In the two foregoing papers of this series I have attempted to characterise "the history of political thought" as the history of a fairly sophisticated and critical language activity, especially visible when conducted among communities of discursive, author and respondent; one consisting of speech acts modified by, yet modifying, structures of language whose content and function we see reason to term "political"; one entailing critical discussion, explication and intensification of awareness by the participants of the terminology, usage and conceptual implications of the languages they are using. It is this last characteristic which enables us to continue using the term "political thought," since by that phrase we may denote the use of political language by one who is aware that his use of language sets "him" problems, which "he" must consider and endeavour to solve in the course of using the language; this awareness may be generated by the process of debate or by that of solitary reflection. I prefer the term "political thought" to "political theory," because the latter can be reserved to mean "theory of politics," which is only one -- or a limited range -- of the modes of discussion that may arise in the use of political language and the growth of political thought.

I have emphasised all along that the use of language and the act of speech prepare such phenomena as explication, criticism and theory. This has been my means of keeping "political thought" anchored in the worlds of social action and in the worlds of history. If the history we write is to be an histoire événementielle, the events we describe must be acts of utterance taking place in, and acting upon, contexts of language. This does not prevent our describing them as acts of thought or thinking as an activity; it supplies the context in which such action takes place and becomes public and historical. Nor -- as I shall attempt to show in another essay -- does it prevent our attempting to explain the relationship between contexts of language, or of systematic thought, and contexts of social behaviour and its historic change; nor the contrary, it is the pre-requisite of any such explanation.
I have emphasized the plurality of languages, signs or rhetorics in which "political thought" may be constituted, and have suggested that a complex text—whose composition and publication form a process going on over time—may often be usefully decomposed and considered as the record of many linguistic performances taking place concurrently in as many linguistic continuities. If such a text has no single history, it will follow that there is no single "history of political thought" either; but our ability to write such history will be enriched by the discovery that there are as many histories as we can recover and reconstitute—subject to the principle of otherness and the rules of verification or falsification we are led to adopt. The performances whose history we recount are complex phenomena: in the first place, they are produced by the actions of recipients, readers, respondents and discussants, as well as of authors (there is, I am told, a German sub-discipline called Rezeptionsgeschichte, of which I should like to know more); and in the second place, they are produced not only by the acts of speech and interpretation, but by the contexts of language, action and social relations in which they occur. I have said something about these two areas of complexity, but I should like to have said more. If I ever revise these papers for publication, I may insert a fourth at this point in the series; it might be called "History as Translation and Retranslation." In it I may attempt to deal with the problems the historian confronts in a variety of situations: when, for example, an author's intended action—that is to say, the meanings his speech should have borne in the language context in contexts he "apparently spoke and desired to be read in"—was modified by the action of an interpreter who either employed the same speech to different effects, on (more challengingly still) insisted on reading the author's text in a context which may not (or even could not) have been one intended by "him." What happened when a scholastic theologian reads Machiavelli? When young M. Defont wrote to Burke for his views on events in France, and received in reply a passionate diatribe addressed as much to an English audience as to him, and as much concerned with English usages and values as with French? In both cases a great deal happened, which we cannot handle without employing the notion of movement, or translation, from one language context into another.
In the cases I have just mentioned, translation was synchronous; we are dealing with languages which exist at the same time. The language of the scholastics was available to Machiavelli; that of the ancient constitution was available to Hooker; and we may have to decide not only why they did not use them, but whether they meant anything by not using them. When is a silence intentional and when is it unintentional? When may we legitimately speak of "secret writing"? When may we employ the presumption that the use of a given language in a given situation was normal and expected, so that its absence from a given text was intended for interpretation by the text's readers, or may be the subject of interpretation by us? We move these problems into a different key by noting that if Machiavelli intended to elude or reject interpretation by scholastics, or Hooker by ancient constitution theorists, these intentions were defeated, since in both cases they were so read; we return to the realisation that intention does not determine performance, and that interpretation and misinterpretation may be indistinguishable. We have also glanced again at the question of the actual historian's freedom to read a language into a text or a text into a language, when the language is one which "he" has reconstituted as a historical phenomenon.

