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Richard Whatmore, ed. *Intellectual History, 1st Edition*. New York and London: Routledge, 2015. 2,134 pages, 12 B/W Illus. \$1590.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-415-66299-4.

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Roundtable on Routledge Intellectual History

The following is a roundtable review of the four-volume Intellectual History, edited by Richard Whatmore (London and New York: Routledge, 2015). The roundtable was commissioned and edited by H-Ideas review editors Nicolaas P. Barr, Eliah Bures, Aidan Beatty, and Madeleine Elfenbein

Introduction to the Roundtable: Qualifying “Intellectual History” by Tracie Matysik

Commissioned by Nicolaas P. Barr

Intellectual history is at the moment a booming sub-field of the historical profession. A field that once implied a narrow history of largely philosophical ideas, usually articulated by elite European, usually male, thinkers, has been undergoing a long-overdue transformation and reinvigoration in recent years. New books in global intellectual history, a journal by that name, and new academic organizations such as the African American Intellectual History Society and the Society for United States Intellectual History all point to a field newly populated by voices that were once nowhere to be found in leading intellectual history journals. Given this uptick in historians of diverse backgrounds self-identifying as intellectual historians, it is no wonder that, as part of its Critical Concepts in Historical Studies series, Routledge would commission a four-volume anthology of outstanding articles that have shaped the field.

Yet, as intellectual history globalizes and diversifies—

as it intersects with all other subdisciplines of the historical profession, whether the history of science, economic history, gender and queer studies, the histories of race and racism, political history, and so on—it becomes clear that its practitioners partake in as many methodologies as the topics they engage. The ideas that emerge from political activism or in the streets or those that emerge from policy room discussions require different reading techniques, different archives, than the ideas that circulate through a university or a medical institution. Some intellectual historians continue to focus on texts as their primary source, but others turn to art, architecture, music, epics, folklore, and film. Some focus on intellectual movements of the past that have cohered in “schools” with stated guidelines or manifestos, while others target more diffuse—perhaps even unnamed—patterns of thought that the historian has to detect and label. If much of the newest intellectual history might have been deemed “cultural” history in the 1990s, in order to distinguish it from a traditional focus on elites in intellectual history, it is arguably a democratizing move today to recognize all history of thought as “intellectual history” and to acknowledge the wide range of reading and interpretive strategies necessary to engage that history.

In the context of this expansion and diversification of the field, it might be a fool’s errand to try to adequately represent “intellectual history” with any delimited collection. Perhaps the best one can do at this point is provide

worthwhile cross sections of the field—meaningful slices through the vast and varied panoply of methods and topics that loosely group themselves under the broad heading. One could, for instance, assemble volumes on the intellectual history of gender and sexuality, on the intellectual history of economic thought, or on that of postcolonial and decolonial thought—to name just a few possible cuts through the complex field. Any one of these cross sections would afford a rich array of classic articles, articles about leading thinkers from the past, articles about methodological disputes.

As the reviews in this forum suggest, Richard Whatmore's impressive four-volume anthology offers us just such a highly specific cross section. While the set commissioned by Routledge is titled simply *Intellectual History* without a qualifier, the reviewers here all note that the anthology's concentration as a whole is indisputably the history of European political thought as treated by the so-called Cambridge school of intellectual history—a school of insistently contextualist methods of historical inquiry that has included practitioners such as Quentin Skinner, J. G. A. Pocock, Peter Laslett, and others. As Whatmore insists, that school is internally diverse and marked by disagreement. As Michael Behrent observes in his review of the first volume, however, those differences and disagreements might be more pronounced to those loosely associated with the school than to those from other intellectual historical orientations—be they practitioners of cultural history, Foucauldean archaeology, the history of science, or many other “subcurrents omitted from the volume.”

Recognizing that any anthology necessarily involves hard choices of selection and thus leave gaping holes in coverage, the reviewers here, each of whom addresses one volume of the four, nonetheless observe rather striking omissions in this collection. Behrent, writing about the volume “The Philosophy of Intellectual History,” comments that “if this collection were your first introduction to historical methodology, you would have no clue, from reading it, that gender, postcolonial, and global history had utterly transformed the field.” Likewise, Amy Jelacic, taking on the third volume, “Classic Essays by Intellectual Historians,” notes the striking paucity of contributions by women or about women (only five and a half articles of eighty-five are by women). Even sticking to the realm of elite European thinkers, one might expect an essay on Simone de Beauvoir or Hannah Arendt, although Mary Wollstonecraft does earn one essay in volume 2, “Classic Essays – Philosophers.” Writing about that volume, George Klosko raises a different question,

namely, why the history of Marxist thought commands so little attention. In a complementary observation, Knox Peden—addressing volume 4, “Controversies in Intellectual History”—deftly detects the privileging of liberalism and its heritage in both topic and methodology. To be sure, all reviewers recognize that the concentration on the Cambridge school and its established areas of interest is complemented with samples from other traditions: an essay by Dominick LaCapra stands in for all that poststructuralism or deconstruction has offered to the field; Ann Taylor Allen's remarkable article on feminism, social science, and “modernity” represents the contributions of feminist historians and historians of women, gender, and sexuality; Reinhard Koselleck warrants one article on linguistic change and the history of concepts.

Yet, for all of these omissions, the reviewers unanimously maintain that the anthology is a remarkable achievement for what it actually *does* include, finding its real strength in the Cambridge school concentration itself. Through that concentration, they suggest, the reader can glean a rich sense not only of the methodologies that have driven the school (insistent and comprehensive contextualism, attention to speech acts and their discursive setting) but also of its internal variations and divisions. Whether those disagreements dilute the idea that there is such thing as a Cambridge school, as Whatmore suggests, or are in fact the complex center that defines it, all reviewers in this forum find provocation in their collection in one anthology.

