Part I
Introduction

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Anatomy of an ideology

This is a book about the evolution of an ideology. Its goal is to show, in a more detailed and systematic way than has hitherto been attempted, why particular ways of talking about economic, social, and political rights became central to the Western liberal tradition around the time of the English Civil War, how these ways of talking have since evolved in that tradition, and in what respects they condition, shape, and constrain arguments about politics and public morality in contemporary Anglo-American political discourse.

The Western liberal tradition that will concern us is the one espoused by the principal architects of its political theory. This is not to say that the study of influential traditions of political theory is the only, even the best, way of trying to penetrate the many complexities that constitute a political ideology, but it is my claim that a detailed analysis of the writings held in great esteem in the established institutions of a culture can reveal much of importance about its underlying values and predispositions that might otherwise go unnoticed. My outlook is thus explicitly anthropological. My goal is to grasp, explain, and think critically about the values and beliefs that constitute our contemporary political culture. This I hold to be integral to discerning how, and in which directions, those values and beliefs might evolve in the future, and how, if at all, they might be influenced to evolve.

I. THE HISTORICAL STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY IDEAS

The basic goal is critically to evaluate contemporary arguments about right and justice, but my approach is necessarily historical for four related reasons. It is, first, a striking feature of the recent contractarian revolution in American po-

litical theory that its most influential proponents make ex-
plicit appeal to the intellectual authority of a contractarian
tradition believed to have emerged in England in the seven-
teenth century and to have established itself in France and
Germany in the eighteenth. John Rawls regards Locke's *Sec-
ond Treatise,* Rousseau's *Social Contract,* and Kant's ethical
works beginning with the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Mor-
als* as "definitive of the contract tradition." His aim is to "pre-
sent a conception of justice which generalizes and carries to a
higher level of abstraction" their arguments (1971:11; cf. also
32 ff, 112, 132). Although more equivocal about Hobbes, he
is nonetheless impressed by his greatness and employs some
of the main arguments of *Leviathan* in the course of develop-
ing his own views (ibid.: 11n, 240, 269). Robert Nozick, too,
develops his account in *Anarchy State and Utopia* by building
on what he takes to be Locke's state of nature (1974:10–25).
In addition to such appeals, these writers (like many more
minor figures they have influenced) rely heavily, as we will
see, on conceptual tools, modes of reasoning, and assump-
tions about human nature and rationality that they take to be
characteristic of this older contractarian tradition, particularly
in its early English variants.

   One should not, however, overlook the fact that the modern
contract theorists have been deeply influenced by other pow-
erful intellectual currents as well, most notably utilitarianism
and legal positivism (against which they reacted but which left
indelible marks on their arguments), post-Kantian deontologi-
cal moral philosophy, and developments in modern economic
and psychological theory. I will try to show how these various
movements have been adapted to fit within the evolving con-
tractarian tradition, which latter in important and usefully
identifiable ways continues to define the basic outlook of the
modern writers: they articulate and reproduce it.

   Second, the liberal rights tradition, viewed more broadly,
has itself evolved over time and these modern writers are to
some extent products of that evolution. They are products in
that they invoke the tradition's authority, but also because they
are influenced by it in ways of which they are frequently un-
aware. In contrast to those commentators who identify "mod-

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ernity" with a single unit-idea, be it the decline of objective moral standards, the supremacy of "possessive individualism," or "the emotivist self,"[1] I argue that the liberal view of rights is an ensemble of related doctrines, beliefs, and assumptions about the nature of persons, value, legitimacy, and ends. The relations among these are complex and have changed over time, more as an internally complex organism with many (and often conflicting) needs adapting to a changing environment, than as a radical disjunction with the past or a single characteristic simplifying assumption that constitutes the motif of modernity. The tradition as I describe it has been through four distinct incarnations or "moments," which I designate as transitional, classical, neo-classical, and Keynesian. These are not presented as historically or conceptually exhaustive categories and their heuristic utility is intended primarily to be thematic and comparative. I do hold, however, that some sense of the changing socioeconomic conditions that gave rise to them is essential to grasping why the modern arguments are presented in the forms that they are, why they confront the particular difficulties that they do, and why, these difficulties notwithstanding, they retain such powerful intellectual and ideological appeal.

