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Quentin Skinner and Martin van Gelderen (eds.). 2013. *Freedom and the construction of Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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*Freedom and the construction of Europe*, written by a broad array of international scholars coordinated by Quentin Skinner and Martin van Gelderen, represents a seminal and comprehensive reading on the theory and practice of religious and political freedom in early modern Europe. The book explores in depth the importance, the complexity and the diversity of debates encompassing religious freedom, constitutional liberties and the political and philosophical nature of a freeman and free states in shaping the modern political practices across Europe. Therefore, its fundamental arguments are organized, firstly, around the conflictual/ harmonic relation between politics and religion, secondly, the continuous contestation of the original meanings of the concept of freedom seen as opposite to servitude, tyranny, predestination and civil supremacy in church and finally, the nature of freedom perceived as the absence of dependence or of the arbitrary rule.

The book is organized in two volumes, each of them coordinated by one of the two editors. Volume I, coordinated by Martin van Gelderen, professor of European Intellectual History at the University of Göttingen examines the intellectual debates across Europe between religious freedom and civil liberty as well as the concept of freedom and particular types of liberties in constitutional thought. All sixteen essays argue cogently the peculiar relationship between freedom and religion. A number of contributions focus on Martin Luther's theological discussions on spiritual and civil freedom trying to elucidate the implications of the Protestant liberty over a Christian man (p. 20). A close attention is also given to the natural religion seen on the edge of freedom and reason, where Hobbes's, Pufendorf's and Locke's arguments are central in the last two essays that conclude the first part (p. 115). The following essays that compose the second part of this first volume emphasize the debates about constitutional liberties and freedom of polity in modern Europe. They continue

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to point out in a comprehensive manner the relation between politics and religion and between church and civil government in some particular historical moments. Finally, the last essay returns to the central idea of this book and examines the Calvinist debates on civil liberties and liberty of conscience (p. 296). The second volume, coordinated by Quentin Skinner, Barber Beaumont Professor of Humanities at University of London examines different conceptions about freedom of thought and action and their relation with different interpretations of citizenship. This volume gives a close attention to the general conceptions of free person and freedom of action by considering the implication of the idea of freedom of will in Jesuit philosophy (p. 26), Descartes' free-will controversy (p. 65) and the problematic of the free citizens and state and the relation between freedom and freeman (p. 105). Finally, the last essays of this second volume encompass the general topic of the book stressing with precision a more general story of the concept of freedom and its important role in the political and philosophical customs of non-European civilizations, namely the Islamic egalitarian polity (p. 283).

As we could see, the topics addressed in this book are closely picked and analyzed. On the one hand, they underline the particular debates about the religious freedom and constitutional liberties, the intellectual conflicts surrounding the freedom of will and on the other hand, they also refer to more general subject matters like the civil liberty seen as independence from arbitrary will and distinction between freedom and dependence. With a particular focus on the political and philosophical facets of freedom, this intellectual endeavor is accessible both to students and researchers specialized in political science, conceptual history and modern philosophy.

The book has two outcomes. The first one is to offer the readers a comprehensive and exhausting understanding of the main intellectual debates about the various meanings of the concept of freedom. Both of the two volumes propose for acceptance a broad array of interpretations regarding the concept of freedom that are different enough one from another. On these grounds, we could see that the first volume considers a collection of meanings emphasizing the close, and sometimes, conflictual relation between religion and freedom; the second one leaves behind almost all the traditional interpretations of freedom and embark in a Skinnerian conceptual history about freedom and citizenship leaving a visible trace in the political and traditional European context.

The second outcome of the book is to provide useful academic materials worth reading in order to produce a better and newly understanding of individual liberty and rights. For a researcher interested in the conceptualizations of freedom finding reliable and worth reading academic sources could represent a

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challenging task since we are witnessing an abundance of articles and books that are written on this particular subject. Therefore, this study succeeds, without any theoretical and methodological constraints, in accomplishing both of these endeavors.

Another aspect that makes the book even more valuable is the innovative theoretical framework where the scholarly contributions manage to leave behind the traditional meanings of the concept of freedom and construct an even more complex and extensive conceptual history. Using carefully a methodology specific to conceptual history (e.g. discourse analysis, theory development, historical research and critical research), the book emphasizes also other diverse meanings and intellectual materials attached to the concept of freedom that were rarely used (immunities, privileges).

Besides the innovative theories, the usage of proper methodology and the richness of meanings analyzed, the book has also a minor shortcoming. Considering the high number of international contributions, one could easily see that because of the different schools of thought that each scholar adheres to, sometimes the essays seem opposite one from another, which could represent a risk for a cursive reading.

Despite the discrete title for such an endeavor and despite the diversity of scholarly contributions from all over the world, the book succeeds in highlighting some of the most controversial meanings embraced by the concept of freedom and its intimate relation with religion. All in all, the main purpose of the book is to supply the readers with a comprehensive understanding of the main intellectual sources about individual liberty and rights and to provide new methods and instruments of reflecting on the academic debates surrounding the concept of freedom in early modern Europe.

Taking everything into consideration, *Freedom and the construction of Europe* is a valuable contribution for the sphere of history of concepts and a book of reference for any researcher in this field. Both academia and political practitioners would find this study worth reading and very useful to have it in their personal library.