The reviews that follow thus concentrate on the productive insights that Whatmore's chosen thematic focus yields. Arguably, any good cross section of a sprawling field should, when framed properly, generate questions that extend beyond itself to speak to the wider discipline in all its variation. Here the reviewers find that interesting patterns and problems emerge thanks to the provocative way in which Whatmore has organized articles side by side that were hitherto scattered across volumes of journals. In his review of the first volume, Behrent is most explicit about identifying the questions he gleans from Whatmore's Cambridge school focus, with these four structuring his essay:

“What is intellectual history's unit of analysis?”

“What kinds of projects can intellectual history rightfully undertake?”

“What problems does language present to intellectual history?”

“Does intellectual history really need a method?”

Although not stating the question so directly, Klosko follows by asking who the audience is—for this anthology, but perhaps also for intellectual history more broadly: philosophers, political theorists, other historians, specialists of specific subfields of thought? Needless to say, the answer can vary for any given contribution, and Klosko is wondering whether there really is a reader for the anthology as a whole or whether its parts will continue to appeal solely to specialists in specific subject areas. In her review, Jelacic asks about both the explicit and implicit schools or orientations in the field and how they relate to one another: How do schools form? Do they evolve out of or cohere around founding kernels of scholarship? Are they better defined by their agreements or their disagreements? Or are they marked primarily by their difference from other schools or movements, coming into relief only through juxtaposition with what they are not? In a complementary way, Peden asks about implicit assumptions that a working group or school might make. More specifically, he draws out an implicit *political* orientation in the articles Whatmore selected (a tendency toward liberalism), suggesting the larger question of how and in what ways methodological and disciplinary practices betray political slants. While Peden seems to argue for no *necessary* connection between any particular methodological or disciplinary practice and political orientation, the question remains as to how the two nevertheless become embedded in one another at a practical level.

Readers of this forum will get a sense of the important contribution Whatmore has made to the field of intellectual history. There is, however, unanimous agreement that his anthology does not capture the richness and expansiveness that the subdiscipline now represents. And perhaps the volumes might have been better titled to indicate their particularity, rather than claiming to represent the field as a whole. The time is long past when mostly white, European, male can serve as the unqualified universal—a fact that Whatmore, as editor of the journal *Global Intellectual History*, understands very well. Nonetheless, the reviewers are also unanimous that there is tremendous value in the particular slant that Whatmore has taken, and they offer the reader a helpful guide through the voluminous project.

Michael C. Behrent on *Intellectual History, Volume I: The Philosophy of Intellectual History*

Commissioned by Eliah Bures

Historians are weaned on Max Weber’s claim that the selection of subject matter necessarily implies bias. What would be more natural than to expect that a collection of thirteen essays selected to represent “the philosophy of intellectual history” would betray some partiality? This anthology—the first of four volumes devoted to seminal articles in intellectual history that Richard Whatmore has edited for Routledge’s Critical Concepts in Historical Studies series—is hardly comprehensive. Nor is it deceptive: it wears its methodological preferences on its sleeve. But while the picture it presents of the discipline is narrow, the volume does deliver on the promise of its title. Philosophy, it reminds us, is not only something that intellectual historians study; it is constitutive of their conception of the historical craft.

In his brief, to-the-point introduction—the only piece written specifically for this volume—Whatmore claims that the collection’s intention is “to provide some of the best definitions of the practice of intellectual history” (p. 2). True, a modest effort has been made to cover a plurality of methods. Two essays deal (more or less) with Arthur Lovejoy’s “history of ideas.” Another two explore the German tradition of conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*). We learn, thanks to the inclusion of a well-known article by Dominick LaCapra, that one can be poststructuralist. Yet the remaining eight essays belong squarely to the same camp: they either exemplify or challenge the approach to intellectual history associated with Quentin Skinner, J. G. A. Pocock, and the so-called Cambridge school. Whatmore claims that the term “Cambridge school” is increasingly seen as “a misnomer, because those associated with it disagree about almost every aspect” of intellectual history (p. 13). Perhaps; one suspects, however, that a cultural historian, a proponent of Foucauldian archaeology, a historian of science, and adherents to other subcurrents omitted from the volume might disagree even more. The collection would have been more accurately entitled “The Cambridge School and Its Critics.” Or maybe: “Contextualism and Its Discontents.”

The volume is, moreover, decidedly inward-looking. It is clearly aimed at a rarefied audience of unrepentant intellectual historians. If this collection were your first introduction to historical methodology, you would have no clue, from reading it, that gender, postcolonial, and global history had utterly transformed the field; indeed, even cultural history barely registers. Yet once these limitations are acknowledged, one can get down to the more interesting business of recognizing the volume’s usefulness. The book does display the “remarkable body of

work” that historians in dialogue with the Cambridge School have produced (p. 13). And, faithful to its title, it does compel the reader to address the question, *Is there a “philosophy” of intellectual history?* And if so, what might it be?

