Hobbes and the Foundations of Modern International Thought

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Abstract
Quentin Skinner concluded The Foundations of Modern Political Thought (1978) with the claim that '[b]y the beginning of the seventeenth century, the concept of the State -- its nature, its powers, its right to command obedience had come to be regarded as the most important object of analysis in European political thought.' For confirmation of this, he quoted Thomas Hobbes who, in the preface to De Cive (1642), declared that 'the aim of "civil science" is "to make a more curious search into the rights of states and duties of subjects".' The Foundations was dedicated to the historical examination of just how the state became the central analytical object of political thought and how the groundwork for a recognisably modern concept of the state had been laid. Fundamental to this concept was the state's independence from 'any external or superior power.' Yet, save for a brief but suggestive account of neo-Scholastic conceptions of the law of nations, the Foundations included no treatment of the state in its nature, its powers or its rights as an international actor. The concept of the state traced by Skinner defined it almost entirely in terms of its internal, domestic or municipal capacities. The relations between states had apparently not yet become an important object of political or historical analysis.

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The Foundations of Modern Political Thought is a two-volume work of intellectual history by Quentin Skinner, published in 1978. The work traces the conceptual origins of modern politics by investigating the history of political thought in the West at the turn of the medieval and early modern periods, from the 13th to the 16th centuries. It represents the culmination of the contextualist approach to the history of ideas which Skinner and his colleagues in the Cambridge School had pioneered in the 1960s. Foundations of Modern International Thought combines important methodological essays, which consider the genealogy of globalisation and the parallel histories of empires and oceans, with fresh considerations of leading figures such as Hobbes, Locke, Burke and Bentham in the history of international thought. The culmination of more than a decade's reflection and research on these issues, this book restores the often overlooked international dimensions to intellectual history and recovers the intellectual dimensions of international history. ...more.