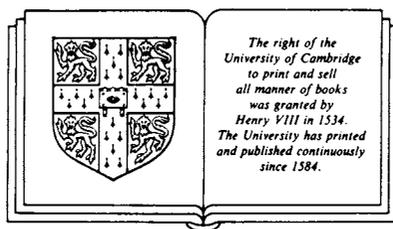


Renaissance and Revolt

Essays in the intellectual and social history of
early modern France

J. H. M. SALMON



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Introduction

METHODS AND APPROACHES

These papers, written over the past twenty years, are the outcome of an even longer period of preoccupation with the history of early modern France. This involvement began when I arrived at Cambridge University from New Zealand in 1953 with the intention of studying the ideas of Jean Bodin and their impact upon English political thought. The project widened into a comparative study of French and English ideas. Perhaps it was relevant to the theme which emerged from my research that, fresh from what was then a colonial background, I resented certain assumptions, doubtless misperceived, about the nature of the English past, and turned to a French counter-model where discontinuity, social protest, and a vein of rationalist idealism presented alternatives to stability, the acceptance of status, and the much vaunted methods of British empiricism. A growing appreciation of the tolerance and respect for academic values that prevailed among my mentors eventually tempered my brashness. An argument appeared: that the ideas generated in the French wars of religion were taken up on a massive scale by English controversialists in the subsequent age and applied to a parallel set of conflicts across the Channel. In consequence English liberalism was much less the product of native experience than it was reputed to be.¹ While this hypothesis, like many revisionist interpretations, was partly the unconscious result of my own conditioning, the evidence for it seemed then, and seems still, entirely to justify the conclusion. It resulted, however, in the subordination of ideas to contingent political events, and owed far more to the methods then in vogue at Cambridge than I realised at the time.

Many of these essays have tried to restore the balance. They have been written in the belief that intellectual and social history should complement each other, if not actually be conjoined in an endeavour to reach a more general understanding. Ideas can be a stimulus to action as well as a means of legitimating the outcome of events. They do not always follow a logical sequence, for no

¹J. H. M. Salmon, *The French Religious Wars in English Political Thought* (Oxford, 1959).

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theory of political obligation or social change is immune to the vagaries of human fears and ambitions when it is applied to, or arises from, actual problems of human conflict. In times of stability there are always voices of protest to mobilise discontents and to identify contradictory elements in reigning orthodoxies. In times of revolutionary change the defenders of the status quo invariably discover inconsistent aspects in the attitudes of their opponents. It is not surprising that the temptations of expediency and the desire to invoke tradition sometimes produce paradoxes and appeal as much to mystiques as to reason. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were times of flux and conflict in France, and it is in the most intense crises that previously unconscious assumptions rise to the surface to expose forces of change in what outwardly seem the most durable of structures. I have not tried to represent ideas as the determinants of historical process, but rather to see them as both signposts and accelerators of shifts in the pattern of society. Each problem, whether it concerns a new direction in the intellectual habits of the élite or a revolt by the unprivileged masses, has been treated within its own context, and the evidence has determined the priorities in its interpretation.

Before the triumph of the school of historians associated with the journal now known as *Annales: Économies, sociétés, civilisations*, attempts to connect social and intellectual history tended either to see theory and belief about politics and society as the reflection of mechanisms of change dependent upon material forces, or to give religion and ideology a positive role in transforming human institutions. Montesquieu identified two kinds of underlying causes in history, the physical and the moral, and those who sheltered under the Marxist umbrella of economic determinism were heirs to the former, just as those who sociologised in the Weberian mode assumed the mantle of the latter. On the other hand, the tradition in the history of ideas prevailing in the English-speaking world, and also in French academic circles, was suspicious of grand theory and had no wish to integrate the subdisciplines of history. It detached ideas from their social context and investigated them analytically in order to discern patterns of influence, to trace intellectual pedigrees, to establish climates of opinion, and to explain intrinsic meaning.² The result was often a Whiggish kind of history where modern concerns dictated the material chosen and the conclusions reached.³ Its practitioners made vague contact with legal and constitutional history, but incurred the contempt of political and diplomatic historians, who tended to regard professed principles as smokescreens to conceal the pursuit of real interests.