To the extent that a philosophy does lurk within these pages, it might be deemed to consist of a series of questions. The first would be, *What is intellectual history’s unit of analysis?* Arthur Lovejoy, as John Diggins reminds us in his essay, founded his vision of the discipline on the study of “unit-ideas,” that is, ideational constellations that persist over time even as their configurations vary (as with “the great chain of being”). Skinner, by contrast, maintains that intellectual history can only credibly study authorial intentions, which he defines narrowly as what an author would have understood him or herself to be doing in writing a text. Pocock, the Cambridge school’s other leading exponent, is less concerned with authorial intentions than with the recovery of “political languages” and linguistic paradigms and the possibilities that inhere in their very structure. As its name indicates, the German school of conceptual history takes as its unit of analysis concepts, understood, as Melvin Richter explains, as “contested intellectual constructions” (p. 152). For these scholars, intellectual history is the pursuit of social history by other means: while not reducible to economic, social, and political phenomena, concepts nonetheless track, at the ideational level, shifts in the structure of society. Finally, the deconstructionist approach theorized by Dominick LaCapra, drawing notably on the work of Jacques Derrida and Mikhail Bakhtin, maintains that historians must analyze texts *qua* texts; rather than simply being documents that register events, texts, LaCapra argues, are endowed with “work-like” features that can challenge, subvert, or “carnivalize” contemporary assumptions and discourses.

How one views the field’s proper unit of analysis has important consequences for another question the volume tacitly raises: *What kinds of projects can intellectual history rightfully undertake?* Skinner’s position is the most categorical: intellectual history can only examine individual statements uttered in particular contexts, which means reconstructing the contextual background—that is, the discursive conventions—that throw into relief the moves that particular authors make (or fail to make). Skinner objects to Lovejoy-style histories that trace idea formations over the centuries not because they can “sometimes go wrong,” but because “they can never go right” (p. 63). The only valid projects are those that aspire to understand individual utterances. Yet unlike

Skinner’s, Lovejoy’s historical vision is founded, as Diggins reminds us, on the premise that “how an idea comes into existence may be less important than what it does to keep the life of the mind alive, to keep thought probing at the pitch of passion” (p. 25). Understood in this way, it becomes possible to tell the history of an idea and the concerns that sustain it over an extended stretch of time. Skinner’s objections notwithstanding, Lovejoy’s conception of history may not be all that different from Pocock’s, whose account of Peter Laslett’s role in pioneering the contextual approach to the history of political thought at Cambridge in the 1950s is one of the volume’s highlights. Though Pocock, like Skinner, has made the recovery of past political languages his trademark, his concern has always been to demonstrate how these languages define a constellation of positions that unfold over time (such as classical republicanism in its Italian, British, and American iterations). Pocock, as Iain Hampsher-Monk explains, constructs narratives that illustrate “the exploration (under stress) of the logical possibilities afforded by the original linguistic set, or grammar” (p. 259). Thus, even the very circumscribed definition of intellectual history advanced by the Cambridge contextualists has generated, in practice, projects of very different scope and purpose.

Conceptual history, for its part, is the variety of intellectual history that has most frequently engaged in collaborative work. The project of tracking the discrete yet interrelated development of concepts over time, as practiced in such works as the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* and the *Handbuch politisch-sozialer Grundbegriffe in Frankreich 1680-1820*, is an undertaking so vast that it has necessarily engaged the efforts of entire armies of historians. With the exception of a few significant monographs, conceptual history has also generally adopted a lexicon or dictionary format. In this genre, concepts are more often catalogued and alphabetized than narratively unpacked. LaCapra, finally, invites intellectual historians to embrace the necessarily interpretive character of their enterprise, which brings them closer to philosophers or literary critics: by reading texts in a “‘dialogical’ fashion,” the historian both acknowledges their inscription in the past and the way that, as “events in the history of language” (p. 210), texts regenerate, through the experience of reading, questions that are “forever old and new” (p. 209).

Despite the considerable differences separating these approaches, almost all of them recognize that intellectual historians must be attuned to language. Thus, a further question that the contributions engage with is,

What problems does language present to intellectual history? Two distinct philosophies inform the two major methodologies intellectual historians have pursued. Ludwig Wittgenstein's views on language have left on an indelible mark on the Cambridge school's theoretical pronouncements. Modern philosophy's crucial insight, for Skinner, is "that we should study not the meanings of words, but their use"—a formula he attributes to Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (p. 65). Yet when it comes to explaining the implication of this claim for the practicing historian, Skinner turns to John Austin. The criteria for understanding a speech act is what Austin calls "being on the uptake": not just decoding words, but grasping the ends to which they are employed. Cambridge school "contextualism" is, theoretically speaking, ancillary to its commitment to speech-act theory. We might more accurately, if less felicitously, speak of Cambridge school "illocutionarism." Context—understood as discursive conventions, not social or political setting—is necessary to understand past utterances if and only if they are speech acts on the uptake of which we seek to be.

This feature of Skinner's methodology has been the target of considerable criticism. Marc Bevir, in a celebrated essay included in the volume, claims that Skinner exaggerates what historians need to know before they can understand a past utterance. Skinner, Bevir argues, claims historians "must approach a text with a prior theory that covers the conventions in terms of which the author expressed his illocutionary intentions in writing that text" (p. 240). Put simply, Skinner says that before we can understand an utterance, we must first correctly identify its discursive context (this is what John Dunn, another Cambridge school figure, calls "closing the context," p. 113). Yet this assertion, Bevir contends, is wrong: to understand utterances, we do not need an exact "prior theory," but merely a good enough "passing theory," which we arrive at by creatively patching up the gap between the text's meaning and the theory we bring to bear on it through "a leap of understanding" (p. 241). Familiarity with context is certainly useful when reading texts from the past, but Skinner, in Bevir's view, makes too much of this. Our passing theories serve us fine.

