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Edited by Terence Ball, James Farr and Russell L. Hanson

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IDEAS IN CONTEXT

**POLITICAL INNOVATION AND
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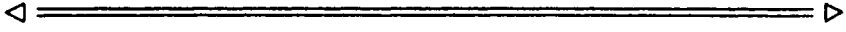
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CONTRIBUTORS

Terence Ball is Professor of Political Science at the University of Minnesota. He is the author of *Transforming Political Discourse* (1988), editor of *Idioms of Inquiry* (1987), coeditor (with James Farr) of *After Marx* (1984) and *Conceptual Change and the Constitution* (with J.G.A. Pocock), and the author of several essays in political theory and the history of political thought.

Richard Dagger is Associate Professor of Political Science at Arizona State University. His essays on rights, political obligation, and other topics in political and legal philosophy have appeared in several professional journals and books. At present he is engaged on a study to be entitled *Politics and the Pursuit of Autonomy*.

Mary G. Dietz is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Minnesota. She is the author of *Between the Human and the Divine: The Political Thought of Simone Weil* (1988) and a variety of articles on the history of ideas and feminist political thought. She is currently at work on a longer study of patriotism and conceptual change.

John Dunn is Professor of Political Theory at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of King's College. His books include *The Political Thought of John Locke* (1969); *Modern Revolutions* (1972); *Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future* (1979); *Political Obligation in its Historical Context* (1980); *Locke* (1984); *The Politics of Socialism* (1984); and *Rethinking Modern Political Theory* (1985). He is the editor of *The Economic Limits to Modern Politics* (forthcoming 1988).

J. Peter Euben is a member of the Committee on Classics and Professor of Politics and the History of Consciousness at the University of California-Santa Cruz. He is the editor of *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (1987). His book *The Road Not Taken* will be published in 1989. He is currently working on a book on political education and democratic politics.

James Farr is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Minnesota. He is coeditor of *After Marx* (1984) and author of a number of articles in the history and philosophy of the social sciences. He is currently studying the science of politics in the early American republic.

Mark Goldie is Fellow, Lecturer, and Director of Studies in History at Churchill College, Cambridge. He has published several articles on the political and intellectual history of later Stuart England, and has a book, *The Tory Ideology: Politics, Religion and Ideas in Restoration England*, forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.

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List of contributors

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J.A.W. Gunn is Professor of Political Studies at Queen's University, Kingston, Canada, and was Head of the Department of Political Studies from 1975 to 1983. He has published *Politics and the Public Interest in the Seventeenth Century* (1969), *Factions No More* (1972), *Beyond Liberty and Property* (1983), and, with J.P. Matthews and D.M. Schurman, has edited *Benjamin Disraeli, Letters* (1982). He is now writing a book on the idea of "public opinion" in French thought of the eighteenth century.

Russell L. Hanson is Associate Professor of Political Science at Indiana University, Bloomington. He is the author of *The Democratic Imagination in America: Conversations With Our Past* (1985) and articles on American politics and political thought. He is currently studying the political underpinnings of welfare policy in the United States.

Graham Maddox is Associate Professor of Politics at the University of New England, New South Wales. He is author of *Australian Democracy in Theory and Practice* (1985) and articles on constitutionalism and constitutional history.

Hanna Fenichel Pitkin is Professor of Political Science at the University of California-Berkeley. She is the author of *The Concept of Representation, Wittgenstein and Justice*, and *Fortune is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli*.

Alan Ryan is Professor of Politics at Princeton University and was until recently Reader in Politics and Fellow of New College, Oxford. He is the author of *The Philosophy of John Stuart Mill* (1970 and 1987), *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (1970), *J.S. Mill* (1975), *Property and Political Theory* (1984), *Property* (1987), and *Russell: A Political Life* (1988).

Quentin Skinner is Professor of Political Science in the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Christ's College. His books include a study of Machiavelli and a two-volume work, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*. His most recent book is *Meaning and Context*, a collection of his papers on interpretation, edited by Professor J.H. Tully.

Michael Walzer is Professor of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey. His books include *Obligations, Just and Unjust Wars*, and *Spheres of Justice*.

PREFACE

The present volume has a dual purpose. The first is to re-emphasize the by now familiar claim that politics is a linguistically constituted activity. Our Editors' Introduction and the two essays that follow spell out this claim and develop a number of implications following from it. Not the least of these is that this claim, which has been more often asserted than defended, requires detailed and in-depth exploration within the context of actual political discourses. This takes us to our second and more pervasive purpose, which is to show that the concepts constitutive of political beliefs and behavior have historically mutable meanings. To trace the changing meanings of specific concepts is the task undertaken by our other contributors. Their conceptual histories reveal the mutations of meaning that attend all our political concepts.

Since there is no one right way to construct a conceptual history, the editors have not attempted to impose any orthodoxy of method or approach. We have, to be sure, selected a particular set of concepts for study and arranged them in a specific order. Our selection of concepts is hardly comprehensive. Some unquestionably important ones – equality, liberty, authority, and power among them – are altogether absent. However, our aim here is to show, in a fairly selective way, how we might begin to think about the political dimension of conceptual change and the conceptual dimension of political innovation, both being different sides of the same coin of communication. To have aimed at anything more comprehensive would have required greater ambition and more erudition than the editors possess. While we greatly admire such recent editorial undertakings as Professors Brunner, Conze, and Koselleck's *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* and Reichardt and Schmitt's *Handbuch politisch-sozialer Grundbegriffe in Frankreich*, we have not sought to duplicate their encyclopedic efforts. What we do share with them, however, is the common conviction that speaking a language involves taking on a world, and altering the concepts constitutive of that language involves nothing less than remaking the world. Insofar as the political world is linguistically and communicatively constituted,

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then, conceptual change must be understood politically, and political change conceptually.

In ordering the chapters we sought to balance two considerations. We wanted to present these conceptual histories roughly in the order in which the concepts came to be historically important. Hence, those concepts which early on became significant in Western political discourse appear first in the following pages. Other concepts follow more or less in the order they rose to special prominence in politics, though some of them actually entered discourse much earlier. We departed from this rule of thumb where it seemed important to group concepts that dealt with closely related themes. Concepts referring mainly to the institutions of government are followed by those which have to do with popular participation in government, and these in turn are followed by concepts bearing on the popular reconstitution of government – a thematic ordering that is fairly consistent with the historical appearance of particular concepts.

In commissioning and assembling these essays the editors have incurred numerous debts, more of them of a moral than a financial nature. We are especially grateful to our contributors for being so patient through numerous delays and requests for revision. To Quentin Skinner we owe a special debt for the various ways in which he contributed to the present volume. His services as series editor, contributor, critic, and advisor have proved invaluable. Each of the editors also thanks the others for having remained relatively good humored through a rather long and sometimes arduous journey.

Finally, we would like to express our appreciation to Roberta Scott and Barbara Hopkins, who typed the manuscript, and Steven Flinn, who provided technical assistance. David Sharp helped prepare the final manuscript, ably attending to matters of style and format. Lawrence Biskowski read proofs and prepared the index. Dr. Jeremy Mynott, Joanna Rainbow, Richard Fisher, and Ann Rex of Cambridge University Press expeditiously handled matters of production with care. For all this help we are most grateful.

Terence Ball

James Farr

Russell L. Hanson