A third reason for an historical approach derives from this fact of evolution. From an intellectual point of view (though not, as we will see, necessarily from an an ideological one) the modern arguments can usefully be thought of as lethal mutations of the earlier ones. The seventeenth-century arguments confronted important intellectual difficulties within their own terms of reference, but they exhibited an underlying intellectual coherence which the modern arguments lack, mainly because they relied on a view of scientific knowledge that was not to survive the eighteenth century. The modern writers try to combine a substantive appeal to the arguments of the early English contract theorists with a methodological appeal to Kant's ethics; in this conjunction reside some of their most intractable difficulties. My argument on this point is comparable in form, though not in content, to the claim in the opening

1 See Strauss (1953), Macpherson (1962), and MacIntyre (1981).

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pages of *After Virtue*. Like MacIntyre I argue that contempo-
rary writers have fragmented an older tradition by appropri-
ating parts of it while leaving behind crucial premises that
gave those parts their underlying coherence. Like him I argue
that an understanding of the processes by which this occurred
is essential to a full critical evaluation of the modern argu-
ments. I do not, as MacIntyre (1981:35) does, locate the rea-
sons for these changes in the mere follies of philosophers, or
in what Richard Rorty (1979:136ff) has, with unintended
irony, referred to as our "optional" commitment to the enlight-
enment epistemology of Descartes and his successors – which
can be jettisoned once we come to understand its muddled
genesis.[2] The history of dominant ideas is far more inter-
twined with the evolution of social structures and practices
than this therapeutic metaphor suggests. Philosophical predis-
positions are deeply embedded in peoples' consciousnesses, at
levels of which they are typically unaware. These beliefs hold
together less abstract views which serve important material
ends. In contrast to these voluntarist accounts of the historical
evolution of ideas, I argue that a much greater role has been
played by extraintellectual factors and I am skeptical of the
extent to which we might return to the arguably more coher-
ent contentions of earlier writers. Many of our most funda-
mental philosophical beliefs are integral to social practices in
which we engage unreflectively every day. Those beliefs are
required, in nontrivial ways, by those social practices, thus
generating important limitations on how we might reasonably
expect beliefs to change. Understanding the intricate relation-
ships between theory and practice and how these relationships
have evolved historically will reveal the dimensions of the task
facing those who advocate altering the beliefs that constitute
the dominant intellectual culture. We need to take much bet-
ter account of our actual circumstances, how they have come
to be what they are, and how they influence our own values
and actions, if we are seriously to argue for the pursuit of
significantly different values in the contemporary political
world.

2 For discussion of Rorty's historical thesis and its implications for the history of
   ideologies, see Shapiro (1982:550–3ff).

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A final, and related, reason for an historical approach is
that it helps to get at the tenacity of this ideology over time; to
grasp the historical power of its core ideas, which have per-
sisted through the various mutations and been reproduced as
dominant institutions and practices have replicated them-
selves. To speak of the tenacity and continuing dominance of
a liberal ideology of individual rights in this way is to some
extent to take issue with recent work by historians of political
thought. In particular, no one who comes to this field of in-
quiry can fail to admire and come to terms with J.G.A. Po-
cock's brilliantly argued thesis in *The Machiavellian Moment* and
elsewhere, seriously questioning the claim that liberal ideas
have been as influential historically as is often supposed. I do
not doubt that a powerful strand of republican ideology, em-
phasizing civic virtue and idealizing the values of civic hu-
manism and republican citizenship (in contrast to the character-
istically liberal focus on jurisprudence and the centrality of
individual rights), can be traced from the Florentine Renais-
sance through the writings of some seventeenth-century fol-
lowers of Harrington. Nor do I doubt that these ideas, which
might usefully be characterized as an Atlantic republican tra-
dition, played a significant role in shaping American revolu-
tionary ideology, or that they have since continued to play
important (if changing) roles in the evolution of American
political ideas. I do question, however, the extent to which
these two ideologies have evolved exclusively of one another
historically, either in their geneses or in all the historical peri-
ods in which Pocock holds them to have been distinct, but it
would take a different book to show this definitively.[3] In con-
centrating here on the evolution of liberal ideas and in trying
to document and explain their continuing historical influence,
I am not supposing that these are the only ideas of signifi-
cance in shaping the values dominant in Anglo-American cul-
ture, or that they have evolved uninfluenced by the evolution
of republican political thought. My interest is in understand-
ing why liberal ideas have retained their powerful appeal over