But translation may be diachronous as well as synchronous; the preservation of speech in material form ensures that an utterance, a text or even a paradigm may be read, interpreted and applied as authoritative in language contexts which were not available to its author and his intellectual not from part of his intentions. Diachronous translation ensures that all history is the history of anachronism; in other words, to put the point less outrageously—it ensures that the history of an utterance, especially when it has taken the form of a text, is the history of its movement away from the author and "his" intentions, towards readers, interpretations, languages and contexts which when arranged synchronously did not, and when arranged diachronously could not, react to his speech as he intended. From this point of view all interpretation is indeed misinterpretation and ought to be; and we may have to review the question whether in the end either authors or texts exist as actors in our history, or whether there are only what Stanley Fish has called "interpretive communities" engaged in an ongoing activity of interpretation. Yet the habit of thinking in terms
of speech act and language, of synchronicity and diachronicity, ensures that the history of interpretation will be a history of continuity and discontinuity. The author is not master of the languages he uses, because these have been historically given, but he may act upon them; he is not master of the languages in which his readers will interpret him, because these will have been historically given, but he may seek to act as an author in history by embodying in his text changes paradigms which will continue to enjoin certain interpretations and languages at the expense of others. The interpretive community is not master of the languages it uses, and is indeed in precisely the same position; and if (as does happen) it accedes authority to certain texts, and to the presumed intentions of the author of those texts, we may always ask, with a nonna as well as with a noun, whether some author has succeeded in embodying his intentions in paradigms persisting through time. Aristotle, Confucius, Paul of Tarsus, Hobbes, Hegel and Marx have claimed to be considered agents as well as patines of certain interpretations of their writings; it is in no way a serial of their or our historicity to say so.

I have mentioned certain authors to whom we accord classical or (what comes to the same thing) hermic status in the history of political thinking, because they illustrate, as extreme cases, the principle that the historian, as student of the agency of others, retains a dialectic between authorship and interpretation, between speech act and language context. Only hermic speech acts (if any in fact have been performed) altogether transform its languages and institute new; others perpetuate with one hand as they innovate with the other, and there are very complex relationships between the two sides of the work. The historian, therefore, will spend much of his time explicating "normal" speech acts, which tend to perpetuate the language games by whose rules they are carried out; the synchronous multiplicity, and fluidity, of language structures ensures the richness and thickness and polyvalence of this part of his reconstitution. He will not be afraid of presenting some paradigmatic language structures as persisting through long periods of time, of explicating the rhetorical patterns which they enjoin in such periods; it may indeed sometimes happen that he "finds" himself explicating a language as an ideal type, a source of hypotheses to be tested concerning speech acts which may have been performed, or of hermetic counterfactuals concerning normal acts which might have been performed if something had not modified them.
Innovation and change will often seem to have been acts of instantaneous translation, the work of creative interpreters rather than authors; but the historian will (or should) be on guard against supposing that this is the only way innovation happens. There will be need of a typology of the various strategies by which authors, interpreters and rather especially disputants have reconstitute the values, altered the rules, or modified the information of which established language games consist; and also of the ways in which new information may have broken into the language world by a kind of main force (for there is no intention to deny that this does happen). If the historian cannot handle these matters, "he" will be in danger of supposing that every act in the history of political thought has been "normal" if it has not been heroic; I would like to call this the revolutionary falacy. But there is a bent in our thinking towards focusing on the heroic, and calling it either philosophy or revolution; and to this I will now turn.

(ii)

Let us consider the philosopher: not the latter-day "lecturer and teacher" reasoning in search of propositions to analyze, but the classical figure of antiquity, seeking to constitute the life of thought - the bios theoreutikos - as the good life for man. This figure is recurrent in the history of political thought, because classical philosophy was an outgrowth of the proposition that the good life for man was the political life; at the classical dialogue between bios theoreutikos and bios politikos continues, of course, to be conducted and explored in our own time. A leading participant in the dialogue, on the side of the bios politikos, is the figure I will call the classical revolutionary; he or she asserts that action and thought can be unified in the conscious transformation of the conditions of historical existence, and that the good life for man is located in the highly political practice of defining "not understanding the world, but changing it." These continue, however, to be classical political philosophers who uphold the autonomy and perhaps the priority of the bios theoreutikos; while between revolutionary and philosopher there has in this century appeared the figure of the analytical philosopher, inclined to accuse both classical antagonists of basing themselves on linguistic confusions, which it is his or her business to unravel. For reasons I will not go into, the analytical philosopher and the historian whose practice I am attempting to describe have at present rather little to say to each other;
but they have in common a propensity to decompose speech and action into a multitude of distinguishable performances, carried out in and modified by a multitude of local circumstances—logical, linguistic or historical—which need to be scrutinised with great specificity. The analytical philosopher, so far as I know to the contrary, can afford to disregard the classical theorist or praxist, regarding both as irrelevant or at least as patients of her or his analysis; but the historian is less free to do this. For one thing, he will encounter both figures as actors in the history he is recounting, and must consider whether his techniques adequately reconstitute their activities, or whether—as will be argued—the tenet to minimise, reduce or distance them. For another, he will meet them as inhabitants of his own world, as students of human political and historical life like himself, and they will very likely offer their reflections on his practice and on the ways in which it appears to reflect upon theirs. In the remainder of this paper I will consider the relations between philosophers, historians and revolutionaries; I have given it a title emblematic of Suffering species inhabiting the same space.

