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MIND AND METHOD IN THE HISTORY OF IDEAS

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ABSTRACT

J. G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner have led a recent onslaught on the alleged "myth of coherence" in the history of ideas. But their criticisms depend on mistaken views of the nature of mind; respectively, a form of social constructionism, and a focus on illocutionary intentions at the expense of beliefs. An investigation of the coherence constraints that do operate on our ascriptions of belief shows historians should adopt a presumption of coherence, concern themselves with coherence, and proceed to reconstruct sets of beliefs as coherent wholes. The history of ideas merges history with aspects of philosophy, where philosophy is understood as the study of the grammar of our concepts.

MIND AND METHOD IN THE HISTORY OF IDEAS

Introduction

When we study the history of ideas, we look at ideas as they appear in texts and other artefacts from the past.[1] This seems clear enough, but if we try to specify what we mean by an idea, we encroach on an intense controversy. Some scholars tell us ideas are products of forms of discourse or languages conceived as social constructs. Others tell us ideas express beliefs or desires conceived as the properties of individuals. One way of making sense of this controversy is to unpack the various positions scholars adopt in terms of their debt to different perspectives in the philosophy of mind. When we study the history of ideas, we look at ideas understood as something like products of mind, so debates about the nature of the history of ideas often reflect different philosophical visions of mind, and especially of the way mind produces ideas as they appear in artefacts from the past. Scholars who tell us ideas are products of languages do so because they regard mind as a social construct. They believe a social form of discourse fixes the ideas, beliefs, and desires of particular individuals. Likewise, scholars who tell us ideas are expressions of beliefs or desires do so because they regard mind as a property of the individual. They believe ideas, beliefs, and desires reflect the particular reasoning or psychological disposition of the individual concerned.

An understanding of debates about the history of ideas in terms of the philosophy of mind provides an interesting perspective from which to view the continuing dispute about the appropriateness therein of a principle of coherence. Traditionally historians of ideas have devoted at least some of their energies to finding a coherent pattern in the ideas of the authors they study. They have struggled to reconcile apparently contradictory ideas found in a single text, or two or more texts by a single author; and sometimes they even have tried to introduce order into the scattered, disjointed remarks of an author by relating them to an overarching theory he

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or she never expressed. Recently, however, linguistic contextualists, led by J. G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner, have denigrated what they see as "the myth of coherence". They argue a concern with coherence is methodologically illegitimate because it leads historians more or less inexorably to depart from anything that actually existed in the past. The arguments of Pocock and Skinner typify the two main views of mind that might lead people to downgrade the place of coherence in the history of ideas. A study of their arguments will enable us, first, to uncover the characteristic limitations of these two views of mind, and, second, to reach an alternative perspective incorporating a rehabilitated principle of coherence.

Because my concern is with the way the linguistic contextualists view the nature of the history of ideas, I will concentrate on their philosophical writings and the errors contained therein. Although an ill-conceived view of the nature of the history of ideas generally hinders the writing of good history, it certainly does not preclude it. There are two reasons why philosophical mistakes do not preclude good history. The first is that scholars might depart from their philosophical principles when they write history. After all, I will not argue that beliefs necessarily are perfectly coherent, but only that they must exhibit a minimal coherence and historians initially should presume coherence. A scholar's historical studies need not be consistent with his or her philosophical arguments. Thus, we should avoid postulating too tight a fit between methodological procedures and substantive outcomes if only because there is a debate as to whether or not Pocock and Skinner really do follow their philosophical principles in their historical work. The second reason why philosophical mistakes do not preclude good history is more important. It is that my sharp philosophical disagreement with the linguistic contextualists over the appropriateness of a presumption of coherence appears only as a matter of degree in substantive historical studies. As I have said, I will argue only for a presumption of coherence, not that beliefs necessarily cohere perfectly. Thus, I am unlikely to deny the validity of every historical example of incoherence to which the linguistic contextualists refer.

Similarly, the linguistic contextualists argue only against too strong a concern with coherence, not that beliefs never cohere at all. Thus, they are unlikely to deny the validity of every historical example of coherence to which I might refer. Because the linguistic contextualists do not subscribe to a presumption of coherence, there are times when their historical studies are insufficiently attune to issues of coherence. But because the question of the place of a principle of coherence in the history of ideas is not an 'all or nothing' one, we can not say all their historical studies necessarily are insufficiently attune to issues of coherence. Sometimes the historical work of the linguistic contextualists reflects the errors of their philosophy; sometimes it does not. I will refer to their historical work, therefore, only to illustrate the way in which their philosophical errors sometimes corrupt it. I will not consider their historical work in any systematic fashion precisely because I do not claim their philosophical errors necessarily corrupt all of it.

Against Social Constructionism

Pocock portrays the history of ideas as a history of languages in a way that reduces mind to a social construct. He argues "the change that has come over this branch of historiography in the past two decades may be characterized as a movement away from emphasizing history of thought (and even more sharply, 'of ideas') toward emphasizing something rather different, for which 'history of speech' or 'history of discourse,' although neither of them unproblematic or irreproachable, may be the best terminology so far found."[2] According to Pocock, historians should focus on languages because languages prescribe what an author can say. Often, especially in his methodological writings, he adopts a strong version of this thesis, arguing languages prescribe the content of utterances, or the ideas of authors, as well as the form of utterances, or the words authors use to express their ideas. He insists the language "within which" an author operates, functions "paradigmatically to prescribe what he might say and how he might say it."[3] The similarities between this view and

the critique of the subject put forward by the structuralists and their post-structuralist descendants should not surprise us since Pocock owes a debt to Saussure, the father-figure of structuralism, from whom he takes the concept of langue understood as a social language that controls parole or speech.[4]

Social constructionism has the effect of undermining a concern with the coherence of an author's work. It has this effect because the coherence constraints we apply to a language, let alone a diverse set of languages, are much weaker than those we apply to beliefs. For example, a language can contain the statements "the room is square" and "the room is round", but something would be amiss if an individual believed both "the room is square" and "the room is round". Social constructionism shifts our attention from the beliefs of individuals to the statements that can be made within a given language, and this considerably lessens the extent of our puzzlement when we find a lack of coherence. Pocock argues historians should focus more or less exclusively on what an author said, conceived as a product of a plethora of different languages, not on a rational reconstruction of what an author believed, conceived as a coherent whole. The political language of any society is inherently ambivalent because it encompasses idioms drawn from a number of sources, such as the vocabularies of jurists and theologians. Far from being a coherent unity, a political language is a polyvalent structure "favouring the utterance of diverse and contrary propositions."[5] This is reasonable enough, but Pocock's social constructionism leads him unreasonably to apply his view of political languages to authors and their texts. Thus, he adds, it "follows - what is nearly but not quite the same thing - that any text or simpler utterance in a sophisticated political discourse is by its nature polyvalent."[6] The ideas of authors, and so the meanings of their utterances, necessarily reflect the ambivalence of the languages that inform them, and they do so just because languages define the content of mind, and so the meaning of utterances. This does not mean coherence never occurs, but it does mean there is something akin to a presumption against coherence. Historians of ideas should perform acts of "deconstruction": they

should recognise "a text compounded of many languages may not only say many things in as many ways, but also may be a means of action in as many histories; it may be broken down into many acts performed in the history of as many languages as there are in the text."[7]

