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EXTENDED MEANING AND UNDERSTANDING IN THE HISTORY OF IDEAS ¹

ABSTRACT

Many historians focus primarily on authors' "intended meanings". Yet all textual interpreters, including historians, need a second kind of meaning. I call this idea "extended meaning", a new name for an old idea: "P means Q" is the same as "P logically implies Q". Extended and intended meaning involve different kinds of understanding: even if we grasp exactly what an author meant, we miss something important if we overlook her errors, for example. Crucially, extended and intended meaning are not alternatives: just as some parts of texts cannot be understood without historical analysis, so too some parts of texts cannot be understood without philosophical analysis. Indeed, some historians are adept at using extended meanings to recover intended meanings. But the failure to make this explicit has led many historians to undervalue philosophical analysis. This paper thus applies the idea of extended meaning to three practical questions: whether we can deviate from authors' intended meanings, whether we can use anachronisms, and how we can use

¹ For comments and criticisms on earlier versions of this paper, I thank my anonymous reviewers; Terence Ball, Robin Douglass, Andrew Murphy, and Geraint Parry; and five philosophers of language who have helped me greatly: Sean Crawford, Wayne Davis, Clayton Littlejohn, Al Martinich, and J.L. Speranza. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Philosophy Department, King's College London, 19 October 2011; the Plamenatz Centenary Conference, Oxford, 4-5 September 2012; the 4th meeting of the European Hobbes Society, Leuven, 26-7 March 2013; and the 11th annual conference of the Association for Political Thought, Vanderbilt University, 10-12 October 2013. I thank participants for their criticisms and suggestions.

extended meanings to recover intended meanings. The idea of extended meaning thus strengthens our theoretical foundations and offers valuable practical tools.

8757 words

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INTRODUCTION

This paper contrasts two key ideas of meaning and understanding in the history of political thought. The first has dominated our methodological literature, and philosophy of language more generally. But a second kind of meaning and understanding is not only a worthy goal of research but even helps scholars whose main aim is the first idea of meaning and understanding. This paper thus makes the second idea explicit – and shows its practical implications.

This paper's most important practical message is that *both* kinds of meaning and understanding matter for *all* textual interpreters, even when we prioritize just one kind of meaning and understanding. Traditionally, history of political thought has been classified into different approaches or schools of thought – contextualist, Marxist, Straussian, and so on. However, we often fail to mention the core ideas which all interpreters use. This paper highlights some of these important unifying ideas. I discuss other unifying principles elsewhere.²

The two central ideas in this paper are “intended meaning” and “extended meaning”. Roughly, intended meaning, which has had most attention until now, refers to what an author meant by what she wrote. Extended meaning refers to the implications of what an author wrote, whether intended or not.

We are all aware of the idea of extended meaning, of course, but it has not been theorized and – crucially – it is rarely made explicit. This is damaging. Because our methodological literature mainly emphasizes the first kind of meaning and understanding, historians do not seem to see how important the second kind of meaning is, how it furnishes a deeper kind of understanding, and how

² Adrian Blau, “History of Political Thought as Detective-Work”, *History of European Ideas* 41 no. 8 (2015), 1178-1194; Adrian Blau, “Interpreting Texts”, in *Methods in Analytical Political Theory*, ed. Adrian Blau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 243-69.

it can even help them uncover the first kind of meaning. There are differences between historians, political theorists and philosophers, of course, but there are important similarities too. Neglecting these similarities weakens not only the methodological literature but also some actual interpretations, I will suggest.

The two ideas can be exemplified as follows. Quentin Skinner states, rightly, that our understanding of Plato's *Republic* depends partly on how well we can recover Plato's motivations and intended meanings.³ But we also understand Plato's text better when we spot its flaws and successes. Similarly, both Skinner and John Pocock agree, rightly, that to understand Machiavelli it is "indispensable" to study the conventions he engaged with and the terms he used. In particular, we should not attribute to him ideas like interests, rights, and natural law, which have different meanings and connotations from his actual terms.⁴ But again, we understand Machiavelli better when we also spot his empirical insights and overstatements, his conceptual strengths and weaknesses, his logical consistencies and inconsistencies.

So, intended meaning matters hugely, but it is not the only goal. Simplifying greatly, we might say that intended meaning is necessary but not sufficient for a full understanding: intended meaning improves the breadth of our understanding, extended meaning improves its depth.

Extended meaning has practical benefits too. This paper thus addresses three practical questions. Can and should we diverge from authors' intended meanings? Can and should we use anachronisms? And can and should we use extended meanings to recover intended meanings? I

³ Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I – Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 107.

⁴ Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 51, 81-7, 142-3; J.G.A. Pocock, *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 13-19, 81-6, 115-6.

answer “yes” in each case, without pretending that all researchers should always do so, and without denying that such analyses can be dangerous. This paper thus demonstrates the independent value of analyzing extended meaning *and* its instrumental benefits for scholars with other focuses.

So, my paper celebrates both diversity and unity. I am not advocating a monolithic approach. Different scholars have different interests, different skills. And a good thing too: this division of labour is beneficial, if enough of us attend to each other’s research. Nonetheless, *combining* different approaches can have great benefits, whether by drawing on specialized research by others, or by doing a bit of it oneself.

While my main theoretical aim is to differentiate extended and intended meaning, my main practical aim is to show the value of combining them. Just as historians have shown that political theorists and philosophers should think historically, so too historians should often think philosophically, in order to make sense of texts, to justify claims about conceptual innovations, and even to recover intended meanings. (“Recovering” intended meaning is Skinner’s term.)⁵ The secret of some historians’ success, I argue, is not just excellent historical scholarship but also their ability to combine this with philosophical analysis.

