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Pluralism and the personality of the state discusses the relations between individuals, groups and the state. Set against the broad context of philosophical arguments about group and state personality, Dr Runciman's book tells, for the first time, the full history of the movement in early twentieth-century English political thought known as political pluralism. The pluralists believed that the state was simply one group among many, and could not therefore be sovereign. They also believed that groups, like individuals, might have personalities of their own. The book is divided into three parts: the first examines the philosophical background to these ideas and refers in particular to the work of Thomas Hobbes and the German Otto von Guericke. The second traces the development of pluralist thought before, during and after the First World War. In the third and final part, Runciman's study returns to Hobbes and looks in particular at his *Leviathan*, in order to see what conclusions can be drawn about the nature of this work and the nature of the state as it exists today.

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To my parents

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Doug. Another king! They grow like Hydra's heads;
I am the Douglas, fatal to all those
That wear those colours on them. What art thou
That counterfeit'st the person of a king?
King. The King himself

Shakespeare, *Henry IV part I*

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Preface

This book is about the political thought of seven men: Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), Otto von Gierke (1841–1921), F. W. Maitland (1850–1906), J. N. Figgis (1866–1919), Ernest Barker (1874–1960), G. D. H. Cole (1889–1959) and Harold Laski (1893–1950). Hobbes was and is the greatest of all English political philosophers; he is also one of the supreme prose stylists in the English language. Gierke was one of the dominant figures in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German life and thought; a jurist, philosopher and legal reformer, he was also an intellectual historian of genius. The same is true of Maitland, the founding father of legal history in England; like Gierke, he is one of the few historians whose works are still being read by other historians over a hundred years after they were written. Figgis was a follower of Maitland, and though his work has lasted slightly less well, it too has retained a readership, both among political theorists and historians. Barker, who was a political theorist and historian himself, achieved greater prominence in his own lifetime than did either Maitland or Figgis, rising to a professorship and a knighthood; his stock, however, has fallen considerably faster, and he is now something of a marginal figure in the intellectual history of this century (though a recent study in this series has attempted to reverse this trend). Barker's stock has not fallen as fast as that of Cole, who like Barker was a historian, but unlike Barker was also a socialist; once one of the most famous intellectuals in Britain, he is now fairly well neglected, if not quite so neglected as he was a decade or two ago. Laski is one of the few British intellectuals whose reputation has suffered a decline more dramatic even than Cole's, despite the brief flurry of interest that surrounded the centenary of his birth in 1993; a fellow socialist, and rival, of Cole's, his ideas are now as unfashionable as they were once fashionable; he is, in addition, generally regarded as having been something of a

fraud. Viewed chronologically, this is not a sequence which follows an upward curve.

What these seven have in common is a shared interest in the concept of group personality, and it is this concept which provides the subject for most of what follows. Of these seven, the last five (and a few others) make up the movement in early twentieth-century English political thought known as political pluralism. It is the central aim of this book to tell the history of that movement, and it is in this respect that chronology is significant, because it is a history containing a clear narrative thread. The thread is provided by Gierke, from whom the concept of group personality immediately derived, and whose own work contained a narrative in which the central place was occupied by Hobbes. It is necessary to know about Hobbes if we are to make sense of Gierke, and it is necessary to make sense of Gierke if we are to have any understanding of the history of English political thought during the early part of this century.

However, Hobbes and Gierke do not appear here simply in order to explicate ideas which were in many respects pale copies of their own. The struggles of the political pluralists to apply Gierkean concepts in a modern English setting throw some light back on those concepts, and back in turn on some of the concepts with which Gierke struggled, prime among which was the concept of the Hobbesian state. In particular, the history of English political pluralism throws some light on an absolutely crucial but often ignored feature of Hobbes's conception of the state – its so-called 'personality'. It is for this reason that the book has a structure which is somewhat dialectical. The first part looks at Hobbes's and Gierke's ideas of persons and group persons in order to provide the background to the history that follows in part II; that history then provides the background for the further exploration of Hobbesian and Gierkean ideas of groups and state which makes up the substance of part III. There are thus two sets of ideas and two sorts of context involved here: there are the philosophical ideas which provide the context for what is essentially an exercise in history; and there are the historical ideas which provide the context for what is essentially (or is at least intended to be) an exercise in philosophy. It is my hope that these two exercises make some sense on their own terms. But if they make any sense at all, it is also my hope that they best make sense together.

There are two points to be made about the text. First, I am very

conscious that this is a book written by a man about men, in which human beings in general are referred to by the epithet 'men', and particular groups of human beings, including all political theorists, are referred to as though they always were men. For the first two of these facts I can offer no excuses. For the third, I can only say that one of the central themes of this book is the distinction between 'persons' and what are usually referred to as 'natural men', and this is a distinction I did not wish in any way to blur. In this context, the gender-neutral term 'person' is very far from being neutral in other respects, and has to be set against what is in other respects a neutral term, which in this case means 'men'. As to the fourth, it is, I am afraid, primarily a matter of stylistic convenience, and 'he' should be read as 'he or she' wherever appropriate. However, I would add that the political theorists discussed in this book would not generally have thought of 'he' as 'he or she'. Moreover, it is one of the themes of this book that political theory should not be confused with real life. Political theory is not reality, it is simply one version of reality. It is, in other words, just a tale, full of its own sound and fury, and during the period covered by this book it tended to be told only by men.

The second point concerns the term 'state' itself. In the literature of the period (1900–33) it was almost always printed as 'State'. This convention has now died out, and the lower case is usually preferred. For the purposes of consistency I have used 'State' in all quotations from the period, even though this is not what was written in every instance. Where 'state' was used, it was purely a matter of convention, the lower case being preferred in some American publications, and in one or two English ones during the 1920s and 1930s. There was certainly no attempt to associate 'the State' with any particular philosophy (say, idealism) or any particular culture (say, Germany), nor was any distinction drawn between 'the State' and individual or historical 'states'. (Even those who wished to make that distinction tended to capitalise both.) Outside of the quotations I have used 'state', as is now conventional; again, nothing is implied by this.

I would like to express my gratitude to the people who have helped me to write this book. First of all, to Michael Bentley, who supervised the original thesis from which it derives, and who has provided much encouragement since. I am also very grateful to the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge for electing me to the Fellowship which afforded the time and the leisure in which to write it. I have received much helpful advice in the unfamiliar areas

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Preface

of Roman law and medieval political thought from Magnus Ryan; all the mistakes that remain are entirely my own. Most of all, I would like to thank the three people who inspired me to write it. First, my father, W. G. Runciman, who pointed out early on the ways in which the research I was doing might be connected with Hegel. Second, Bee Wilson, who pointed out the possibility of a connection with Shakespeare. And third, Quentin Skinner, who pointed out the connection with the person without whom this book would not exist at all, Thomas Hobbes.