The eagle is the philosopher, the historian the owl; the owl regards the eagle as an actor in his story, but the eagle is not content to be so regarded. The canon we have built up of major classical philosophers, starting with Plato and culminating with Marx—or was it Heidegger?—can be regarded as a canon of exponents of the bios theoretikos in its encounter with the bios politikos; and whether or not the canon provides a framework on which history can be written, it seems to define the figure whom we have learned from Volin to call the “epic theorist,” and to remind us that from time to time such a figure does appear in the historic record. He or she contemplates the human predicament from a standpoint including the assumptions which constitute political philosophy, and responds by practising the bios theoretikos in its encounter with the politikos. This entails a major recasting of the values, paradigms and languages of politics and philosophy as the epic theorist finds them; it entails also a major restatement of the relations between philosophy and politics, theory and praxis. The theorist’s enterprise becomes heroic at the point where it entails the claim to be something more than an actor according to
the conditions, a player of games according to the rules, which the times permit, but to have comprehended
and transformed them, either in contemplation or in action, and reached a new understanding of how
contemplation and action are related or confronted.

The eagle soars in the summit of heaven, but the owl takes flight in the gathering dusk. Actu-
ally, this is not quite fair: the owl is a time-traveller, obsessed to revisiting palaeogic landscapes
by the light of vanished suns. "He" is, however, obliged to reconstitute both the landscape and the sun
to see it by; and though this task does not dismay him; it does mean that "he" is interested in events
after they have occurred and in the contexts in which they occurred after they have become thoroughly
contingent. Any sun he reconstitutes is likely to strike the philosopher as rather like the fire in
the cave; something which existed under conditions which it did not control, and could therefore be
known or acted upon only in part. The historian may be ideologically certain with a world in
which knowledge and action are only contingently possible; yet sees limits to his neighbour's
demands to know and act upon him; but he needs assert only that this is a possible way of
looking at things, and the way in which "he" has chosen to look at them. "He" has not
Distinguished between "his" activity and that of the philosopher; but "he" has not yet solved
the problem how "he" will characterise the philosopher's activity when it is that of an
agent in history and becomes the subject of "his" activity of reconstituting the acts of agents
other than himself.

The epic theorist as historical actor performs acts which are certainly not limited to
the making of utterances within and upon particular language contexts of the sort discussed in my
second lecture. He criticises and reflects upon the use of language by himself and others; he
discusses the nature of language itself; and of these activities he constructs language
which may be of a sharply different order from any of those used in the normal conduct of
politics as he finds it. He may also be an enormously sophisticated and profoundly original
literary craftsman, employing, inventing and reconceiving every rhetorical device and
literary game which exists in his time, and inventing new ones which take his
contemporaries profoundly by surprise. The historian an intelligent reader will find
himself" absorbed and fascinated by the pursuit of the various actions and combinations of actions in which the philosopher engages, but as historian, "he" will still have the aim of reconstituting these actions as historical events, performed in contexts which permit them to be considered as history. We have defined a practice of situating speech acts in language contexts which they maintain or modify, and have stressed that political speech may be viewed as occurring in a multiplicity of such language contexts at the same time. Within limits, that practice may continue to be applied in historicizing the speech of the philosopher. If the historian has any sensitivity at all to the philosophical enterprise, "he" will know that "he" cannot reconstitute it simply by situating the philosopher in one language context or cage after another, and then trying to watch how he performed in it, broke out of it or rebuilt it from within, before moving on to consider how he behaved in the next one. The philosopher knew more about cages, how to inhabit several of them at once, and how to recombine them for his own purposes, than the historian is even going to discover except by laborious and piecemeal reconstitution. Yet the analytic strategy of dealing with the philosopher's text one language at a time leads to its own kind of synthesis; it furnishes the historian with ability to see in what combinations of contexts the philosopher performed, how he set about recombining them so as to produce new sorts of performance, and what we must remember interests the historian no less—what perforations he was led to perform by the actions of readers, respondents and disputants who insisted on interpreting him in contexts of their determining as well as his. The philosopher's speech may be uttered outside the cage, but its echoes are interpreted within it.