No doubt I could illustrate the way social constructionism reduces the importance of coherence by reference to several of Pocock's historical studies. My one example, however, will be his writings on Burke. In 1960 he published an article that made sense of various passages in Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France by locating them in the language of a common-law tradition that derived from the age of Sir Edward Coke.[8] In 1982 he published another article that made sense of various passages in Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France by locating them in the language of a denunciation of paper credit that derived from political economy.[9] One might think the next step would be to ask how Burke conceived the relationship between the arguments he made in terms of the common law and those he made in terms of political economy. If we take the articles to be studies of Burke's beliefs, we will want to know how his beliefs about the ancient constitution and paper credit related to one another within the context of his general view of the French Revolution. We might decide there is not enough evidence to satisfy our curiosity, but we will be curious. In contrast, Pocock views his articles as studies of the ways in which different languages appear in Burke's text. Because the units of his history are languages, he has little interest in their coherence. As he explains:

> It [his second article] will not be much concerned to inquire into the relations between the two traditions, or the possible consistencies and inconsistencies in Burke's text or thought occasioned by the fact that they are both present there. It seems more important to establish that Burke can be read in both of these contexts than to inquire whether he can be read in both of them simultaneously.[10]

Social constructionism encourages a focus on languages that leaves scholars insufficiently troubled by inconsistencies and so insufficiently interested in coherence.

Social constructionism is an erroneous view of mind. No doubt social structures influence ideas understood as the content of mind, but they do not determine them. No doubt the words we use have prior social meanings, but the way we use words is not prescribed by their social meanings. Social constructionists argue langue or some sort of social structure fixes the ideas that are the content of individual minds and thereby the meanings that are the content of parole. If this were so, we should be able to deduce what someone thought from knowledge of the relevant social structure alone, and at the very least we should be able to give a full explanation of why someone thought what they did by reference to the relevant social structure alone. But, of course, we can not do either of these things. People accept different theories and say different things against the background of the same social structure, and we can explain why they do so only by referring to the creative way they reason as individuals. Thus, in front of any social structure there must be an undecided space where people can adopt either this theory or that theory, and say either this or that, for reasons of their own. For example, no doubt the languages of the common law and political economy provided Burke with a vocabulary, understood as form, which he then used to express his ideas, understood as content, and no doubt the ideas other authors already had expressed using these languages influenced his ideas. None of this, however, implies his ideas were fixed by a social structure composed of these languages and the ideas previously expressed using them. If we want to explain Burke's ideas on the French revolution, we must refer not only to social structures but also to his individual reasoning. Social structures might influence the content of an individual mind, but they definitely do not fix it.

The failure of social constructionism undermines Pocock's critique of a concern with coherence in the history of ideas. The content of our mind and speech derives from our individual reasoning within a social context, not from the social

context itself. A language provides us with words, but we use these words creatively to express our own beliefs. A tradition influences the ideas we come to hold, but we reach our ideas by reasoning creatively against the background of a tradition. Ideas are beliefs people hold for reasons of their own, albeit in a social context: ideas are not mere manifestations of a social structure. Thus, the coherence constraints that operate on ideas are those we associate with beliefs, not those we apply to a language. Historians who want to know about the content of Burke's text can not be satisfied by a study that dismisses any apparent inconsistencies in his ideas as a feature of his using the diverse languages of the common law and political economy. Rather, they must ask what beliefs Burke hoped to express using these diverse languages, and doing so will involve their puzzling over any inconsistencies they find in his ideas.

As we have, seen Pocock defends a strong thesis of social constructionism according to which langue determines parole. He argues "the author inhabits a historically given world that is apprehensible only in the ways rendered available by a number of historically given languages; the modes of speech available to him gave him the intentions he can have by giving him the means he can have of performing them."[11] The implication of such statements is clear: languages decide the context of utterances - the beliefs authors express - as well as their form - the words they use. It is true Pocock sometimes appears to advocate a weaker thesis since he allows texts can have multiple meanings and so suggests their meanings can not be fixed by a language. Actually, however, he ascribes the multiple nature of a text's meaning not to the ability of the author to use language creatively to convey novel content but to the fact that any linguistic context typically includes several languages each of which gives the text a different meaning. As he explains, "the more complex, even the more contradictory, the language context in which he [the author] is situated, the richer and more ambivalent become the speech acts he is capable of performing."[12] Certainly this appears to the position he adopts in his study of Burke. The multiple meanings of Burke's text do not come from Burke's creativity in a way that would require us to ask

how he reconciled his use of different languages. They come instead from the way different languages give the text different meanings. However, whilst Pocock himself adopts a strong social constructionism, other contextualists might try to defend a similar position on the grounds of a weak thesis that <u>langue</u> limits or influences, as opposed to determines, <u>parole</u>. Although I am not convinced by this weak thesis, here I want to point out only that it can not sustain an attack on the myth of coherence.[13] If social structures do not fix content, then in front of any social structure there must be an undecided space where people adopt beliefs for reasons of their own. If languages only limit or influence speech, so there must be a sense in which individuals use languages to express their own beliefs. Once we allow individuals use languages to express their beliefs, we inevitably raise the question of why they use languages as they do, of what their beliefs are. And once we shift our attention from languages to beliefs, we necessarily introduce into the history of ideas the stronger coherence constraints associated with beliefs.

The Place of Intentions

Skinner equates the meaning of a text with the intentions of its author thereby rejecting Pocock's thesis of social constructionism. His method does not rest on a neglect of the nature of mind as a property of the individual. It rests rather on a particular approach to mind as a property of the individual that is implicit within his deployment of John Austin's theory of speech acts.[14] He argues to understand an utterance we must grasp both the meaning of the words within it and its intended illocutionary force. The intended illocutionary force of an utterance is its point: when a policeman tells a skater "the ice over there is very thin," his illocutionary intention is to warn the skater; when Defoe parodied arguments against toleration of religious dissent, his illocutionary intention was to ridicule them; and when Locke ignored the prescriptive force of the ancient constitution, his illocutionary intention was to reject it. Most of Skinner's methodological conclusions derive from his belief that we must

grasp illocutionary intentions if we are to understand utterances. In particular, he defends a contextualist method on the grounds that to grasp an illocutionary intention we must have prior knowledge of the relevant social conventions. Authors want to be understood, so their illocutionary intentions "must be conventional intentions," so "to understand what any given writer may have been <u>doing in</u> using some particular concept or argument, we need first of all to grasp the nature and range of things that could recognizably have been done by using that particular concept, in the treatment of that particular theme, at that particular time."[15]

A focus on illocutionary intentions has the effect of undermining a concern with the coherence of an author's works. It does so because the coherence constraints we apply to illocutionary intentions are weaker than those we apply to beliefs. Our folk psychology suggests intentions are beliefs or desires upon which people have decided to act.[16] According to Skinner, illocutionary intentions are not intentions to act but rather intentions in acting. Whereas an intention is held prior to an action and so stands in a contingent relation to it, illocutionary intentions are embodied in the actions whose point they constitute. This distinction implies intentions and illocutionary intentions have different relationships to the actions they inform, but it does not imply they have different relationships to the desires and beliefs that inform them. Illocutionary intentions are the desires or beliefs that constitute the point of an action.

