

剑桥政治思想史原著系列（影印本）

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

普莱斯政治著作选

Price

Political

Writings

Edited by

D. O. THOMAS

中国政法大学出版社

RICHARD PRICE

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RICHARD PRICE
Political Writings

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剑桥政治思想史原著系列

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本丛书意在使学生能够获得为了了解政治思想史所需要的最为重要的原著。就了解政治思想史而言，当代人的学识已经大大拓展了我们对不可缺少的作者的认识范围，对于这种发展，本丛书将予以体现。本丛书还将纳入一些不那么知名的著作，尤其是那些为确立知识的脉络所需要、并有助于凸显重要著作意义的作品。当然，本丛书的主要目的还是基于最新的学术成果，就那些重要的原著本身提供新的译本。编者注重原作的完整性，作为本丛书的一个特点，我们在单独一卷书的范围内对每个原作予以补充，加上辅助性的背景材料。每一本书都有导言，内容涉及该著作或相关著作的历史地位和现实意义，以及历史年表、进一步阅读的提示，还有（在适当时）关于书中所提及的重要个人的简要生平梗概。

本丛书已出版著作的书目，请查阅书末。

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

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The series is intended to make available to students the most important texts required for an understanding of the history of political thought. The scholarship of the present generation has greatly expanded our sense of the range of authors indispensable for such an understanding, and the series will reflect those developments. It will also include a number of less well-known works, in particular those needed to establish the intellectual contexts that in turn help to make sense of the major texts. The principal aim, however, will be to produce new versions of the major texts themselves, based on the most up-to-date scholarship. The preference will always be for complete texts, and a special feature of the series will be to complement individual texts, within the compass of a single volume, with subsidiary contextual material. Each volume will contain an introduction on the historical identity and contemporary significance of the work or works concerned, as well as a chronology, notes on further reading and (where appropriate) brief biographical sketches of significant individuals mentioned in each text.

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Introduction

Richard Price was born at Tyn-ton in the parish of Llangeinor near Bridgend in the county of Glamorgan on 23 February 1723. His father, Rice Price, was a Dissenting minister who had been an assistant to Samuel Jones, founder of the Academy at Brynllwarch. By all the accounts that have survived, Rice Price was a strict Calvinist who maintained an austere discipline in the home. Richard, however, rebelled against his father's theology at an early age, and though he upheld the puritan values inculcated by his parents, his religious beliefs became much more liberal and much more rationalist.

Price's father died on 28 June 1739 and his mother, Catherine, scarcely a year later. Richard then went up to London, where his uncle, Samuel Price, was an assistant minister to the famous hymn-writer Isaac Watts, at St Mary Axe in Bury Street. Once established in London, Price was entered at Coward's Academy in Tenter Alley, Moorfields, where he came under the instruction and the influence of John Eames, who had been a friend and a disciple of Isaac Newton. It was at this Academy that he was prepared for the ministry, which was to remain his vocation and his first concern throughout an extremely active career. It was at this Academy too that he received the training in mathematics that enabled him to make important contributions to the theory of probability, to actuarial science and to the growth and development of insurance. When he left the Academy (probably in 1744), he became a family chaplain to George Streatfield, a wealthy businessman living in Stoke Newington. Very little is known about his life during these years, except that for a period he was an assistant to Samuel Chandler at the Meeting Place at Old Jewry, but it would

seem that he had ample leisure to devote himself to intellectual pursuits. Those bore fruit in 1758 in the form of a work now regarded as a classic of eighteenth-century moral philosophy, *A Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals*. The main aim of this work was to defend the objectivity of moral judgement against the kinds of subjectivism and voluntarism that were fashionable in his day. Price believed that he could demonstrate this by showing that moral judgement is an exercise of reason. If moral judgement is rational, its objectivity is secured, for reason apprehends necessary truths. It is on these grounds that Price is classified as a rationalist among moral philosophers.

