

Introduction: Life, Work and Historical Context

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Ian Hunter

Samuel Pufendorf's stature as a European political, juridical and theological writer is comparable with that of his contemporaries Thomas Hobbes, Hugo Grotius and John Locke. Despite this, Pufendorf's work is less well known than theirs, especially in English-speaking contexts, but even in his German homeland. One reason for this is that Pufendorf wrote in Latin and his works were only sporadically translated into European vernaculars. As far as English is concerned, there were significant translations of his natural law works in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and again in the 1930s, followed by some scholarly translations in the 1990s which were in turn followed by new scholarly studies. The first modern scholarly edition of Pufendorf's texts did not begin until 1996 in Germany and is ongoing.¹

A second reason for Pufendorf's relative obscurity is that there is no authoritative biography dedicated to him, leaving scholars to piece together his life and works from a variety of sources. In this, however, they have been immeasurably helped by the biographical and intellectual-historical studies of the German Pufendorf scholar Detlef Döring.² From Döring's studies, and the bibliographic and critical studies of the Italian

¹ Samuel Pufendorf, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. W. Schmidt-Biggemann (Berlin, 1996–).

² Döring's most important set of biographical studies is *Pufendorf-Studien. Beiträge zur Biographie Samuel von Pufendorfs und zu seiner Entwicklung als Historiker und theologischer Schriftsteller* (Berlin, 1992). For a helpful summary and guide, see Detlef Döring, 'Biographisches zu Samuel von Pufendorf', in *Samuel Pufendorf und seine Wirkungen bis auf die heutige Zeit*, ed. B. Geyer and H. Goerlich (Baden-Baden, 1996), 23–37. An overview of Pufendorf's political reports and polemics is provided in Detlef Döring, 'Samuel von Pufendorf als Verfasser politischer Gutachten und Streitschriften', *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 13 (1992), 189–232. And Döring discusses Pufendorf's theological and religious writings in 'Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung der theologischen und religionspolitischen Vorstellungen Samuel von Pufendorfs', in *Religion und Religiosität im Zeitalter des Barock*, ed. Dieter Breuer, Barbara Becker-Cantarino, Heinz Schilling and Walter Sparr (Wiesbaden, 1995), 873–82. Döring's contributions to an array of more specific Pufendorf topics will be cited below.

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scholar Fiammetta Palladini,³ emerges a vivid picture of the life, education, and political and intellectual itinerary of a particular kind of early modern political intellectual. Like all modern Pufendorf scholars, the editors of this volume are indebted to the work of these path-breaking Pufendorf researchers.

A final reason for Pufendorf's somewhat blurred modern image is that it is difficult for today's readers to recognize the kind of intellectual that he was. For the intellectual that we meet in Pufendorf's works is a now-unfamiliar figure: the Protestant political humanist.

1. Political Humanism

To characterize Pufendorf as a political humanist is to name an intellectual persona that combined two dimensions that are at once unfamiliar to us and in a seemingly paradoxical relation to each other. In the first instance, political humanism refers to a style of thought and writing that, unlike modern political theory, was not grounded in philosophical principles but rather in the collection, investigation and use of classical texts.⁴ Emerging in the Renaissance and reaching a peak during the seventeenth century, humanism was a Latinate scholarship based in philological studies of classic Greek, Latin and Christian texts.⁵ These were treated as treasure

³ Among Palladini's contributions are *Discussioni seicentesche su Samuel Pufendorf. Scritti Latini: 1663–1700* (Bologna, 1978); 'Die Bibliothek Samuel Pufendorfs', in *Samuel Pufendorf und die europäische Frühaufklärung: Werk und Einfluß eines deutschen Bürgers der Gelehrtenrepublik nach 300 Jahren (1694–1994)*, ed. F. Palladini and G. Hartung (Berlin, 1996), 29–39. Her major study is *Samuel Pufendorf discepolo di Hobbes. Per una reinterpretazione del giusnaturalismo moderno* (Bologna, 1990). This was recently translated into English: Fiammetta Palladini, *Samuel Pufendorf, Disciple of Hobbes: For a Reinterpretation of Modern Natural Law*, trans. D. Saunders (Leiden, 2019).