It was against narrow professionalism and a preoccupation with discrete

²E.g. Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, Conn., 1932); J. N. Figgis, *From Gerson to Grotius, 1414-1625* (Cambridge, 1907); Alan Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936); Pierre Mesnard, *L'Essor de la philosophie politique au XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1936).

³E.g. C. H. McIlwain, *Constitutionalism and the Changing World* (Cambridge, Mass., 1939); Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (4th ed., 2 vols., Princeton, 1963).

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events on the part of political and diplomatic historians that Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch, the founders of the *Annales* movement, reacted. They turned to social history and associated with it the study of mental habits and attitudes to life and death. When they wrote upon ideas they did not link them with political events, but preferred to investigate such problems as whether atheism could exist in the sixteenth century, or how it was that people could believe in the magical healing power of kings.⁴ The next generation expressed an outright hostility to history as event, partly from distaste for diplomatic and military history in the aftermath of the Second World War, and partly under the spell of those atemporal social scientists with whom the first generation had been linked. *L'histoire événementielle* came to be denounced by Fernand Braudel as an abnegation of the historian's true responsibility. It was not only that the minutiae of individual actions seemed to trivialise the past; it was also that the kind of evidence consulted by the political historians, despite their archival expertise, inhibited certain and meaningful generalisation. Furthermore, history as the realm of the political fact and the personal decision appeared to some within the movement as the expression of liberal bourgeois ideology.

Hence the *annalistes* looked towards a time frame that transcended the actions of individuals and subordinated personality to collective mentality. In the vast perspective of the *longue durée* problems of objectivity disappeared, and so, too, did the unsatisfying relativism that caused history to be constantly rewritten as the criteria of what was important in the past varied from one generation to the next. This, as Thucydides had once boasted, was indeed history for all time, and yet time, it seemed, had all but vanished from consideration. Even within the shorter span of *conjoncture* acknowledged by the *annalistes*, change was slow and continuity the norm. Concepts imported from geography and anthropology gave a static air to explanation. Quantitative history affirmed the slow pulsation of demographic shifts and revealed an alternation of times of dearth and times of plenty. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie declared that "history which is not quantifiable cannot claim to be scientific," and extolled "present-day historiography with its preference for the quantifiable, the statistical and the structural."⁵ His own work on peasant society in Languedoc took its place beside Braudel's study of the Mediterranean basin, Pierre Goubert's analysis of Beauvais, and Pierre Chaunu's serial accounting of Atlantic shipping – all of them cast in the early modern period.⁶ What was achieved in terms of certitude, and

⁴Marc Bloch, *Les Caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française* (Oslo, 1931), and *Les Rois thaumaturges: étude sur le caractère surnaturel de la puissance royale* (Paris, 1923); Lucien Febvre, *Philippe II et la Franche-Comté* (Paris, 1912), and *Le Problème de l'incroyance au XVI^e siècle: la religion de Rabelais* (Paris, 1942).

⁵*The Territory of the Historian*, tr. Ben Reynolds and Sian Reynolds (Chicago, 1979 [1973]), pp. 15, 111. The quotations come from papers first published in 1968 and 1972 respectively.

⁶Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Les Paysans de Languedoc* (2 vols., Paris, 1966); Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris, 1949); Pierre Goubert, *Beauvais et le Beauvaisis: contribution à l'histoire sociale de la France au XVII^e siècle* (2 vols., Paris, 1960); Pierre Chaunu and Huguette Chaunu, *Séville et l'Atlantique* (9 vols., Paris, 1954–9).

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it was no small achievement, was described as stability, not as change. In all this, intellectual history had little part to play. The realm of conscious ideas belonged to the passing parade. The historian perceived ultimate reality but the transient individual was always the dupe of his time. Braudel eventually came to justify his approach in terms of grand theory, and cited Werner Sombart's aphorism "No theory, no history."⁷ One could reply, "No change, no history."