Two coherence constraints operate on illocutionary intentions. First, because illocutionary intentions are either beliefs or desires, the coherence constraints on them must include the weaker of those associated with beliefs or desires, which is those associated with desires. The coherence constraints on desires are weaker than those on beliefs because we can hold contrary desires without being irrational whereas rational beliefs must be consistent. For example, we can rationally want both to eat chocolate because it will taste nice and not to do so because it will damage our teeth, but we can not rationally believe both we are eating chocolate and we are not doing

so. The second coherence constraint to operate on illocutionary intentions derives from their relationship to particular actions. When we act, we have to do so in a single way, so we have to organise any relevant reasons for action into a hierarchy, and doing so imposes a new coherence constraint upon them. For example, when we act, we either do or do not eat the chocolate, so we must sort any relevant desires into a coherent hierarchy. To summarise, the coherence constraints on illocutionary intentions are as follows: first, if two actions embody separate illocutionary intentions, they need to cohere only to the extent desires need do so; but second, if one action embodies two separate illocutionary intentions, they need to cohere quite strongly. Thus, a focus on illocutionary intentions leads to a strong concern with coherence within a given utterance, but only a weak concern with the coherence of two or more utterances made by a single author.

Skinner condemns a concern with coherence in the history of ideas because he applies to different texts by a single author the weak coherence constraints connected with illocutionary intentions, not the stronger ones connected with beliefs. He focuses on the aims or intentions of authors, not their beliefs. He argues, for instance, that "the aims and successes of a given writer may remain so various as to defy" all appeals to "a coherent system in their scattered thoughts."[17] As Skinner implies, we have no reason to expect the desires, intentions, and illocutionary intentions of an author at one time to cohere with his or her desires, intentions, and illocutionary intentions at another time; and we have no reason to expect the desires, intentions, and illocutionary intentions of an author when engaged in a theological dispute to cohere with his or her desires, intentions, and illocutionary intentions when engaged in a political dispute. Thus, because Skinner focuses on desires, intentions, and illocutionary intentions, he concludes authors' works need show no unity since authors typically will have "contributed over several decades to several quite different fields of enquiry."[18]

No doubt I could illustrate the way a focus on illocutionary intentions reduces the importance of coherence by reference to several of Skinner's historical studies. My one example, however, will come from his earliest article - an often incisive critique of F. C. Hood's account of Hobbes's political thought.[19] Hood tries to make sense of Hobbes's ideas by considering his work as a whole.[20] He concludes Hobbes held a dual theory of political obligation: whereas just men will recognise political obligation as inherent in a Natural Law dictated by reason and commanded by God, unjust men must be brought to regard political obligation as in their own interests by prudential arguments based on an egoistic psychology. Skinner makes many valid points against Hood, notably that Hood misrepresents the relationship of the psychological and religious arguments in Leviathan. What concerns us, however, is Skinner's dismissal of the very idea of looking for a coherent relationship between the political beliefs Hobbes expressed in Leviathan and the religious beliefs he expressed in later texts. Skinner argues that because the intention of Hobbes in writing Leviathan was to base a "whole doctrine" on the "naturall Inclinations of Mankind," therefore, we must approach Leviathan in these terms alone without referring to the religious beliefs Hobbes expressed in other texts written at other times. Hobbes intended Leviathan to have this meaning, and we have no reason to expect the intentions an author has in writing different texts to cohere, so we should not try to relate this intention to those informing Hobbes's later, more religious texts. A focus on desires, intentions, or illocutionary intentions leaves scholars uninterested in the coherence between different texts by a single author.

Skinner's denunciation of the myth of coherence confuses intentions and beliefs as two features of mind. He erroneously extends the comparatively weak coherence constraints that operate on illocutionary intentions to beliefs. He is right to suggest we have little reason to postulate a close fit between the desire informing the illocutionary intention in a text and the desire informing the illocutionary intention in another text by the same author. But this does not, as he thinks, allow him to

condemn the myth of coherence for the simple reason that illocutionary intentions are not the only concern of historians of ideas. When historians choose to focus on ideas or meanings rather than illocutionary intentions or speech-acts, the coherence constraints of concern to them are those operating on belief. Obviously I am not precluding the study of texts as linguistic actions embodying illocutionary intentions. I am only insisting on the legitimacy of the study of texts as expressions of meaning embodying beliefs. Here I do not feel it is necessary to defend the legitimacy of an interest in beliefs, partly because I can see no argument against it, and partly because Skinner himself clearly accepts it. Indeed Skinner has gone so far as to identify a focus on belief as central to the history of ideas, saying "the primary aim [of historians of ideas] is to use our ancestors' utterances as a guide to the identification of their beliefs."[21] When a policeman shouts "the ice over there is very thin", we want to know not only that he is issuing a warning, but also what he thinks the danger is; when Defoe parodies arguments for religious intolerance, we want to know not only that he is ridiculing the arguments, but also why he thinks they are silly; and when Locke ignores the ancient constitution, we want to know not only that he is rejecting a prestigious form of argument, but also why he thinks it unimportant. When historians of ideas ask questions like these about the belief, they must deploy the coherence constraints operating on beliefs, not those operating on illocutionary intentions.

We can illustrate the fallacy in Skinner's argument by returning to the example of Hobbes. No doubt Hobbes's illocutionary intention in Leviathan was to construct a self-sufficient argument premised on an egoistic psychology, and no doubt we have no reason to postulate a close fit between this intention and those in his later writings on religion. But things look somewhat different if we turn our attention from his illocutionary intentions to his beliefs. Perhaps Hobbes believed everyone should obey the sovereign both for the prudential reasons given in Leviathan, and because God commanded them to do so. If he believed these two things, then the comparatively strong coherence constraints that operate on beliefs would lead us to wonder how his

beliefs related to one another, and upon investigation we might conclude they did so in something like the way Hood describes. The important point here is not whether or not Hood is correct in his view of Hobbes. It is that when we consider Hobbes's beliefs, we raise the question of how the beliefs he expressed in <u>Leviathan</u> relate to the religious beliefs he expressed in later texts. If our interest is in Hobbes's beliefs, we will want to know not only that he believed such and such about the prudential basis of obligation, but also how such and such fits in with the rest of his beliefs including any he held about the religious basis of political obligation. We will want to do so precisely because we expect people's beliefs to be fairly coherent.

<u>On Philosophy and Mind</u>

I want to turn now from an analysis of how mistaken views of mind can lead people astray to an analysis of the role a principle of coherence should play in the history of ideas. My analysis will rest on the theory of mind given to us by the grammar of our concepts. The idea that philosophy elucidates the grammar of our concepts derives from Wittgenstein, and stands in contrast to the view of philosophy made familiar by the logical positivists. The logical positivists argued the truth-value or semantic meaning of a proposition consists in the method of its verification.[22] If no facts could show a proposition to be true or false, it is meaningless, unless it is a tautology. This verifiability principle led the logical positivists to distinguish sharply between synthetic and analytic propositions understood as two contrasting types of knowledge with different forms of justification. A synthetic proposition is true or false according to whether or not it is verified: synthetic truths, those of science, rest on empirical facts. An analytic proposition is true or false according to whether it can be proved or disproved solely from definitions using the laws of formal logic: analytic truths, those of logic and mathematics, are tautologies. If a proposition is neither synthetic nor analytic, it has no truth-value, it is meaningless. The logical positivists

insisted, therefore, that the whole of philosophy must consist of tautologies, of purely analytic truths.

