

J.G.A. Pocock

Paper: *Cambridge beyond Cambridge: political thought and history*
Cambridge, 12th May 2008

Born in London and brought up in Christchurch, New Zealand, J.G.A. Pocock was educated at the universities of Canterbury and Cambridge, and is now Harry C. Black Emeritus Professor of History at The Johns Hopkins University. In a long and most distinguished career, he has established himself as one of the most important intellectual historians of our time. Beginning with his study of the relationship between seventeenth-century historiography and constitutional thought, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, first published in 1957 (second ed., 1987), his successive seminal contributions to the field have continued to shape scholarly debate for over five decades. Amongst works since that time, special mention may be made of *The Machiavellian Moment* (1975), the essay collections, *Politics, Language and Time* (1971; 1989), *Virtue, Commerce and History* (1985), and *The Discovery of Islands* (2005), and his edition of *The Political Works of James Harrington* (1977). His current, ongoing project is a major study of the work of Edward Gibbon and the many contexts within which it may be situated, under the general title, *Barbarism and Religion* (4 vols, 1999-2005; two further volumes have been announced as in preparation).

Running through all these works, as Prof. Pocock explains in his paper, has been a continuing concern with the status of historiography as an alternative mode of political thought, distinct from what is commonly termed political theory. This is a theme he has explored in a number of contexts. Seminar participants may find the following helpful in pursuing it further:

J.G.A. Pocock, '[Quentin Skinner: The History of Politics and the Politics of History](#)', *Common Knowledge*, 10 (3) (2004), pp. 532-550.

- -, '[The politics of historiography: The Creighton Lecture for 2003](#)', *Historical Research*, 78, 199 (2005), pp. 1-14.

- -, '[Historiography and Enlightenment: A view of their history](#)', *Modern Intellectual History*, 5,1 (2008), pp. 83-96.

Selected Publications

- *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: a study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957;1987)
- *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972;1989)
- *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975;2003)
- (ed.), *The Political Works of James Harrington* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977)
- *Virtue, Commerce and History: Essays on Political Thought and History Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)
- *Barbarism and Religion, vol.1: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737-1764* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1999)
- *Barbarism and Religion, vol.2: Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- *Barbarism and Religion, vol.3: The First Decline and Fall* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)
- *Barbarism and Religion, vol.4: Barbarians, Savages and Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- *The Discovery of Islands: Essays in British History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

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