It is, however, important to bear in mind that there is another element in Price's account of moral judgement that cannot be easily reconciled with the view that moral principles are instances of necessary truth. On the latter view we should expect to find that Price held that moral principles are indefeasible: necessary truths do not admit of exceptions. But when Price dealt with the problems occasioned by the conflict of duties, he conceded that an obligation to perform an action indicated by a moral principle may be overridden or outweighed by an obligation indicated by a principle of greater weight. On this latter view at least some moral principles are defeasible. One very important implication of the latter view which has important consequences for Price's political philosophy is that his moral philosophy was not so completely dominated by abstract principles as it has often been supposed to be. His teaching as to how conflicts of duty are to be resolved implies that we cannot determine what action we ought to take in any situation in an 'a priori' way: we have to examine the context in which action is to be taken to ensure that we do justice to all the obligations that may be said to arise in it, and only when we have done so can we determine what we ought to do. For this reason Price's moral philosophy is much more pragmatic and much more heavily influenced by empirical considerations than it has often been thought to be.

In the *Review* Price also attacked utilitarianism in the name of an intuitionist account of moral principles, and he defended a libertarian account of free-will. The relevance of this work to his political philosophy must engage our attention later on; what I first wish to emphasize is the relevance of Price's vocation as a minister of the Gospel to an understanding of his thought. It is not just that Price

held that his duties as a minister had the first call upon his time and energy, but also that the world in which he lived was orientated towards and dominated by the worship and service of God. When towards the end of his life he expressed in his shorthand journal the hope that his life had been useful, he was revealing an abiding fear that he had failed to discharge the duties he owed to God. In one who accomplished so much the remark is a striking testimony to his humility of mind.

Throughout his career Richard Price's thought on moral and political matters was heavily influenced by the problems faced by the Dissenters in the eighteenth century. As is well known, at that time in England and Wales the Dissenters were struggling to obtain fuller legal recognition of the right to worship God in the way they thought fit. They strove to remove the legal disabilities from which they suffered. Those who rejected orthodox Trinitarianism did not fall within the protection of the Toleration Act of 1689, and, as the law then stood, they were liable to suffer severe penalties. Those who did not take the sacrament according to the rites of the Anglican Church were debarred from holding office under the Crown or under municipal corporations. They suffered other severe disabilities: they could not, for example, matriculate at Oxford, and though they could study at Cambridge, they could not take a degree there.

The leaders of the Dissenters were anxious to remove these disabilities. They sought to establish that everyone has a right not to toleration – for that would imply a condescension in those in authority – but to worship God according to the dictates of conscience. They wanted to establish not simply that everyone should not be hindered in worshipping according to conscience, but also that no one should suffer handicaps or disabilities in doing so. To establish this position the Dissenters were anxious to deny that the State has any responsibility for man's spiritual welfare; the only responsibility the magistrate has in religious matters is to guarantee to each individual the enjoyment of freedom of worship by inhibiting those who would attempt to invade it and by removing privileges or special protection to any particular sect or denomination. The defence of religious liberty dominated Price's thinking from the first of his pamphlets, *Britain's Happiness* (1759), to the last, the celebrated *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789).

In addition to defending the right to freedom of worship, Price also

emphasized the importance of establishing and safeguarding the right of inquiry. Although the fundamentals of the faith are accessible to all persons of sound understanding, there is much in the field of religion that is obscure. In addition to emphasizing the duty and the right to act in accordance with conscience, he also stressed the duty to inform conscience. Although we are blameless if we do what we sincerely believe to be our duty, that consolation is only available if we have made every effort to find out what our duties really are. We have obligations of candour in both the speculative and the practical realms. We have a duty to seek the truth and a duty to act upon what we find. Price believed that the pursuit of knowledge would eventually lead us to realise in our lives and in our institutions the truths of the Gospels. The practical implications of this belief can be seen in his discussion of the role of education. Students should not be told what to believe, but rather how to discover the truth for themselves. His optimism was such that he believed passionately that opening society to rational inquiry would inevitably lead to the establishment of a purified form of the Christian religion, to economic progress, and to social harmony. The role of the State in promoting progress is, however, strictly limited. The experience of the Dissenters had led them to mistrust State intervention, especially in religious matters. But minimizing the role of government was not based solely on the fear that power would be abused: it was also based on the conviction that there are many things that are better done if done by the individual or if done by people acting together in small associations. Price believed very firmly in the virtues of self-dependence.

