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Introduction

The political ideas examined in this volume were generated in a period that requires its historians, in an especially marked degree, to 'look before and after'. A watershed between 'medieval' and 'modern' European history has conventionally been located in the late fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth – the period which saw the final eclipse of the Byzantine Empire, the flowering of the humanist Renaissance, and the first stages of the Protestant Reformation. Yet the society of the three centuries following that period has increasingly been represented as a 'world we have lost' – a world essentially pre-modern because pre-industrial (at least in terms of what Marx called 'machinofacture') and pre-capitalist (if by 'capitalist' we mean to refer to a society having an urban proletariat as a major characteristic). Demographically, the population explosion accompanying the social transformations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought into being mass societies of an unprecedented kind. In political terms, it is true, there may seem to be less reason to question the modernity of the period here under scrutiny. There is a genuine sense in which the 'sovereign state' – even if its lineaments are more clearly discernible in medieval Europe than has sometimes been supposed – took firmer shape in and after the sixteenth century. Yet even here the need to distinguish an 'early modern' from a later phase is evident. The European nation-state of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a very different entity from the typically dynastic states (or the surviving republics) of that Ancien Régime which was shaped in the period with which we are here concerned. The modern democratic state, the welfare state, the *dirigiste* or corporatist state, the bureaucratic state, the state organised around political parties (or around a single party) – all these, in forms we could readily recognise, are developments of the past 200 years. The monarchies which dominated the political scene for three centuries or so before the French

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Revolution – whether they were absolute or limited monarchies – belonged to a quite different world. The republics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, even if they might ascribe sovereignty to the *populus*, were hardly 'people's republics' or 'democracies' as we understand those terms.

This is not, of course, to imply that the world of early modern Europe was merely a world of medieval survivals, of a continuity with the middle ages not to be broken significantly within our period. Decisive changes had taken place: there are features in early modern society and institutions that can and must be differentiated from what had gone before as well as from what was to follow. Yet it seems equally clear that, as the differentiation between 'early modern' and 'later modern' has sharpened, that between 'early modern' and 'medieval' has softened. This is manifestly a point to be considered in depth in the book as a whole; but it is one worth exemplifying and exploring briefly even in this introductory essay. An illustrative area of particular importance is that of ecclesiastical polity. In the traditional view, this was perhaps the clearest exemplification of 'the end of the middle ages'. The collapse of the universal authority of the papacy marked the demise of 'medieval christendom'. The *respublica christiana*, insofar as it took visible shape, did so, from the sixteenth century onwards, in the form of 'national churches'. Here above all, it seemed, the sovereignty of the new, modern state was asserted and vindicted. Even in Catholic Europe – in Spain, in France, in the Habsburg Empire – this pattern prevailed. Now it cannot be doubted that this view, so far as it goes, is substantially correct; but how far does it in fact take us towards an understanding of the ecclesiastical polity of early modern Europe?

If we think of the modern state as 'secular', as accepting (or even insisting upon) a separation of church and state, then we are again bound to question the modernity of early modern political society and of much of its political thinking. The states of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, whatever else they may have been were not secular states. They were, or at least they strove strenuously to be, confessional states, in which membership of the political community was inseparable from membership of a coextenive ecclesial community. The *respublica christiana* survived vigorously, however much the doctrinal ground of its being might be disputed. Again, the notion of a *christianitas* of which the universality, even the unity, was compatible with political diversity and with the exercise of substantial control of the church by the state was not simply a development of post-Reformation times. Already in the later middle ages means had

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been found of reconciling papal authority with the 'free empire' of temporal (but by no means secular) rulers. Here as elsewhere the period from the late fifteenth century to the end of the seventeenth saw neither innovation nor even the unfolding of what had been implicit or latent, but rather the fuller and faster development of tendencies already explicitly present and manifest in late medieval society. These and other related themes are here illuminated not only in those chapters (6–8 especially) dealing directly with ecclesiological issues, but also in those which explore the impact of law and legal concepts on political ideas (e.g. chapters 3 and 10).