Febvre and Bloch had perceived collective patterns of belief underlying the particular articulation of ideas that had interested them. Robert Mandrou sought to identify these patterns in an analysis of French sixteenth-century society which he called an "essay in psychological history."⁸ It was a part of the series *L'Évolution de l'humanité*, founded by Henri Berr to integrate the social sciences, and it revealed the interdisciplinary ideals that had inspired the movement from the outset. This was a work anticipating the future direction of *Annales* and summarising much that had gone before. After describing the material conditions of life, it reconstructed the emotional and sensational aspects of popular collective mentality under the rubric *l'homme psychique*. It followed Febvre in giving primacy over sight to hearing and touch, and contrasted past with present attitudes to language, space, and time. In his survey of social structures, Mandrou analysed the family, the parish, and the Marxist triptych of nobility, bourgeoisie, and common people. These he named *solidarités fondamentales*, as opposed to *solidarités menacées*, which comprised state, monarchy, and religion. Although he listed the major works of resistance theory and mentioned literate and religious culture, primarily in terms of its secular implications, Mandrou passed quickly over articulate thought and made little attempt to relate it to events. His history was contrived with statuesque immobility. Indeed the structures it depicted appeared to hold humanity in so rigid a grip that Mandrou felt obliged to list those who escaped the system as *évasions*. They included mercenaries, actors, utopians, mystics, satanists, and suicides. When the third generation of *annalistes* made a methodological cult of what they now called *mentalité*, the mental structures that concerned them, like their social counterparts, were still seen to be, in Braudel's words, the "prisons of the *longue durée*."⁹

It was this generation that came to embrace structuralist techniques developed in literary theory and anthropology. Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of structural linguistics, saw language as an arbitrary code of conventions in which intelligibility depended upon synchronic relations between its components, conveying nothing meaningful about the nature of external reality. His followers mapped these relations both syntagmatically (as sequence) and paradigmatically (as association), with no regard for philological change through time. There were logical problems when Claude Lévi-Strauss applied this approach to primitive culture and the savage mind, and Braudel himself sug-

⁷*Civilisation matérielle et capitalisme* (Paris, 1967), p. 9.

⁸*Introduction à la France moderne: essai de psychologie historique, 1500-1640* (Paris, 1961).

⁹*Écrits sur l'histoire* (Paris, 1969), p. 51. "Les cadres mentaux aussi sont prisons de longue durée."

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gested reservations.¹⁰ Such difficulties were compounded when structuralist concepts invaded *annaliste* history. By definition the historian must think diachronically. The detritus left by the past is his evidence and occupies the status of external referent in whatever he writes. To a linguistic structuralist a work of history is nothing more than a text to be appraised solely in terms of the association of its internal components, but it is a strange historian who denies the reality of the sources he employs, or of the past society that engendered them. Roland Barthes's essay on historical discourse admits that structural linguistics is incompatible with the idea of history, and finds the later *annalistes* more concerned with certainty in the present than with reality in the past.¹¹

Another approach derived from literary theory – one sometimes associated with structuralism – is the view that tropes such as synecdoche, metonymy, and metaphor underlie the process whereby language develops from imaginative or poetic consciousness to sophisticated conceptualisation. The application of this to history is at least as old as Vico's *New Science*, and it has value for the understanding of *mentalité* in the decoding of myth and the analysis of popular superstition. It has also been applied to historiography by those who contend that the rhetorical strategy of the historian takes shape unconsciously through a dominant trope before the emergence of the rational constructs it subsequently controls. Hayden White has shown the relevance of this assumption to the interpretation of Romantic historiography, and it is true that French Romantic historians in the first half of the nineteenth century were themselves protagonists of the poetic imagination and conscious practitioners of the art of intuitively conveying the feel of the past. Perhaps this explains the rapport the *annalistes* claim with Michelet, despite the fact that he was writing *l'histoire événementielle*.¹² Imagination is certainly an important element in the understanding of past attitudes – not for the purpose of filling lacunae in the evidence, but rather to lead the historian to testimony he might otherwise have overlooked and to understand it as something different from his own experience.