The other philosophy of language that has shaped the methodology of intellectual history is philosophical hermeneutics, from Wilhelm Dilthey to Hans-Georg Gadamer and Derrida by way of Martin Heidegger. The emphasis here is not on statements as actions, but on language as the locus of history's inherently interpretive character. This position has implications for under-

standing both language's role in history and the ways in which historians can understand linguistic expressions from the past. Richter reminds us that Gadamer was a founding editor of the *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* (Archive for Conceptual History) and that Reinhart Koselleck, conceptual history's preeminent scholar, attended Gadamer's seminar, where he crossed paths with Heidegger. This philosophical lineage contributed to one of conceptual history's key claims: that language registers one of modernity's most fundamental experiences, which was "a crucial shift in the conception of time, along with the reorientation towards the future" (p. 155). In an important essay included in the volume, Koselleck argues that language is endowed with characteristics that shape yet which are not inherent in the sequence of historical events, namely the fact that linguistic phenomena are repeatable: language, he explains, "bundles together, as a storehouse of experience, the conditions of possible events," anticipating "possible events which, under different conditions, may, but need not, recur" (p. 138). As Koselleck argues, we can understand something about how democracy developed in Great Britain, France, and Germany by considering the distinct ways in which the temporalities of language interacted with the temporalities of events in each case.

LaCapra's deconstructionist method is also deeply indebted to hermeneutics. This is evident when he implicitly reproaches Cambridge-style contextualism for being monologic, that is, for believing the task of interpretation to be complete when the historian has grasped a past author's intention—when the context, to use Dunn's phrase, is closed. Setting aside the question of whether so complete an interpretation is ever possible, this approach overlooks the fact that interpretation is necessarily dialogical. LaCapra maintains that the historian's "own horizon is transformed as he confronts still living (but often submerged or silenced) possibilities solicited by an inquiry into the past" (p. 189). Thus, rather than seeking to pinpoint authorial intention through the reconstruction of context, hermeneutically inspired approaches to intellectual history devise strategies for the delicate business of unpacking these "storehouses of experiences."

Perhaps a final question that this volume raises is, *Does intellectual history really need a method?* The rigid approach that Skinner has defended over the objections of his many critics is premised on the conviction that we are only doing intellectual history if we are committed to determining what past authors meant by why they said, in terms that they could actually recognize. Nothing prevents us from doing philosophy, political theory,

or cultural criticism; but if that is what we wish to do, we should not call it history. Contextualism is the best and, in Skinner's view, only means of achieving this end. Bevir believes that, on this point, Skinner is exactly wrong: "the fact of human creativity," he writes, "means that there can be no fixed method for understanding texts. We cannot specify any prerequisites for adequate passing theories.... There can be no methodological rules, only rough guidelines and helpful hints" (p. 249). The hermeneutic situation in which intellectual history inherently finds itself leads one scholar to call rigorous method a necessity, and another to declare the kind of rigor that would "close the context" a pipe dream.

The first volume of Whatmore's series on critical concepts in intellectual history does, in this way, largely succeed in presenting some of the key theoretical conversations that have constituted intellectual history as a discipline over the past eighty years or so. The volume undoubtedly has its limitations. With the exception of the introduction, the volume is simply a reproduction of the essays as they first appeared in print. There is no index, comprehensive bibliography, or consistent system for notes; when one essay refers to another essay in the collection, the page references are to the original version, not to the present volume. Yet though little effort has been made to further the dialogue, the essays Whatmore includes are undeniably in conversation with one another. This useful collection reminds us how much intellectual historians, in their commitment to recovering the ideas of others, have enriched the thinking of our own time as well.

George Klosko on *Intellectual History, Volume II: Classic Essays—Philosophers*

Commissioned by Aidan Beatty

We have here a collection of fifty-three previously published articles on important figures in the history of political thought. It is advertised as a "landmark collection" that provides "a comprehensive survey of the subdiscipline, and assembles the very best research" of scholars in several countries "from ancient times to the present." Subjects addressed range from Plato to Michel Foucault, spread out relatively evenly through time, though more recent authors seem to receive short shrift. The twentieth century receives five pieces: two on Max Weber, then one each on John Dewey, Carl Schmitt, and Foucault. In addition to the standard, major figures in the history of political thought, articles address some interesting and perhaps surprising theorists who are less

familiar. These include: Richard Hooker, John Milton, François Fénelon, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, and perhaps less surprisingly, Bartolus of Sassoferrato, Bernard Mandeville, Robert Malthus, and Benjamin Constant. Theorists generally receive one article apiece, although Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and—surprisingly—Jeremy Bentham receive two each. Aside from some more recent omissions—for example, John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas—coverage is impressive. In keeping with the volume's intention to reproduce "classic articles," its contents appear to be well-known pieces by important scholars.

In the introduction, Richard Whatmore briefly notes his aim of including pieces that help to locate the different thinkers in their historical contexts. This is in opposition to the practice of philosophers, who have been known to extract specific arguments from texts and apply them directly to contemporary debates. Whatmore's aim is in keeping with overall theme of the four-volume set: *Intellectual History*. The articles in this volume are purportedly by "philosophers," as opposed to the similar pieces by "intellectual historians," in volume 3 of the series, though a good deal of overlap seems inevitable, and some authors appear in both volumes (e.g., David Armitage, J. G. A. Pocock, Quentin Skinner).

It is difficult to assess the articles included. Many are clearly excellent pieces. I could go down the list, although readers with different interests and, perhaps, different expertise might favor different pieces. I think it is unlikely that many prospective readers are familiar with all the articles included, and so virtually everyone would likely benefit from reading at least some of the contents.