But this is to present the philosopher as shape-changer, as Pau-pu-kkee-kwis rather than Great Spirit. At the end of all our study of his linguistic cunning, his recombinations and invasions of other men's acts and languages, we must expect to hear his voice uttering reflections on his enterprise, on the activity of aping theorizing, on the relation of theoretikos to politikos, and going so at a very high level of synthetic intelligibility. As readers with claims to philosophic sensibility ourselves, we will want to affirm that utterances of this kind are to be
understood by similarly complex efforts of synthetic apprehension, and it is for him evident that anyone ever understood them by the methods we have described: the historian as following; that is, by breaking them down into all the different senses in which it was historically possible to understand them. Yet as historians we must seek to reconstitute the philosopher's most comprehensive and synthetic utterances as historical events. According to the practice we have described, this can best be done by establishing that there existed, or that the philosopher helped bring into existence, a vocabulary, aism and paradigms in which such utterances were to be expressed; that there was or came to be a philosophical language for the performance of philosophical statements. The language will then furnish the context with which the speech act continues to constitute the historical event.

At this point it is very tempting, and it is often possible, to think of philosophy as a second-order language, or language for talking about the use of other languages; this is a most attractive way of imagining how a philosophical language comes into being. But it may not do justice in every case to the complexity of historical processes. It does not seem likely that the fiction of Plato, or of Hegel, came into being simply as the product of a conjunction of critical necessities for the discussion of other languages already in active being; quantum jumps of far greater length, and quite differently impelled, may have to be imagined, notably when we are looking at cultures in process of changing their media of communication. But the pattern of language and act, of paradox and transformation, not only helps us supply philosophical language with a history, but helps us understand its co-existence with other forms of political speech. Once a second-order language is established, institutionalized and in general use, it necessarily becomes a first-order language: one in which the general arrangements and problems of society are publicly discussed as they enter the realm of debate. And once this happens, the phenomena of synchronous translation ensure that its terms and signifiers become mingled with those of other language systems. The philosopher is audible in the cave and the market place; the wizards of one college can be overheard by the wizards of another; and discourse of a high order can result as well as noise.
Philosophy, Western intellectual discourse was deeply concerned with the conjunction or disjunction between the language of philosophy and that of prophecy and revelation. There are those who seek to isolate the canon of classical philosophes within its own history, but this seems to be valid only as a selective and critical device. Philosopher is of course concerned with philosopher, but the language of his concern is spoken publicly, and cannot be immunised against interaction with other public languages. It is sometimes important to observe the theories by which philosophers seek to achieve such an immunity — the esoteric assertions which Straussian exegesis term 'secret writing' / 'furnish examples' — but historians will merely class these among other languages in which discourse has been conducted.

Above all, it is important not to confound a critical opportunity with an historical event. We may find it possible to isolate the theories of Horkheimer and confront them with those of Hobbes; but if we find that the whole weight of the historical evidence suggests that what Horkheimer intended to do, and was interpreted as doing, was to refute the theories of Habermas, the critical or normative relation with Hobbes is not by itself sufficient to constitute a historical event or process in which the utterance of Habermas's theory is associated or connected with the utterance of Horkheimer's theory in a series of historically verifiable happenings. It may be sufficient to make us suspect that there may have been such a series of events, and it may assist us in constructing hypotheses which we test in the search for such a series; but it cannot by itself either verify or falsify the hypotheses. To do this we must verify or falsify, as best we can, that there was a Habermasian language, spoken in such ways that it interacted with the speaking of a Horkheimer language. Nevertheless, our awareness that Habermasian language was spoken in such ways as to arrive at conclusions other than those dictated by the speaking of Horkheimer language cannot, once established — I will not ask if in fact it has been — be excluded from either our theoretical or our historical consciousness; and this is where the relations of eagle and owl, in the historical study of theory, become really difficult.

(iii)

The epic theoretician — or indeed, any thinker who retains our attention by his theoretical sophistication — perform acts of utterance which engage our understanding for their
theoretical value. As political theorist and epistemologist, he engages the attention of the eagle as philosopher; as an employer of highly sophisticated language, he engages the attention of the eagle as literary theorist; and one might continue with this classification. The eagle is not so lacking in historical sensitivity that he does not know himself to be studying acts performed in remote times and cultures; his knowledge may even supply him with important information; but it is not his primary concern to reconstitute the performance of these acts as historical events. What he does is to reiterate the utterance in the context appropriate to the pursuit of his intellectual enterprise, as philosopher, political theorist, literary theorist or whatever it may be. The utterance re iterated may be a single proposition or principle culled from the epic theorist’s text; it may be a highly complex pattern of thought which the text is interpreted as containing; it may even—though serious problems of fiction will arise at this point—be the epic theorist’s performance reconstituted as a consistent whole and given his name in such a way as to enhance its and his status as paradigm. But in every case it has been reconstituted according to the programmatic demands of the heuristic context in which the eagle now reiterates it.

