

Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective

From Cambridge University Press

Popular Sovereignty
in Historical Perspective

Edited by Richard Bourke
and Quentin Skinner



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This collaborative volume offers the first historical reconstruction of the concept of popular sovereignty from antiquity to the twentieth century. First formulated between the late sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, the various early modern conceptions of the doctrine were heavily indebted to Roman reflection on forms of government and Athenian ideas of popular power. This study, edited by Richard Bourke and Quentin Skinner, traces successive transformations of the doctrine, rather than narrating a linear development. It examines critical moments in the career of popular sovereignty, spanning antiquity, medieval Europe, the early modern wars of religion, the revolutions of the eighteenth century and their aftermath, decolonisation and mass democracy. Featuring original work by an international team of scholars, the book offers a reconsideration of one of the formative principles of contemporary politics by exploring its descent from classical city-states to the advent of the modern state.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Popular sovereignty is the most fundamental, most widespread and least understood principle of political legitimacy in the world today. As the first comprehensive scholarly treatment of the subject over the longue durée, Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective will become a pivotal work in the history of political thought."

David Armitage, Harvard University

"Although the idea of popular sovereignty is central to modern political thought, its historical evolution and conceptual transformations have received little sustained scholarly attention. The erudite and insightful chapters in Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective trace its emergence and development across time and space, from the ancient Mediterranean world to the present, and from Europe to the United States and India. It is a major scholarly achievement, and is sure to become a standard reference point for those working on the topic in political theory, intellectual history, philosophy and law."

Duncan Bell, University of Cambridge

About the Author

Richard Bourke is Professor in the History of Political Thought and Co-Director of the Centre for the Study of the History of Political Thought at Queen Mary, University of London. He has been a Humboldt Fellow at the University of Munich, an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fellow at the Huntington Library in San Marino and a Fellow at the Institute of Advance Study in Berlin. He has written extensively on the history of enlightenment political thought and on modern Irish history. His books include Peace in Ireland: The War of Ideas (2003, 2012) and Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke (2015).

Quentin Skinner is Barber Beaumont Professor of the Humanities at Queen Mary, University of London. He is a Fellow of the British Academy and the Academia Europaea, and a foreign member of many other learned societies. His scholarship, which is available in more than twenty languages, has won him numerous awards, including the Wolfson Prize for History in 1979 and a Balzan Prize in 2006. His books include The Foundations of Modern Political Thought (2 volumes, 1978), Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes (1996), Liberty before Liberalism (1998), Hobbes and Republican Liberty (2008), Forensic Shakespeare (2014) and a three-volume collection of essays, Visions of Politics (2002).

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