⁴ Anthony Grafton, 'Humanism and political theory', in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450–1700*, ed. J. H. Burns and M. Goldie (Cambridge, 1991), 9–29. Gerhard Oestreich, 'Die Bedeutung des niederländischen Späthumanismus für Brandenburg-Preußen', in *Humanismus und Naturrecht in Berlin-Brandenburg-Preussen*, ed. H. Thieme (Berlin, 1979), 16–28.

⁵ For overviews, see Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800* (Cambridge, MA, 1991). Ralph Häfner, 'Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philologie um 1700. Zum Verhältnis von Polymathie und Aporetik bei Jacob Friedrich Reimman, Christian Thomasius und Johann Albert Fabricius', in *Philologie und Erkenntnis: Beiträge zu Begriff und Problem frühneuzeitlicher 'Philologie'*, ed. R. Häfner (Tübingen, 2001), 95–128. Gianna Pomata

troves of eloquence and repositories of wisdom, to be scrutinized and culled for exemplary concepts, histories, ways of life, kinds of person and forms of political rule. The Northern European humanism in which Pufendorf was formed was thus a fundamentally pedagogical phenomenon, inseparable from the teaching of Latin and the transmission of classic texts in the grammar schools and arts faculties that had adopted a reformed humanist pedagogy during the sixteenth century.⁶ The notion that knowledge could be gained and problems solved through individual philosophical introspection was foreign to humanists like Machiavelli, Bruni, Erasmus, Lipsius, Casaubon, Scaliger, Grotius and thence Pufendorf. For them knowledge was gained by reading books. Pufendorf thus fashioned his arguments through continuous reference to and citation of a wide array of ancient texts, including those of Herodotus, Xenophon, Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Livy, Cicero, Juvenal, Seneca, Tacitus, Horace, Ovid, Virgil, Epictetus, Diodorus Siculus, Quintilian, Lucian, Plutarch, Philo Judaeus, the Roman law *Digest* and the Bible, to name some of his more important sources. But he also used modern texts in the same way, drawing on works by Bacon, Casaubon, Machiavelli, Montaigne, Charron, Gentili, Descartes, Bodin, Selden, Spinoza and especially Hobbes and Grotius as sources of wisdom and as objects of criticism, repeated scrutiny of which allowed him to build his discourses, sharpen his insights and, in the case of Richard Cumberland, revise his major natural law treatise. The originality of the humanists lay not in exemplary acts of philosophical introspection – whether in the form of Descartes' *cogito*, Leibniz's ascent to clear and distinct ideas, or, later, Kant's acts of transcendental deliberation – but rather in the painstaking scholarship in which they consulted, analysed and sometimes eclipsed the most formidable authorities in a given field. Pufendorf's treatment of such authorities as Spinoza, Grotius and Hobbes was highly original in just this way.

Secondly, and somewhat paradoxically in relation to their erudition, humanists were typically 'engaged' intellectuals. This meant that they

and Nancy G. Siraisi (eds.), *Historia: Empiricism and Erudition in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2005). Dmitri Levitin, 'From sacred history to the history of religion: Paganism, Judaism, and Christianity in European historiography from Reformation to "Enlightenment"', *The Historical Journal*, 55 (2012): 1117–60.

⁶ See Juliette A. Groenland, 'Humanism in the classroom', in *The Making of the Humanities, Volume I: Early Modern Europe*, ed. R. Bod, J. Maat and T. Weststeijn (Amsterdam, 2010), 199–229.