By now logical positivism has given way to visions of philosophy inspired by work as diverse as that of Thomas Kuhn on the sociology of science, of W. V. O. Quine working within the empiricist tradition of the logical positivists themselves, and of Ludwig Wittgenstein in his later writings.[23] Despite their differences, Kuhn, Quine, and Wittgenstein all agree semantic meanings depend on their contexts in a way that undermines logical positivism. They all argue what we would count as a verification of a proposition depends at least on some of the other beliefs we accept as true. The dependence of semantic meanings on particular contexts undermines a sharp distinction between the synthetic and the analytic understood as two different types of knowledge.[24] Synthetic propositions can not be true or false simply by virtue of being verified by pure facts, since what we accept as a verification must depend on other beliefs that stabilise our definition of the terms of the proposition. And analytic propositions can not be true simply by virtue of definition and the laws of formal logic, since how we define something must depend on other beliefs that can vary with further empirical investigations. All our knowledge must arise within the context of a single web of beliefs.[25]

To reject a sharp distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions is to raise again questions about the type of knowledge philosophy provides us with. Wittgenstein's account of philosophy as the elucidation of the grammar of our concepts provides an answer to this questions.[26] Philosophers reach their conclusions by examining the meanings - the content and implications - of our web of concepts. To say this is not to commit oneself to the sharp distinction drawn by logical positivists between analytic and synthetic knowledge. Although the terms analytic and synthetic can not refer to two different types of knowledge, they still can refer to two different ways in which we can come to know things. After all, the acceptance of a body of beliefs provides us with a context that goes a long way towards fixing the

semantic meaning of its component parts. Thus, against the background of a given body of beliefs, we can come to know things either by further investigations of the world or by exploring the implications of the beliefs we already hold. The latter approach differs from both science and formal logic, the synthetic and the analytic, as they are conceived by the logical positivists. It consists neither in further empirical investigations nor in the elucidation of tautologies impervious to further empirical investigations. It draws out the logical implications of beliefs we currently hold true but might change at a later date. So understood, philosophy gives us knowledge that is true for us purely by virtue of semantic meaning, that is, by virtue of being implied by the concepts we use to make sense of the world.[27] The knowledge philosophy gives us is not self-evident since someone who did not share our concepts would not share it, but it is knowledge we can not question since our acceptance of our concepts makes it true for us by virtue of meaning alone. Even if Wittgenstein's talk of the grammar of our concepts can seem a bit metaphorical, the bold outline of his position is clear, and this outline will suffice for us.

Philosophy can provide us with a theory of mind by elucidating the concepts with which we make sense of mental phenomena, that is, the concepts of folk psychology. Folk psychology consists of a cluster of concepts that refer to human attitudes, perhaps attitudes to states of affairs, or perhaps attitudes to propositions; concepts such as fear, belief, desire, and pleasure. No doubt we can have the psychological attitudes we can, and also do the things we can, only because we possess certain physiological characteristics. But even if we discuss our capacity for holding attitudes and performing actions in physiological terms, we still discuss our actual attitudes and actions using folk psychology. Again, although various philosophers and scientists have attempted to devise a theory of mind that ignores, or even overturns, folk psychology, their efforts are of little relevance to the historian.[28] The most these physicalists can claim is that we should set about devising a physical interpretation of, or alternative to, folk psychology; after all, at the moment we can

neither correlate cognitive states with neuro-physiological ones nor provide an adequate account of our mental life in purely physiological terms. Thus, historians must ask physicalists what they should do while they wait for cognitive scientists to tell them how they should discuss mental phenomena. Physicalism embodies an aspiration; it is a research programme based on a faith in science. No doubt if this aspiration became a reality historians would have to rethink their discipline. But until it becomes a reality historians must continue to work with folk psychology precisely because that is the language we use to discuss mental phenomena.

Crucially, because historians must use folk psychology, we can devise a theory of mind for historians by elucidating the grammar of the concepts that make up folk psychology. Indeed I drew implicitly on the grammar of folk psychology when I highlighted certain theoretical problems with the linguistic contextualists' attacks on the alleged myth of coherence. First consider Pocock's social constructionism. Folk psychology allows us to conceive of people reaching a novel conclusion by exercising their reason or imagination. Even if people necessarily set out from various assumptions they inherit during the process of socialisation, they still can go on to exercise their reason or imagination to modify the assumptions they thus inherit in a novel way. Thus, the grammar of folk psychology precludes our reducing beliefs to a social language in the way Pocock attempts to do. Next consider Skinner's use of speech-act theory. Folk psychology allows us to unpack an intention-in-doing something in terms of desires as well as beliefs: the policeman tells the skater "the ice over there is very thin" because he wishes to warn the skater of a danger, but Locke ignored the debate about the ancient constitution because he believed it to be irrelevant. Thus, the grammar of folk psychology precludes our equating the coherence constraints operating on beliefs with those operating on illocutionary intentions in the way Skinner attempts to do.

Folk psychology provides us with a broad understanding of concepts such as belief, desire, and intention. Belief is the epistemic stance of holding a proposition to

be true. Desire is the emotional stance of wishing something to be the case.[29] Here belief and desire differ from one another primarily by virtue of their direction of fit to the world: whereas people want their beliefs to correspond to the world, they want the world to correspond to their desires. Finally, intention is the psychological state of having decided to act in such and such a way, with an intention-in-acting being the purpose for which the act was performed in accord with such a decision.[30] Of course, these definitions of belief, desire, and intention are very broad, leaving controversial issues undecided, but there is nothing wrong with this since we can identify the place of a principle of coherence within the history of ideas independently of such issues. In particular, we need not resolve the key issue in philosophical psychology about the metaphysical status of psychological states. As far as I am concerned, historians can conceive of belief, desire, intention, and the like as concepts that denote genuine mental states, or as purely functional concepts, or as concepts defined exclusively by reference to behaviour, or almost any other way they might wish.

One thing I must be clear about, however, is the nature of coherence. A perfectly coherent set of beliefs or desires would be a perfectly consistent one. Thus, there can be degrees of coherence since sets of beliefs or desires can contain a variable number of inconsistencies. The nature of coherence is a little more complex when we are considering beliefs or desires expressed at different times. Coherence across time entails not only consistency but also an appropriate stability or continuity. For a set of beliefs or desires expressed at one time to cohere with a set expressed at a later time, the two sets must be consistent, but their being consistent will have no significance unless the individual concerned still holds the earlier ones at the later time. Only if he or she still holds the earlier ones will the fact the beliefs or desires are consistent tell us something about a set of beliefs or desires someone really did hold in the past. Coherence means consistency at a given moment in time, but when we consider beliefs or desires expressed at different times, the relevant consistency also requires an appropriate stability.

