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POLITICAL THOUGHT

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Roman political thought is currently a very fertile field of research, thanks in part to new and interesting perspectives opened up by the cross-fertilisation between Roman history and ancient philosophy. This book's interest in Roman political thought lies mainly in its potential as normative value. Hence the unusual organisation around four pairs of authors. Each pair comprises an ancient and a modern political thinker: Cicero is coupled with Arendt, Livy with Machiavelli, Tacitus with Montesquieu, Seneca with Foucault. Although the criteria behind these pairings are not completely arbitrary, it would be beneficial for the reader to be given some guidance on the logic behind the pairings. At first sight, in fact, the structure of the book could appear puzzling and not historically sound. Do the modern thinkers provide a lens through which it is possible to see the ancient authors in a new light? Or did the modern thinkers see something in the ancient authors which, so far, has escaped our attention? H. explains: 'what emerges by bringing together these modern and ancient thinkers is the role of political thought in giving life to political form – in activating our political world. More than questioning specific institutional forms, each of these thinkers is moved by a preliminary concern: a sense that the political markers by which communities form identities, establish boundaries, foster attachments, and organise purpose have been lost' (p. 223). By way of modern authors, it is possible to appreciate fully the Roman contribution to political thought and bridge the disciplinary gap between the investigations of political theorists and the study of ancient historians. Chapter 1 identifies this gap and finds its genesis mainly in the technical languages of each discipline.

The book makes two very important claims. First of all, it identifies the Roman conceptualisation of politics as the mapping of a *terra recognita*. 'The Roman question that underlies my reading and the one that I believe attracts these modern thinkers to the Romans, is not "How do we create anew?" but "Where do we go

from here?" Rather than a utopia – a perfect nowhere – the Roman task can be better understood as reconstructing a *terra recognita* – an attempt to know again, to recognise, the world that we inhabit' (p. 6). 'The starting point for this *terra recognita* is the mental map by which individuals orient themselves politically' and that 'is filled with recollections of laws and institutions, names and places, and events and traditions' (p. 7), which ultimately present the conceptual core of Roman political thought. Secondly, it considers the political vision held by the Romans as organised around affective associations. According to H., the contribution offered by the Romans to political thought lies for the most part in the conception of sentiments as a conceptual part of political experience.

It is obvious how a full appreciation of the first notion allows a true and deeper understanding of the Roman political world. However, the second notion may encounter more scepticism. It is not at all obvious in what way and to what extent the recognition of such a nature of the Roman political experience would advance our knowledge of the Roman political world. Nevertheless, these doubts should be dispersed after reading Chapter 3, 'Livy, Machiavelli, and the Recovery of Felt Meanings', the most successful of all the chapters and, in my opinion, the most brilliant account of the idea of *libertas* in Livy (especially 98–120). The chapter is based on the notion that Livy's political concepts should be understood as felt meanings, 'accumulated over time, woven into the emotions, and made salient by memory' (p. 9). Thus, in order to understand fully Livy's understanding of the concept of liberty, one should go beyond the strictly juridical notion of the term and conceive of it as born of affective associations. 'Meaning, in short, becomes an association of experiences by their effect on us. This effect can be something as seemingly mundane as what we imagine when we hear the word "blue", as emotionally charged as when we hear the word "terrorist", or as multivalent as a term like "liberty" or "authority". What is called to mind is not reducible to a formula or even able to be fixed as an image once and for all. Rather, the image is itself affected by context, by potential application, and by previous experiences. Concepts, thus, emerge through a process of assimilating different experiences into a composite image that guides us in turn in how we see and respond to other situations' (pp. 82–3). This understanding of Livy's 'psychological history' allows for understanding concepts as 'born in time and animated by experience. Through the telling of history as a record of deeds that are "worthy of memory" (7.2.2), what is not just portrayed but also felt are the animating forces of politics: the beliefs, ideas, habits and principles that move people to act' (p. 92).

A fully rounded understanding of the notion of *libertas* is completed by a very convincing analysis of this value under the principate. Chapter 4, on Tacitus and Montesquieu, focusses on the moral psychology of despotism. By an admittedly unnecessary recourse to Celsus' *De medicina*, H. identifies the highest casualty of despotic rule as the killing of people's souls, which are left lifeless entities abandoned to slavish behaviour. By way of Foucault, Chapter 5 explores the problematic issue how one should orient oneself in a world in which political markers have lost their shared meaning. As illustrated by the case of Seneca, the notion of withdrawal from politics can be recast in the possibility of recovering one's own sense as political actor within a broader conception of what constitutes the sphere of politics. This is an instance where recourse to a modern thinker has obfuscated, rather than illuminated, the issue. Concentrating on a laboured reading of Foucault, H. misses the opportunity to explore fully the implications of this broader conception of politics as applied to the ancient world.

The least felicitous chapter is perhaps Chapter 1, on Cicero and Arendt. Through a cumbersome structure, by way of Arendt's work, the book presents an analysis of Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, the results of which, however intelligent and ultimately persuasive, are not revolutionary. The main thesis is not far from that held by I. Gildenhard in *Paideia Romana: Cicero's Tusculan Disputations* (Cambridge Philological Society, 2007), which must have appeared too late for H. to take into account. H. argues that the *Tusculan Disputations* should be read politically to show how the role of culture could function in the recovery of markers by which one might orient oneself in the world of politics.

It is a pity that the book does not engage fully with the recent revival of studies on republicanism (exemplified, above all, by the work of P. Pettit), which position the concept of Roman republican liberty at the centre of their programme. These philosophers trace down the genealogy of Roman republican thought through early modern thinkers, who are labelled neo-Roman in virtue of their Roman intellectual allegiance. It is to this neo-Roman tradition, they argue, that we should look in order to find a different and more profitable way of conceptualising modern liberty and, more generally, politics. However, in the Epilogue H. explicitly rejects this line of argument: '... the legacy of Roman political thought extends beyond an inquiry into law and administration and beyond its traditional association with republicanism. Roman political thought is engaged most fundamentally in an exploration of what animates us as political beings' (p. 226).

Thoughtful, original and well argued, this is an important book. Readers interested in the Roman contribution to political thought will return to it time and again.

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