

How effectively does Hampsher-Monk establish the balance between the explanation of texts and contexts in intellectual history, in your view?

Hampsher-Monk balances the merit of a text alongside its contextual history extrapolating various different figures within intellectual history. Moreover, he also explores concurrently how such figures (or bodies of figures) can be affected by external factors. Such an example would be the advance of industrialisation within Germany and the impact of the working classes on Marx's politics, and thus his work (p. 483).

Hampsher-Monk himself describes his text as not pioneering ideas but acting as a tool written primarily for the undergraduate or the educated layman (p. ix). This is very much evident, however, the text as a 'history' is more conflicting. As has been suggested, the text reads like an independent source for various essays comprising articles within a book.¹ This then raises doubt on the balance between ideas being autonomous and the effect that context has upon authors due to its essay-like system, rather than a genealogy-style history. With the style of writing, the text appears more of a timeline of how ideas have permeated in publications from the 16th century to that of the more modern 19th century. This could suggest Hampsher-Monk's establishment of texts and contexts lends more weight to the idea that merit is self-contained within an author's words due to his 'timeline' of figures ranging from the radical revolutionary to the more reserved philosopher.

However, Hampsher-Monk could be interpreted as being inconclusive in whether historians should give more credence to an author's contextual history, or whether their history is less influential to how a text is read. He does state that there is a conscious need for historians to overstress context, but this can then be seen as denying an author's agency (p. x). With this detrimental effect, it could be argued he balances the analyses of both text and context

¹ Robert Wokler, et al., 'Book Review: A History of Modern Political Thought: Major Political Thinkers from Hobbes to Marx', *Political Studies* 41 (1993), pp. 685 – 91 (p. 686).

equally. However, he states that the other extreme opposite would be an author occupying a vacuum of ideas without relation to the present [at which they write] and therefore you cannot read a text without some form of historical background (p. x).

The relevance of a genealogy of ideas (tracking the lineage of a theory) to how an author establishes context and text can be examined throughout the work.² Hampsher-Monk does this, perhaps somewhat indirectly, through his style of fragmented textual and contextual analysis. He begins with Thomas Hobbes, who is considered the more traditional precursor to the field of intellectual history. This, in itself, is a testament to the significance of tracking a concept (which in this case, is a genealogy of ideas). Here, it can be assumed that ideas carry across generations – as with the Marx analysis he definitively states Hegel's influence upon the field of philosophy, and thus the influence upon Marxism itself (pp. 484 – 489). Here, it could be suggested that Hampsher-Monk's inclusion of Hegel's work and ongoing influence on German philosophy is obvious as a limited analysis of context's importance (p. 483). However, it is the context for Marx and not Hegel. The latter's influence is not one of his contexts, rather his ideas have carried across the philosophical community in Germany, validating the autonomous merit that a text has rather than that of the context an author wrote from.

Hampsher-Monk grants less than half of the figures mentioned within the text a biography of sorts. Those excluded from this are Hobbes, Stuart Mill, Hegel and Marx. By denying the reader an (albeit brief) insight into the formative beginnings of the men analysed, Hampsher-Monk could be interpreted as suggesting that only to certain figures are their principles or ideologies influenced by their beginnings. By including the state of the Prussian political arena, and the social issues within the Rhineland, it could be implicated that

² Mark Bevir, 'What is Genealogy?', *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 2 (2008), pp. 263 – 275 (p. 263).

Hampsher-Monk believes these issues to be direct causations of Marxism and theories he later appropriated (p. 483). The exclusion of Locke's medical career and the resulting later struggles with his philosophical thinking in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* or Hume's unusually early entry into University and his aversion to the professors under which he studied, are then deemed inappropriate or inconsequential to their later intellectual philosophies, whereas Hobbes' can be considered central.³

Further to this, Hampsher-Monk's writing style – the separation of ideas within each figure's analysis – most notably that of 'Introduction: The German Enlightenment and early influences' in Hegel's review, is pivotal to context (p. 409). The separation of the Enlightenment, but also its specification within Hegel's proto-biography, could implicitly denote that Hegel's work is in tandem with the broader contextual factors: the new ideas surrounding rationale and the individual. Therefore, Hampsher-Monk establishes that in order to understand the ideas pre-Hegel, you need to understand said Enlightenment philosophies which then reflect upon Hegel's own work. Moreover, by specifying the Enlightenment in Hegel's work, is this then a tool of which used to understand an author's merit? Or more something that establishes context as an overt factor in assessing the work of a figure in political thought?

Throughout Hampsher-Monk's detailed work, he assesses both textual merit and contextual. However, the balance between them is skewed in favour of separating them from each other. To do this, Hampsher-Monk decisively concludes that you cannot favour one over the other unless at risk of removing an author's autonomy, but also the impact of historical background. Yet, the author is not consistent with this view, he routinely decides against using biographical content for many of the thinkers recognised and delves deeper into the

³ Earnest Campbell Mossner, 'Hume at La Flèche, 1735: an unpublished letter', *Studies in English* 37 (1958) pp. 30 – 33 (p. 31).

autonomy of their ideas. Resultingly, it can be said that Hampsher-Monk establishes the balance of ideas and context on an individual basis.