

Liberty as Independence

What does liberty entail? How have concepts of liberty changed over time? And what are the global consequences? This book surveys the history of rival views of liberty from antiquity to modern times. Quentin Skinner traces the understanding of liberty as independence from the classical ideal to early modern Britain, culminating in the claims of the Whig oligarchy to have transformed this idea into reality. Yet, with the Whig vision of a free state and civil society undermined by the American Revolution of 1776, Skinner explores how claims that liberty was fulfilled by an absence of physical or coercive restraint came to prominence. *Liberty as Independence* examines new dimensions of these rival views, considering the connections between debates on liberty and debates on slavery, and demonstrating how these ideas were harnessed in feminist discussions surrounding limitations on the liberty of women. The concept of liberty is inherently global, and Skinner argues strongly for the reinstatement of the understanding of liberty as independence.

Quentin Skinner is Emeritus Professor of Humanities at Queen Mary University of London. He was at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton between 1974 and 1979, and was Regius Professor of History at the University of Cambridge between 1996 and 2008. He is the author and editor of numerous books on Renaissance and Modern Intellectual History, and the recipient of many awards including the Wolfson Prize for History and a Balzan Prize. Previous publications include the two-volume study, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge, 1978), *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998) and, most recently, *From Humanism to Hobbes: Studies in Rhetoric and Politics* (Cambridge, 2018).

Liberty as Independence

The Making and Unmaking of a Political Ideal

Quentin Skinner

Queen Mary University of London



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I began by converting the talk I had given at the conference into a lecture, which I then tried out on some exacting but encouraging audiences. I first did so while serving, later in 2017, as Visiting Professor at the Neubauer Collegium in the University of Chicago, and I am very grateful to Jonathan Lear, as well as Gabriel Richardson Lear, for being such attentive and generous hosts. I presented more of my new material early in 2019 as Weinstein Fellow in the School of Law at Berkeley, and I owe special thanks to Kinch Hoekstra and David Lieberman for their invitation and for much valuable advice. But David died soon afterwards, and I continue to mourn the loss of a greatly valued friend.

The papers delivered at the 2017 conference were published by Cambridge University Press in 2022 under the title *Rethinking Liberty before liberalism*, edited by Hannah Dawson and Annelien De Dijn. I incorporated my new research into a reply-to-critics chapter, on which I have drawn in several places in the present book. The publication of the volume was celebrated in May 2023 with a further conference, this time held at King’s College London and organised with memorable panache by Hannah Dawson. A further series of remarkable papers were presented on this occasion by Teresa Bejan, Richard Bourke, Cécile Laborde,

¹ Here I allude to Annelien De Dijn’s book *Freedom: An unruly history*, to which I am also indebted. See De Dijn 2020.

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During the years when I was writing *Liberty as independence* I was still teaching at Queen Mary University of London. There I supervised a number of outstanding MA and PhD students, and I need to single out several who wrote dissertations on topics akin to my research on the concept of liberty, notably Lorenzo Sabbadini, Evangelos Sakkas and Max Skjörnberg, all of whom have influenced my work.² I am also most grateful to numerous colleagues at Queen Mary for support and encouragement throughout these years, particularly to Warren Boutcher, David Colclough, Andrew Fitzmaurice, Gareth Stedman Jones and Georgios Varouxakis. I am likewise indebted to several members of the wider community of scholars in London who study and teach intellectual history, especially Valentina Arena, Adrian Blau, Hannah Dawson, Angus Gowland, Dina Gusejnova, Niall O’Flaherty and Samuel Zeitlin.

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² See Sakkas 2016; Skjörnberg 2016; 2019; 2021; 2022; 2023; Sabbadini 2016; 2020.

³ See Pettit 1997; 2001; 2012; 2014.

As always, I reserve my most heartfelt thanks for Susan James. She has read every draft of this book, discussed it with me in the fullest detail, and shown endless patience with my project. At the same time she has brought to bear her profound and wide-ranging understanding of early modern philosophy, thereby improving my argument as well as saving me from misstatements and mistakes. The value of her support, and that of our children Olivia and Marcus and their families, remains beyond words.

I also owe many thanks for a large amount of institutional as well as personal support. I began teaching at Queen Mary University of London in 2008, retiring at the end of 2022. I remain much indebted to Philip Ogden, whose idea it was that I should join Queen Mary, and to all my colleagues in the School of History, who gave me such a warm welcome. These years turned out to be among the happiest and most fruitful of my academic life.

My research for this book was initially conducted at the British Library, but its closure in 2020 during the Covid pandemic left me even more reliant than usual on electronic resources. For some years intellectual historians have been much indebted to Jisc for bringing together the EEBO and ECCO databases as *Historical Texts*, but it was during the pandemic that I began to find this resource nothing less than indispensable. As always, however, I also owe many thanks to the British Library. The staff remain as courteous and efficient as ever, and every reader owes them additional thanks for their heroic response to the cyber attack suffered by the library in 2023. I was one of a large number of scholars whose ability to consult secondary materials was suddenly cut off, but was reinstated by the library's willingness to create an interim catalogue and keep its reading rooms open, all of which proved to be crucial to the completion of my book.

I am about to say something I have said before, but it remains important for me to repeat how greatly I appreciate the help and encouragement I have always received from Cambridge University Press. Liz Friend-Smith has again acted as my editor, and has done so with unfailing efficiency and kindness, from which I never cease to benefit. I am deeply grateful as always for her guidance and support. To Ruth Boyes as Senior Content Manager I am indebted for overseeing the process of production, and to Dino Costi I owe many thanks for compiling an exemplary index. To Mary Starkey I owe special thanks for her meticulous copy-editing, which has rescued me – not for the first time – from numerous confusions and mistakes. I am grateful to her not only for extensive advice, but also for a highly enjoyable correspondence. My warmest thanks to everyone for so much assistance and expertise.

Conventions

Abbreviations

BL:	The British Library.
ODNB:	<i>The Oxford dictionary of national biography</i> , 60 vols. (Oxford, 2004).
n.p.	No stated place of publication.
<i>Bibliographies</i>	These are simply checklists of the primary and secondary sources I quote in the text. They make no pretence of being systematic guides to the critical literature on the themes I discuss. The bibliography of primary sources lists anonymous works by title. Where a work was published anonymously but the name of the author is known I place the name in square brackets.
<i>Classical names</i>	I refer to ancient writers in their most familiar single-name style both in the text and in the bibliographies.
<i>Dates</i>	Generally I follow my sources, except that I date by the common era. The shift to the Gregorian calendar was not made in Great Britain until 1752, but throughout my text I treat the year as beginning on 1 January, not 25 March.
<i>Gender</i>	I try to use gender-neutral language wherever possible but occasionally I have felt obliged to follow the usage in my sources in order to avoid altering their sense.
<i>References</i>	I use the author-date system when quoting from primary as well as secondary sources. All references to journals in the bibliography of secondary sources are given in Arabic numerals. But when I refer in footnotes to sections of books I sometimes use Roman and sometimes Arabic numbering, depending

Conventions

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Transcriptions

on the preference shown by the author or editor of the work concerned.

I modernise all spelling and punctuation, remove most italics and capital letters, and correct obvious typographical mistakes. My aim, without I hope sacrificing accuracy, is to make my sources as accessible as possible.