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sought to put ancient wisdom to work in a wide variety of modern contexts, seeking models for everything from mining technologies to warfare, control of the passions, love and friendship, state and government, and political rule and the giving of political advice.⁷ Often they did so outside of the university, but in Northern Europe they were commonly professors. In this regard, it is important to observe that early modern European universities were not founded on or governed by the ideal of the free exercise of individual reason. Rather, they were institutions where learning was placed at the disposal of churches and princes, with the arts faculty furnishing students with the linguistic skills and basic knowledge necessary to undertake studies in the higher faculties of law, theology and medicine.⁸ In the German Empire, universities were thus designed to supply princely territorial states with trained clergy, jurists, officials and teachers, educated in accordance with the religious and ideological needs of particular states, under the supervision of political and religious officials.⁹ Pufendorf's three universities – Leipzig in Saxony that he attended as a student, Heidelberg in the Palatinate where he held the first chair in natural law and philology, and Lund in Sweden where he lectured in natural law and history – were of this kind. In this setting, it was not unusual for academics to act as theological officials for churches or political secretaries for princes, or for the career of a political humanist to combine academic scholarship with political service to princely courts, contexts that were quite porous to each other. In threading his way between academic appointments at Heidelberg and Lund, and service as official historian and political adviser first to the Swedish then to the Brandenburg court, Pufendorf's career exemplified that of the early modern political humanist.

⁷ Gerhard Oestreich, 'Die antike Literatur als Vorbild der praktischen Wissenschaften im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert', in *Classical Influences on European Culture A. D. 500–1500*, ed. R. R. Bolgar (Cambridge, 1971), 315–24.

⁸ Notker Hammerstein, 'Relations with authority', in *A History of the University in Europe, Volume II: Universities in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800)*, ed. Hilda de Ridder-Symoens (Cambridge, 1996), 114–54.

⁹ Anton Schindling, 'Schulen und Universitäten im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Zehn Thesen zu Bildungsexpansion, Laienbildung und Konfessionalisierung nach der Reformation', in *Ecclesia Militans. Studien zur Konzilien- und Reformationsgeschichte Remigius Bäumer zum 70. Geburtstag gewidmet*, ed. W. Brandmüller, H. Immenkötter and E. Iserloh (Paderborn, 1988), 561–70. Notker Hammerstein, 'Universitäten – Territorialstaaten – Gelehrte Räte', in *Die Rolle der Juristen bei der Entstehung des modernen Staates*, ed. R. Schnur (Berlin, 1986), 687–735.

Thanks to Fiammetta Palladini's research on Pufendorf's library we have something approaching a concrete picture of the spread and depth of his learning.¹⁰ In her synoptic discussion,¹¹ based on an analysis of the library's auction catalogue, Palladini reports that the library consisted of 1,663 volumes, containing approximately 2,000 separate works, considered thus to be of middling size for private scholarly libraries of the period. Seventy per cent of the volumes were in Latin, 9% in French, 8.5% German, 5.5% Greek, 3.5% Italian, 1% in Swedish, and then a small scatter of Dutch, English, Hebrew, Spanish and Danish works. In terms of the disciplinary composition of the library, historical works formed the largest category, comprising 427 (22.34%) of the approximately 2,000 separate works. The second-largest grouping was the juristic, consisting of 348 titles (18%), with Palladini also including some political and moral philosophy in this group, in addition to natural law and public law. Third in size was a grouping of 257 works (13.44%) consisting of medical and natural-philosophical works, including titles dealing with chemistry, alchemy, botany, zoology, mineralogy, pharmacology, geology and physics. Following in fourth place at 245 titles (12.8%) were works of philosophy broadly construed, with political philosophy dominating. The fifth largest grouping consisted of works of philology, ancient history and classical texts, consisting of 193 works (10%). Theological works comprised the sixth-largest group, containing 176 works (9%), including works of moral theology, biblical philology and kabbalistic works. In seventh place at 116 works (or just above 6%) came Pufendorf's collection of neo-Latin literature and modern works in national vernaculars. The eighth group consisted of miscellaneous works or unclassified works, making up 65 titles (3.4%), and then in ninth and tenth place came works dedicated to mathematics, geometry, astronomy and architecture, comprising 24 titles (1.25%) and forming the smallest group. In a summary comment, Palladini characterizes Pufendorf's library as that of a working humanist:

The Pufendorfan library was a working library. That means that in the first instance he had at his disposal the books that he used for his own writing (history, law, philosophy and theology); secondly works that represented the basis of

¹⁰ See Fiammetta Palladini, *La biblioteca di Samuel Pufendorf. Catalogo dell'asta di Berlin del settembre 1697* (Wiesbaden, 1999).