What do I mean by philosophical analysis? Very roughly, we can think of historical analysis as primarily empirical (describing and explaining), whereas philosophical analysis involves evaluating and/or prescribing. Empirical analysis involves such things as asking what Locke meant by “property” and why he wrote *Two Treatises*, whereas philosophical analysis involves asking how well his ideas work and what he should have said when he errs. In

⁵ For example, Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 111.

philosophical analysis, we test how well ideas fit together, ask if conclusions really follow from premises, and so on.

Of course, extended meaning is an idea that we all *implicitly* know and use, and the idea of logical implication goes back to Aristotle. But its status as a form of meaning has not been *explicitly* recognized for nearly a century.

The structure of this paper is as follows. After outlining extended meaning, I compare extended and intended meaning. I then address three practical implications for our research: using intended meaning to investigate extended meaning, using anachronisms to investigate conceptual change, and using extended meaning to investigate intended meaning. I conclude by reiterating the value of this idea of meaning and understanding for all of us – historians, political theorists and philosophers.

EXTENDED MEANING AND UNDERSTANDING

Extended meaning is a simple idea: the extended meaning of a statement is what it implies logically. In a syllogism with the premises “All men are mortal” and “Socrates is a man”, we could conclude “therefore Socrates is mortal”, or “it follows that Socrates is mortal”, or “*this means that* Socrates is mortal”.

Definition of extended meaning: To say that P means Q is to say that P logically implies Q.

Examples: If my mother is Jill and Jill’s mother is Meryl, this means that Meryl is my grandmother; if I call Meryl my brother, this means that I am wrong.

Textual interpreters often talk this way. For example, Hobbes’s “definition of a law ... means that for Hobbes there can be no ... deep separation of law and morals”.⁶ Such comments are widespread, among historians, political theorists, and philosophers.⁷

As with Skinner’s classic essay,⁸ this paper is about meaning *and* understanding. Extended meanings help us understand texts: we understand texts more deeply when we see their implications – for example, “this means that Mill’s *On Liberty* is not fully consistent with *Utilitarianism*”, or “this means that Rawls is not really gender-neutral”.

The idea of logical consequences is of course age-old, but I am not aware that it has explicitly been related to *meaning*, aside from one paragraph in a 1923 book by Ogden and Richards,⁹ who cover fifteen other notions of meaning, mostly in much more detail.¹⁰ It is not included in Paul Grice’s pioneering account of meaning, or the typologies expounded by E.D.

⁶ Sharon Lloyd, *Morality in the Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes: Cases in the Law of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 267.

⁷ For example, Leo Strauss, “Niccolo Machiavelli: 1469-1527”, in *History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 3rd edition, 297; Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 93; John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 95, 156; Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume II – Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 192; Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli’s God* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 69, 80, 95.

⁸ Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”, *History and Theory* 8 no. 1 (1969), 3-53; Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, chapter 4.

⁹ C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language Upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1927), 2nd edition, 198.

¹⁰ Ogden and Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, 185-208.

Hirsch, Mark Bevir, or A.P. Martinich.¹¹ Skinner does not include it as one of his three core ideas of meaning.¹² He mentions it only very briefly and in passing: unintended implications are part of “the meaning of the *text*”, not the author’s meaning.¹³ Discussing Strauss’s denunciation of Machiavelli as “immoral and irreligious”, Skinner doubts that “such a tone of denunciation is ... appropriate to the stated aim of trying to ‘understand’ Machiavelli’s works”.¹⁴ Skinner’s quotation marks are revealing here, but if Strauss is right that Machiavelli is immoral and irreligious, we do understand Machiavelli better by recognising this.

EXTENDED AND INTENDED MEANING

The rest of this paper involves intended and extended meaning. Consider again Sharon Lloyd’s comment that Hobbes’s “definition of a law ... means that for Hobbes there can be no ... deep

¹¹ Paul Grice, *Studies in The Way of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 86-137; E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 8, 38, 62-3; E.D. Hirsch, “Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted”, *Critical Inquiry* 11 no. 2 (1984), 214-5; Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4-8, 31-77; A.P. Martinich, “Four Senses of ‘Meaning’ in the History of Ideas: Quentin Skinner’s Theory of Historical Interpretation”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 3 no. 3 (2009), 225-45.

¹² Quentin Skinner, “Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts”, *New Literary History* 3 no. 2, 396-7; Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 90-3.

¹³ Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 111.

¹⁴ Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”, 13; *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 64.

separation of law and morals”.¹⁵ Note the wording: Hobbes’s *definition* means this. *Hobbes* may or may not have meant it.

So, intended and extended meaning are analytically separate. Given the intended meaning of a statement, its implications do not depend on whether the author spots them. If Lloyd’s inference is right, Hobbes’s definition implies certain things whether or not he sees this. His argument’s extended meaning would be the same even if he explicitly rejected these implications. Indeed, extended meanings become particularly interesting when they contradict what authors say. Rousseau claims to love liberty; we understand him differently if we think his ideas imply authoritarianism. Berlin claims to discuss two concepts of liberty; we understand him differently if we think he is wrong. We understand Mill’s “one very simple principle”¹⁶ differently if we decide that it is neither one principle nor very simple. Extended meanings may thus let us see authors in ways they did not or could not.

Although intended and extended meaning are analytically separate, they may go hand in hand. Indeed, one of this paper’s key points, discussed further below, is that we may need to think philosophically to recover what authors meant. Consider Rousseau’s comment that the aim of the social contract is for a citizen to “obey only himself and remain as free as before”.¹⁷ We probably cannot work out what Rousseau meant here without thinking through whether he has civil and/or

¹⁵ Lloyd, *Morality in the Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes*, 267.

¹⁶ J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, in *On Liberty and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1.9 [chapter 1 paragraph 9], 13.