But the articles can be criticized on grounds other than quality. One concern is the volume's intended audience. Is this scholars in general or specialists on the different thinkers? The volume seems to follow a selection principle no more specific than that articles should be historically well informed. Some articles, perhaps the majority, address subjects central to theorists' work and so could be useful for nonspecialists. But this is not always the case. One advantage of a competing series, for example, Oxford Handbooks or Cambridge Companions, is that they present pieces expressly commissioned to provide overviews (though of different sorts) in regard to the contents in question. Many of the present volume's contents do not do this. For instance, the one piece on Marx, D. Doveton, "Marx and Engels on Democracy," is a valuable survey of where Marx and Engels stood in regard to democracy at different stages of their careers. But this

theme is not as central to Marx's thought as would be a piece that directly engaged his theory. The absence of in-depth discussion of Marxian theory is especially notable, as this is the only piece on that tradition of political thought. Lenin, Eduard Bernstein, Georg Lukacs, the Frankfurt school, and so forth are not included. Similar examples could be multiplied. For instance, in this category, I would include the article on Plato, A. Laks, "Legislation and Demiurgy: On the Relation between Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*". While clearly a fine piece, the article is mainly on the *Laws*, and not only would be highly difficult going for people not deeply conversant with that text, but it presents a perversely uncharitable reading of the *Republic*, which makes little effort to make sense of many of Plato's proposals in that work. In these cases, one could easily suggest pieces that would be more helpful to a wide readership. Moreover, it is likely that most people who work in the history of political theory have come across different articles that they think are particularly important or valuable, although tastes are likely to vary. For instance, in my view, Richard Ashcraft's historical work on Locke, "Revolutionary Politics and Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*" is more valuable and illuminating than the two pieces included. Something similar could be said about a piece on his theory of property, whether by C. B. Macpherson or another scholar.

All of these concerns are relatively minor, and perhaps pale before the evident quality of the articles included. But two more concerns bear mention. First is the age of the articles. Quick calculations indicate that the average age of the first ten articles is about thirty years, while some are a good deal older than that. The volume includes more recent articles, but of the fifty-three pieces, I count only six that are published after 2000 (though several more appeared in that year). The inevitable result is that the collection includes little scholarship that could be considered recent or cutting-edge.

Another concern is the four-volume set's exorbitant price: \$1,485.00 The volume under consideration in this review is large and, as indicated, contains many valuable articles. But these have been in print for a long time. It seems hard to imagine why it would not behoove a reader to spend a few hours in the library (or better, online) collecting the articles in question rather than paying Routledge's steep price.

Amy Jelacic on *Intellectual History, Volume III: Classic Essays by Intellectual Historians*

Commissioned by Madeleine Elfenbein

One of the major contributions of the field of intellectual history to the broader world of humanities scholarship is the idea that so-called classic texts are considered such due to a range of cultural and social processes that have conferred this status on these texts for various reasons that may or may not have merit. Applying these insights to the field of intellectual history itself is a natural action when considering a collection called *Classic Essays by Intellectual Historians*.

This is the third volume of the four-volume series *Intellectual History*, edited by Richard Whatmore. It begins with a short introduction by Whatmore explaining the rationale behind the collection. The key consideration here is how intellectual historians have handled the relationship between ancient and modern thinkers. Whatmore suggests that a "major division among scholars is the extent to which they argue that the modern world is best understood by reference to categories used by the Greeks and the Romans" and states that the volume has been arranged with this in mind (p. 1). The first half is composed of essays that consider the extent to which forms of politics in the early modern period can be mapped on to "ancient forms of argument, or indeed on to Christian philosophies modified by knowledge of what the ancients did in a pre-Christian age" (p. 2). Essays in the second half of the book reflect the idea that "the modern world emerged when ancient ways were renounced or deemed ... inapplicable to the altered world of the seventeenth century."

In the introduction Whatmore specially notes the inclusion of Peter Laslett's 1956 essay, "The English Revolution and Locke's 'Two Treatises of Government.'" As many intellectual historians will know, Laslett is responsible for groundbreaking scholarly editions of works by John Locke and Sir Robert Filmer; he placed these texts firmly in their historical contexts and in doing so showed that much conventional thinking about them was unsound or incorrect.[1] Perhaps his best-known contribution here was to show that Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, despite its publication year of 1690, was written in 1681 and therefore could not possibly have been intended as a defense of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, as earlier scholars had supposed. In doing this, Laslett powerfully demonstrated the importance of context for understanding the intended meaning of a text.

Laslett's contextualist work was a radical break from conventional treatments of the history of political thought and is commonly thought of as a, if not *the*, starting point of the so-called Cambridge school of in-

tellectual history. Decades later, this tradition remains unorthodox in many ways. Cambridge school methods have become highly influential within the field of intellectual history, but they have also been met with skepticism within the field and outside it and have hardly supplanted the vast array of other methods available for dealing with political ideas and their histories. Moreover, the school itself contains a great diversity of thought—something not always fully understood or appreciated among its critics and adherents alike.

The works collected in *Classic Essays by Intellectual Historians* include many by important figures in the Cambridge school tradition, including Quentin Skinner, John Pocock, John Robertson, and David Armitage, to name but a few. Among these essays the reader will see hints of that diversity which makes some skeptical that such scholars can be meaningfully grouped together in the same “school.” The reader will also see suggestions of a set of shared and implicit ideas about the distinctiveness of modern political thought, and when this is considered alongside the “ancients and moderns” rationale laid out in the introduction it becomes apparent that perhaps there is a second, unspoken split in this volume: work from the Cambridge school and from other traditions. This does not manifest as a sharp boundary, but the differences between the works as delineated by this second set of categories will be apparent to the careful reader.