There are many species of eagles, and they see in different light patterns. Since my concern is with historians, I need say no more of the eagle engaged in this kind of reconstitution than that “he is not an owl; that is, his enterprise is not that of reconstituting the theorist’s performance as a historical event. It is to be reconstituted as part of an intellectual enterprise, philosophical, literary or whatever in character, in which the eagle is engaged and in which the theorist may be represented, interpreted or simply employed, as engaged also. Given that the heuristic demands of the enterprise have been adequately specified and are now retained as paramount, to ask whether the theorist as historical actor was engaged in the enterprise is like asking why the eagle has employed the speech of the entire theorist instead of constructing speech of his own; the answers to such questions are only accidentally of interest. The
The owl—precisely because it is “his” enterprise to reconstitute the performances of agents other than “himself” in the contexts which they have made their acts significant—finds no reason to object to what the eagle is doing. The eagle is an architect, not an archaeologist, of contexts; or rather, where the owl constructs a context for the purpose of affirming that formerly it existed but was modified by events including the performance of utterances which it made possible, the eagle constructs a context for the purpose of affirming that if an utterance is reiterated under the conditions which it makes possible, certain consequences will ensue. The owl, furthermore, sees the eagle as engaged in an activity with which he is perfectly familiar: that of diachronic translation, or taking an utterance out of one context and reiterating it in another, for purposes other than those for which it was first made. If he thinks of the eagle as an actor in history, he will reflect that the latter's experiment is probably being conducted under conditions other than those it specifies for itself, and will probably have consequences other than those entailed by its predictions. But the owl is a Popperian bird, and knows that an experiment is a normative and self-limiting device for isolating those conditions under which prediction is possible from those under which it is not; hence it is possible because they have not...
yet been isolated. Since the owl can reconstitute only those familiar existing contexts whose existence he can claim to have verified, he is not very differently situated himself, and is in no hurry to describe the eagle's enterprise as sooner or later reconstruction by the cunning of l'histoire totale. Since the owl is a baker's son, she is aware that it is one thing to know what we are and another to know what we may be; the one enterprise is not cancelled by the other.

Even the dramatic problems which arise when an author's name has to be attached to an utterance ought not to cause confusion. During the year 1976 I attended several conferences to commemorate the bicentennial of the death of David Hume, and at times it did seem that the philosophers and historians present were using the word Hume in highly discontinuous ways. In the philosophers, it appeared to be the name of an actor in various scenarios designed by themselves, and served to trigger various language games which they desired to play. The phrase Hume says..., which they frequently employed, was shorthand for: "the following location, found in a book bearing Hume's name and forming part of a pattern of thought ascribed to Hume, in purposes of identification, will bear different meanings if interpreted in different ways. Our task is to study these divergent significances; we use the name of Hume as a means of identifying the location itself and some, but not all, of the contexts in which it may be reiterated." In the historians, on the other hand, Hume was the name of an actor in the history of certain systems of discourse which might be seen to have been modified by his utterances. The phrase 'Hume says'...note the change of tense...was shorthand for: 'David Hume (1711-1776) uttered the following location. He seems to have intended it in such a context, but it has been interpreted in others; and in consequence, the modes of discourse indicated by these contexts have been modified in various ways.'

It seems evident that in situations like this, philosophers and historians are operating on different wavelengths. They had better — and ordinarily they do — abstain from direct dialogue, so fear of confusing the contexts in which they may examine the same location; they should be content to listen in on one another's transmissions, in the hope of hearing something which either...
may usefully employ in the construction of his own discourse. For example, the information that Hume’s location can be interpreted in a certain context may make the historian wonder whether that context was operative at a former time, such as Hume’s own; or conversely, the information that Hume could not have intended to be interpreted in such a context may make the philosopher wonder on precisely what grounds he is offering it as a context in which to interpret Hume’s location. The fact that authors, philosophers, and historians so often all inhabit a time-continuum of linguistic change renders it all the more desirable to be able to distinguish contexts and moments of action; and here the change of tense to which I drew attention may be useful. Ideally, the historian should always employ the phrase “Hume said,” meaning “Hume meant to say”; the philosopher or other non-historical critic the phrase “Hume says,” meaning “Hume means to me,” while the force and status of the word “Hume” will change accordingly. Unfortunately, this very instance is enough to show that distinctions such as I am proposing cannot be drawn with absolute clarity.

