eighteenth Century* (1995, with Lesley Sharpe) and *The Constitution in Transformation: European and Theoretical Perspectives* (1996, with Richard Bellamy).

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To our friends in the Political Thought Conference

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*Temptation of Homo Europaeus* (1993) and *Identités multiples dans l'Europe des Régions* (1997).

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## Preface

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The idea for this book derives from conversations between the two editors – two different nationals with different national upbringings in the history of political thought. Whilst one of them was learning about yet a third and fourth national context (Iain Hampsher-Monk was at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study as the guest of the Dutch *Begriffsgeschichte* project), the other – Dario Castiglione – organised a conference in Exeter, at which exponents of a range of different national histories of political thought were invited to speak on the topic. Whilst the participants judged the conference a great success, we were aware that the original invitation was likely to produce a disparate set of responses, not only in terms of content but in terms of how the history of political thought was construed. And so indeed it proved.

Although the conference *provoked* the book, there remained much to be done before a coherent volume could result. New papers were commissioned in order to fill gaps, a great deal of rewriting, editing and translation was undertaken and time – and length – limits imposed on the authors. Given all this, and a range of other circumstances (not least the current external forces shaping university life – which often seem devised specifically to prevent academics from doing the kinds of things they thought they were there to do – namely teach and conduct research), it has taken a long time to bring the volume to its present shape, and we are aware that we have tried the patience and good will of some of our earlier contributors. We hope they will think the result worth it – for we do.

That result does not claim any closure or ultimate coherence, but rather, as we explain in the introduction, reveals – as we originally hoped it would – the way national context shapes not only different histories, but even different conceptions of ‘histories’.

A book so long in the making incurs many debts. We are, as we have already said, grateful to our original contributors for their patience and to those others who attended the conference for their comments; to

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