To define coherence as consistency is to raise questions about its relationship to rationality and to truth. Although rationality has been defined in many different ways, I will use it to characterise both sets of beliefs or actions that are coherent, and the individuals who hold such beliefs or perform such actions. I will use rationality in this broad sense not because I reject all stronger, more restricted senses of the term, but simply because doing so enables me to equate the rational with the notion of coherence with which I am concerned. Again, because I do not want to preclude stronger senses of the term rational, I do not want to move from a concern with the place of a principle of coherence in the history of ideas to advocacy of a coherence theory of truth. Although semantic holism rules out pure facts by which we conclusively can verify propositions, we still might be able to define objective knowledge, let alone truth, in terms of a concept of epistemic rationality that goes beyond consistency.[31]

The Coherence of Beliefs

What are the coherence constraints that operate on our ascriptions of belief? I will identify three such constraints: first, the actual priority of coherent beliefs implies a minimal degree of consistency must have been present; second, the conceptual priority of coherent beliefs implies we initially should presume consistency when we study a single text or two or more texts written at the same time by an author; and third, the conceptual priority of coherent beliefs over time implies we initially should presume consistency when we study two or more texts written at different times by a single author.

1) The Actual Priority of Coherent Beliefs. Actions instantiate beliefs as well as reasons for acting. What is more, because people can not act in two incompatible ways at the same time, their beliefs must exhibit at least a minimal degree of consistency at any given moment if they are to act successfully in the world. In order to act as we do, we must have a set of beliefs capable of informing our actions, that is,

a set of beliefs possessing a minimal degree of coherence. Successfully to go to the delicatessen and buy food, I have at the very least to believe that it exists, is open, and sells food, that I have a means of payment accepted there, and so on. I can not believe, say, it is open but does not exist, or it sells food but the storekeeper will not accept my credit card and I have no other way of paying. Moreover, because human behaviour is not a random sampling of unconnected actions, but rather a series of linked actions sometimes organised in accord with complex plans, the beliefs informing this behaviour must exhibit at least a minimal degree of stability and consistency over time. In order to string together a series of actions in accord with an overall plan, we must have a set of beliefs capable of sustaining such actions, that is, a set of beliefs whose stability can sustain a meaningful commitment to future action and whose continuing consistency makes action possible. Successfully to plan and have a skiing holiday, I have at the very least to believe I am going to a place where there will be snow and where I will ski, and I have to do so while I book the hotel, buy the tickets, pack clothes, skis, and so on. I can not believe, say, I need not take my skis as there will be no snow, and I can not change my mind about where I am going when I reach the bus station, or suddenly think I am going to a tropical beach and pack accordingly. The grammar of folk psychology commits us to the actual priority of coherent beliefs in two respects. First, to succeed in performing an action we must have a reasonably consistent set of beliefs. Second, to succeed in performing a planned set of actions we must have a reasonably consistent set of beliefs that remain fairly stable over time.

How far does the actual priority of coherent beliefs extend? My arguments show only that to act we must have reasonably coherent beliefs. They do not show people are perfectly rational. People often make mistakes in their reasoning in a way that leads them to adopt inconsistent beliefs; people's desires can interfere, perhaps unconsciously, with their process of belief-formation in a way that leads them to adopt inconsistent beliefs; and people can have conflicting desires in a way that makes them

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act inconsistently over time. Unfortunately we can not identify the content of the minimal coherence implied by the fact we regularly perform actions and sets of actions successfully. We can not do so because the particular set of coherent beliefs someone must hold depends on the actions he or she performs, and we can not identify a set of actions everyone must perform. All we can say is: because someone performs actions X, he or she must hold beliefs that cohere to the minimal extent Y, where what content we give to Y depends on the nature of X.

2) The Conceptual Priority of Coherent Beliefs. The grammar of folk psychology embodies the conceptual priority of consistent beliefs and thereby commits us to a presumption that people's beliefs are coherent at any given moment in time.[32] Crucially, our concept of a language precludes the possibility of our having a language at all unless saying one thing often rules out saying something else. The possibility of sentences having a meaning depends on the fact that to assert something is to deny the contrary. For example, if saying something was somewhere did not rule out saying it was not there, to say something was somewhere would have no meaning. (Of course, some objects might have special properties such that they can both be somewhere and not be there at the same time, but in this case to say something that did not have these properties was somewhere would have to be to rule out saying it was not there). Our concept of a language requires us to accept the very existence of a language presupposes a norm of logical consistency governs its use in particular utterances.[33] Moreover, this norm requires us initially to assume the beliefs people hold form a coherent set. We would not be able to treat people's use of language as governed by a norm of consistency unless we assumed their beliefs also were governed by such a norm. For example, if someone says something is somewhere, we can not rule out their saying it is not there unless we can assume they do not believe it is both there and not there. We must deploy a general presumption that people's beliefs are consistent because if we do not we will be unable to ascribe meanings to

utterances. We can ascribe meanings to utterances, and beliefs to people, only if we do so in accord with a norm of consistency.

The grammar of our concepts both reflects and informs our view of ourselves in embodying a presumption in favour of coherent beliefs. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how we could avoid treating our own beliefs in terms of a presumption of consistency. If we did not presume our beliefs were consistent, we could not conceive of ourselves as people who could adopt reasons for action in the light of our own beliefs, so we would have to conclude we lacked any stable identity. Thus, because we must presume we ourselves have consistent beliefs, and because we should reconcile the way we treat other people with our view of ourselves, we initially must assume other people too have consistent beliefs. The process of ascribing beliefs to others is governed by a norm of consistency.

What does the conceptual priority of coherence entail? It does not mean that people can not hold inconsistent beliefs, or that we can not ascribe inconsistent beliefs to people. Rather, it means only that a norm of coherence governs the process of interpretation, only that interpreters should ascribe beliefs to people in accord with a norm of consistency. The grammar of folk psychology embodies a norm of consistency, and this means the process of ascribing beliefs to others must be governed by a presumption of coherence. Such a presumption contrasts with an expectation. Presumptions are norms that guide, but do not fix, a human practice, such as that of communicating with one another or of ascribing beliefs to one another. Presumptions arise from the grammar of our concepts, so they are things we must accept purely by virtue of meaning; they are part of the conceptual underpinnings of a practice, not part of the discoveries made through a practice. They can not be overturned unless we adopt a completely new set of concepts, a new practice, a new form of life. In contrast, expectations are things we have come to regard as likely because of our prior interactions with the world. Expectations rest on our beliefs about certain objects, so they are conceptually antecedent to factual information or

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specific theories we have about a particular thing or set of things. They can be overturned if we merely decide these particular beliefs are wrong. The grammar of folk psychology embodies a norm of consistency which implies we must ascribe beliefs to people in accord with a presumption of consistency. We can ascribe inconsistent beliefs to people, we even can come to expect some people to have inconsistent beliefs, but we can do so only against a norm, a presumption, in favour of consistency.