3 For a recent summary of Pocock's views on this incommensurability before the
Scottish jurisprudence of the eighteenth century and after 1789, see Pocock
(1981:353–68).

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time, these and other competing influences notwithstanding. We might say that I am concerned to explain the ideological appeal of the view that Pocock is concerned to debunk.

II. THE STUDY OF IDEOLOGY AND THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF POLITICAL THEORY

If my concern is with a major intellectual tradition and the canonical figures who comprise it, my venture differs at root from conventional studies of The Greats, whose principal focus tends to be on interpreting what are taken to be their Fundamental Insights into the human condition. The questions I am asking concern why they are thought to have these Fundamental Insights; my interest in them is from the point of view of an evolutionary anthropology of establishment values. Such an enterprise requires interpretation of canonical texts, but it is interpretation undertaken from a different point of view, with different goals in mind, than most modes of textual exegesis.

My enterprise differs, also, from the attempts by Quentin Skinner and his followers to reread the history of ideas as what they take to be the history of ideologies. My disagreements with these writers, and my realist alternatives to their hermeneutic procedures, have been set out and defended elsewhere, and need not detain us now.[4] Skinner and his followers focus exclusively on an internal reading of texts, geared toward the detailed recovery of authorial intention. My view is that, insofar as we are concerned with the history of *ideologies,* such analysis, while necessary, will never be sufficient. It must be supplemented by an external analysis that goes beyond the realm of authorial intent and locates the texts, as well as the traditions they constitute, in the broader processes of socioeconomic change that give rise to them *qua* ideological entities, and which they are instrumental in reproducing.[5] This is not to relegate the text to the realm of the

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4 See Shapiro (1982:335–78).
5 There are some affinities between my use of the terms "internal" and "external" and H.L.A. Hart's use of them in his discussion of the relation between moral and legal rules in *The Concept of Law* (1961:168–80). For more extensive discussion of my uses of them see Shapiro (1982:554–63).

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epiphenomenal (the relationship between ideologies and the causal reproduction of the social world is vastly more intricate than this notion suggests), nor is it to hold the quite fashionable view that authorial intent is intrinsically irrecoverable, and, anyhow, irrelevant, to textual exegesis – which latter depends exclusively on the meaning imputed by the reader. The intentions of the authors of canonical texts are indeed manipulated by subsequent generations (it is doubtful that the process of canonization could otherwise occur). Attention to the ways in which this process occurs can be highly instructive in tracing the evolution of an ideology and in thinking critically about it. Although texts become relatively autonomous of their authors once written or, as Pocock (1984:31) has noted, there is a certain "refraction and recalcitrance" to uttered speech or written language, which means it can be manipulated by others, such processes of manipulation are never without limits. These limits derive partly from the meanings of the words themselves, not because they do not change over time, but because they exist in weblike, mutually interdependent, relationships with other parts of our conceptual vocabularies. As Hanna Pitkin (1972:175–6ff) has pointed out in relation to the concept of justice, the very fact that we use this term and its cognates in a whole mesh of interrelated and overlapping ways places limits on its manipulability in a given usage. We do (or fail to do) justice to meals as well as criminals, to an author's intentions as well as to a corrupt politician, to our convictions as well as to our students, and this whole network of overlapping meanings cannot simply be detached from a single substantive use for a particular ulterior purpose. The web of connected meanings ensures a certain amount of continuity over time and space, although the degree of this will vary and is unlikely to invite much that is useful in the way of theoretical generalization.