Complexity and ambiguity are likewise to be found in intellectual and cultural history. The great movements of the Renaissance and the Reformation did indeed mark significant new departures. That is why those movements dominate the early chapters of the book. Yet neither humanism nor Protestantism – to say nothing of the continuing vitality of other intellectual and spiritual traditions – retains in recent historiography quite the appearance it formerly had. This is in part a result of lengthening the chronological perspectives, of recognising the significance of what might be called proto-humanism and of earlier instances of the genus 'renaissance'; or of acknowledging that the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation of the sixteenth century are themselves part of a much longer 'age of reform' in western Christendom (Ozment 1980; Oakley 1979). It is also a matter of perceiving greater complexity in the relationships between what might otherwise be seen as antithetical groups or movements. Intellectual activity did not, could not, take place in rigidly separated channels. One man in his time could play different parts as circumstances required: Giovanni Francesco Poggio, son of the great Poggio Bracciolini, could write both a humanist's discourse on princely government (Poggio 1504) and a scholastic jurist's treatise on papal and conciliar authority (Poggio 1512?). Again, as we ourselves move further away from the educational dominance of the classical tradition and from the influence of religious concepts derived from both Catholicism and Protestantism in their sixteenth-century forms, it becomes harder to accept the modernity of the principles and values embodied in those modes of thought and teaching.

When, almost at the end of the volume we find (in chapters 18–20) the stubborn persistence of theological issues that had preoccupied late medieval scholastics, it may yet again seem that distinctive modernity has been submerged. Yet there are after all intellectual criteria of that

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modernity which do come to us from the early modern period, and perhaps especially from the seventeenth century. The philosophy and what we would call the science of that seminal era, whatever indebtedness there may have been to the insights of late scholasticism, do convey the sense of novelty expressed in Bacon's *Great Instauration*. Neither the rationalism nor the empiricism of the age of Descartes and Hobbes, of Locke and Leibniz, has proved definitive; but both may be seen as characteristic of a recognisably modern way of thinking. Nonetheless such a theme or thesis – classically expounded in Alfred North Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World* (1926) – requires cautious scrutiny: we need, for instance, to remind ourselves that the thought-world of an Isaac Newton is remote in many ways from our concerns and our assumptions. As ever, there is no evading the historian's responsibility for reading the evidence as far as possible in its own terms. Such a reading may lead us to adopt and transplant Galileo's *eppur si muove*: the world of ideas, like the world of institutions and social relationships, moved decisively in the period with which we are concerned. Nor is the historical importance of that movement in any way lessened by the recognition that the process has continued, perhaps even more decisively, in the transformation of the world we have lost into the world in which we find ourselves.

The history of political thought in early modern Europe could obviously be written in different ways. Mere chronicling is perhaps the only historiographical mode ruled out by the nature of the subject. Some chronological ordering there must indeed be; and the division of this volume into five parts reflects that need. Such dividing-lines cannot, however, be rigid. Plainly the concerns of Renaissance thinkers continued into the period of Reformation and Counter-Reformation when the ideas analysed in Part II were generated. And a theme like the constitutionalism discussed in chapter 9, besides projecting long shadows beyond the notional terminal date of the chapter in the early seventeenth century, demands that the source of the light casting those shadows be sought in the period mainly examined in Part I. Late scholastic thinkers such as John Mair and Jacques Almain, writing in the early decades of the sixteenth century, were to be significant for some ways of thinking throughout the seventeenth. Recurrences and overlaps, then, are both unavoidable and deliberate. Chronological sequence can provide no more than a broad flexible framework for the investigation.

Within that framework, again, different schemes of subdivision suggest themselves. The thematic scheme adopted below need not be defended

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here: it must be judged by its fruits in historical elucidation of an intricate and complex mass of material. At the same time there are at least two other options calling for preliminary comment, both because of their own claims and because each has in fact had a certain modifying effect on the structure the book has aquired between planning and completion.

There is, first, the possibility of treating the history of political ideas as the history of modern Europe in general is often treated; as a series of inter-related but discrete national histories. J.W. Allen's *History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century* largely exemplified this approach; and it is noteworthy that when Allen carried his investigation into the next century he did not undertake to look further afield than English political thought (Allen 1928, 1938). Now it is indeed quite clear that, in comparison with the middle ages, there is much greater national diversity in political discourse from the mid-fifteenth century onwards. To ignore this, or even to reduce it (as, in general, has been done here) to a secondary role in determining the arrangement of the material, carries the risk that important aspects of the subject will be left in shadow. It may be the case here, for instance, that – despite the recurrence of a thinker like Suárez in several chapters – Spanish political thought, in a period when Spain was a dominant European power, has received less than due attention. Yet a case can be made for accepting this kind of possible lack of proportion as the necessary price for sustaining a more illuminating approach to the subject as a whole.