3) The Conceptual Priority of Coherent Beliefs Over Time. The grammar of folk psychology is such that we ascribe beliefs to people using criteria of rationality, and this sets up a presumption not only of consistency but also of stability of belief over time.[34] After all, to ascribe any one belief to someone we also have to ascribe other beliefs to them, and one way in which we do this is by presuming people are reasonable in that they do not change their beliefs at random. We presume people's beliefs will remain stable unless they have a reason to change them. We have seen Skinner attacks the myth of coherence because he focuses on the weak coherence constraints that operate on desires over time. There is nothing strange about our wanting to eat chocolate at one time, but not another time, and if we act on these two desires, there is nothing strange about the lack of coherence between our actions and so the illocutionary intentions they embody. In contrast, if someone believes something at one time, but not a later time, they must have a reason for having changed their mind or we will consider them irrational. When people hold a belief, we assume they will continue to do so unless new evidence or reasoning provides them with a reason to change their mind. People's desires can change over time for no reason without their being irrational: if we decide we no longer want to eat chocolate, we do not thereby imply our old desire to do so was wrong, we merely have a new set of wants.[35] In contrast, people's beliefs can not change over time for no apparent reason without their being irrational: if we decide we no longer believe eating chocolate is bad for one's teeth, we thereby imply our previous belief that it was was

wrong, and we must have a reason for doing so if we are to be considered rational. The grammar of folk psychology is such that we can ascribe beliefs to people only by adopting a norm of coherence with respect to beliefs over time.

Once again, the grammar of our concepts both reflects and informs our view of ourselves in embodying a presumption in favour of stability of belief over time. It is difficult to imagine how we could avoid treating our own beliefs in terms of a presumption of stability over time. If we did not presume our beliefs would remain constant unless we had a reason to change them, we would be unable to make any coherent plans requiring actions in the future, so we would have to conclude we lacked any stable identity over time. Thus, because we must presume we ourselves have coherent beliefs over time, and because we must reconcile the way we treat other people with our view of ourselves, we initially must assume other people too have coherent beliefs over time. The process of ascribing beliefs to others is governed by a norm of stability.

Here too our presumption of coherence does not imply people can not change their beliefs for no apparent reason, or that we can not understand them as having done so, let alone that people can not change their beliefs at all. Rather, it means only that a norm of coherence governs the process of interpretation, only that interpreters should ascribe beliefs to people in accord with a norm of stability over time as well as one of consistency. Again, the existence of a presumption of coherence does not imply historians can not ascribe incoherent beliefs to people. When historians investigate an author's beliefs in accord with a presumption of coherence, they might conclude either the author held inconsistent beliefs at a moment in time or the author's beliefs were not stable over time. Critics might say to allow historians such flexibility is to deny the force of my own arguments and leave only confusion. Actually, however, the flexibility of historical interpretation is something I have to accept given my grounds for renouncing logical positivism. If there are no given empirical facts, no historical interpretation is unquestionable; if what we accept as true depends on the

theories we hold, how we should interpret some aspect of the past must depend on the other beliefs we hold. Although there is a norm of coherence, a norm is something one can depart from, and semantic holism suggests our other beliefs about the past necessarily enter into our judgement as to whether a historian legitimately may depart from this norm on any particular occasion. There always will be disputes about the nature and extent of the coherence of an author's beliefs just as there always will be disputes about other aspects of the content of an author's beliefs. Clearly the flexibility of historical interpretation also implies historians can go too far in making someone's beliefs seem coherent, although, of course, what counts as too far must vary with the context. I can accept, therefore, some of the examples Skinner criticises merit his censure.[36] Nonetheless, my analysis of the coherence constraints that operate on beliefs leads to a view of the nature of the history of ideas very different from that associated with the linguistic contextualists.

I want to turn now, therefore, to the following question: what implications does my analysis of the coherence constraints that operate on beliefs have for historians of ideas? The important constraints here are the latter two - the conceptual priority of coherent beliefs and the conceptual priority of coherent beliefs over time. They have implications for the presumptions, concerns, and procedures historians of ideas should adopt, and these implications combine to promote a distinctive view of the nature of their discipline as a composite of history and philosophy. The first implication of my analysis of the coherence constraints that operate on beliefs is this: we should presume coherence when we try to identify the beliefs expressed in an utterance or several utterances made by one person. To say this is, of course, merely to record the fact the grammar of folk psychology is such that we ascribe beliefs to people using criteria of rationality and so in accord with a norm of coherence. No doubt there will be times when historians reach the conclusion that a particular author held incoherent beliefs, and perhaps there will be times when they get so used to reaching this conclusion they will come to expect a particular author or group of

authors to hold incoherent beliefs, but these things can happen only against the background of a general presumption that authors held coherent beliefs.

The second implication of my analysis of the coherence constraints that operate on beliefs is this: we should concern ourselves with the coherence of the beliefs of the authors we study. If historians of ideas presume coherence, if they ascribe beliefs in accord with a norm of coherence, they will be puzzled whenever they uncover apparently incoherent beliefs. Whenever they uncover apparently contrary beliefs in a single text, they will want to know if the beliefs really are incoherent, and if so, why the author nonetheless held them to be true. For example, if they find Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France expresses beliefs associated with both a common law tradition and a tradition of political economy, then unlike Pocock they will concern themselves with the way these beliefs relate to one another. Likewise, whenever they uncover apparently contrary beliefs in different texts written by one author, they will want to know if the beliefs really are incoherent, and if so, what reason the author had for renouncing the earlier ones. Thus, if they find Hobbes gives a secular, prudential account of political obedience in Leviathan, whereas he later developed religious arguments for political obligation, then unlike Skinner they will concern themselves with the way his secular argument related to his religious convictions.

The final implication of my analysis of the coherence constraints that operate on beliefs is this: we should proceed by means of a philosophical reconstruction of sets of beliefs as consistent wholes. When historians of ideas ascribe beliefs to people, they do so using a norm of coherence. They ascribe beliefs to people in part by showing how the relevant beliefs cohere with one another. Thus, historians of ideas must focus on the conceptual links that bind together the beliefs of a given author. They must try to reconstruct his or her beliefs as a single, coherent whole held together by their intelligible connections to one another. Here the reconstruction of a coherent set of beliefs is in part a philosophical task because it relies on the

identification of intelligible connections between the beliefs concerned. Historians of ideas analyse the relationships that bind concepts together, and the study of the relationships between concepts is a philosophical task, particularly given that philosophy concerns the grammar of our concepts not logical tautologies. Equally, however, the reconstruction of coherent sets of belief is a historical task because particular individuals really did hold these sets of belief at sometime in the past. Historians of ideas explore the links between beliefs that existed in the past, and the study of things that existed in the past is a historical task. The history of ideas, therefore, merges philosophy with history.

I have argued the history of ideas merges history with philosophy. In contrast, Pocock insists "it is important to distinguish between the approaches made to this subject [the history of ideas] by the philosopher and the historian."[37] He argues philosophers are interested in past beliefs in so far as they can explain them rationally, whereas historians are interested in them in so far as they can recover them from the historical records. Philosophers endow past beliefs with the highest possible rational coherence: historians reconstruct them historically. Thus, he allows (albeit grudgingly) philosophers legitimately can study texts in terms of their coherence if they so wish, but he allows them to do so only if they forswear all claims to be studying history.[38] Here, however, Pocock evokes a false dichotomy. There is no clear distinction between the philosophical task of reconstructing beliefs in accord with the coherence constraints we apply to all beliefs and the historical task of reconstructing beliefs as they existed in the past. If we are to recover an author's beliefs as they existed in the past, we must do so in terms of the inner consistency that held them together, so we must reconstruct them as a more or less coherent set. Aspects of the philosophical task of investigating the rational consistency of beliefs enter into the historical task of recovering beliefs from the historical records. Although to study beliefs from the past is not to endow them with the highest possible

rational coherence, it is to <u>presume</u> their coherence, to <u>concern</u> oneself with their coherence, and to <u>proceed</u> by uncovering their coherence.