The basic principles of Price's theological position can be stated quite simply: that there is an omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent God, that there is a Providence that adjusts the course of events to secure the realization of His ultimate purpose, that this life is a period of probation after which the virtuous will receive the reward of eternal life and the vicious will be annihilated (although there is some evidence that in his later years he was beginning to incline to the view that ultimately all men will be restored to communion with God). Our overriding interest is to secure eternal life, the pearl for which all else must be sacrificed, and to this end what is essential is that we seek to do our duty. What is crucially important morally and politically, therefore, is that everyone is, as far as is possible, guaranteed the freedom to act conscientiously. Since, however, we are all fallible and weak

creatures, no one's virtue of itself will merit the reward of eternal life. At this point Price stressed the indispensability of Christ's saving Grace. He was thus an Arian, holding what may be termed a midway position between the Calvinist view that redemption is secured wholly and entirely by Divine Grace and the Socinian view that Christ's redeeming role is confined to His teaching and His example.

The tendency towards the secularization of politics in Price's thought, which I shall discuss below, should not blind us to the fact that political activity is placed by Price within a context in which God is relied upon to redress the apparent injustices of life on earth. It needs to be recognized, however, that Price allotted two contrasting roles to Providence, both of which play a part in his thinking throughout his career, but each receiving greater emphasis at some times than at others. In periods of depression and gloom when all his projects seem to be frustrated, as in 1781, when there seemed to be no prospect of a favourable end to the War of American Independence, Price stressed the part played by God's Providence in securing justice for the virtuous in another life; it was in this mood that he composed his *Fast Sermon* of 1781. In more hopeful times, for example, after the Americans had won their independence, Price saw the hand of Providence working in human history. The success of the Americans and the prospect of reform at home revived millennial expectations: these are clearly in evidence in *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution* (1784), and in *The Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement in the State of Mankind* (1787). They are also manifest in *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789), particularly in the way in which he welcomed the opening events of the French Revolution and the prospect of harmony between England and France.

Scholars of the millennium distinguish millenarian views from millennialist ones; the former find in the Book of Revelation the prophecy that Christ will come again to inaugurate a period in which He and His saints will rule for a thousand years before the Day of Judgement, when all men will each receive their just deserts; the millennialists hold that the millennium will precede Christ's coming, and will, if it has not indeed already begun, be a time when the condition of man on earth will improve gradually so as to be fit for the rule of Christ and His saints. Price belonged to the latter group, and in his mind the millennialist doctrine meshed in with the more secular

doctrine of progress held by thinkers such as Turgot and Condorcet. Particular emphasis was placed on the contribution to enlightenment and progress made possible by religious freedom and the freedom of inquiry. It is in the light of these expectations that we must understand the enthusiasm of his reflections on the achievements of the American Revolution and the ardour with which he greeted the French Revolution.

Against this background it may seem strange to argue that there are marked tendencies in his thought towards the secularization of politics, so the claim needs careful explanation. Following in a tradition which owed much to John Locke, Price believed in the separation of the spiritual from the secular, and in confining government as far as possible to the defence of life, liberty and property. The State has no responsibility for man's spiritual welfare, except, as I noted earlier, for its duty to guarantee to every one the enjoyment of the right to religious liberty. The great achievement of this tradition, which Price played an important part in developing, was to establish the separation of the secular from the spiritual so strongly in conceptual terms that the separation seemed to many to be the keystone in the arch of liberal ideology.