¹⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.6 [book 1 chapter 7], 49-50.

moral freedom in mind here, or neither.¹⁸ And even that task probably requires philosophical analysis, because Rousseau also describes civil and moral freedom ambiguously. Even if Rousseau's contemporaries defined civil freedom in a certain way, or even if he had defined freedom unambiguously in the previous paragraph, we would still need to check if the definition fits "remain as free as before"; that too is a philosophical enterprise.

In short, extended and intended meaning are analytically separate but the former can help us recover the latter. We all do this. For example, we tacitly make assumptions about whether one passage helps us understand another, and we often prefer an interpretation which makes more sense than a rival. "Philosophical" reasoning need not require special training.

So, we understand authors better when we grasp the strengths and weaknesses of what they wrote, how their ideas fit together, and so on. This can even help us recover authors' intended meanings.

Before continuing, I should clarify what I mean by "understand". On my account, we understand something when we correctly grasp the relevant meaning. "Understanding Rousseau" might refer to grasping his intended meanings and/or inferring the extended meaning of what he writes.

On this view, meaning and understanding are correlative: each type of meaning generates a particular kind of understanding. (Skinner's seminal essay on meaning and understanding

¹⁸ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 1.8, 54.

presents a non-correlative view.¹⁹) Grasping intended meaning thus leads to a different kind of understanding to grasping extended meaning. Both kinds of understanding matter.²⁰

MUST EXTENDED MEANING BE BASED ON INTENDED MEANING?

I now want to get practical – to see how extended and intended meaning interrelate and how this helps our research. The following three sections thus ask three practical questions: how closely must we attend to authors’ intended meanings, may we read texts anachronistically, and can extended meaning help us recover intended meaning?

How closely must we attend to authors’ intended meanings? John Dunn, rightly, does not require all of us to recover authors’ intended meanings. Although he himself aims at identifying “Locke’s *own* meaning”, ignoring this is “in no way illegitimate.” Dunn praises C.B. Macpherson’s “penetrating” and “brilliant” analysis of the problems and presuppositions of Locke’s theory of property, noting merely that what Macpherson describes is “a misleading identification of just what these issues are for *Locke*”.²¹

¹⁹ Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”, 45, and implicitly, Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 79, 82-3.

²⁰ For a justification of why my account of understanding does not look to “hermeneutics” in general, and Gadamer in particular, see Adrian Blau, “The Irrelevance of (Straussian) Hermeneutics”, in *Reading Between the Lines: Leo Strauss and the History of Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Winfried Schröder (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 37-51.

²¹ John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke: An Historical Account of The Argument of the ‘Two Treatises of Government’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), ix, 214-6.

In effect, Dunn mainly addresses intended meaning (“Locke meant P”) and motivation (“Locke wanted to say Q”), Macpherson mainly addresses extended meaning (“this means that Locke is wrong”, “this means that Locke’s theory presupposes R”). Importantly, though, Dunn accepts both approaches and does not imply that analyzing extended meaning requires analyzing intended meaning or motivations.

Dunn could have gone further: it is not actually *Locke’s* theory of property if, hypothetically, Macpherson had repeatedly misunderstood Locke’s intended meanings. If someone claims that for Rousseau we can only be free by obeying the military leader General Will, this is not ultimately an account of *Rousseau*. Milder errors are scarily easy. If “maximizing” utility meant something different to Bentham than to us,²² many well-known critiques are not actually about *Bentham’s* utilitarianism.

So, we should usually try to recover authors’ intended meanings when evaluating their ideas. Dunn himself exemplifies this approach well: his first published article, on consent in Locke is historically respectful but is essentially philosophical.²³ For example, given the “damaging lacuna” that Locke’s theory does not say what “express” consent involves, Dunn tries to reconstruct Locke’s position, but finds normative problems with all of the plausible reconstructions.²⁴ Seeking correct intended meanings does not stop us from probing extended meanings.²⁵

²² Frederick Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism From Hume to Mill* (London: Routledge, 2003), 226-31.

²³ John Dunn, “Consent in the Political Theory of John Locke”, *The Historical Journal* 10 no. 2 (1967), 153-82.

²⁴ Dunn, “Consent in the Political Theory of John Locke”.

²⁵ A.P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 11-12.

Other brilliant examples of work primarily focused on extended meaning include Julia Annas on Plato, John Simmons on Locke, Joshua Cohen on Rousseau, and John Gray on Mill.²⁶ These scholars ask whether authors' inferences are valid, what their arguments imply, how clear their concepts are, and so on. But each scholar also tries to recover authors' intended meanings, with at least some use of historical scholarship. The ensuing hypotheses about authors' meanings should be taken seriously even when, inevitably, we disagree with some of these interpretations (as with some hypotheses by historians). As I discuss below, then, extended meaning can even help us recover intended meaning.

I now examine a more controversial question: may we consciously ignore some of an author's intended meanings? We can ignore intended meanings, or at least avoid being precise about them, in many places. We do not need to understand precisely what Rousseau means by "freedom" and "general will" to grasp some of their linkages. We do not need to understand Rousseau's perplexing "pluses and minuses" passage²⁷ to see that the general will arises from individual interests. And a fundamental feature of deductive logic is that we can spot if P follows from Q without knowing what P or Q is. We do not know exactly what Plato meant by *dike* (often translated as "justice"), but some of his conclusions about *dike* are clearly invalid because he argues by analogy not deduction. In short, historical, political and philosophical research does not always need to recover intended meanings correctly or exactly.

²⁶ Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); John Simmons, *The Lockean Theory of Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Joshua Cohen, *Rousseau: A Free Community of Equals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); John Gray, *Mill On Liberty: A Defence* (London: Routledge, 1996), 2nd edition.

²⁷ Rousseau, *The Social Contract* 2.3, 60.