Past literary fashions are important sources for the historian of ideas, just as modern literary theory may sharpen his insights and add a new dimension to his methods. Recent studies of eighteenth-century historiography have established formal relationships with the structures of fiction and epic poetry.¹³ Such associations may support belief in the priority of the literary aspect of history, but equally they may yield valid generalisations about past attitudes. To some,

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹¹"Historical Discourse," in Michael Lane (ed.), *Introduction to Structuralism* (New York, 1970), pp. 145–55.

¹²Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973); Braudel, *Ecrits*, pp. 38, 47.

¹³On the association of fiction and epic see Harold L. Bond, *The Literary Art of Edward Gibbon* (Oxford, 1960); Leo Braudy, *Narrative Form in History and Fiction* (Princeton, 1970); and Suzanne Gearhart, *The Open Boundary of History and Fiction: A Critical Approach to the Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1984). The last book sets the ideas of modern structuralists and poststructuralists in parallel with selected *philosophes*.

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style serves as a primary indicator of the nature of a particular historical endeavour; to others, at second best, it is a mask that must be removed before the historian's real purpose is discovered.¹⁴ To me the poetics of style may afford clues to the general modification of literate mentalities. Two papers in this collection associate a shift in literary genre with a change in moral climate.¹⁵

The investigation of élite literature in the history of ideas is not, however, the strategy of the majority of the new *annalistes* and their disciples. *Mentalité* for them is primarily the study of such phenomena of low-level culture as carnivals and village fêtes, folklore, popular religion, and rural witchcraft.¹⁶ The distinction between high and low culture is not just another sign of preference for the deep-rooted and immobile aspects of human mentality; it is also an indication of the familiar trend to see social and intellectual history in terms of class antagonism. Conflicts of this type seldom impinged upon the methods of the second generation of *annalistes*. They were less occupied with the motive forces for revolution than with stability and rhythmic regularities. They chose the middle ages and the early modern period to exemplify their methods, leaving the age of revolutions as the domain of historians with a Marxist bent. Many *annalistes* in the new wave, however, have linked the modern age with preceding periods, and brought Marxist sympathies to the investigation of *mentalité* in every epoch. Retaining their interest in mechanisms of social change, they have reintroduced the historical event and used it as a fulcrum in discussion of social conflicts and popular attitudes.¹⁷

The concept of *mentalité* has become looser and more mobile in the hands of Marxist scholars already influenced by structuralism. Michel Vovelle, for example, has probed the relationship between ideology and *mentalité* and concluded that the former has been absorbed by the latter. Ideology was conceived as the realm of *la pensée claire*, as a systematic vision of the world that enables the individual either to come to terms with it or to work to change it. *Mentalité* has now been widened to include both articulated thought and the collective unconscious. In the process ideology has lost its revolutionary aspect and become a kind of systematic illusion. To understand *mentalité* is to stand outside the historical process and see the falsity of ideology. One of the most influential of neo-Marxist

¹⁴Peter Gay, *Style in History* (New York, 1974).

¹⁵See below, pp. 27–53, 73–97.

¹⁶Some representative studies of this kind (not all of them directly associated with *Annales*) are: Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1978); Natalie Z. Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, Calif., 1975); A. N. Galpern, *The Religion of the People in Champagne* (Cambridge, 1976); Robert Muchembled, *Culture populaire et culture des élites dans la France moderne, XV^e–XVIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1978). Mandrou's *Introduction* (note 8) is in many respects a model. His *Magistrats et sorciers en France au XVII^e siècle* (Paris, 1968) attributes the ending of witchcraft trials to growing rationalism in élite culture.

¹⁷A remarkable example where social analysis and the elucidation of collective attitudes are brought to a focus by an event is Le Roy Ladurie's *Le Carnaval de Romans* (Paris, 1979). That *Annales* may operate at several levels simultaneously is demonstrated by Denis Richet, "Aspects socio-culturels des conflits religieux à Paris dans la seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle," *Annales: Economies, sociétés, civilisations*, 32 (1977), 764–89.

