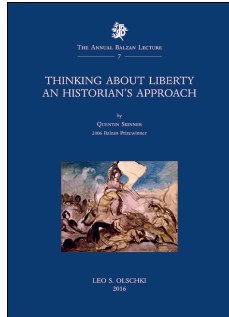


QUENTIN SKINNER

## THINKING ABOUT LIBERTY AN HISTORIAN'S APPROACH

Contemporary political theorists frequently say that there is only one coherent way of thinking about liberty, and that it consists in recognising that an individual is free so long as there is no interference with the exercise of his or her powers. In *Thinking About Liberty: An Historian's Approach*, Quentin Skinner shows that this is mere dogma by tracing a genealogy that considers different ways of thinking about liberty, a central concept in social and political thought in today's Western democracies. He isolates three distinct strands in the genealogy of modern liberty, including the above men-



tioned freedom as absence of interference (by external agencies or by the self), as well as two alternatives: freedom as absence of dependence (as in *liber homo* vs slave status) and freedom as self-realisation. In speaking as an historian, Skinner's chief concern is to excavate a way of thinking about freedom that has lately been in danger of getting lost.

The lecture also presents Skinner's 2006 Balzan Prize research project, which involved young European scholars to address questions about the place of civil, religious and political liberty in the formation of modern Europe.

*I teorici politici contemporanei spesso affermano che l'unico approccio coerente al concetto di libertà consista nel riconoscere che un individuo è libero finché non si verificano interferenze con il suo potere. L'autore dimostra che si tratta di un mero dogma, tracciando una genealogia che considera diversi modi di riflettere sulla libertà, concetto centrale nel pensiero socio-politico delle attuali democrazie occidentali.*

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CASA EDITRICE

Casella postale 66 • 50123 Firenze  
info@olschki.it • pressoffice@olschki.it

Tel. (+39) 055.65.30.684



LEO S. OLSCHKI

P.O. Box 66 • 50123 Firenze Italy  
orders@olschki.it • www.olschki.it

Fax (+39) 055.65.30.214