Even more controversially, can we *amend* authors' intended meanings? Many scholars would say no. But we sometimes need to do so when addressing contradictions or problems in authors' arguments. I will consider three examples, in ascending order of contentiousness. I suspect that most historians could accept the first two, but would balk at the third, so I will argue that the third is valuable even if historians themselves would not do it.

The least controversial amendment of intended meanings is to resolve apparent contradictions. For example, Skinner delicately notes how to "rescue" Hobbes's consistency with minor changes to conflicting statements.²⁸ Skinner does not tell us what Hobbes meant or that we should read him like this. But he looks beyond Hobbes's apparent intended meanings to think through what Hobbes may have been getting at.

A more controversial amendment of intended meanings involves disregarding what authors wrote. For example, Tom Sorell argues that we should mostly sidestep Hobbes's table of different sciences in *Leviathan* chapter 9, as it clashes markedly with what he writes elsewhere.²⁹ There may be times to take it at face value, and we might want to explain why he wrote it.³⁰ But if one has not spotted the contradiction and gives chapter 9's table the same weight as his other comments on science, one risks seriously misunderstanding Hobbes.

²⁸ Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume III – Hobbes and Civil Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 217, 235; see also 190.

²⁹ Tom Sorell, "Hobbes's Moral Philosophy", in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's Leviathan*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 136; see also Noel Malcolm, *General Introduction*, volume 1 of *Leviathan*, ed. Noel Malcolm (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), 143-5.

³⁰ For example, Malcolm, *General Introduction*, 145.

The most contentious reason for amending intended meanings is to “improve” authors in ways they might have rejected or could not have conceived of. Consider Gregory Kavka’s “reworking” of Hobbes’s flawed understanding of powers, and conflict in the state of nature more generally.³¹ The historian Richard Tuck dismisses such reconstructions, criticising Kavka and also Robert Nozick for “pillaging the classics” to find ideas for modern times.³²

Tuck is right to criticize Nozick, who clearly misreads and misuses Locke.³³ True, such pillaging might still give us insights: Jonathan Barnes notes that even “a misreading or a lazy reading of a text may be more fruitful philosophically than a profound and accurate study”, as with Brentano’s and Lukasiewicz’s misuse of Aristotle.³⁴ But we should not present those ideas as the author’s actual ones, which Nozick does.

Kavka, though, is explicit that his account is Hobbesian, not Hobbes’s.³⁵ And Tuck misses something important in Kavka’s reconstruction: *improving a flawed argument shows how serious its errors are*. For Skinner, Hobbes’s inconsistencies are minor. For Sorell, Hobbes’s inconsistencies are major, but we can square Hobbes’s circle by dropping some of what he wrote. For Kavka, though, Hobbes’s problems cannot be corrected within Hobbes’s system (as with Dunn

³¹ Gregory Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 83-125; quotation at 94.

³² Richard Tuck, “History”, in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy: Volume I*, ed. Robert Goodin, Philip Pettit and Thomas Pogge (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 69.

³³ Jonathan Wolff, *Robert Nozick: Property, Justice and the Minimal State* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 103-7.

³⁴ Jonathan Barnes, “Introduction”, in Jonathan Barnes, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), xvii; see too Margaret Leslie, “In Defence of Anachronism”, *Political Studies* 18 no. 4 (1970), 445-6.

³⁵ Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory*, 3-4.

on Locke).³⁶ “This means that Hobbes’s problems are easily corrected” and “this means that Hobbes’s problems are fundamental” are legitimate uses of the word “mean” and *significantly* advance our understanding of Hobbes – an understanding that would presumably have interested Hobbes himself. To dismiss such analyses as “pillaging” involves an unnecessarily narrow form of meaning and understanding. If this is pillaging, more of us need to find our inner Viking.

Of course, most historians will not want to go this far or are not interested in such questions. That is perfectly legitimate: everyone has her own skills and interests, and we do not need or want every textual interpreter to study everything in the same way. I hope, though, that in future scholars will not be as disdainful as Tuck.

In summary, then, we should usually try to get authors’ intended meanings right, but we do not always need to do so, and sometimes we should not. Please note: I am not arguing that anything goes. Where appropriate, we should try to indicate when we have amended or dropped an author’s ideas, like Kavka or Sorell, and unlike Nozick.³⁷ When we read texts with “presentist” mindsets, we should remember how easily misreadings can arise.³⁸ Presentism has benefits and costs. I thus turn to a closely related issue: anachronism.

MAY WE READ TEXTS ANACHRONISTICALLY?

Anachronistic analysis is a second way in which extended meaning can advance our understanding. This approach too has been dismissed by some historians, so again I will defend its

³⁶ Dunn, “Consent in the Political Theory of John Locke”.

³⁷ Leslie, “In Defence of Anachronism”, 444.

³⁸ Iain Hampsher-Monk, book review, *Political Theory* 43 no. 1 (2015), 131-2.

intellectual merits even if historians themselves prefer not to use it. I will also show that there are times when historians can or do write anachronistically, and indeed, that it is sometimes inevitable.

Were the Levellers democrats? Was John Locke a liberal? “We can ask these questions if we like, but to me they seem so anachronistic as to be pointless”, argues Skinner.³⁹ It is foolish even to ask “whether Marsilius [of Padua] should be said to have had a ‘doctrine’ of the separation of powers”, the idea that “one condition of political freedom is the separation of executive from legislative power”. Marsilius “is not concerned with the issue of political freedom at all”, and lived two centuries before the debate over whether a fusion of powers turned Rome from a republic into an empire. Writers who ask if Marsilius had a doctrine of the separation of powers ignore “the impropriety of supposing that he *could* have meant to contribute to a debate the terms of which were unavailable to him”.⁴⁰ Skinner even calls anachronism a “sin”.⁴¹

But Skinner’s critique overstates the place of intentions in meaning. (I use “intentionalism” differently to Branko Mitrović, but my conclusion is similar.⁴²) It is legitimate to refer to “Marsilius’s doctrine of the separation of powers” if his ideas *amount* to this, via conceptual redescription. Actually, Marsilius’s ideas seem not to amount to a separation of powers.⁴³ But such

³⁹ Quentin Skinner, “Interview with Quentin Skinner” (by Petri Koikkalainen and Sami Syrjämäki), *Finnish Yearbook of Political Thought* 6, 58; see also Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 49-51, 60-1; and Quentin Skinner, “Surveying the *Foundations*: a Retrospect and Reassessment”, in *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, ed. Annabel Brett and James Tully (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 247.