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historians, Louis Althusser, redefined ideology as “the imaginary relationship of individuals to the actual conditions of their existence.”¹⁸ To the neo-Marxist, the structuralist, and the Braudelian, the historically situated individual has a spurious view of reality, and to think otherwise is to share the misconceptions of liberal empiricists who reject grand theory and take refuge in the evanescent procession of events and conscious ideas. Thus in the outcome the *annaliste* viewpoint has triumphed over the intellectual baggage its new acolytes have brought to the cult of *mentalité*. Yet the cult has become somewhat vaguer in the process. François Furet, who, like Vovelle, is a historian of revolution but, unlike him, has renounced his Marxist affiliations, is sceptical of its continued value. He has remarked astutely that the marriage of Marxism with structuralism has transformed Marxist ideological commitment. To use his neologism, what has resulted is “la désidéologisation structuraliste du marxisme.”¹⁹

It has been necessary to sketch the methodological development of the *annalistes*, and to trace their association with structuralism, because they represent the dominant mode of linking social with intellectual history and because they have contributed so much new knowledge about society in early modern France. Their general approach, however, has devalued the objectives I have pursued in these papers, which have used events as a focus for the investigation of social tensions and have preferred the articulate expression of ideas to the manifestation of unconscious attitudes. I have resisted the reduction of history to immobility and facelessness, and have felt no enthusiasm for the view, implicit in the application of structural linguistics to human behaviour, that the course of human affairs is arbitrary and ultimately inexplicable. But what they have actually written on France in the centuries before the Revolution has often been far less stereotyped than this critique of their methods may imply. Le Roy Ladurie, for example, has adapted *annaliste* techniques to fit the particular historical problems his vivid imagination has defined. To reread what I have written on popular revolts is to realise how much I have benefited from the insights many specific *annaliste* works afford, if not from the methods they so stridently maintain. There are, however, other important ways of treating ideas in their social context that are more relevant to my purpose.

These essays share some common ground with Donald Kelley’s *Beginning of Ideology*. This remarkable book blends generalisations about collective rational and emotional states of mind with an appreciation of historical circumstance. Unlike the *Annales* school, it gives ideology a privileged position over *mentalité*, and uses events and personalities in sixteenth-century France as inseparable parts of its analysis. Kelley seeks “a way of relating the study of society, whether in terms of institutional or class structure or set of cultural forms, to particular human thought and testimony,” and he directs attention to “that pivotal and

¹⁸Cited by Michel Vovelle, *Idéologies et mentalités* (Paris, 1982), p. 6.

¹⁹*L’Atelier de l’histoire* (Paris, 1982), p. 51.

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almost inaccessible juncture between society and consciousness.”²⁰ The Reformation in France is treated as an intellectual revolution, and its impact is to be understood as much in changing institutional structures as in formulated ideas. An essential confrontation is assumed between Protestant transcendence and Catholic immanence, while the infusion of religious enthusiasm into existing political and social tensions produces, by way of reaction, a secularised pattern of modern ideology in embryo. The development of political theory is conveyed through a series of impressionistic sketches, or “soundings,” from the first outbursts of heterodox opinion through the effects of conversion and its formalisation upon the family, the congregation, the university, the legal profession, the mode of propaganda, and the political party.

It is not surprising that there are some themes here comparable with Kelley’s, given our parallel interests and mutual criticism over the years. There are also important differences. *The Beginning of Ideology* adopts a bolder and more imaginative method, and is more indebted to insights from modern anthropology and sociology, than the present collection. These essays give greater weight to the adaptation of institutions and secular ideas to meet political needs than they do to the moulding force of religion. They seek to be more specific and precise within a more limited terrain. They take a different view of the social crisis of the sixteenth century, locating it towards the end of the religious wars rather than in their early stages. They dispute the logical priority accorded to Protestantism, and discern a radical spirit in French Catholicism. They stress a secular resemblance between the two, based on their common roots in earlier patterns of thought rather than on a metaphysical contrast, and they find more significance in a general shift in public and private morality.

