

Canon Controversies in Political Thought

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Two Theories of Influence

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PREFACE

To be influential indicates a degree of originality. The influential are set apart from their peers and have achieved an unrivalled independence of thought or creativity. Originality therefore suggests freedom *from* the influence of both peers or forbearers alike. To liberate one's self from overbearing masters, mad or otherwise, paves the way for creative autonomy along Harold Bloom's 'hidden roads'; roads which run between original works. How, though, does the Great writer or artist become influential whilst simultaneously escaping what is the inescapable 'astral,' or 'emanational,' force of influence itself? To be sure, achieving influence over others through originality, greatness, genius, or independence represents a break from the very chains of influence. Yet defining a theory of the much-overlooked notion of influence, as the network of hidden roads between the influential and those who fall under their influence, has proved notoriously difficult. Although in one sense it is pejorative—pernicious even—in representing the co-dependence and potentially oppressive relationship between *influential* Greats and the merely inferior *influenced*, there is another view that influence (as a theory) can be both progressive and collaborative.

Any confusion is only a problem if a linear relationship between influence and originality is questioned. Is it possible, however, to examine the very claim that influence and originality are merely two sides of the same coin: that more influence equals less originality, and vice-versa? This book challenges such an assertion by exploring the paradoxical relationship between influence and originality that stems, arguably, from the very etymology of influence. From the outset, as both a process and a quality, a

verb (*to influence*) and a noun (to possess *influence*), the term serves as a gerund makes elucidation difficult. The usual academic claims can be made here: that the scholarly neglect of the notion of influence legitimizes such an ‘overdue’ study, which in turn ‘fills a gap’ in the literature. Even broader and more prescient justifications could be made. For example, we now live (hopefully only fleetingly) in the age of the *influencer*, and that somehow discovering both the history and the psychological secrets behind the forces of influence is not only profitable for pedagogical or social reasons should some individuals try to influence others toward better ends, but also materially-profitable for advertisers, self-help gurus, or marketing executives trying to sell a product. The limited scope of this book, however, is to simply ask how examining the meaning of influence can assist those interested in understanding the role it plays in the formation of ‘canons’ of Great artists, writers or thinkers. Two theories of influence are thus offered. The first, and the dominant understanding of the term, represents the status quo. The second less popular theory attempts to invert this relationship and restate an older and less anxiety-ridden state of affairs whereby influence can serve as a positive, intergenerational force.

I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to Professor Julia Stapleton, Durham University, for her encouragement, patience and kindness during my postgraduate studies.

Professor Gary Browning, Oxford Brookes University, has been a tremendous source of inspiration. I am beyond grateful for both his time and mentorship.

This book is dedicated to my amazing wife Dr Elizabeth Monaghan who, as ever, has supported me throughout the long writing process. I promise I will never write anything ever again. Maybe ...

Finally, this book is also dedicated to my darling daughter, Marion Lucy. She is the greatest of all influences.

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