⁴⁰ Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”, 8; Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 60.

⁴¹ Skinner, “Interview with Quentin Skinner”, 57.

⁴² Branko Mitrović, “Attribution of Concepts and Problems with Anachronism”, *History and Theory* 50 no. 3 (2011), 303-27.

⁴³ Antony Black, “Communal Democracy and its History”, *Political Studies* 45 no. 1 (1997), 12-13.

redescriptions are theoretically possible.⁴⁴ Similarly, we can ask if authors' use of different terms (e.g. freedom, liberty, *liberté*) amounts to the same thing. Skinner himself notes, indeed, that "although *Leviathan* contains an extensive discussion of the concept of unfreedom, Hobbes never uses that word".⁴⁵ Precisely; and this claim is true whether or not Hobbes could have used the term.

Moreover, some anachronistic questions are important. Julia Annas asks if Plato depicted justice as act-centred and/or agent-centred, Isaiah Berlin asks if Machiavelli was a value-pluralist, and Jürgen Habermas asks if Hobbes and Kant provide monological rather than dialogical accounts of moral reason.⁴⁶ Berlin and Habermas ask such questions for their own normative purposes, but Annas is simply trying to understand Plato, as are two historians asking anachronistic questions: David Wootton, on how democratic the Levellers were, and Knud Haakonssen on Adam Smith's proto-Kantianism.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Gad Prudovsky, "Can we Ascribe to Past Thinkers Concepts They had no Linguistic Means to Express?", *History and Theory* 36 no. 1 (1997), 15-31; Mitrović, "Attribution of Concepts and Problems with Anachronism"; Robert Lamb, *Thomas Paine and the Idea of Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 9-13.

⁴⁵ Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 216.

⁴⁶ Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, 157-69; Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 25-79; Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, translated by William Rehg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 90-4.

⁴⁷ David Wootton, "The Levellers", in *Democracy: The Unfinished Journey. 508 BC to AD 1993*, ed. John Dunn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 71-80; Knud Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 148-53.

For Skinner, such questions are “pointless”.⁴⁸ Yet Berlin, Habermas and Wootton are making important claims about authors’ originality, while Haakonssen is arguing that Smith’s arguments point in Kantian directions – as Kavka argued for Hobbes (see above), as Simmons argues for Locke,⁴⁹ and as Kant himself argued for Rousseau. These are profound issues about the development of modern moral and political thought. Some historians may not be interested in such discussions but I hope they will accept others asking them.

I would go further: *anachronistic analysis is inevitable for historians, because it is inherent to claims about conceptual change* – an issue which Skinner describes as “central” for historians of philosophy.⁵⁰ We can only say that an idea changes over time, or that a contribution is original, by making explicit or implicit comparisons. For example, Pocock sees “the origins of the doctrine of the separation of powers” in the work of Guicciardini and Gianotti.⁵¹ This implies that the idea is absent in predecessors like Marsilius. As soon as we ask if that is right – whether Marsilius did in fact have a doctrine of the separation of powers – we are on the same territory as asking if the Levellers were democrats or if Locke was a liberal. In short, we cannot understand conceptual change without anachronism: any claim that a thinker was the first to have a particular idea implies that no previous thinker had it. This claim is inherently anachronistic.

Skinner perhaps overlooks this because his account of meaning is too closely tied to intentions. While great care is needed to avoid anachronism infecting our readings of texts, this

⁴⁸ Skinner, “Interview with Quentin Skinner”, 58.

⁴⁹ Simmons, *The Lockean Theory of Rights*, 39-46.

⁵⁰ Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 178.

⁵¹ J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 128, 288.

section highlights the theoretical value of one kind of extended meaning for textual interpreters, even for historians.

CAN WE USE EXTENDED MEANING TO RECOVER INTENDED MEANING?

I have just argued that extended meaning can help not only political theorists and philosophers but also historians, using anachronistic conceptual redescription to demonstrate conceptual innovation. I will now argue that *extended meaning can actually help us recover intended meaning itself*. I will even suggest that to recover intended meaning, historians may sometimes need to think like political theorists and philosophers. That is not what historians' methodological writings imply – again, because extended meaning has not been properly theorized.

Intended meanings, like all intentions, are states of mind, and we cannot directly observe them: we can only infer them, indirectly.⁵² As philosophers of language note, to understand comments we make guesses, moving from what was said to what was not said.⁵³ Imagine that Fatima asks “Shall we go to the cinema tonight?”, and Robert replies “I have to study for an exam.” He actually means “[I can't go to the cinema tonight because] I have to study for an exam.” To spot this, Fatima might think as follows: “Robert didn't directly answer my question, but if he was responding to it, his statement would be relevant. Since studying for an exam takes a long time, he

⁵² Behan McCullagh, *The Truth of History* (London: Routledge, 1998), 138-41.

