Everything James Madison Knew He Learned from Quentin Skinner: A Roadmap

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EVERYTHING JAMES MADISON KNEW HE LEARNED FROM QUENTIN SKINNER: A ROADMAP

2 OCL 840

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ABSTRACT.

Quentin Skinner’s abhorrence of the ‘great books’ approach to political history is well known; ditto, allowing the search for ‘context’ to hijack the investigator’s analysis. Our Constitutional Logic suggests that the search for a framework other than what semantics afford (as far as text is concerned) or chronology (as far as kinesis is concerned) began with James Madison. The issues are presented and roadmapped.

KEY WORDS: kinesis, semantics, Skinner, ‘and then, and then, history with quotes.’

A. INTRODUCTION. OCL launches this roadmap to OCL’s survey/s of The Foundations of Modern Political Thought (1978) [FMPT], Quentin Skinner’s two-volume study of the development of the state from the mid-fourteenth to the early seventeenth century.

OCL hastens to point out that James Madison died on June 25th which was long before November 26th which is when Quentin Skinner [QS] was born. Therefore, technically, OCL must concede that JM couldn’t have learned anything from QS.

If the reader is willing, she is welcome to press forward.
Otherwise, lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch’entrare, and all that.

B. SKINNER’S FOUNDATIONS. FMPT concerns itself with systems. It offers (on the whole) a history of the development of political society up through the early seventeenth century. The end point is marked by the single references to Charles I and Cromwell each in vol. II. On the other hand, John Locke is well cited, which may or not be disconcerting given QS’s well advertised hostility to the Great Books approach to political theory and practice.

QS on systems devolves to The State – note caps – around which The Papacy, the Roman Catholic Church and a variety of monarchs rotate, with the nascent Lutherans and Anglicans offering themselves as competitors to the RCC.

The book is the unheralded hero as booksellers, printers, dealers and other hangers-on make money from traffic in ideas. And counter-ideas, naturally. Written, mostly in Latin, no less. Obviously, nothing has changed.

C. A FRAMEWORK FOR ALL THINGS FMPT. Political society is a contrivance or construct which exists in bourgeois society for the purpose of delivering goods, services, artifacts, developed talent and new failure to bourgeois society, hereinafter ‘civil society.’

Human beings in civil society are broken down into four types:

• consumers
• users (which includes system managers)
• designers, and
• remote observers.

Political society is a system; it is worth studying as the ancestor of modern application systems; a working ancestor for the latter is the Bank of England (1694), to give the reader an example. This list is further developed in _Coöpting, Constraining, and Compressing Rights Which Pre-Exist A Founding_, 2 OCL 201.

Users of application systems include managers. Consumers are those whose custom is solicited by the system but who are not ‘in’ the system that is, at the moment of attention, accessing goods, services, artifacts, developed talent or new failure and thereby reaping the benefit of this access.

Remote observers include investigators of immediate or distant remote, in time or space.

OCL, Skinner, and Madison are all remote observers.

Managers are users who are employed by the system and therefore they stay inside the system; it is consumers – or attention to consumers – that make managers honest. Without managers they would have to force themselves to get outside the system and see what it looks like from that perspective, being tempted. As managers it’s their job to think like that.

• Artifacts include such text as statutes, treaties or constitutional text or published books.
• Developed talent is what professional, commercial, official, and vocational actors offer, via their own participation in systems to consumers.

Civil society is treated as a consumer of the outputs of application systems. It is obviously not a human being. Theorists of all ages – including designers and remote observers – have placed the ‘contrivance’ that is political society in relation to civil society such that the relation is easily absorbed into the anthropomorphic.

For Aristotle this is explained by the partnership myth. “Every state is (as we see) a sort of partnership,” appears in the introduction to _Why Do Political Societies Exist?_ 2 OCL 883 which names the three overarching or ultimate purposes of political societies as constructs within civil or bourgeois society: (1) promoting of private wealth (and its ancillary principle avoidance of wealth destruction); (2) disabling hostility to minorities identified as such; (3) setting a threshold by which minorities (in coalition) may block organic change.

Political societies originally had five groupings of service missions: exchange and the supporting transportation and communication infrastructure (read capital projects and services) _and_ deployment of interior (policing) and external (army/navy) defense force/s.
Political societies soon discovered that they couldn’t perform the policing function (interior or home defense) without resolving social conflict, so they were backed into establishing court systems to fulfill these five groupings of service missions.

Courts were rapidly seen as a success; it was not a minor point that popular involvement in decision-making was itself successful and, at least on that account, Aristotle happily explained letting the lesser rub shoulders in the jury-box with their betters in Aristotle’s Politics (Book III). See Aristotle’s Got Talent, 2 OCL 727; tables the pertinent text. see also Aristotle Divides ‘Laws Correctly Laid Down’ from ‘Laws [Which] Must Necessarily Be Just,’ 2 OCL 326.

There are three modes worth tracking when political societies reinvent themselves, as discussed in How Do We Know When Political Societies Change? 2 OCL 315. These points are pertinent to FMPT. Systems re-position, re-purpose, and sub-divide themselves.

- Systems re-position themselves by finding new service missions to tempt consumers. Consumers are outside the system; they have to be tempted to come into the system.
- Systems re-purpose existing service missions by re-purposing projected accomplishment.
- Systems sub-divide existing service missions into subdivisions; the division of labor takes over, as the multiplicity of actors and bodies expands, at least arithmetically.

These are known as Group II Modes. Group III Modes are explored in The Settecento’s Fundamentals: Five Structures That Define ‘Constitutionalism’, 2 OCL 225.

Group I modes were listed above and cited to 2 OCL 201.

For a political scientist/historian to tell the story of how any given political society changed, she might ask, ‘what is political society doing to promote wealth formation?’ Or, ‘what is it doing to (at least) avoid disincentivizing minorities so that their developed talent will increase the Wealth of (our) Nation?’

To bring this back to the western side of the Atlantic, the reader may peruse The Doctrine of Semantic Purity: Madison’s Project (and Its Difficulties) Introduced, 2 OCL 798. U.S. Constitutions of the Year Four (I) and Eleven (II) launch projects by which semantic purity is (more or less awkwardly) enshrined.

A believer in semantic purity holds fast to the notion that for every change in political society a corresponding textual change will have been made to the organization’s charter. A second rule matches the first in doctrinal dignity. For every change or amendment in text there will have been a preceding change in political society itself. How’d that work out?

The historian’s choices are two:
QS follows the kinetic and hangs his presentation thereon. Take the Union of Utrecht (1579), unnoticed by QS but touched on – and in Skinnerian fashion – by JM: “The union of Utrecht, says another respectable writer, reposes an authority in the states-general, seemingly sufficient to secure harmony; but the jealousy in each province renders the practice very different from the theory,” TF No. 20. Excepting said treaty, there was no MPT prior to 1775 for TF or FMPT to exalt as Logos en arche.

The reader must concede that QS could have written that sentence!

And there are plenty of QS’s sententiary elocutions that JM might have penned.

E. **Resources.** For on-line access to Peter Aschenbrenner’s articles, tables and charts see purdue.academia.edu/PeterAschenbrenner or works.bepress.com/peter_aschenbrenner/

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