Another point of departure in these papers from Kelley’s method is that they are rather less preoccupied with the issue of modernity, a disposition which, by definition, raises the relevance of the past to present concerns and subtly contradicts the most resolute endeavour to understand the past in its own terms. To see ideas in the context in which they were formulated, and to evaluate them with sensitivity to the vocabulary and the general literature of their day, are approaches endorsed by J. G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner.²¹ I have attempted to follow these injunctions, with the reservation that one cannot escape entirely from one’s own mental conditioning, nor communicate one’s findings without using words bearing anachronistic implications. Historicism, the term in current use for scholarly objectivity, or seeing the past for its own sake, is itself loaded with ambiguity. Karl Popper employed it with a quite antithetical meaning to describe the practice of speculative history, of endowing historical process with metaphysical purpose.²² Current usage is rather nar-

²⁰Donald R. Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology: Consciousness and Society in the French Reformation* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 3, 4.

²¹J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time* (New York, 1971); Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” *History and Theory*, 8 (1969), 3–53.

²²*The Poverty of Historicism* (London, 1957).

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rower than what Meinecke meant by *Historismus*, which included the ability to see human institutions discretely rather than holistically, and to understand their development as a matter of circumstance rather than as the teleological unfolding of a predetermined form.²³

The natural science model of governing general laws continues to assert a mental blockage in history and the social sciences, and it is, of course, from this kind of positivism that structural linguistics has sought an escape. The conviction that there must be one true explanatory model for the physical universe for long impeded a historicist approach to the history of science. Only those past explanatory theories which led in linear fashion to modern science seemed worthy of study, and those which were digressions or dead ends by this mode of thinking were consigned to oblivion. Such an approach prevented understanding of the context in which an alternative general theory or paradigm could gather strength until it could challenge and replace accepted orthodoxy.²⁴ The elaboration of this insight by Thomas Kuhn has encouraged a relativist approach to the history of thought in general, but there are always some who find it difficult to compare one paradigm with another without reference to some ultimate paradigm which, as the repository of truth, provides criteria to evaluate the others.

The modern historicist encounters paradoxes in Renaissance thought. The age which discovered the meaning of anachronism in history through humanist philology was also that which sought to emulate the superior achievements of the ancients. Moreover, despite the persistence of Aristotelian teleology in political and social thought, many saw change as a process of corruption, and desired to reform and purify by return to pristine models. Thus Protestantism, and even some strands in Catholic thought, desired a return to the primitive church; Machiavelli sought to restore the Italian city state by reversion to the conditions of its foundation; and François Hotman called for the reestablishment of the principles upon which the original constitution of Francogallia had been created. Even among that extraordinary group of French historians in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries who are credited with a historicist outlook there was a tendency to look back to antiquity for principles to guide the present. In this way Etienne Pasquier insisted upon associating the parlement with remote Frankish assemblies to justify its constitutional role in his own time.

Present-mindedness reveals itself unexpectedly whenever the historian of ideas pursues a particular insight over an extended period. By seeking the foundations of *modern* political thought in the late middle ages and the Renaissance, Quentin Skinner appears at times to undermine his own contextual and

²³Zachary Sayre Schiffman, "Renaissance Historicism Reconsidered," *History and Theory*, 24 (1985), 170–82. Schiffman uses Meinecke's analysis to criticise J. G. A. Pocock, Julian H. Franklin, Donald R. Kelley, and George Huppert for misusing the term, and Orest Ranum and me for adopting their usage.

²⁴Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1962; 2d enlarged ed., 1970).

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relativist method. By granting privileged treatment to past historicist perceptions when identifying the foundations of *modern* historical scholarship, Donald Kelley steps back from the canon of historicism at large.²⁵ In neither case does the paradox seriously detract from the author's achievement in communicating the sense of past attitudes to the present, and it may be that a retreat from relativism is justified when a particular insight, a Pocockian "Machiavellian moment," is given atemporal status.