Price's patron, George Streatfield, died in 1757, and in the following year Price became minister to the Presbyterian chapel at Newington Green where he remained until 1783. It was at this chapel on 29 November 1759 – a day appointed for a General Thanksgiving – that he preached the sermon later published under the title *Britain's Happiness, and the Proper Improvement of it*. In it Price expressed many of the beliefs that dominated his thinking on religious and political topics throughout his career: the conviction that there is an omnipotent and benevolent God, that there is a Providence that adjusts the course of events so as to secure the ultimate realization of the Divine purpose, that there is general amendment in human affairs which justifies millennial expectations; that men have a duty to worship God, and to cultivate the virtues, that everyone has a right to worship God in the way he thinks most fitting, and to act in accordance with his conscience, that the people of Britain are especially fortunate in enjoying a large measure of religious liberty, and that the Glorious Revolution had established a form of constitutional government that, although imperfect, was able to secure the protection of everyone's life, liberty and property.

To those more familiar with Price's writings during the War of American Independence and at the outbreak of the French Revolution, it may come as a surprise to find him exulting in the nation's prowess in arms and talking of the good fortune that the British enjoyed under George II with an almost undiluted praise. It is equally surprising to find one who attacked imperialism and the 'spirit of domination' with such passion claiming that the extension of military and commercial power was a sign of Providence's intention to use the British people as an instrument in the amelioration of the state of mankind. But Price was not completely uncritical: he did not altogether disguise his belief that much remained to be done to make Britain the seat of liberty that he wished it to become, pre-eminently by extending the benefits of freedom of worship to all sects and by reclaiming those who had fallen from Grace to the paths of virtue.

The defects were, however, only lightly sketched in, and it is not until his later pamphlets that we find the sweeping denunciations of the administration of the day. In 1759, even if he had wanted to indulge in heavier criticism of British institutions, he might have felt that it would not have been appropriate in a thanksgiving sermon, and especially not in a year when the French had been so decisively defeated by Wolfe at Quebec and by Hawke at Quiberon Bay.

In addition to his duties as a minister Price had many intellectual pursuits – he edited an essay by Thomas Bayes on the theory of probability, in recognition of which he became a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1765; and in the mid sixties he was invited to advise the newly founded Society for Equitable Assurances on demographic and actuarial problems and entered upon a period of intense study which culminated in the publication of his *Observations on Reversionary Payments* in 1771. During this period his interest in the problems of government finance was awakened, and he devoted a chapter in the first edition of *Observations on Reversionary Payments* to a discussion of the problem of the National Debt. This essay he extended to a pamphlet that was published separately in 1772 under the title *An Appeal to the Public on the Subject of the National Debt*. After the Glorious Revolution and the introduction into this country of what Disraeli was later to term 'Dutch finances' the Government fell into the habit of financing much of its activity by borrowing and funding debt. The interest required to service the debt became an annual charge on the nation's revenue. As the debt grew, and it grew rapidly

in wartime, the burden of the annual charge upon the nation's income became proportionately heavier. Price was alarmed that it might grow to such an extent that it would threaten national bankruptcy. Earlier in the century a sinking fund had been established with the ultimate aim of wiping it out. The scheme was a simple one. By taxation the government was to create a surplus of income over current expenditure and place it in a fund that would be used to buy back debt. Instead of cancelling the debt as it was bought up, interest should be paid on it and used to buy up further debt. The fund would then grow at compound interest until a sum large enough to liquidate the whole debt would be created. Price was scandalized by the failure of successive ministries to maintain this scheme. Ministers had found it difficult to impose the level of taxation necessary to supply it, and in times of financial stringency, so far from supplying the fund, they had found it all too tempting to raid it.

There were further reasons for reforming government finance. The fears of early redemption of stocks had led the market to prefer to take up stocks bearing low rates of interest at a high discount rather than high interest stocks at par: for example, a nominal £100 stock bearing 3 per cent interest issued at £60 was more attractive than a £100 stock bearing 5 per cent issued at par. The rate of return was the same on both issues, but the stock issued at a discount was more attractive because if the government wanted to redeem the stock it would have to pay £100 for every £60 it had received. Price complained that the government was irresponsibly extravagant in creating a large capital debt in return for much smaller sums raised.