Quentin Skinner’s “Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s Buon Governo Frescos: Two Old Questions, Two New Answers” is a particularly valuable inclusion, not just for its demonstration of intellectual history scholarship at the highest standard, but also for demonstrating how effectively contextualist methodology can be applied to artwork. At a time when many are moving to look beyond common areas of inquiry in intellectual history, which have traditionally been found among textual sources in European political thought, Skinner’s essay offers an important model for those seeking to produce rigorous, boundary-pushing scholarship. Ideas are not found solely in printed form, as Skinner ably demonstrates; his meticulous investigation of the famous frescos of the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, opens up and displays their rich layers of meaning and symbolism with great elegance. Many types of source can enrich our understanding of intellectual history and it is both beneficial and wise that we are open to this and embrace it where appropriate.

Less edifying is Jacob Viner’s “The Intellectual History of Laissez Faire.” This attempt to locate a twentieth-

century conception of laissez-faire across centuries, from ancient thinkers through medieval theology to seventeenth-century moral philosophers and on to the present day, will seem bizarre to anyone allergic to anachronism. It was originally delivered as a speech, which might be reason to excuse the glossing over of some of its subject matter; the many gross generalizations and sparse referencing are not so easily forgiven. Talk of the “defense of private property as against communism presented by Aristotle, and taken over by several of the early Christian Fathers” (p. 169) or the assertion that “the standard late-medieval meaning of ‘common estimation’ was market price under free competition” (p. 173) is baffling. It seems an unusual choice for inclusion when one considers the superior work in the history of economic thought by Donald Winch or Andrew Skinner, for example. This essay appears in the first half of the book and is ostensibly included as a work that seeks to connect our world to the ancients’, but unfortunately it is not a fine example of this.

At least half the essays in this collection form a bloc closely related through subject matter and citations. Its nexus is John Pocock’s scholarship on eighteenth-century British political thought generally, and particularly his essay “Hume and the American Revolution: The Dying Thoughts of a North Briton,” which appears part-way through the volume. Essays by István Hont, John Robertson, Duncan Forbes, Colin Kidd, Lance Banning, Joyce Appleby, and others coalesce around discussions of constitutionalism, republicanism, political economy, Machiavelli, David Hume, and Montesquieu. To be sure, the subject matter is diverse to a point, but this happens within clear bounds. Almost all of these articles directly engage with Pocock, many do so with Hont, and all are connected by a network of citations.

Taken as a whole, this collection-within-a-collection is stimulating; it was a pleasure to see the web of related articles and themes taking form, and reading these articles in succession allowed for a range of subtle links and common themes to appear as a result of deep and sustained focus on just a few key topics. It is surely instructive for a student readership to see this kind of academic debate taking place in this manner. The tight structure here throws the various scholarly strengths and weaknesses of each essay into sharp relief. Forbes’s incisive “Skeptical Whiggism, Commerce and Liberty” stands out for its careful consideration of the use of the labels “Whig” and “Tory” to describe the politics of Adam Smith and Hume, respectively. His development of the categories “skeptical Whiggism” and “vulgar Whiggism”

complicates understandings of the political and economic thought of each and challenges dubious orthodoxies. This work is sensitive to context and close to its primary sources; it contrasts strongly with essays such as the two on Jeffersonian thought, which seem more concerned with historiographical debates and sit above their primary material.

With approximately half the essays in this volume so closely linked, the other half ends up feeling like a somewhat random collection by comparison. This is a bit unfair and especially when that other half includes such illuminating work as “The Idea of ‘Character’ in Victorian Political Thought,” by Stefan Collini. The bracing eclecticism of the book’s early essays slowly gives way to controlled discussion of set topics in a more obviously curated set of articles, and the eventual turn back to topics outside eighteenth-century political thought is thus jarring. The content of the collection does evidently follow the rationale laid out in the introduction to a degree, but it also feels disjointed as a result of its eighteenth-century bloc.

Further, the themes that link that particular group have been explored before in such volumes as *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain* (1993), a festschrift for John Pocock that contains two of the articles appearing in the collection at hand: “The Rhapsody of Public Debt: David Hume and the Voluntary State Bankruptcy,” by István Hont and “Universal Monarchy and the Liberties of Europe: David Hume’s Critique of an English Whig Doctrine,” by John Robertson. When a book such as this exists, one can imagine few instances in which it would make more sense to turn to the collection under review, which performs a similar function with less specificity. Perhaps, however, a very general collection is a good place to encounter more things to explore via its footnotes and reference lists.

I finish this review by noting my surprise at finding only one woman’s name present among the authors of the twenty-two essays in *Classic Essays by Intellectual Historians*: that of Joyce Appleby. It is true that a gender disparity of this kind is not necessarily reason for immediate concern. The book is comprised of “classic” essays and that status tends to indicate something which has been around long enough to earn it; as the discipline of intellectual history was really taking shape throughout the twentieth century there were simply not many women among the most influential and high-output scholars. The reasons for why this is are important to explore and understand, of course, but they

do not change the actually existing state of affairs. If this volume was composed of essays published in decades when it can be fairly said that no women produced a “classic essay” in intellectual history, so be it. However, the earliest contribution is from 1956 and the most recent is from 2011, and with such a scope it is hard to defend a choice to include just one essay by a woman scholar. The work of Annabel Brett, Helena Rosenblatt, and Lorraine Daston, to name just a few, would have been at least equally worthy of inclusion as any essay in this volume, and in some cases more. It could have also addressed some of the book’s unusual gaps: for example, it was odd to see so little Hobbes in a survey of a discipline that has produced a wealth of scholarship on that subject.

Defining a set of classic essays is a significant act in the construction of the history of the field of intellectual history and I am not sure all inclusions in this volume are meritorious. The book’s thematic structures are difficult in some respects and the collection would have benefited from greater attention to this; the rationale given in the introduction does not seem entirely convincing or accurate when the strongest themes in the collection are identified and examined after reading. There are indeed many brilliant and indispensable essays brought together in *Classic Essays by Intellectual Historians*, and appreciating how and why they shine regardless of their setting is perhaps the most compelling reason to seek out this volume.