The transformation as well as the survival of the *respublica christiana* in this period has already been noted. We now need to consider the emergence of the notion of a 'republic of letters'. This was surely not the least important contribution made by humanism to European intellectual life; and for all the diversity in experience and in the articulation of that experience in political reflection and analysis, the sense of a 'common market' in ideas persists. George Buchanan's *De jure regni apud Scotos* was at one and the same time a response to a crisis in one small realm and part of a European debate on monarchy engaging general concern across national frontiers. Its author's correspondence with other humanists graphically illustrates the kind of intellectual community within which that debate took place. It is with European political thought in this sense that the chapters below seek to deal.

Do chapters 13, 14, and 15 stand out as exceptions to this norm? Is there even some reflection here of an 'anglocentricity' only too likely to be found in a history published in English and written almost wholly by British and

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North American scholars? Not necessarily so. For one thing, these chapters are grouped in a part of the book which opens with a chapter bringing out very clearly the affinities between English and French conceptions of absolute monarchy and exemplifying the tendency in recent historiography to soften the sharp contrast conventionally made between England and continental Europe in such contexts. And, to the extent that there is then a considerable concentration on the importance of English experience, this is by no means a mere manifestation of intellectual chauvinism. There was, it is true, conflict and debate elsewhere in Europe in the early and middle years of the seventeenth century – perhaps even a 'general crisis' of authority across the entire continent. Yet the British and particularly the English aspect of that crisis threw issues into uniquely sharp relief and generated an unrivalled wealth of ideological dialectic. Specifically English the ideas – or at least their expression – may be in many instances; their historical significance nonetheless transcends such limitations.

As it happens, two English thinkers who do *not* receive attention mainly in the chapters just referred to illustrate the second possible approach to the subject which, while not predominant has had its influence here. Hobbes and Locke would be universally recognised as major intellectual figures; and here, like Pufendorf, Spinoza, Grotius, Bodin, Machiavelli, these thinkers have chapters or substantial parts of chapters devoted to their ideas. There is neither space nor need here to rehearse the now well-worn theme that the history of political thought is at best imperfetly written in terms of a succession of 'great thinkers'. And yet, however one conceives the nature of that history, the fact remains that figures emerge every now and then – and they were perhaps especially numerous in our period – who demand sustained analysis and who cannot, without distortion, simply be 'reduced to the ranks'. A balance must be struck between recognising this and responding to the demand of other, lesser voices to be heard. If there is dissonance as well as counterpoint (and sometimes harmony) in the composition, it must be hoped that such a result is inseparable from the nature of the subject.

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I

Renaissance and Counter-Renaissance

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I
Humanism and political theory

ANTHONY GRAFTON

i Scholarship and power: a problematic partnership

In 1599 the Habsburg archduke and his Infanta came to the university of Louvain to hear a humanist teach. The outstanding local scholar Justus Lipsius proved more than equal to this challenging task, as he explained to a friend in a characteristically immodest letter:

> I had to perform in the School of Theology, after what they call a theological 'Actus'. So I stood up and began to speak . . . after an extemporaneous introduction I explained a short text from Seneca's *De clementia*, beginning: 'The prince's greatness is firmly founded if all know that he is at once above them and on their side etc.' I explained the text from Seneca, I say, and in it the task of princes, and finally I added a reflection on the happy result that would stem from this, that is that we Belgians would feel towards them the benevolence and loyalty we had always felt for our rulers. That's it. They heard me with such sympathy that the prince never took his eyes off me; he inclined towards me not just mentally but bodily. So did the other nobles present, and they in turn received the favour of the ambassador of the king of Spain, a scholar, and one who favours me, as you should know. The Infanta was there too. I leave you to imagine what – or if – she understood. Now you know what went on here – the unusual, or possibly unique, event of a female prince coming to these exercises. I, and other prudent men, may begin to cherish better hopes for the republic, since the princes are openly beginning to show themselves favourably disposed to their Belgians and their ways. (Lipsius 1637, II.454)

The lesson could hardly have gone better.

