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052161712X - Defining the Common Good: Empire, Religion and Philosophy in
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The theme of this book is the crisis of the early modern state in eighteenth-century Britain. The revolt of the North American colonies and the simultaneous demand for wider religious toleration at home challenged the principles of sovereignty and obligation that underpinned arguments and assumptions about the character of the state. These, in turn, were expressed in terms of the 'common good', 'necessity', and 'community' – concepts that came to the fore in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European political thought and which gave expression to the problem of defining legitimate authority in a period of increasing consciousness of state power. The Americans and their British supporters argued that individuals ought to determine the common good of the community which they comprised. A new theory of representation and freedom of thought marks the cutting edge of this revolutionary redefinition of the basic relationship between individual and community.

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IDEAS IN CONTEXT

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eighteenth-century Britain*

PETER N. MILLER

University of Chicago



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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
 The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
 40 West 20th Street, New York NY 10011-4211, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
 Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 1994
 First paperback edition 2004

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Miller, Peter N., 1964–
 Defining the common good: empire, religion and philosophy in
 eighteenth-century Britain / Peter N. Miller.

p. cm. – (Ideas in context: 29)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0 521 44259 1 hardback

1. Great Britain – Politics and government – 18th century.
2. Political science – Great Britain – History – 18th century.
3. Imperialism – Great Britain – History – 18th century.
4. Great Britain – Church history – 18th century.
5. Philosophy, British – 18th century. 6. Common good.

I. Series.

DA480.M627 1994

941.07 – dc20 93–19862 CIP

ISBN 0 521 44259 1 hardback

ISBN 0 521 61712 X paperback

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For Mom and Dad

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Again this is apparent to us in daily conversation: that if four or five persons that have lived together be talking, another speaking the same language may come in and yet understand very little of their discourse, in that it relateth unto circumstances, persons, things, times and places which he knoweth not. It is no otherwise with a man having no insight of the times in which they were written and the circumstances unto which they relate, and the reading of ancient books, whether they be divine or humane.

Harrington, *Oceana*

What is justice? It is constant care for the common good. In what does the science of law consist? In the knowledge of the best government. What is law? It is an art of watching over the public interest. What is law, or 'the just'? It is the useful. What is *natural law*? The private interest of each one of us. What is the law of nations? The common good of all nations. What is civil law? The good of the commonwealth. What are the sources of law and why did the law of nature originate? That many may live in any way soever. Why did *jus gentium* arise? That man might live in security and ease. What reason accounts for the establishment of civil law? The attainment of a happy and prosperous life. Which is the highest law, the standard we are to follow whenever we interpret any legal enactment? The greatness of the state, the preservation of our ruler, the glory of both.

Vico, *On the Study Methods of our Time*

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Acknowledgments

Rabbi Perahia said: 'Appoint for yourself a teacher and acquire a friend.'

Mishna Avot 1:6

Though I have spoken in some detail of the duties of the teacher, I shall for the moment confine my advice to the learners to one solitary admonition, that they should love their masters not less than their studies, and should regard them as parents not indeed of their bodies but of their minds.

Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* II.ix

In his *Commentary on the Mishna*, Maimonides suggests that the friendship that exists between teacher and student arises from two people striving for the same end. 'How true', he writes, 'is the statement of Aristotle, "for his friend really is another self".' I feel especially fortunate in no longer being able to distinguish between my teachers and my friends.

My most profound debt is to Quentin Skinner. He inspired me to do this kind of history from afar, years ago, and remains a constant source of encouragement and insight. The final shape of this argument is the product of many enjoyable hours talking about a wide range of ideas with Istvan Hont and Richard Tuck, both of whom took an interest in my work and read this document in its earlier and less happy incarnations. A typically acute question by John Dunn has remained with me and insisted upon an answer. I hope to have given a better one than when first asked. Anthony Pagden and John Robertson examined the dissertation upon which this substantially revised version is based and Michael Sonenscher read a later draft; their questions led me to think fruitfully about other ways of telling this story. My teachers at Harvard, Wallace MacCaffrey and the late Judith Shklar, first nourished my interest in early modern European history and its political thought and encouraged me to keep at it.

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In so far as ‘conversation is civilization’, as Michael Oakeshott has written, my education in Cambridge can be described as one long civilizing process. If my teachers have become my friends, it is as true that my friends have become my teachers. Sam Black, Patricia Clavin, Joan-Pau Rubiés and Norberto de Sousa have been my Virgil. The many hours eating, drinking and talking with Bill Acres, Melissa Calaresu, Cathy Curtis, Richard Fisher, Béla Kapossy, Dean Kernan, Steve Pincus, Jai Ramaswamy, Neil Robertson and Bill Sherman have given these years an extraordinary emotional and intellectual richness. There are no better teachers than people for whom ideas matter – and who can talk about them with a smile.

This project would have neither begun, nor been completed, without material support. I gratefully acknowledge my debt to the Master and Fellows of Trinity College who elected me into an external research studentship, and to the President and Fellows of Clare Hall for first, electing me into a research fellowship, and then making such a hospitable home. Brian Jenkins, Christine Fenn, Gillian Johns and Godfrey Waller have, in turn, made the Rare Books and Manuscript Rooms of the Cambridge University Library the comfortable and alluring places they have been for me. My gratitude to them and to the staffs of that library, of the Wren Library at Trinity College and of the British Library is expressed functionally, in footnotes, but is no less heartfelt for that. I wish to thank Sandra Sider for her help in viewing a manuscript in the collection of the Hispanic Society of America. I am grateful to Professor Jean Bran for assistance with Latin translation. Parts of this argument have been tried out formally at the Social and Political Thought Seminar at Cambridge, the Colloquium on British History at Harvard, the Le Moyne Forum on Religion and Literature, the North American Conference on British Studies Mid-Atlantic Division, the Anglo-American Conference, the American Historical Association Annual Convention and the King’s College Research Centre seminar on ‘Reason of State’. I thank the hosts for the opportunities, and the audiences for the questions, that have helped give shape to my work.

When Quintilian sought a model for the love of students for teachers, he chose parents. The affection and gratitude I feel for mine can only be acknowledged, never repaid. This book, however, like all human creations, is also a history of its author and in this respect, at least, makes manifest the scale of my indebtedness to them, and to all those who have contributed profoundly to my life these past six years.