Note

[1]. Peter Laslett, ed. *Locke: Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), and Peter Laslett, ed. *Patriarcha and Other Political Works of Sir Robert Filmer* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949).

Knox Peden on *Intellectual History, Volume IV: Controversies in Intellectual History*

Commissioned by Nicolaas P. Barr

The fourth and final volume of Richard Whatmore’s collection maintains the emphasis on the Cambridge school and its legacy. Nominally focused on “Controversies in Intellectual History,” the book devotes roughly a third of its content to revisions and challenges to J. G. A. Pocock’s work. This would be cause for concern were Pocock not arguably the greatest intellectual historian of the age by any reckoning—and unarguably by this one. Other essays treat spatio-temporal challenges to the field, for example in Donald Kelley’s ruminations on “Intellec-

tual History in a Global Age” and David Armitage’s case for a “serial contextualism” in his consideration of intellectual history over the *longue durée*. North American intellectual history is more or less dispatched in a single entry, an excoriating assessment of Jonathan Israel’s multivolume history of the “radical Enlightenment” by Anthony La Vopa. Criticisms of Israel’s work are now legion. Despite its encyclopedic presentation of early modern philosophical culture, its claims for the centrality of a “package logic” of modernity located in Spinoza’s metaphysics are too proleptic to be persuasive. Even though Israel is a transplant from Britain, Whatmore includes this essay as indicative of a North American propensity for “grand controversies about the meaning of modernity” (p. 2). He is distrustful of Israel’s tendency to judge historical thinkers for their “unhealthy backwardness,” which gives his description of Israel as committing “all the sins of scholarship in the history of ideas before the 1960s” an element of presumably unintended irony.

Earlier volumes in the series acknowledged Reinhart Koselleck’s *Begriffsgeschichte* and various forms of French poststructuralism as offering rival approaches to the field. Curiously absent from the endeavor as a whole is any treatment of intellectual history internal to critical theory or Marxism. Perry Anderson’s Olympian surveys of political, social, and historical thought are nowhere to be found. Omission of Martin Jay’s synoptic histories of such entities as totality, vision, or experience is not surprising, given how suspiciously close to unit-ideas these notions appear. But in light of its focus on the emergence of the Frankfurt school out of the institutional intersection of competing discourses—Weberian sociology, Marxism, and psychoanalysis—one would think Jay’s pathbreaking history of the Institute for Social Research, *The Dialectical Imagination* (1973), would merit an honorable mention. (Disclosure: I was a doctoral student of Martin Jay’s and strive to play the apostate in all contexts but this one, apparently.)

It is a cardinal sin in book reviews to talk about what the book could have been rather than what it is, so there is no use pursuing this whataboutism much further. Every minimally informed and politically aware reader of this volume will have their own ideas about what is missing. Yet the name of the Routledge series to which this enterprise belongs is *Critical Concepts in Historical Studies*, and this largely justifies Whatmore’s focus on an approach to intellectual history that treats it as conceptually cohesive and borderline doctrinaire. Cambridge school contextualism is distinctive in a way that its North American, French, and German counterparts are not. In

each of these other cases, the approach to intellectual history is grounded in a philosophical orientation, usually some kind of hermeneutics. Jay’s work broadly instantiates Habermasian themes; Hayden White’s innovation lay largely in using theoretical principles from other disciplines to challenge the disciplinarity of history as such; Dominick LaCapra’s approach to intellectual history is plausibly if uncharitably describable as applied poststructuralism. Notwithstanding the philosophical elements one finds in Cambridge school contextualism—from Quentin Skinner’s appeal to speech act theory to Pocock’s Arendtian concern for the political action of the citizenry—there is a sense in which its approach to the past is *sui generis*. What Skinner, Pocock, and John Dunn share is a commitment to a distinctly historical mode of understanding that finds its ground not in a philosophical warrant for the method, but in the historical compartment itself. More royalist than the king(s), Whatmore makes plain that intellectual history is a safe space in which philosophy can find no quarter. This is why he endorses Ian Hunter’s capstone essay to this volume for “defending the practice of intellectual history from philosophers and philistines” (p. 3).

Hunter’s assessment of “The Mythos, Ethos, and Pathos of the Humanities,” is a tour de force that expands on his work tracing the persistence of scholastic metaphysics into the present via the persona of the philosopher or humanist academic who inculcates in adherents an air of heightened presupposition instead of a concern for judiciable evidence. Marshaling the descriptive resources of the empirical historian, Hunter shows how most defenders of the humanities prefer an existential compartment geared toward self-improvement (or outright transformation) to one grounded in the documentary or philological. The countervailing ethos on offer from Hunter is deemed consistent with the rule of unintended consequences and the incremental nature of historical change, two commitments Whatmore sees as integral to intellectual history as a discipline. I admit I fail to see the connection between an empirical attentiveness to myriad contexts and a vision of historical change as incremental. The knowledge of the past that intellectual history provides is what it is. Sometimes change will be sudden, demonstrably so. It seems to me that to insist that change is incremental is to smuggle a particular vision of politics into the method of intellectual history itself.

In this regard, the political origins of contextualism acquire their own meaning. It is no secret that intellectual history in its Cambridge formulation devel-

oped in opposition to Marxist approaches, such as C. B. Macpherson's theory of "possessive individualism" which he traced to Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. The negative example of Leo Strauss's work also mattered. But the virtues of the method should hardly stand or fall by its political orientation, as indeed they have not. Much of the contextualist work being done today on economic and political thought in the twentieth century yields insights that are, if not entirely continuous with Marxism, hardly antithetical to it.[1] Whatmore's volume is devoted to controversies in the field, but what will strike many readers as most controversial is this barely implicit link between political and disciplinary orientation.