Lipsius' lecture to his Habsburg patrons encapsulates in one exemplary case the humanist enterprise in political thought. We encounter a scholar firmly committed to the belief that practical instruction for the most urgent tasks in political and social life can best be found in Greek and Roman texts. We see him extract from one of these a message not particularly Roman but directly germane to the Habsburgs, whose refusal to learn or even

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accommodate themselves to the customs of their Burgundian subjects had helped to provoke the Dutch Revolt. We see his audience nod eagerly in agreement even when they do not understand what he is saying. In short, we see the ancients made to live again as political counsellors. And yet, in this as in other instances, the more closely we scrutinise the exercise, the more it puzzles us. Is this the limited free speech allowed to a famous and valued counsellor, an independent intellectual challenging the authorities? Or is it a prearranged public ritual of conciliation between Habsburgs and Spanish officials on the one hand and Belgian dignitaries on the other? Did Lipsius mean – or expect – his advice to carry weight? Did Lipsius – until 1591 the leading scholar in the Protestant provinces of the Netherlands, an intellectual architect of their successful military resistance to Spain, a designer of the new model army led with such brilliance by his pupil Maurice of Nassau – really think that a Habsburg would come to hear about Seneca, attain enlightenment, and put an end to the revolt? The letter seems rich and vivid, yet the images it calls up are soon dispelled, and we are left, much like Alice, able to see the humanist's smile of satisfaction but not to grasp his meaning in a way that satisfies us.

The same interplay of fascination and frustration recurs when we trace the brand of scholarship Lipsius represents back to its Italian roots. To be sure, not every humanist and every fact proves difficult to place or assess. We know where the movement started. We can trace its spread and watch it take on institutional form. But we must remember the element of the mysterious in the humanists' enterprise as we try to grasp their distinctive forms of political discourse and teaching.

ii *Dictatores* and philologists

We begin in the thirteenth century, with the growth of two parallel and related intellectual traditions in the Italian city-states. On the one hand, *dictatores* sprang up in every city and in many universities. These men, neither lawyers nor orators in the modern sense, performed a variety of necessary public functions, commercial, administrative, and legal. They developed an elaborate and stylised method for writing, in epistolary form, about matters of private and public interest. They kept formulary books of model letters and contracts, boiler-plate which could be copied or adapted to serve the needs of a businessman writing to a partner or a government clerk keeping records. And they soon came to play an active role in the

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small permanent governments that the Italian city-states developed to collect taxes and administer justice (Witt 1982).

On the other hand, intellectuals simultaneously began to form small cohesive groups and create new forms of literature and scholarship in the same cities. These men came from a variety of social orders and practised a variety of professions. Some, like the Paduan lawyer Lovato Lovati, were laymen; others, like the *Mansionarius* of the Verona cathedral, Giovanni de Matociis, were priests. But all shared a dedication to seeking out unknown or little-known classical texts. All tried to sort out the historical and philological problems the new texts posed (like the relation between the Pliny of the *Natural History* and the Pliny of the *Letters*, the nephew of the former, which Giovanni de Matociis explained). All tried to decode and master the most difficult and novel formal features that the texts presented (like the metres of Senecan tragedy, which Lovati became the first man in centuries to try seriously to scan). And many wrote substantial works of their own, ranging from derivative and traditional compendia to innovative histories and poems, in which they put their classical discoveries to work (Weiss 1947; Holmes 1986).

The two groups were not cut off from one another. Some early humanists worked with or as *dictatores* in public life. Some of the *dictatores* found the direct study of the Roman law and other classics to be to their professional advantage. Albertino Mussato, the best known of these early humanists, even tried to use the most advanced scholarship of his world to practical political effect. He not only mastered Seneca's metres but used them to write a Senecan tragedy on the tyranny of Ezzelino da Romano. He hoped that this powerful composition might dissuade his fellow citizens from giving in to the tyrannical della Scala. Cola di Rienzo similarly used the *lex regia* to persuade his fellow Romans to restore their republic to greatness.

When the *dictatores* and early humanists addressed themselves to political issues, they drew on Cicero and Seneca to dramatise the need for concord and pursuit of a common good; and to that extent a pre-humanist political discourse came into being, which adumbrated many features of later humanist political writing. It did not, however, annex the advanced philology of its time; the scholarship of the humanists remained a private preoccupation of scholars and writers, throughout the fourteenth century. The most original and learned scholar of the time, Petrarch, studied Roman inscriptions and Livy's history with great intensity. He loved the brilliant early centuries of Roman history, which he saw as the culmination

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