The debate on whether or not we impute meanings to texts tends to be conducted at so high a level of abstraction that it entirely misses these issues, which are frequently crucial to grasping in concrete historical terms how ideologies evolve. It may be that the arguments of canonized writers are systematically misapplied in ways that they would never have endorsed

or perhaps in some cases even have understood, but this is typically the result of bending, stretching, and pulling at parts of arguments, of subtly manipulating the contexts in which they are held to apply, of being half-true to an author's intentions, not of distorting them wholesale. Just as powerful ideologies invariably have some significant connection with reality, make straightforward sense of some realm of experience, and depend on these facts for their justificatory appeal when missapplied in other contexts for other purposes,[6] so it would be a mistake to think that there are not elements of Locke's argument, as the argument he made, which, while doubtless manipulable into the service of various competing political goals, nonetheless retain a powerful straightforward appeal in their own right and contribute to his continuing influence in the liberal tradition as a result. For this reason close attention to the internal aspects of the argument and their connection with evolving external aspects of it can be essential to getting at its ideological force over time. Nozick's "misreadings" of Locke, Rawls's of Kant, we will see, reveal a great deal about the modern evolution of liberal ideology.[7]

In short, though I follow Skinner in conceiving of ideologies in functional terms and in analyzing them by reference to the practices they are instrumental in legitimating or attacking, we differ both in our accounts of what such analysis requires and in that we are not, ultimately, interested in the same social practices. Skinner focuses on an internal hermeneutic analysis to get at the ideological force of the argument for its author. I supplement this with an external analysis in which I try to get at the more complex relationship between the meaning of the text for the author and its role in the evolving tradition, and to locate these in the broader processes of socioeconomic reproduction and change of which they are

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6 I am here following Walzer's discussion of the concept of ideology (Walzer, 1983:12ff).

7 This does not go to the question of whether I, as reader, can be certain I understand the text in the sense of being sure I know what Locke's intentions in writing it really were, or that I can be certain of having grasped Nozick's reading of Locke's intentions. Obviously to say that Nozick misreads Locke is to presume a correct reading of Locke (and of Nozick). For reasons given elsewhere (Shapiro, 1982: 575–8), I see no a priori reason to suppose that such correct readings are intrinsically unavailable.

a part. Finally, where Skinner's focus is exclusively historical, my emphasis is on comprehending contemporary ideas historically: my interest in the evolution of the liberal rights tradition is geared toward a better critical understanding of its dominant contemporary manifestations.

III. THE LIBERAL IDEOLOGY OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

If the liberal rights tradition is to be thought of as an internally complex set of doctrines, beliefs, and assumptions that have evolved over time while retaining a relatively enduring underlying structure, more needs to be said about how these processes of change and persistence occur, and about the underlying structure itself. We need a better sense of our animal's basic anatomy and of how this directs and limits its activities in an environment that is itself evolving over time.

i. Ideologies as conservative adaptive mechanisms

A useful start to thinking about this problem can be made by considering W. V. Quine's seminal discussion of knowledge and belief in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism." The two "dogmas" that Quine was concerned to overturn were Kant's analytic/synthetic distinction and the related correspondence theory of truth, which in his view rested on a misleading reduction of the relationship between language and experience. In contrast to the empiricist view of beliefs deriving from sense-data, which in turn correspond to particulars in the world, he averred:

The totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs, from the most casual matters of geography and history to the profoundest laws of atomic physics or even of pure mathematics and logic, is a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges . . . [it] is like a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience. A conflict with experience at the periphery occasions readjustments in the interior of the field. Truth values have to be redistributed over some of our statements. Reevaluation of some statements entails reevaluation of others, because of their logical interconnections – the logical laws being in turn simply certain further statements of the system, certain further elements of the field. Having reevaluated one statement we must reevaluate some others, which may be statements