¹¹ Fiammetta Palladini, 'Die Bibliothek Samuel Pufendorfs'. A much more detailed analysis is provided in Palladini, *La biblioteca*, VIII–LXI.

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humanistic culture in which he also participated (classics and philology); third Pufendorf also owned works of conversational-literature (modern and neo-Latin literature, including travel literature which provided him with supporting anthropological material for his natural law works).¹²

A significant consequence of Pufendorf's humanistic learning is that his various writings do not form a unified system. This was a characteristic shared with other humanists such as Erasmus, Lipsius, Montaigne, Vossius and Grotius, and observing this is in no sense a criticism. Rather, it is a pointer to the fact that, unlike metaphysical philosophers, humanists did not regard knowledge as constituting a unity grounded in abstract principles, but as a house of many mansions through which the humanist roamed, gathering the intellectual materials, arts and methods needed for particular purposes and occasions.¹³ It was quite foreign for humanists in general and Pufendorf in particular to think of knowledge as forming a unity due to its grounding in something called reason. Pufendorf thus turned his back on the model of intellectual unity provided by the scholastic model of man's rational participation in God's divine intellection of all possible things. Neither did he show any interest in the modern variant of this model that had been improvised by another Leipzig graduate, the metaphysician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and then turned into a scholastic programme by the latter's follower, Christian Wolff. Reason for Pufendorf was not an essence or faculty that man shared with God and through which all things could be known. It was only a generic name for man's capacity to learn and think by reading books, making observations and experiments, and drawing conclusions.

This meant that what counted as rational knowledge differed between domains characterized by different arts of reasoning, which in turn led to the cultivation of an eclectic and polymathic intellectual disposition. The dispersed and domain-specific character of reason also allowed Pufendorf to carve out an important domain of knowledge – knowledge of God – that

¹² Palladini, 'Die Bibliothek Samuel Pufendorfs', 36.

¹³ On this difference, see Jill Kraye, 'Philologists and philosophers', in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. J. Kraye (Cambridge, 1996), 142–60. Dmitri Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom in the Age of the New Science: Histories of Philosophy in England, c. 1640–1700* (Cambridge, 2015), 1–32. Martin Mulsow, 'Christian humanism in the age of critical philology: Ralph Häfner's *Gods in Exile*', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 70 (2009): 659–67. Gianna Pomata and Nancy G. Siraisi, 'Introduction', in *Historia*, ed. Pomata and Siraisi, 1–38.

was not based in reason at all, but rather in the divinely revealed truths of the Bible. Pufendorf thus rejected the various programmes to harmonize philosophy and theology, ‘reason’ and ‘revelation’, that characterized scholastic and modern metaphysics.¹⁴ Instead, like the Lutheran Pietists with whom he was closely associated, Pufendorf declared that, as the result of their flawed intellectual faculties, humans could have no rational insight into God’s reasoning or mind. Knowledge of the divine will could thus only be obtained through biblical revelation, while knowledge of natural and human things had its own sources in erudition, observation and reasoning.¹⁵ Pufendorf’s unswerving commitment to a biblically based Lutheran faith was thus neither the foundation of his ‘observational’ natural law nor in tension with it.¹⁶ Rather, it constituted an adjacent way of intellectual and moral life, dedicated to the pursuit of eternal happiness rather than civil well-being. For these reasons Pufendorf’s writings in the discursive or disciplinary fields that he mastered – natural law, imperial public law, philology, history and theology – do not constitute a unified system with a single philosophical or methodological foundation, not even when several of them are present within one work. They form instead an array of intellectual endeavours held together by Pufendorf’s humanist learning and the circumstances and purposes that called it into action.