⁵³ Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber, “Inference and Implicature”, in *Meaning and Interpretation*, ed. Charles Travis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 45-75. See also Kent Bach and Robert Harnish, *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979), 24; Grice, *Studies in The Way of Words*, 28-9; Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber, “Truthfulness and Relevance”, *Mind* 111 issue 443 (2002), 605-19.

probably can't also go to the cinema in the same evening. So, his statement really means that he can't go to the cinema." She would not think this consciously: our brains make such inferences in a flash.⁵⁴

Textual interpreters make the same inferences, sometimes subconsciously, sometimes by consciously scrutinizing implications. But the principle is the same: we use extended meanings as evidence about intended meanings. I must stress that this evidence is never conclusive. But no evidence is conclusive.⁵⁵

I will give three examples for textual interpretation, relating to the text alone, to part text and part linguistic context, and finally, to part text and part political context. This shows that historians too use extended meanings to make inferences about authors' intended meanings – again, highlighting extended meaning's importance.

The purely textual example is *On Liberty*'s comment about utility being grounded in man's permanent interests as a progressive being.⁵⁶ What Mill means here is unclear. But *Utilitarianism* seems to depict autonomy and security as permanent interests.⁵⁷ This is evidence, though not proof, about what *On Liberty* may be getting at. In effect, the syllogism is:

(1) Utility should be grounded on man's permanent interests.

(2) Man's permanent interests are autonomy and security.

⁵⁴ This example is amended from John Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 33-5.

⁵⁵ Blau, "History of Political Thought as Detective-Work", 1181-93.

⁵⁶ Mill, *On Liberty*, 1.11, 14.

⁵⁷ Gray, *Mill On Liberty*, 51-3.

(3) Utility should be grounded on autonomy and security.

Mill says (1), and elsewhere seems to say (2), and we can deduce (3) – then inductively guess that this might have been what Mill meant in (1). Perhaps this inductive move is incorrect: authors are not always coherent.⁵⁸ Inductive inferences are always guesses and may be wrong.⁵⁹ But reading one text into another, or parts of one text into another part of the same text, is a powerful tool for making inferences about what authors may have meant.

My second example uses linguistic context too. Machiavelli writes that republics give “the assurance that one’s wife and children will be respected”.⁶⁰ Machiavelli is probably thinking about men here, as women could not have wives in Machiavelli’s day. In effect, the syllogism is:

(1) Certain people want their wives to be respected.

(2) Only men can have wives.

(3) Men want their wives to be respected.

Machiavelli says (1), his linguistic context tells us (2), and we can deduce (3) – then inductively guess that Machiavelli is thinking of males and not females, whether consciously or subconsciously. Again, this inductive move might be incorrect: perhaps by “wife” Machiavelli

⁵⁸ Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”, 16-22; Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 67-72.

⁵⁹ Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 121.

⁶⁰ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, ed. Bernard Crick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), book 1 chapter 16, 154.

means “spouse”, in which case Machiavelli would actually be thinking of men and women here. We cannot know in advance if an author is upholding or amending her linguistic context.

My third example involves political context. Take Rousseau’s comment that a state is “close to ruin” when its citizens “prefer to serve with their purse rather than with their person”.⁶¹ Many Genevan citizens were doing exactly this. Was Rousseau hinting that the Genevan state was close to ruin? The syllogism is:

- (1) A state is close to ruin when its citizens serve with their purse not their person.
- (2) In Geneva, citizens serve with their purse not their person.
- (3) Geneva is close to ruin.

Rousseau says (1), his political context tells us (2), and we can deductively infer (3) – then inductively guess that Rousseau consciously intended this apparently abstract argument to relate to Genevan politics. Again, this inductive guess may be wrong.

Two points are worth emphasizing here. First, when we use linguistic or political context to make inferences about intended meaning, as historians rightly encourage, *the logic of inference can be identical to a purely textual reading*: the above examples use different evidence but have the same deductive structure, followed by an inductive guess.

Second, I suspect that two of these examples highlight an overstatement in Skinner’s (largely correct) emphasis on intentions. Following J.L. Austin, Skinner argues that to recover intended meaning it is “essential” to know the author’s “illocutionary” intentions. For example, if

⁶¹ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 3.15, 113.

a police officer tells some skaters “the ice over there is thin”, we do not properly understand what the police officer says if we treat this as a mere physical description of some ice: it is also a warning. So, intention is “equivalent” to intended meaning.⁶²

I agree that it is *helpful* to try to recover correct intentions; Skinner’s substantive interpretations bear this out brilliantly.⁶³ I also agree that “there is a sense in which we *need* to understand why a certain proposition has been put forward if we wish to understand the proposition itself”.⁶⁴ But *equating* intentions and intended meaning seems too strong. Following Austin, Skinner sees intended meaning as the “sense and reference” of a word or phrase, i.e. its definition and what that refers to.⁶⁵ Yet knowing an author’s intention will not necessarily reveal these things.

Some of the most powerful illustrations of this point involve gender assumptions. The Machiavelli example, above, is one such case. Or consider Hobbes, who tries to talk of “man” in universalistic terms; but as Diana Coole shows, when we look at the implications of Hobbes’s comments – their extended meanings – his intended meaning sometimes only involves adult males,

⁶² Skinner, “Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts”, 403-4; Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 99-100. The police officer example, originally in P.F. Strawson, “Intention and Convention in Speech Acts”, *The Philosophical Review* 73 no. 4 (1964), 444, is from Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 104-5. For Austin’s account of illocutionary force, see J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 33, 72-6, 98-100, 116, 147.

⁶³ For example, Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 138-77.

⁶⁴ Quentin Skinner, “A Reply to My Critics”, in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics*, ed. James Tully (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 274, emphasis added; Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 115, emphasis added.