It is, of course, a complicating element in the historicist approach that literary texts may survive the audience for which they were intended and receive the attention of subsequent generations in very different circumstances. A method of literary interpretation amenable to the historical treatment of ideas is the technique developed in the 1970s by the Constance school of *Rezeptionsgeschichte und Rezeptionästhetik*. Its votaries deny synchronic value and meaning to a literary work, and proceed relativistically to place it in dialectical relationship with the chain of similar works before and after it, as well as with the interpretations of successive generations of readers.²⁶ The extent to which a work alters the threshold of the reader's expectation from one age to the next provides the criterion of literary value. In the conjunction within French humanism of stylistic and ideological change the insights of the Constance school find a particular use. Here it is necessary to take account of the Renaissance debate on imitating the works of classical antiquity. Those who offered Ciceronian style as an absolute standard defended their model with such intensity that it provoked a reaction in which the image of Cicero as a political sage was altered to fit new moral criteria. Generic literary changes seem likely to occur in periods of social or political stress, and also in their aftermath, when analytic thought achieves historical understanding and rhetoric becomes formalised.²⁷ This conclusion seems to fit Athens in the ages of Pericles and Demosthenes and Rome in the last throes of republicanism. It has also been effectively applied to Florentine humanism in the quattrocento.²⁸

A few of these essays were written before some of the particular approaches just outlined received formal definition, and occasionally they anticipate the methods in question. Many of the papers in the collection have been influenced in positive or negative fashion by new hermeneutic techniques. Others are avowedly traditional. It needs to be repeated, however, that the methods employed arise primarily from the subject matter, and that all the papers stress discontinuity and change. This is because later sixteenth-century France expe-

²⁵ Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1979); Donald R. Kelley, *The Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship* (New York, 1970).

²⁶ Hans Robert Jauss, *Kleine Apologie der ästhetischen Erfahrung* (Constance, 1972), and *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt am Main, 1974).

²⁷ See below, pp. 27–53.

²⁸ Nancy S. Struever, *The Language of History in the Renaissance: Rhetoric and Historical Consciousness in Florentine Humanism* (Princeton, 1970).

Introduction

rienced not only religious and political conflicts but violent popular movements and conscious social antagonisms. Seventeenth-century France also endured massive disorders, but these, like the early religious wars, tended to cut vertically through the society of orders, and not to threaten the social fabric by the horizontal alignment of one estate against another. Memories of the time of the League continued to haunt a society in which hierarchical distinctions were more rigidly fixed, corporate privilege more vigorously defended, and an increasingly bureaucratized and autocratic government held off a recurrence of social anarchy. While many of the essays in this volume turn upon the ideas of a classically educated élite, others examine the actual processes of popular revolt, and in so doing reveal occasional instances of the way popular discontents were verbalised. At the same time the satires and polemics of the later religious wars, although directed primarily by one upper-class faction against another, vividly express fears felt by the higher orders at the revolt of the lower. This was the situation that fostered the growth of the Bourbon state, which, while rigidifying social barriers, in turn opened new fissures in the social edifice and experienced a concomitant change in moral values.

In this way it is possible to suggest points of junction between intellectual and social history. For an age of social turmoil and shifting ways of legitimating authority and justifying personal action, it has seemed appropriate to concentrate upon the indicators of flux and instability. The actual process of social change cannot, of course, be fully explained by the testimony of political ideas at any level. For this it is also necessary to look at different evidence concerning such large-scale events as the expansion of the royal fisc, the institutionalising of venal office, the employment of the intendants, the reactions of the traditional nobility, and the revolt of the masses. A section of this volume consists of investigations into some of these topics, but even here use has been made of dissenting voices to supplement the archives of officialdom. Very often the cracks in the system allow the most revealing insights into the structures themselves. A petition to Henri III from the *peuple orphelin* of the Vivarais peasantry, a Leaguer protest against social oppression, a declaration of provincial liberties addressed to Louis XIV by the estates of Béarn – these are as important in this collection as treatises on sovereignty, the divine right of kings, or reason of state.

PARTICULAR THEMES

The preceding remarks about methodological concerns have already introduced the general theme of the relationship between ideas and social tensions at points of crisis in the history of early modern France. It remains to explain the particular themes under which the papers have been grouped, and to comment on relevant studies published subsequent to their composition.