Lord North's defence of this policy rested on the assumption that the burden to the nation's resources lay only in the annual charge that the debt created, and that since this was so, the government should always accept the lowest rates of borrowing it could find. This was tantamount to declaring that the National Debt was a permanent charge upon the nation since there was no intention that the debt should ever be repaid. This contention proved completely unacceptable to Price: he retained the notion many still retain today that a debt, whether public or private, is something that ought to be repaid. His abhorrence of the thought that the government should ease its own burden by creating a permanent charge on the nation's income was reinforced by his extreme distaste for contracting debt. Morality required that one should repay one's debts; prudence required that

one should, wherever possible, avoid contracting them. The need to redeem debt became almost an obsession with Price: he spent a great deal of time and energy inveighing against the ways in which the Government raised money and in advocating the re-establishment of sinking fund procedures for redeeming debt. When he came to advise the Americans on the construction of a new State in *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution*, Price was particularly concerned to warn them of the evils of public indebtedness. There were other reasons for reducing debt: the existence of the debt itself led to the maintenance of a class that lived off the funds, it led to the unwholesome stockjobbing practices of the Alley, and since a large portion of the fund was held by Dutch financial houses, it led to an annual export of specie that the nation could ill afford.

There were further reasons for reforming the ways in which the government raised money. There are many affinities between Price's political thought and what Hans Baron has identified as the tradition of 'civic humanism': among them the fear that power may be used corruptly and the consequent need to prevent the accumulation of power beyond what is strictly necessary to discharge the duties of government. Price suspected that the ways in which government loans were raised – by private allocations on very favourable terms – opened the way to corruption: it was only too easy for those in government to gain support for their policies in Parliament by allowing loans to be taken up at rates substantially below their market value. Subscribers could then make a quick profit by selling stock shortly after they received it. Price's allegations were difficult to prove because there were ways in which unsavoury operations could be concealed, but there were good reasons to suspect that his charges were well founded in the fact that the prices of stocks rose substantially after they were issued, thus presenting an easy profit to those who had been allowed to subscribe.

Up to the outbreak of the War of American Independence Price was known primarily to the relatively small circle of those who read his writings on moral philosophy, theology, probability theory, assurance and the nation's finances. It was his defence of the American rebels that brought him to the attention of a much wider public. In February 1776 he published his *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty*, of which, according to his nephew, William Morgan, 60,000 copies were sold. It was followed a year later by *Additional Observa-*

tions, in which he clarified some of the positions he had adopted in the earlier pamphlet and published more accurate accounts of the nation's finances. According to Horace Walpole, one of the reasons why the first pamphlet had caused such a stir was that it laid bare the financial ruin threatened by the prosecution of the war. In 1778 the two pamphlets were republished in one volume under the title *Two Tracts*.

In these political pamphlets Price's main aim was to establish that in their quarrel with the British administration right was on the side of the American rebels. He used several different kinds of argument to establish this. The British administration were in the wrong in seeking to impose their will on the colonies and doubly wrong in seeking to do so by military force. In opening hostilities the British government were entering upon a war they could not win; they were embarking on a course that would be heavily expensive in men and resources, one so expensive that it carried with it the threat of national bankruptcy and ruin. The main argument, however, was that the British administration were in the wrong because they had violated a basic principle. Political authority, Price argued, originates with the people: the forms of government are just the ways in which they choose to govern themselves. Following Locke and Hoadly he repudiated the theory of Divine Right, claiming instead that the authority of the ruler derives from the social compact whereby the people agree among themselves to accept the constraints of law and choose the forms under which they will be governed. If authority derives from the people, it follows, Price claimed, that every community has a right to govern itself.

No community can have a right to make other communities subject to it. There are no grounds for justifying imperialism, conquest or dominion. Applying this principle to the claims of the colonists, Price held that if they so chose, the Americans had the right to rid themselves of rule from London and become independent. He did not want to see the break-up of the British Empire; he would rather have seen it become a confederation of political societies, each participating on an equal basis and submitting to a Federal authority for the regulation of those matters that were of common concern. This was the ideal, but if the Americans did not wish to participate in this way, they should be left free to go their own way.

Price showed considerable polemical skill in identifying what he