To paraphrase the anthropologist Pierre Clastres on the state, to be opposed to a narrative of modernity requires being in favor of an alternative one. And Whatmore certainly concedes that, beyond the methodological affinities, what united the first generation of Cambridge school practitioners was an account of the origins of political modernity to rival the competing ideologies of the postwar moment. There are differences in the details, but the unifying concern was for the fate of the civic ideal—oriented around notions of the integrity of the political unit and what belonging to that unit entails—with the advent of the state as an impersonal and regulatory institution in many respects contrary to this ideal.

The dialectical nature of this tension was clearest in the relationship between virtue and commerce in Pocock's work, reaching a *summum* of sorts in his early masterpiece, *The Machiavellian Moment* (1975). Christopher Nadon's essay in this volume challenges Pocock's distinction between liberal and republican paradigms by focusing on Aristotle's role. More Pocockian than Pocock, Nadon's approach is to complicate the Aristotelian legacy, bringing nature back in as an essential ingredient in the account of moral perfection on offer in this tradition. John P. McCormack targets Skinner as well as Pocock, countering their putative elitism with his own reading of a more radical democratic element in Machiavelli's historical example that is hardly continuous with Pocock's Harringtonian or Madisonian preferences. Finally, Mark Jurdjevic suggests that, despite their reputation for pluralism and empiricism, Skinner and Pocock are both more hedgehogs than foxes when it comes to Renaissance humanism. Again, their challenge to one origin story takes the form of an alternative one, a vice deemed inconsistent with intellectual history as an ideal they promote.

These essays focused on the Italian setting amount to

minor revisions, ultimately. But their inclusion speaks to the overwhelming significance of that moment in the Cambridge school iconography. The most incisive assessment of Pocock focuses not on this aspect of his work, but instead his notions of "Greater Britain" as a subject of historical inquiry. Richard Bourke's "Pocock and the Presuppositions of the New British History," first published in *The Historical Journal* in 2010, is as subtle as it is illuminating in its focus on a "idealized conception of politics" that is no doubt present in Pocock's example, but seems to be a more general feature of the Cambridge school approach. "For Pocock," Bourke writes, "politics is an egalitarian enterprise charged with distributing the activities of ruling and being ruled" (p. 187). And it is this vision of politics that accounts for a dialectical conception of British imperial history, distinct from the Roman antecedent, in which "English attitudes and institutions had been perpetually modified and reshaped by colonial reaction and redefinition" (p. 178). Adding to the significance of European integration for Pocock's work on this subject, Bourke points to the phenomenon of Ulsterization as a vital political context for making sense of what Pocock himself once described as his "neo-Seeleyanism"—to wit, an integrated vision of the history of empire and the primacy of politics as the site of that history.

The volume is rounded out by two other articles that speak in different ways to intellectual history's virtues. Donald Winch's "Mr. Gradgrind and Jerusalem" issues a historical corrective to those who invoke Gradgrind's name to caricature the depredations of utilitarian capitalism. He does this by making clear Charles Dickens's own ambivalence about this character in *Hard Times* (1854), showing that F. R. Leavis's agenda-setting take on the book was more a reflection of his own Romantic anxieties than Dickens's Victorian ones. The outlier to the volume—in more ways than one—is Ann Taylor Allen's intellectual history of debates on the origin of the family in the late nineteenth century, a piece which first appeared in the *American Historical Review* in 1999, and which shows how the fracturing of society lamented by modernists was not experienced as a loss by everyone. Indeed, leading feminist thinkers repurposed work in anthropology, history, and sociology not simply to denaturalize patriarchy but to show that any legitimization of social roles based on a distinction between nature and culture was bound to fail.

Allen's article gets into the twentieth century, albeit barely. And Hunter's contribution deals summarily with French poststructuralism. But by and large the volume is overwhelmingly focused on the early modern period.

This is not incidental. The Cambridge school “method,” insofar as one remains, is built on the interrelated gestures of recovery and corrective. Reconstructing a context presupposes that such a context is not already the one in which you operate. This requires a certain gesture of distancing that is hard to accomplish when you speak the language. What is salutary in this approach is the challenge to teleological conceptions of history; those in the past were unenlightened, and since we now know better, we consequently know them better than they knew themselves. Work that starts from that stance will almost never be good history. But I wonder how we determine which presuppositions can be suspended and which cannot. In a primer on intellectual history published shortly after this collection appeared, Whatmore speaks of the advent of intellectual history out of a situation in which “it began to be recognized that there was nothing essential about human life and that particular experiences generated particular ideas, which might then play their part in shaping lived experience and what followed from it.”[2] That the particular begets the particular is platitudinous. But, whatever else it is, the claim that there is nothing essential about human life is hardly agnostic—which raises the question of its utility as a presupposition for work in intellectual history. Many read-

ers will recognize the bracing effect of Skinner’s “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas” in Whatmore’s enthusiastic description of it. But his gloss on it as an “inspiration,” a “classic statement” that “continues to give budding intellectual historians their sense of identity”[3] is just as likely to provoke eyerolls—not least for its inconsistency with the ethos called for and in large part on display in the essays he has collected for us. The future of intellectual history seems bright indeed, as long as the discipline remembers that what it needs to thrive are practitioners, not initiates.

Notes

[1]. Recent historical work on the intellectual history of globalism or globalization is a case in point. See, for example, Or Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939-1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017); and Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[2]. Richard Whatmore, *What Is Intellectual History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 21.

[3]. *Ibid.*, 46.

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