⁶⁵ Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 3, 104; Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 100, 108, 138, 147-8.

not adult females.⁶⁶ Susan Okin shows that the same applies to Aristotle, Kant, Macintyre, Nozick and Rawls.⁶⁷ Coole and Okin uncover the sense and reference of how these authors used “man” without looking for intentions, except for making the simplest assumptions i.e. that these authors meant what they wrote. (So too even the most ahistorical philosopher must make some implicit historical assumptions.)⁶⁸

Moreover, if we use a more conventional definition of “intentions” than Skinner, it could be wrong to restrict intended meanings to an author’s intentions: in talking of “men”, the above writers may intend to include women, but actually they do not. The much maligned and misquoted Plamenatz says something similar.⁶⁹ It does not even matter if the above authors were unaware of their gender assumptions: intentions can be unconscious too.⁷⁰

I now return to textual examples such as what Mill means by “permanent interests as a progressive being”. All interpreters, including historians, need to use textual consistency to make inferences about intended meanings. Consistency is never a conclusive guide to intended meaning: writers are always inconsistent in some way.⁷¹ But it helps us hypothesize about intended meanings and test interpretations.

⁶⁶ Diana Coole, *Women in Political Theory: From Ancient Misogyny to Contemporary Feminism* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 2nd edition, 56.

⁶⁷ Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 10-13, 44-60, 80-7, 90-7.

⁶⁸ Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan*, 12.

⁶⁹ John Plamenatz, *Man and Society: Volume One* (London: Longmans, 1963), ix-x.

⁷⁰ Freedman, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 34-6; Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, 70-1.

⁷¹ Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”, 16-22; Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 67-72.

This is one of the key points in my paper, because it undermines any strict divide between thinking philosophically and thinking historically: *to the extent that we want to recover how authors themselves understood the terms they used, we usually need to think philosophically*, even if only in a fairly mild way. Consider Rousseau’s claim that “whoever refuses to obey the general will” should be made to do so, such that “he shall be forced to be free”.⁷² Rousseau does not specify what this means. John Hope Mason reads extra words into this: as with Socrates, the disobedient citizen is “forced to [recognise the justice of the punishment inflicted on him so that the city as a whole (including him) can] be free”.⁷³ But this is not consistent with Rousseau’s original statement: being forced to recognize justice is not the same as being forced to be free. Socrates recognized the justice of his punishment, but while his punishment may have left his city free, it left Socrates himself pretty unfree. Mason’s interpretation is probably not what Rousseau had in mind.

Historian Helena Rosenblatt, by contrast, relates “forced to be free” to Rousseau’s political motives and his broader conceptual inheritance. The Genevan government endorsed a “non-political” and “negative” view of liberty: “the ability to go about one’s business with as little obstruction as possible”. Rousseau countered with his version of a Christian/republican view. For many Christians, “liberty is ... linked with obedience to God’s law and the conquering or overcoming of one’s sinful passions”. For republicans like Cicero, “through the law we are all made servants in order that we may be free”. Rousseau brings these ideas together: obedience to the general will produces freedom. The general will is “the rational will everyone *ought* to have

⁷² Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 1.7, 53.

⁷³ John Hope Mason, “Forced to be Free”, in *Rousseau and Liberty*, ed. Robert Wokler (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 125-6.

.... Just like abiding by God's will makes men free in Christian thought, abiding by the general will makes citizens free in Rousseau's thought".⁷⁴ Rosenblatt in effect reads Rousseau's claim as "he shall be forced to be free [because only by abiding by the general will can a citizen be free]".

Rosenblatt's interpretation is consistent with other passages in Rousseau. It seems far likelier than Mason's reading. Rosenblatt's brilliant contextual analysis influenced me significantly when I was a graduate student; it is a superb example of how historical research can cast new light on much-discussed philosophical treatises. However, she sometimes weighs contextual evidence too heavily. For this passage, in particular, she treats contextual consistency as a trump card and does not highlight enough consistencies with Rousseau's text. She could strengthen her interpretation by noting that it coheres with Rousseau's comment that "impulsion of mere appetite is slavery, and obedience to the law one has prescribed to oneself is freedom".⁷⁵

More importantly, there are potential inconsistencies too. On Rosenblatt's view, obedience to the general will is constitutive of freedom, whereas straight after talking of "forced to be free", Rousseau seems to depict the relationship instrumentally. Rousseau might have held both constitutive and instrumental views, and each fits his comments elsewhere; he may not even have had any clear idea in mind. Consistency may not resolve the problem, then. Like all kinds of extended meaning, consistency only points to answers – and as with all evidence, it can point in different directions.

Every historian does this kind of philosophical analysis to some degree, even if only by noticing consistencies between textual and contextual evidence. Few historians do it to a great

⁷⁴ Helena Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva: From the First Discourse to the Social Contract, 1749-1762* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 255-6.

⁷⁵ Rousseau, *The Social Contract* 1.8, 53.

degree; Skinner is an exception, as when he probes Hobbes on freedom and on representation.⁷⁶ The real Skinner is a far richer interpreter than his methodological writings imply. The same is true of Dunn, as with his analysis of Locke on political legitimacy.⁷⁷

The secret of Skinner's and Dunn's success – and I am afraid it is a secret, because I am not aware that either states it explicitly – is their *combination* of textual, contextual and philosophical analysis. Historical analysis alone could not possibly reap such rewards. Unfortunately, historical analysis is what tends to be emphasized, precisely because of the constraints of narrow frameworks of meaning and understanding. Some historians even oppose philosophical analysis.⁷⁸

In short, we will sometimes struggle even to grasp an author's intended meanings without thinking philosophically. Rousseau on “forced to be free” is one example. Similarly, without philosophical reflection on Hobbes's “foole” passage, we will have little idea about what Hobbes is actually *doing* in chapter 15 of *Leviathan*. This may explain why so few historians have advanced our understanding of this extremely tricky passage. One exception is Tuck, whose analysis here – revealingly – is philosophical not historical.⁷⁹ It bears repeating, then, that historians can be very adept philosophers, and sometimes must be for a fuller understanding of

⁷⁶ Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty*, 24, 45, 108, 132-8; Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume III – Hobbes and Civil Science*, 177-208.