Historians so employ the historic present, “Hume says.” They do so partly because the text or corpus of texts bearing Hume’s name is before them as a present object and may be mined as a source of information; partly because it is sometimes and momentarily a sufficient authority for giving a location a certain meaning to be able to cite its author’s own words; partly because the action of establishing that a certain context of interpretation existed in time past may take its departure from, though it cannot be validated by, the fact that it exists in time present; partly because the method of speech act and language context renders the historic present rhetorically appropriate — what the language says (at whatever moment in history) can be used in establishing what the author said (or meant to say). But the present tense is also employed because of a strong impulse to dramatise our experience in such a way that “Hume” appears to be a present agent informing us, and the text or corpus of his writings the mode of his presence and agency. The philosophers and historians I have sought to describe — those endeavouring to establish a diversity of contexts in which Hume’s speech can be interpreted — are alike engaged in reconstructing this presence and hearing it from
into a number of modalities; and there ought in principle to be no collision between the contexts or the diverse activities of establishing them.

(iv)

In practice, however, such acts of energeia tend to find themselves in collision courses. The text, which we imagined situated before the reader at the outset of these enquiries, is one cause of this. It represents a sustained effort of composition and deployment of written speech, carried out by the author over a period of time; sometimes, indeed, the term "text" is used to denote the entire corpus of his writings, consisting of a series of such compositions, carried out serially or concurrently over an even longer period. It is in the nature of print that text or corpus should seem to confront the reader as a single statement, or aggregate or complex of statements; and there are readers of an equine which make it their business to enquire whether, by the adoption of this or that interpretive strategy, a text or corpus can be shown to consist of a consistent system of statements, constructed on principles which render it unproblematically intelligible once they are known, or whether a number of such systems or incoherence can be elicited from it if the more ambitious objective cannot be attained. The political theorist may seek to reconstitute the text as political theory; the literary theorist as coherent verbal strategy. Given that the program of reconstitution fits into the enterprise in which the eagle is engaged—this after all is not for the owl to determine—the latter will as we have seen find no ground of objection to it; but trouble will arise if the eagle is not to declare that the principles on which "he" has reconstituted the text were those on which the author organised it, so that his "programmatic" reconstitution is at the same time a historical reconstitution, or that the character of the author's enterprise in history is better understood if we reconstitute his text on these principles of systematisation, whether or not he fully succeeded in organizing it after them.

The eagle has now claimed to be an owl, who sees behind him as part of his mounting pattern; and the trouble is that "his" assertion is not historically impossible. The author as agent in history may have been engaged in the enterprise, which the program of systematisation entails; the language in which the systematisation is carried out may have been that in which he expressed and organized his enterprise, or may provide us with important clues to the understanding of his language. The
enterprise of showing that a text becomes consistent if organised upon certain principles is not much
unlike the enterprise in which the historian engages, of showing that it becomes significant if considered
on the rules of a certain game. Therefore, the historian claims to have
reconstructed history, as it were with the left hand, in the course of carrying out a program in which
"he" and the author were both engaged, is not inherently false. The problem is to determine the
methods and criteria by which it is to be tested and validated. At this point the historian will begin
to ask questions concerning the formal language in which the author, rather than the historian, carries
out his program. He may point out, for example, that since Hobbes declared his intention of destroying
one kind of systematic philosophy and substituting another, it is indeed reasonable to inquire for the
premises on which his work may be said to display systematic coherence; whereas to conduct the
same enquiry in the case of Edmund Burke, however powerful and visionary his vision of politics,
is on the face of it bizarre. But the historian will ask for evidence that any language of
systematisation attributed to Hobbes was indeed one spoken by Hobbes and intelligible to readers
in his own time and culture; and the fact that the language so attributed can be effectively used by
a modern interpreter to systematise Hobbes's text without doing violence to its vision and vocabulary
will take "him" some way towards satisfaction on this point, but not the full distance.

The historian insists on working in terms of performances, carried out in the interactions
between Hobbes as author and a series of interpreters, of whom Hobbes himself was the first — when
he re-read, revised or merely retrospected his own work in the course of writing it — and the historian's
respected colleague the theorist in the latest. Some — conceivably though very improbably all — of
these performances were carried out within a program or programs of systematisation; the historian
is concerned to reconstitute them whether they were or not. If "he" finds Hobbes conducting
language performances — say in the third and fourth books of Leviathan — apparently discontinuous
with the enterprise of political philosophy being conducted in the first and second, "he" is liable to
pursue the history of these performances whether or not they can be proved continuous or consistent
with the others. If "he" finds that Hobbes interspersed all four books to form a consistent whole,
but that interpreters then and since have read them disjunctively and as belonging to different
language works," he will pursue the history of these interpretations without condemning them as mistakes, for he is concerned with the history of performances, and performances are the work of a diversity of agents. Even the author's interpretation of his own work will impress the historian as one among a number of performances which the text seems to hold together; and it is interesting to see how the problem of systematization illustrates this point. In a recent defence of the enterprise of reducing a text to consistency, put forward by Howard Warriner in a debate with Quentin Skinner, it seems to be conceded that the principles on which a text may be rendered consistent need not be such as could all have been put forward at any one moment. Now if we suppose the case of an author struggling to articulate a system, but only at the end of his career aware whether or not he has done so, there will be a difference between his acts of articulation and his retrospective act of self-interpretation. The historian may employ grammatical tense as a means of distinguishing between what the author from time to time "was doing" and what at the end of his performance he "had done." And yet says that it was good; or rather, that it has been well done.