Pufendorf’s intellectual profile is thus not that of the genius philosopher who discovers in scrutinizing their own mind fundamental principles supposedly capable of founding or revolutionizing state, society and church.¹⁷ Rather, it is that of the political humanist who investigated a vast array of ancient and modern writings in order to assemble the intellectual arts, examples, wording and tools that he needed to engage

¹⁴ For a characteristic criticism of the ‘mixing’ of theology and philosophy, revelation and reason, aimed at Valentin Alberti, see Samuel Pufendorf, *Commentatio super invenusto pullo*, in *Eris Scandica*, 259–92, at 265–6.

¹⁵ On Pufendorf’s religious comportment and theological writings, see Döring, *Pufendorf-Studien*, 55–115. Döring, ‘Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung der theologischen und religionspolitischen Vorstellungen Samuel von Pufendorfs’. See also Walter Sparr’s Chapter 12.

¹⁶ For the argument that Pufendorf’s natural law was grounded in his Lutheran faith, and that this blocked its secular and liberal development, see Leonard Krieger, *The Politics of Discretion: Pufendorf and the Acceptance of Natural Law* (Chicago, 1965), 243–54.

¹⁷ For the profiling of Spinoza in this way, see Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2001).

with the problems that confronted him at the interface of his academic and political offices.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Pufendorf's erudite adaptation of ancient wisdom to modern problems and circumstances was actually more urgent, fraught and telling than a good deal of the supposedly society-shattering thought ascribed to the heroes of philosophy. In fact, Pufendorf's work was driven by a cascading series of conflicts, exigencies and unplanned opportunities. As a result, the intellectual instruments that he improvised and the works that he fashioned were typically in the service of some political, religious or academic agenda, and hence frequently in conflict with those supporting rival agendas. That said, it is possible to discern amid his diverse works a certain abiding intellectual and moral disposition. This was formed by the manner in which he used his erudition firstly to provide a secular or civil grounding for a state capable of governing multiple religions, and secondly to defend a biblically based pietistic form of Protestant theology and religion.

2. Education and Formation

Born into a Lutheran clerical household in the middle of the Thirty Years War, it is perhaps not surprising that Pufendorf became committed to the cultural and political defence of Protestantism against political Catholicism, and to the stabilizing and pacifying role of the sovereign territorial state. These two life-long commitments, coupled with his exposure to the intermittent war between Sweden and Denmark, arising from his service to the Swedish court, meant that Pufendorf's central writings – in the areas of natural law, political history and theology – would never be free of the interests that drove them and the conflicts that shaped them. That is what makes these works so interesting and challenging, and their author so multifaceted and engaging, as the contributions to this volume make clear. In order to bring this unusual figure into sharper focus, and to introduce the ensuing chapters dedicated to particular aspects of his writings and life, it is necessary to say a little more firstly about Pufendorf's

¹⁸ The failure to understand this has led some scholars to criticize Pufendorf for not personifying the critical political philosopher that they imagine he should have been. See, for example, Krieger, *Politics of Discretion*.

formation as a political humanist and secondly about the itinerary of his career and writings.

Pufendorf was born on 8 January 1632 in the Saxon village of Dorfchemnitz, where his father was a Lutheran pastor, before becoming pastor to the nearby village of Flöha in 1633. As an overwhelmingly Lutheran princely territorial state, Saxony was subject to the depredations of the Thirty Years War. In 1637 the Flöha parsonage was plundered and the family threatened by soldiers of the Catholic imperial army. A renewal of this threat in 1639 saw the Pufendorfs temporarily flee the town.¹⁹ Presumably, these events made a significant impression on the young Samuel, perhaps imprinting his abiding concerns with the vulnerability of the Protestant religion and the protective role of the sovereign territorial state.

