The historian, investigating any event in the past, makes a distinction between what may be called the outside and the inside of an event. By the outside of the event I mean everything belonging to it which can be described in terms of bodies and their movements: the passage of Caesar, accompanied by certain men, across a river called the Rubicon at one date, or the spilling of his blood on the floor of the senate-house at another. By the inside of the event I mean that in it which can only be described in terms of thought: Caesar’s defiance of Republican law, or the clash of constitutional policy between himself and his assassins. The historian is never concerned with either of these to the exclusion of the other. He is investigating not mere events (where by the mere event I mean one which has only an outside and no inside) but actions, and an action is the unity of the outside and inside of an event. He is interested in the crossing of the Rubicon only in its relation to Republican law, and in the spilling of Caesar’s blood only in its relation to a constitutional conflict. His work may begin by discovering the outside of an event, but it can never end there; he must always remember that the event was an action, and that his main task is to think himself into this action, to discern the thought of its agent.

development since the publication of John Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment* in 1975 and Quentin Skinner’s *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* in 1978; with the recent appearance of reassessments of historical republicanism by these authors, a re-evaluation of the subject is timely.

The scholarly activities that help to explain contemporary interest in republicanism are varied, and often characterised by the role of unintended consequences. Two important moments in the story occurred in 1949 and in 1960, when the Cambridge historian Peter Laslett published an edition of the writings of Sir Robert Filmer, followed by a critical edition of John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*. ⁴ Laslett revealed that Filmer’s *Patriarcha* had been composed prior to his other writings, and published posthumously between 1679 and 1680. More surprisingly, Locke’s text, rather than being a defence of the ‘Glorious Revolution’, as it had traditionally been described, having appeared in print from 1690, was shown to have been written around 1681, at a time when Whigs of Locke’s stamp were contemplating violence against the Stuart court. Laslett’s editions raised questions for historians concerning the relationship between an author’s intentions in writing a text and the intentions behind its publication, causing in the process a wholesale re-evaluation of late seventeenth-century political thought.

Between Laslett’s editions, three works were published which revised the way historians thought about early modern intellectual life, and complicated inherited perspectives on the origins and elements of ‘modern’ political thought. In 1955, Hans Baron’s *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* described the reassertion of the classical republican *vita activa* by Colluccio Salutati and Leonardo Bruni, the great Quattrocento Chancellors of the Florentine Republic, in the face of the threat of monarchical tyranny represented by the Visconti of Milan.⁵ In 1957, John Pocock published *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, which further questioned accepted understanding of seventeenth-century thought, by revealing the significance to contemporaries of a ‘language of politics’ beyond jurisprudence and governance, tying together disputes about the antiquity of common law and parliament and the meaning of the Norman Conquest. In 1959, Caroline Robbins published *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman*, which traced the development of Old or Real Whig arguments, in England, Scotland, Ireland and North America, for the rotation of public offices, for the relevance of natural rights to political liberty, and for the necessity of a separation of constitutional powers in free states, between the Restoration and the assertion of North American independence.⁶ Revisionist studies emphasising the importance of contextual readings in the history of political thought appeared throughout the 1960s, with leading instances having been produced by Felix Gilbert, Bernard Bailyn, Gordon Wood, and John Dunn.⁷ Linking together such writings has