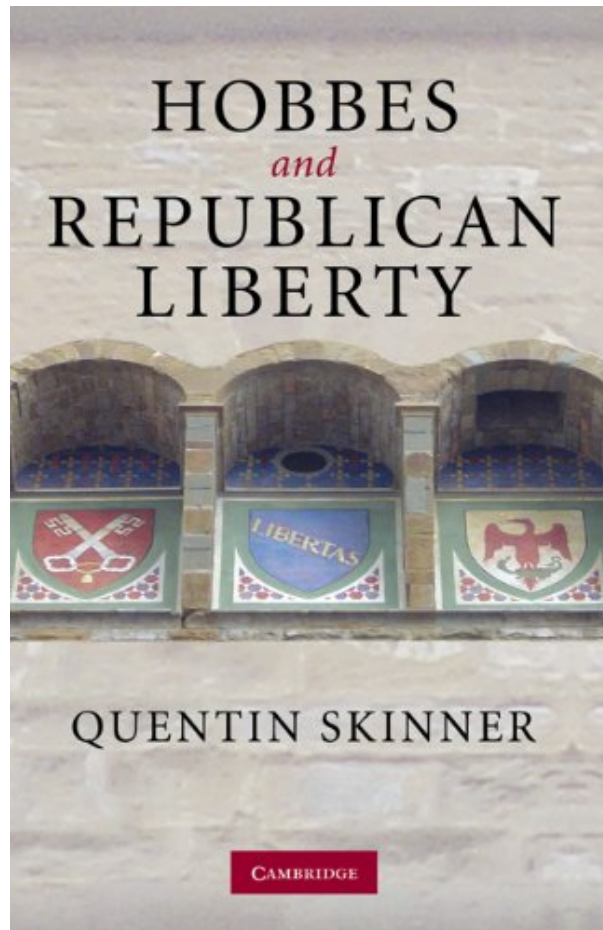


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Review

" Hobbes and Republican Liberty is rigorously argued, meticulously researched and lucidly written, as we have come to expect from Skinner....Skinner has indeed made a valuable contribution to the study of Hobbes as well as to the study of English political thought during the civil war period; it is one that cannot be ignored." - Geoff Kennedy, University of Ulster

About the Author

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Quentin Skinner is one of the foremost historians in the world, and in *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* he offers a dazzling comparison of two rival theories about the nature of human liberty. The first originated in classical antiquity, and lay at the heart of the Roman republican tradition of public life. Thomas Hobbes was the most formidable enemy of this pattern of thought, and his successive attempts to discredit it constitute a truly epochal moment in the history of Anglophone political thought. *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* develops several of the themes announced by Quentin Skinner in his celebrated inaugural lecture on Liberty before Liberalism of 1997. Cogent, engaged, accessible, and indeed exhilarating, this new book will appeal to readers of history, politics, and philosophy at all levels from upper-undergraduate upwards, and provides an excellent introduction to the work of one of the most celebrated thinkers of our time.

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Most helpful customer reviews

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Well Done and Informative for Our Times

By Dr. Terrence McGarty

Hobbes seems to come in and out of favor. In many ways he is seen as a sycophant to the King in his writings. Skinner uses the comparison of liberty as view in the classic republican sense to that as developed by Hobbes. For Skinner the classic republican liberty is that of the free man, as compared to the slave, one

whose actions are limited by a free man. Skinner then takes this concept and draws the line to and through the development of English law.

Skinner develops the liberty theme in Chapter 1 and on pp 34-35 he details some of the strengths and weaknesses of Hobbes and his approach. In reading Skinner one sees more clearly the jumps to faith used by Hobbes, the definitions without any basis in demonstrable fact of evidence that Hobbes uses in his constructions. This is in sharp contrast to Locke who is soon to follow. Specifically on p 35 the discussion of the equality of natural liberty to natural right is worth the reading. Skinner does the concepts justice.

On p 48 Skinner makes some telling comments. For example he states: "Politics, we are being reminded, is pre-eminently the arena in which fortune holds sway" He then continues with the statement: "Hobbes is one of the earliest English philosophers to write in a similar way (as to Aristotle) of "politics" as the art of governing cities."

Chapter 3 details the concept of liberty in the act of living in a real city. On p 79 Skinner states a telling statement: "For Hobbes, accordingly, the puzzle remains; what can it possibly mean when someone claims to be a free man while living under a monarch, in which the fullest rights of sovereignty will inevitably be held by the king himself." This is the quandary of Hobbes. Rather than rejecting the king outright, he struggles to justify liberty on the one hand and the almost divine right of the King. Skinner works elegantly through that tension.

In Chapter 5 Skinner deals with liberty in the context of Hobbes in the Leviathan. On p 127 he details Hobbes as follows defining liberty; "Liberty or freedom, signifieth (properly) the absence of Opposition (by Opposition I mean the Impediments of motion; and may be applied no less in Irrational and Inanimate creatures..."

The last is the culmination of freedom as per Hobbes, the ability of water to flow unstopped down a brook, no more no less. Chapter 6 takes this and carries it through a discussion of liberty and political obligation and finally Chapter 7 moves through the present.

Skinner has done a superb task in detailing Hobbes in an historical context and at the same time detailing the ever present issue of what makes a free man. Hobbes is an apologist for the central authority, in contrast to Locke and the other who follow. The whole basis of our Revolution in the United States was freedom as being free from Government oppression and oversight. Hobbes justifies that alternative view, albeit in a less than convincing manner.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Interesting

By R. Albin

This is an interesting extended essay on the development of Hobbes' concept of liberty. The author is the very distinguished intellectual historian Quentin Skinner. This is a nice example of Skinner's contextualism; the study of an idea via a close reading of its text and the surrounding contemporary literature, plus an informed view of contemporary events. Skinner discusses the concept of liberty in Leviathan and in some of Hobbes' earlier works, showing how Hobbes' conception of liberty changed significantly, at least partly in response to the polemics of other writers (most now largely forgotten) and also in response to major events. Hobbes point of departure was his effort to construct a systematic philosophy based on an atomistic, mechanical view of the universe. His conception of human psychology was highly individualistic, rather bleak, and social bonds were required to protect us from each other. Skinner follows Hobbes' definitions of liberty as based on this mechanical view, eventually freedom from external constraints on movement and not

much else. Skinner discusses Hobbes response to Republican theorists and others involved in the controversy about the extent of Royal authority in the events leading to the Civil War. Some of Hobbes' thought appears to have been inspired by minor writers of the time.

Skinner does a nice job of how Hobbes develops a sophisticated analysis of liberty in Leviathan and how Hobbes' arguments are related to contemporary controversies and the events of the Civil War. In particular, Skinner shows how Hobbes attempted to reduce the sting of his rather authoritarian approach, even when he was attacking Republican theorists for their rather naive (to him, at any rate) views of the power of the state and sovereignty. But Skinner shows also how Hobbes reached conclusions quite uncomfortable for conventional defenders of Royal authority. Hobbes' materialistic approach undermines any religious sanction for Royal power, and his emphasis on the crucial role of the state in guaranteeing social safety as the key aspect of legitimacy meant that any effective government, royal or not, could be accepted as legitimate.

This book is written well and as a nice feature, Skinner features the "emblematic" tradition of 17th century rhetoric in which striking visual allegories and images, such as the famous frontispiece of Leviathan, were an integral part of the argument of such works. This leads to the inclusion of quite a few interesting images.

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Four Stars

By Jeffrey Barnouw

good work

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