Pufendorf's formal schooling began in 1645 when he was sent to the grammar school in Grimma, following in the footsteps of one of his older brothers, Esaias. Grimma was an elite grammar school (*Fürstenschule*), teaching the classical texts and philology, and functioning as a feeder-school for the University of Leipzig. There is little remaining evidence about the curriculum and pedagogy at Grimma, but we do know from Pufendorf's later complaints that he was drilled in logic, grammar and rhetoric. We also know, courtesy of an anecdote about its theft, that he kept a commonplace book, in which students were encouraged to transcribe extracts culled from their reading of the classical texts. The keeping of such books was a key feature of humanistic learning. This literate practice was intended to build-up a *copia*, or storehouse, of stylistic exemplars, historical narratives, famous lives, moral adages, philosophemes and political examples on which humanists could draw when composing discourses for a wide variety of circumstances and purposes.

By the time that the 18-year-old Pufendorf enrolled at the University of Leipzig in 1650 – the same year that Swedish occupying forces vacated the city – he was thus already fully embarked on the path of Protestant humanistic learning that would now be further developed through eight years of academic study. The foremost scholar of Pufendorf's time at Leipzig has observed that almost nothing is known about his course of studies there.²⁰ Nonetheless,

¹⁹ Döring, 'Biographisches zu Samuel von Pufendorf', 24.

²⁰ Detlef Döring, 'Samuel Pufendorf als Student in Leipzig', in *Samuel Pufendorf in der Welt des 17. Jahrhunderts: Untersuchungen zur Biographie Pufendorfs und zu seinem Wirken als Politiker und Theologe* (Frankfurt am Main, 2012), 1–43, at 24.

a good deal can be deduced from Döring's account of the Leipzig curriculum and teaching, which can in turn be partially verified through the records of Pufendorf's contributions to the scholarly society to which he belonged – the *Collegium Anthologicum*. Setting aside the medical faculty, the most important disciplines taught at Leipzig during the 1650s were classical philology, historiography, theology and jurisprudence. The evidence from Pufendorf's contributions to the *Collegium* suggests that his driving concerns were with classical philology and history, with his interest in theology being centred in biblical philology, but there is no evidence that he attended lectures in jurisprudence.

That said, it must be kept in mind that the philological study of the classics by no means excluded the study of modern history, politics, law and philosophy, since philology was fundamentally a way of studying texts and documents of any kind in their historical settings. The historian of philosophy Jacob Thomasius, who joined the Leipzig arts faculty in 1652, thus not only lectured on ancient pagan philosophers and early Christian theologians, but also offered lectures on Hobbes, Gassendi, Descartes and Spinoza, indicating his willingness to critically engage with a series of modern philosophers, all of whom would feature in Pufendorf's major natural law work, the *De jure naturae et gentium* of 1672.²¹ Pufendorf's studies at Leipzig would seem to have traversed a similar array of ancient and modern texts and disciplines. Despite their focus in classical texts, source criticism and biblical philology, his philological studies were open to modern writers, while his biblical theology seems to have been informed by the anti-Catholic, anti-Syncretist and anti-Calvinist outlook of Leipzig Lutheranism.

This conjecture finds significant confirmation in the 53 lectures that Pufendorf presented to the *Collegium Anthologicum*. These presentations were grounded in philological method and used many of the ancient and modern authors who would appear in Pufendorf's mature works – from Apuleius, Aristotle and Bodin, through Casaubon, Cicero, Conring, Diodorus Siculus, Erasmus and Grotius, and extending to Herodotus, Lucretius, Luther, Pliny, Plutarch, Polybius, Scaliger, Suetonius and Tacitus. Demonstrating the flexibility of the humanist approach, Pufendorf addressed a variety of topics that would continue to preoccupy

²¹ On Thomasius, see Sicco Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte: Philosophiegeschichte zwischen Barok und Aufklärung* (Tübingen, 2004), 21–98.