But we do not stop on the seventh day. What an author "has done" is determined for him in the performances of interpreters other than himself, and the persistence of his speech in textual form is one particularly interesting mode of ensuring that these performances may continue in historical time. He is not alive to see, in whose languages he could not have spoken. This is the point at which we must stop using the word "Hume" as the name of a living agent and employ it as that of a dead author attached to a persistent text; within this prescription, however, we may continue to speak of "Hume" as party to a continuous series of performances. We are now, however, increasingly concerned with the activities of agents performing in language contexts as discontinuous as they are continuous with those in which the author performed while he was writing his texts; and these agents are performing the acts of synchronic translation. They are interpreting; but we have seen that an interpretation need not be concerned with its historical character as performance. That is, the context which the interpreter selects in order to incorporate an author's speech in the execution of his own program need not, and very probably will not, be identical with the context the historian constructs in order to show that it was modified by some act of an author or interpreter. Even when the two contexts partially coincide, as they very often will, the interpreter is not entitled...
still less is he obliged — to write the history of his own act, or to make it include the history of the author's. The act by which he establishes the context in which to interpret the author's speech is pragmatic; he need not, though he may choose to, reconstitute it as a historic act of translation, of substituting one context of interpretation for another. He is not an owl. The fact that he is not obliged to be his own historian, however, deprives him of title to be the historian of anyone's act; and should he claim that he does need, and does possess, some knowledge of the historicity of his action, the specialist historian may claim that the full reconstitution of his performance required more information than he either needed or possessed.

The owl—the historian whose practice I have attempted to describe—is therefore not an interpreter so much as one who claims to know more than interpreters do about the reconstitution of interpretations as acts entailing translation from performance in one context to performance in others. He will therefore reconstitute interpretations as performed in contexts other than those which interpreters constituted in order to perform them; and in presenting the interpretation as more than the interpreter intended, he may very well appear to be presenting it as less. This kind of historicization will be particularly unwelcome to those interpreters who are conscious of their own historicity but nevertheless wish to engage in conversation with the text in its historicity or with the author in his; but the historian is not seeking to frustrate their enterprise so much as to discipline it. The claim that the interpretation writes its own history cannot be made by a historiographer, but is regularly made by those who might be termed historiosophers or philosophers. The historian sees them as at least the authors of Platonic Dialogues, Petrarchan letters or conversations in Elysium; at worst, the authors not of myths, but of pseudo-histories mythically constructed but passed off as reconstitutions. The literature of political philosophy abounds with such pseudo-histories, in which a single interpretative pattern is passed off as a mutation controlling the whole history of philosophy; the historian knows that what is philosophically valid may be historically false. He knows this because of his ultimate commitment to the principle that history is the work of agents other than himself, in contexts he must try to reconstitute; and he also considers pseudo-history any suggestion that the recorded past is no more than a series of texts awaiting his interpretation.
may go on in the tropics of discourse, the historian inhabits the temperate zone (this is how "he" knows that the only puns worth making are bad ones). The agents in "his" story are not actors in "his" drama or figures in "his" landscape, but citizens of "his" synchronous city, transmitting to "him" information which modifies "his" capacity to interpret their actions. The pure historian is concerned with what they meant to say, the pure interpreter with what they mean to "him"; there remains only the case of the practitioner of an enterprise (other than historiography) in the present, who wants to reconstitute in its full historicity some past performance in an enterprise continuous with his own, as a means to apprehending more vividly the historicity of "his" own performance. There seems no reason why such a practitioner should not accept the discipline of historiography in the appropriate parts of "his" enterprise, seeking both to translate as he learns and to reconstitute as "he" translated. This has recently been done with remarkable sophistication by John Dunn in his Political Obligation in Historical Context.