The Error of the Positivist

No doubt some linguistic contextualists will respond to my argument as follows. They will say 'perhaps you are right to defend a presumption of coherence, but whether or not we find coherence still depends on the evidence, and all we want to insist upon is the illegitimacy of going beyond the evidence when endowing texts or minds with coherence'. They will hark back to Pocock's insistence on an exclusive focus on the thoughts people actually thought in the past at the level of abstraction at which they actually thought them. Pocock argues "the strictly historical task before us is plainly that of determining by investigations on what level of abstraction thought did take place."[39] His proposed criteria for deciding whether or not our accounts of the past correspond to a genuine reality is verification against conscious formulations. If historians evoke assumptions of which their subjects never became conscious "it will be difficult to submit the model to verification," but "if it can independently be shown that these assumptions were consciously formulated from time to time, then what was an explanatory model will begin to appear a history of events which actually occurred."[40] The question is: does my presumption of coherence make any difference to the way historians should treat the evidence?

I think it does, and to show why, I want to explore the concept of evidence. Pocock's appeal to criteria based on verification against conscious formulations assumes, first, that conscious formulations are given to us as pure unproblematic facts so we can test our theories against them with much more certainty than we could test them against the unexpressed beliefs we postulate when we interpret texts. And it assumes, second, that we conceivably could recover thought at the level of abstraction at which it took place without thereby ascribing preconscious beliefs to the people we study. Thus, Pocock's position suffers from the very failings semantic holism points

to in logical positivism. These failings are recognised so widely now I hope I will be excused giving only a brief indication of how they undermine Pocock's position. Philosophers such as Kuhn have argued forcefully that we do not have any pure observations.[41] Consequently, historians of ideas can not verify their attribution of beliefs against the conscious formulations of the people they study without making a number of theoretical assumptions. Philosophers such as Quine have argued forcefully that the meaning of a proposition depends on its theoretical context.[42] Consequently, historians of ideas can not ascribe an adequate content to the conscious formulations of the people they study without ascribing unexpressed and even pre-conscious beliefs to them. No beliefs are simply given to historians as present in an author's work, and historians can conclude an author believed one thing only by ascribing other unexpressed and preconscious beliefs to the author. Thus, once we reject Pocock's positivism, we find historians of ideas necessarily make sense of the beliefs of their subjects in a holistic process of interpretation. They ascribe a whole range of beliefs to authors, some of which they take to be consciously formulated in texts, some of which they take to be consciously held but not expressed in texts, and some of which they take to be preconscious or even unconscious. Only by ascribing an enlarged set of beliefs to an author can they make sense of the texts they study. Only as an enlarged set of beliefs do their interpretations map onto historical reality. Interpretation is a holistic activity, which, of course, is why we have insisted historians have the flexibility to ascribe inconsistent beliefs to people in a way that means our rejection of the linguistic contextualists' approach does not imply we must reject all their historical studies.

Pocock upholds a positivist faith in pure evidence of consciously formulated beliefs. Without this faith, he could not insist on historians restricting themselves to such beliefs. In contrast, I have argued historians confront only theory-laden evidence, so their task must be to infer from it to the best available interpretation irrespective of whether or not doing so requires them to go beyond what they consider

to be consciously formulated beliefs.[43] Crucially, when historians extrapolate from the theory-laden evidence to the best available interpretation, they should do so in accord with a norm of coherence. When we interpret the past, we necessarily do so holistically in the light of the other things we hold true, and one of these things, given to us by the grammar of folk psychology, is a commitment to a norm of coherence with respect to belief. Thus, a presumption of coherence sometimes can justify a historian ascribing unexpressed or even preconscious beliefs to authors in order to make their views seem more consistent. It can legitimise attempts to endow the beliefs of authors with a reasonable degree of coherence. For example, if we found someone believed both social stability was an essential prerequisite of human flourishing and anarchism always destroyed social stability, we probably would be justified in assuming they believed anarchism was a bad thing. We would be justified in doing so irrespective of our ability to verify our assumption against conscious formulations, and irrespective also of whether or not they ever had thought about the matter at the relevant level of abstraction. We would be justified in doing so simply because doing so would be part of a process of extrapolating to the best available interpretation in the light of the evidence and a presumption of coherence. Historians can appeal to unexpressed and preconscious beliefs that endow an author with a reasonable degree of coherence when doing so helps them to make sense of things as best they can. Thus, some of the things Pocock would describe as the illegitimate imposition of coherence upon the evidence, I would describe as legitimate inference in the light of the evidence together with a norm of coherence.

Again, my account of the history of ideas as a merger of history and philosophy applies to the whole of the discipline, not just the study of a few special authors. Pocock suggests a focus on the coherence of Hobbes's work has legitimacy whereas one on Burke's work does not because Hobbes claimed to be devising a consistent philosophical system whereas Burke did not.[44] In contrast, my justification for reconstructing sets of beliefs as coherent wholes does not lie in the expressed

intentions of a few authors, but rather in the way the grammar of our concepts compels us to treat all beliefs as operating under certain coherence constraints. It would be besides the point, therefore, for historians to follow Pocock's advice and ask "for evidence that the author both intended the production of a coherent text and understood what would constitute its coherence."[45] Historians do not need such evidence because they can presume the author had coherent beliefs. To study the beliefs of Machiavelli, Burke, or Jefferson, no less than those of Hobbes, Kant, or Hegel should be to <u>presume</u> their coherence, to <u>concern</u> oneself with their coherence, and to <u>proceed</u> by uncovering their coherence.

<u>Conclusion</u>

The current tendency to denigrate the concern of historians of ideas with the coherence of beliefs rests on either a fallacious doctrine of social constructionism or a misguided focus on desires, intentions, or illocutionary intentions at the expense of beliefs. Strong coherence constraints operate on our interpretation of beliefs, and an adequate conceptualisation of the history of ideas must allow for this. The grammar of folk psychology commits us not only to the actual priority of coherent beliefs, but more importantly to the conceptual priority of both consistent beliefs and stable beliefs over time. A norm of coherence governs our ascriptions of beliefs to others. Consequently, historians of ideas should adopt a presumption of coherence with respect to beliefs, they should concern themselves with the coherence of beliefs, and they should try to reconstruct sets of beliefs as coherent wholes. Their task is a philosophical one as well as a historical one. Interpreting the past is a flexible, holistic activity we undertake in the context of the other beliefs we hold true, notably a commitment to a norm of coherence that governs the ascription of beliefs to others.

[1] An earlier version of this essay appeared in <u>History and Theory</u>.

[2] J. Pocock, "State of the Art", in <u>Virtue, Commerce, and History</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 2.

[3] J. Pocock, "Languages and Their Implications: The Transformation of the Study of Political Thought", in <u>Politics, Language and Time</u> (London: Methuen, 1972), p. 25.

