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INTRODUCTION

This reader provides an introduction to modern political philosophy from Machiavelli (1513) to Nietzsche (1887). Most of the works reprinted here have long been recognized as central to the history of political philosophy: Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Mill. Like any such selection, this one also reflects contemporary interests and preoccupations: Nietzsche seems a much more important political philosopher now than he did thirty years ago, and Mill's *The Subjection of Women* seems a much more important text. Adding one text in a reader such as this means dropping another; Marxism is the obvious casualty of the last twenty years, and though I have included an extensive selection from Marx himself, I have excluded Luxemburg, Lenin, and Trotsky, to name three for whom space might once have been found.

In selecting the texts, I have been conscious of the fact that most students are introduced to modern political thought in the course of a one-semester course. This volume therefore represents an idealized semester's reading: Instructors will want to drop one or more of the selections in order to make the program more manageable. I hoped the book would be shorter than it is, but it did not seem to me that there would be any general agreement about which texts could best be dropped: While one course may pass lightly over Hobbes in order to spend time on Locke, another will skim Rousseau in order to give time to Hume, Smith, and Burke. My hope is that nearly all instructors will find their most urgent needs satisfied by the present selection.

While there is in practice fairly general agreement about which texts students should read, we noticeably lack any satisfactory account of how the modern list of 'classic' texts came to be put together. Instead we have accounts of the changing reputations of individual thinkers, such as Machiavelli, over time, and proposed solutions to particular problems, such as why Locke has always seemed more important in America than in England. But when, where, and why did political theory crystallize into a discipline in which these particular texts were accepted as canonical? Alas, political scientists, philosophers, and historians of ideas have been much less self-conscious about questions of canon-formation than literary critics. But it is worth pausing to note that the canon is more diverse than one might fear, yet also less representative than one might hope. More diverse, in that the texts which are accepted as classics do not simply represent the orthodoxies of liberal, democratic culture: Machiavelli and Hobbes are often made to seem more respectable than they should be, but for century after century they have mainly been read as presenting challenging arguments that must be refuted. Despite the shifting fortunes of Marxism and the continuing disagreement as to whether the works of the 'young' or the 'mature' Marx are the more interesting, Marx's arguments will continue to receive attention, as Rousseau's do. Nevertheless, the canon does not adequately represent the historical evolution of political theorizing. It is far too secular, for one thing (a defect I have sought to remedy by including a chapter from Calvin); moreover it excludes

texts which shaped the political thinking of generations, such as Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees,* or Beccaria's *Crimes and Punishments*; and at its heart lie texts which were regarded as insignificant when they were first published (*The Prince, The Second Treatise of Government*), but which came to seem extraordinarily important much later. This selection adopts a critical attitude to the contemporary canon by including three chapters from Smith which, though they may never be canonical, are pedagogically invaluable. But in the main I have accepted the canon for what it is, not sought to reform it.

If there is general agreement about which are the key texts in the history of political philosophy, there is no general agreement about how to read them. Some read them for their relevance to contemporary philosophical debates; others for their enduring wisdom; others in order to understand the development of a particular mode of discourse over time; yet others read them as literature. Different readers are likely to focus on different texts. Contemporary philosophers find Mill more interesting than Machiavelli; followers of Leo Strauss find Machiavelli more interesting than Mill; while Quentin Skinner and John Pocock negotiate the whole question of what distinguishes a classic from a minor text with some unease. Consequently the content of advanced courses designed by members of different schools of thought is bound to differ substantially: It is only at the introductory level that there is widespread agreement on the texts that all students of modern political philosophy need to encounter first. My own introductions to the texts concentrate on historical questions because some historical knowledge is a necessary foundation for any interpretation. Anyone reading Hobbes immediately after Machiavelli (as students often do) needs to have some sense of what has happened in the one hundred and fifty years that separates them. They need to know that the Reformation had transformed political practice and theory, that Galileo had shaken the entrenched supremacy of Aristotelian science, and that Hobbes was contributing to an existing tradition of natural-law theory. About this there can be general agreement, while there is likely to be much less agreement over the relevance to an interpretation of *Leviathan* of Hobbes's translation of Thucydides, the Engagement crisis of 1650, or twentieth-century game theory.

It is worth remarking that the texts that have found their way into the canon have done so because they satisfy a number of very different requirements.

First, they are well written and well argued. Beccaria's *Crimes and Punishments* is a good example of a text that its first readers thought deserved to become a classic, if only it were better written, hence all the revised, reorganized, and heavily annotated editions of Beccaria which promptly appeared.

Second, they simplify the lives of instructors by standing for an intellectual period or a political epoch. So Machiavelli stands for the Renaissance, and few students read More or Montaigne; Rousseau symbolizes the French Revolution, obscuring Siéyès. The one obvious omission among the classic texts is the absence of a text that encapsulates the Reformation: Here Calvin fills the gap.

Third, the classic texts are both philosophically challenging and intriguingly ambiguous. It is fashionable to argue that all texts invite a multitude of interpretations, and one might claim that the range of interpretations surrounding each of the classic texts simply reflects the effort that has gone into their exegesis, but I suspect that ambiguity is a precondition for classic status. There is little disagreement about how to interpret Engels, and little agreement about how to interpret Marx. Yet it is Marx we read, not Engels. Classic texts pose problems that seem almost insoluble. Does Machiavelli favor republicanism or despotism? Is Hobbes an atheist? Is Mill's liberalism consistent

with his utilitarianism? These texts invite debate and disputation, and resist a merely passive reading. Which is why each generation in its turn finds reading them not a chore but a pleasure.

On Method

Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Philosophy in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)

Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* [1952] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988)

James Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988)

On Canons

John Guillory, 'Canon', in Frank Letricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (eds.), *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 233–49

Surveys

There is no good one-volume, single-author survey of our subject. Three works which have stood the test of time and give an account of political theory from Plato to the modern day are:

Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967)

Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979)

Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960)

A useful collection of essays, again covering ancient as well as modern political theory, is

John Dunn (ed.), *Democracy: The Unfinished Journey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)