(v)

I have left myself only a minute or so for something to which a whole further lecture could well be devoted: the debate in this parliament of birds between the owl and the raven. We know that eagles can be prophetic birds, at any rate when flying on the left; but the raven may stand for the revolutionary praxist or dialectician, who wants both to study and to use speech as the instrument of its own transformation and that of the social world in which it is uttered. "He" is often dissatisfied with the historian's practice of constituting language as the matrix of speech action, which tends to conserve itself, and the utterance as the act which may both conserve and transform the language; he sees this as having a conservative bias (which "he" often calls a liberal one), and he responds by accusing the historian of detaching the structures of language from the movements of history. At this point the raven's voice may be as the braying of the ass, whom we met in an earlier lecture on political thought. The language structures of "abstract fiction"—though the ass is as likely to be a neo-conservative realist, who thinks language structures are divorced from history and ought not to be studied at all, as a neo-revolutionary praxist, who thinks they cannot be divorced from history and are being studied as if they could be. Both ass and raven, I am obviously going to suggest, have mistaken the relations between language and speech, theory and practice.
but you will remember my saying that the ass has seen a thistle, and there are thorny problems which occur when we seek to connect action through and upon the structures of language with action through and upon the structures of social relationships, especially when the latter have not been realised in the language.

The reader wants to represent all speech as praxis, so that “he” and “his” speech may acquire greater practical effect from this knowledge. He therefore wants any act of utterance represented as performed in a context of social action, preferably one formed by the relations between contending social actors. The end, however, knowing a great deal about the diversity of contexts in which speech may be found performing, may reply that identifying the context of action is not necessarily the best way of understanding the performances of speech. It tells us little about Machiavelli’s Prince to ask whether it was written to legitimise or delegitimise the restoration of the Medici in 1512; we learn more when we realise that it addresses the problems of a diversity of actors who were not sure what they wanted next, how to get it or on what principles to justify wanting it. We can next compare the Prince with other writings of the moment addressed to the same problems, and discern that it explores questions of far greater generality than they do, in which the specific conditions of Florence in 1512 are left behind though they never disappear. The Prince is therefore a work of theory and indeed of epic theory, and we have to understand its performances as carried out in the contexts supplied by the relevant languages of theory, rather than those supplied by political action at Florence. It next becomes a text and is translated into discourse conducted in France and Spain and England, where it can be seen performing in language contexts which these societies shared with Florence but applied in action contexts which were their own. The Prince therefore was involved in French performances very different in effect from those performed at Florence, but at the same time we may think of it as mobilising an international rhetoric a paradigm which could pass from one action context to another and modify the utterances which could be performed in any one of them.

To understand its history as praxis, therefore, we must understand its history as theory, and we must be able to disengage it from contexts of political action, situate it in contexts of language formation, and return to contexts of the human kind. “Abstraction”, to quote the ass, is now a necessary historical technique.
Wishing to present speech as effective in a context of social relations, the raven will present it as the product or effect of that context; and sometimes "he" will present it as giving pedagogic effect to any and all of the characteristics which that system of social relations may be said to have possessed. "He" will now seem to the owl to have given "himself" unlimited interpretative licence to read characteristics of the social context into the language context, possibly legitimising "himself" by the formula that "language reflects social reality." But the owl is mistrustful of unlimited interpretative licence, and does not believe that history is a game played with mirrors. "He" holds that societies are confined to expressing themselves with the languages they have, and do not find them particularly easy to change or modify; "he" also holds that these languages have come into being as the result of complex historical processes, and that simple functional accounts of their character are unlikely to prove satisfactory; that elements of the social structure are present in the language if they are realised in it and absent if they are not; and that changes in the social structure can be seen producing changes in the language when they can be seen supplying it with information in one way or another, and that their effect is non-proven when they cannot be seen to do this. The owl is perturbed at this point when the raven—speaking perhaps with the voice of the ass—accuses "him" of believing that languages are independent of social reality; "he" had supposed "himself" to be saying that they were part of it, that the activity of producing them was one of the activities pursued by human beings in society, and was, like the others, in a complex and probably confused relationship with the activities connected with it. The history of language change in contexts of social action is, after all, this historian's business.

"His" attention has throughout rested on those communities of discursive acts and discursive subjects who inform "him" by relating upon their language as they relate in it, and who inform "him" concerning language change because of the role they play in bringing it about. Their speech activity obviously has a strong bent towards the production of theory and second-order speech, but "he" claims to know something about how theory returns to the realm of practice. There remain two fields of enquiring about which I have said nothing. One is the impact of speech on paradigm and ideology, upon those whom it tends to exclude from the language worlds of politics—women, whom "he" presumed to have no concern with it, or upon adolescents (in the preference) whom "he" presumed incapable of speaking it; the raven may find his ultimate dialectic here. The other is the question how for the historian
may use the categories by which "his" speech explains the behaviour of a past society to explain that society's use of a speech containing different categories. I claim, however, that both these fields of enquiry can be explored in ways continuous with the practice I have attempted to describe in these lectures.