[4] See Pocock, "State of the Art".

[5] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 9.

[6] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 9.

[7] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 12.

[8] J. Pocock, "Burke and the Ancient Constitution: A Problem in the History of Ideas," in <u>Politics, Language and Time</u>, pp. 202-32.

[9] J. Pocock, "The Political Economy of Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution," in <u>Virtue, Commerce and History</u>, pp. 193-212.

[10] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 194.

[11] <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 4-5.

[12] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 5.

[13] Against the weak thesis, see M. Bevir, "The Individual and Society", <u>Political Studies</u> (1996).

[14] See, in particular, Q, Skinner, "Conventions and the Understanding of Speech-acts," <u>Philosophical Quarterly</u> 20 (1970), 118-38; and Q. Skinner, "On Performing and Explaining Linguistic Actions," <u>Philosophical Quarterly</u> 21 (1971), 1-21. My difficulty with Skinner concerns the way his use of Austin entails sliding from premises applying to mind conceived in one way to a conclusion applying to mind conceived in another way. I do not think the confusion is present in Austin's work. See J. Austin, <u>How To Do Things with Words</u>, ed. J. Urmson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

[15] Q. Skinner, "Motives, Intentions and Interpretation," in J. Tully, ed., <u>Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics</u> (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), p. 77. In so far as Skinner looks on the languages in which illocutionary intentions are expressed as social conventions, he ends up with a

method resembling Pocock's. However, I think the proximity of the two usually is over-stated. Skinner's emphasis on intentions has no real echo in Pocock's work, and the contexts that interest him are <u>debates</u> in which authors make moves, not <u>languages</u> that define what authors can say.

[16] Some philosophers define intentions to include beliefs and desires on the grounds that we intend to act in a way we believe will lead to the fulfilment of a desire. Skinner's illocutionary intentions are not like this. He defines an illocutionary intention as the point of an action in contrast to its meaning, that is, as a belief or desire embedded within it that points back to a reason for performing it in contrast to the beliefs that channel the reason in a particular direction.

[17] Q. Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," in Tully, ed., <u>Meaning and Context</u>, p. 40.

[18] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 39.

[19] Q. Skinner, "Hobbes's <u>Leviathan</u>," <u>Historical Journal</u> 7 (1964), 321-33.

[20] F. Hood, <u>The Divine Politics of Thomas Hobbes</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

[21] Q. Skinner, "A Reply to My Critics," in Tully, ed., <u>Meaning and Context</u>, p. 258.

[22] A. Ayer, <u>Language, Truth and Logic</u> (London: V. Gollancz, 1936). Also see L. Wittgenstein, <u>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</u> (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960).

[23] T. Kuhn, <u>The Structure of Scientific Revolutions</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); W. Quine, <u>Word and Object</u> (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1960); and L. Wittgenstein, <u>Philosophical Investigations</u>, trans. G. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972).

[24] Compare, in particular, W. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", in <u>From a Logical Point of View</u> (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 20-46

[25] The image of our beliefs as forming an interconnected web derives primarily from W. Quine & J. Ullian, <u>The Web of Belief</u> (New York: Random House, 1970).

[26] For an early exposition of the notion of philosophy as the grammar of our concepts, see L. Wittgenstein, <u>Philosophical Grammar</u>, ed. R. Rhees, trans. A. Kenny (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974).

[27] On Wittgenstein in relation to Quine's critique of analyticity, see H. Putnam, "Analyticity and Apriority Beyond Wittgenstein and Quine", in <u>Philosophical Papers</u>, Vol. 3: <u>Realism and Reason</u>

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 115-38; C. Wright, <u>Wittgenstein on the</u> <u>Foundations of Mathematics</u> (London: Duckworth, 1980), partic. pp. 358-63.

[28] See, for example, S. Stich, <u>From Folk Psychology to Cognitive Science</u> (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1983). For a defence of the ineliminable and sufficient nature of folk psychology, see L. Rudder, <u>Saving Belief: A Critique of Physicalism</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

[29] Some philosophers prefer the term pro-attitude to that of desire because they think desires are just one of several possible bases for our preferences and so motives. See D. Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes", in <u>Essays on Actions and Events</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 3-19.

[30] I am following Skinner in defining intention in a way indebted to G. Anscombe, <u>Intention</u> (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957).

[31] For two recent, rather different ways of doing so, see M. Bevir, "Objectivity in History", <u>History and</u> <u>Theory</u> 33 (1994), 328-44; and T. Schatzki, "Objectivity and Rationality", in W. Natter, et. al., eds., <u>Objectivity and its Other</u> (New York: The Guildford Press, 1995), pp. 137-60.

[32] The idea of conceptual priority as a norm governing ascriptions of belief is a familiar one to philosophers who have used it to defend not only the weak notion of coherence for which I am arguing but also notions of objective rationality, truth, and the like. Compare the accounts of radical interpretation in D. Davidson, <u>Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); and Quine, <u>Word and Object</u>. Also see D. Dennett, "Intentional Systems", in <u>Brainstorms:</u> <u>Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology</u> (Brighton, Eng.: Harvester Press, 1981), pp. 3-22.

[33] The importance of a concern with consistency has been stressed even by philosophers who deny logical truths are given as self-evident. See Quine, <u>Word and Object</u>, p. 59. Richard Rorty argues a restricted concept of rationality as consistency has no real content since everyone can meet it. R. Rorty, <u>Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 174. However, even if Rorty is right, his argument shows only that a restricted concept of rationality has no place in the evaluation of beliefs, not that it has no place in the interpretation of beliefs.

[34] On the place of a concept of rationality in the criteria of application for the concepts of folk psychology, see Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes".

[35] It is possible some of our desires are so integral to our identity people would consider us unreasonable if we changed them for no reason, but this certainly is not true of all of them.

[36] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding".

[37] J. Pocock, "The History of Political Thought: A Methodological Enquiry," in P. Laslett & W. Runciman, eds., Philosophy, Politics and Society (second series) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), p. 190.

[38] cf. "If they [philosophers] say simply that the text can be made sense of in such a way, and that it does not matter to them whether the author or any previous reader has ever made sense of it in such a way, they are informing us that their philosophical enterprise does not oblige them to study the actions of any historical agent; after which they have only to abstain - and it may not be easy - from inadvertently speaking as if they are after all describing the actions of historical agents and writing history with the disengaged hand." Pocock, "State of the Art," p. 24.

[39] Pocock, "History of Political Thought," p. 186. I address my comments on positivism exclusively to Pocock because I do not think Skinner would respond to my critique in a positivist manner. For an attempt to condemn Skinner as a positivist, see B. Parekh & R. Berki, "The History of Political Ideas: A Critique of Q. Skinner's Methodology," Journal of the History of Ideas 34 (1973), 163-84. For Skinner's justified surprise at the charge, see Q. Skinner, "Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action," in Tully, ed., Meaning and Context, pp. 97-118.

[40] Pocock, "History of Political Thought," p. 188.

[41] Kuhn, Structure of Scientific Revolutions.

[42] Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism".

[43] See P. Lipton, Inference to the Best Explanation, (London: Routledge, 1991).

[44] Pocock, "State of the Art," p. 24.

[45] Ibid., pp. 24-5.