⁷⁷ Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke*, 131-46.

⁷⁸ Peter Laslett, “Introduction”, in John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 81-90.

⁷⁹ Richard Tuck, “Hobbes's Moral Philosophy”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. Tom Sorell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 193-5.

authors' intended meanings. How much of Hobbes can we understand without thinking philosophically?

Neglecting the value of philosophical reasoning for recovering authors' intended meanings has given historical reasoning an undeserved methodological dominance and stopped some historians from seeing the value of philosophical analysis. Skinner is absolutely right that recovering intended meaning may take "extremely wide-ranging as well as detailed historical research".⁸⁰ But he says little about the relevance of philosophical analysis.⁸¹ The same is true of other historians' methodological writings. This helps to explain why historians often shut themselves off from philosophical analyses. For example, historians have almost entirely sidestepped Simmons's (1992) philosophically-derived hypotheses about what Locke meant by such things as "rights", "property", "enough, and as good", and "original community of all things".⁸² What is lost by plugging his conclusions into one's reading of Locke to see if things make more sense?

So, while we will misunderstand aspects of some past texts if we do not place them in their linguistic and political contexts, we may also misunderstand aspects of some past texts if we do not read them philosophically. Both approaches may be needed. Skinner writes that scholars who read texts out of context and who ignore what their authors were doing cannot "in principle"

⁸⁰ Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 116.

⁸¹ One exception is Quentin Skinner, "Hobbes's *Leviathan*", *The Historical Journal* 7 no. 2 (1964), 331.

⁸² For a longer justification of Simmons's approach, see Blau, "Interpreting Texts", 254-7.

adequately understand these texts.⁸³ “In principle” is too strong,⁸⁴ but I agree that reading texts out of their contexts and ignoring what authors were doing may lead to misunderstandings. My point is merely that the same can happen through not reading some parts of some texts philosophically.

In summary, extended meanings can help us recover intended meanings – the main aim of many historians, and of some political theorists and philosophers. Rosen has rightly argued that historians and political theorists/philosophers often have different but complementary aims.⁸⁵ Yet even when they have different aims, *they may sometimes need to use the same methods*. That point deserves emphasis. Historians like Skinner have articulated a theoretical case for the kinds of meaning and understanding that drive historians; this has influenced many political theorists and philosophers. But political theorists and philosophers have been less effective at articulating the theoretical case for the kinds of meaning and understanding which drive many of us, and which historians too sometimes need.

So, I hope that this paper will show historians how they can sometimes benefit from the techniques and insights of political theorists and philosophers, and that even when we use different evidence, we sometimes share the same logic of inference. This paper thus celebrates both diversity and unity.

⁸³ Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I*, 79; see the similar but differently worded argument in Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”, 31.

⁸⁴ Robert Lamb, “Quentin Skinner’s Revised Historical Contextualism: a Critique”, *History of the Human Sciences* 22 no. 3 (2009), 58-64.

⁸⁵ Michael Rosen, “The History of Ideas as Philosophy and History”, *History of Political Thought* 32 no. 4 (2011), 693.

CONCLUSION

It has been precisely 50 years since the publication of Quentin Skinner's seminal essay "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas", in this very journal. Skinner's argument focused on what I have called intended meaning, and his key recommendation was to think historically. My paper has argued that we should also address extended meaning, which requires us to think philosophically as well. My main contributions are as follows:

- (1) In the history of ideas, "meaning" has been largely restricted to intended meaning.
- (2) Yet in everyday English and in academic discourse, many people use the language of extended meaning: P means Q if P logically implies Q.
- (3) This important kind of meaning enables a valuable kind of understanding.
- (4) Historians tend to prioritize intended meaning, political theorists and philosophers are likelier to prioritize extended meaning.
- (5) Analysis of extended meaning should usually be based on correctly recovered intended meaning, but sometimes we can legitimately look beyond authors' intended meanings.
- (6) One form of extended meaning, anachronistic conceptual redescription, underpins any claim about an author's conceptual originality.
- (7) Extended meaning can help us recover intended meaning.
- (8) Just as we can misunderstand arguments if we read them out of context, so too we can misunderstand arguments if we do not read them philosophically.
- (9) Extended and intended meaning are not alternatives: each helps us interpret texts.

This last conclusion is the most important. And it casts new light on the skills we need when interpreting texts. Plato's ideal ruler was part philosopher, part king. The ideal textual interpreter is part philosopher, part detective. Recovering intended meaning mainly involves detective-work, although philosophical analysis of extended meaning can be crucial. Exploring extended meaning is mainly philosophical, although detective-work to recover intended meaning usually helps.

The ideal philosopher-detective does not exist. Skinner himself perhaps comes as close as anyone, but most of us are further away. When interpreting texts requires not only careful detective-work but serious philosophical analysis, there are three options. First, we can move out of our comfort zone and think in different ways. Second, we can draw on different types of scholarship. Third, we can simply see interpretation as a collective matter, and accept that research which is imperfect in its philosophical rigor or detective-work – in other words, all research! – may still advance the communal pool of knowledge, and may be further improved in future research.

Each option, though, relies on openness to different approaches. Fortunately, it is easier than ever for people with one set of skills and interests to learn from people with another. That point is worth stressing. For it seems to me that many historians view political theorists and philosophers with a degree of haughtiness. Sometimes this haughtiness is justified, sometimes not. But overall, textual interpretation has benefited greatly from a diversity of approaches. And if this paper has a single message, it is that when we are willing to combine approaches, or use insights from scholars with other approaches, there are huge benefits – in terms of both meaning and understanding.