



English Radicalism 1550-1850

Edited by
Glenn Burgess and
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ENGLISH RADICALISM, 1550–1850

An exploration of the place of radical ideas and activity in English political and social history over three centuries. Its core concern is whether a long-term history of radicalism can be written. Are the things that historians label 'radical' linked into a single complex radical tradition, or are they separate phenomena linked only by the minds and language of historians? Does the historiography of radicalism uncover a repressed dimension of English history, or is it a construct that serves the needs of the present more than the understanding of the past? The book contains a variety of answers to these questions. As well as an introduction and eleven substantive chapters, it also includes two 'afterwords' which reflect on the implications of the book as a whole for the study of radicalism. The distinguished list of contributors is drawn from a variety of disciplines, including history, political science and literary studies.

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Introduction

Glenn Burgess

I

Radicalism is a term well-entrenched in the historian's lexicon. A search on the Royal Historical Society's on-line bibliography for British and Irish history retrieves nearly 300 books, essays and articles that use the word in their title.¹ The total rises to nearly 850 if the search term used is 'radical' rather than 'radicalism'. Radicals and radicalism are everywhere, at least from the sixteenth century onwards. They come in all sorts of varieties, popular and elite, of the left and of the right, Tory and Whig; British, English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh. But the word is, in many of its uses, curiously weak. We are likely to have a rough idea of the sorts of things that might be meant by calling someone a socialist, a conservative or a liberal, and a corresponding sense of what the equivalent 'isms' might look like, even if that sense quickly becomes complex and sub-divided. But what sense do we get from hearing someone described as a radical? We would assume that the 'socialisms' of different periods might show some resemblances (however forced or artificial), and there is a recognisable core meaning in describing Thomas More, Gerrard Winstanley and Karl Marx as communists. All of them envisaged an ideal society in which private property was abolished. They have all been described as radicals too, but it seems less clear what this label tells us about them.

The present collection of essays is a collaborative attempt to address three questions that are central to any understanding of the function of the terms 'radical' and 'radicalism' in the historian's conceptual toolkit. First, does it make sense to talk of the existence of 'radicalism' before that particular label was invented? (1820 is the first use of the term recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.) Second, do the various people, ideas and groups to which the label 'radical' has been given by historians have

anything in common with one another? And, third, is there in any sense a 'radical' tradition in English political culture, constituted by the transmission of 'radical' ideas through time? The book does not claim to have answered any of these questions. They are the sort of questions unlikely to receive agreed answers. Indeed, it may not be desirable that there are agreed answers, for the heuristic value of the radical/radicalism vocabulary may well be great in some circumstances and little in others, depending on the precise questions being asked and the way in which definitions are being constructed. The purpose of the book, instead, is to explore the sorts of problems raised by 'radicalism', and to try out a variety of solutions to them, some broad, some narrower and more local. Historians should be as conscious of the implications of the language they use, and as self-aware and self-critical, as they can be, and the present book is intended to contribute to the achievement of these notions. Its authors would varyingly like to restrict, refine or qualify discussions of radicals and radicalism, but they do not by any means speak with a single voice, and one would not wish them to do so.

This introduction will chart the terrain, identifying the sorts of assumptions that underline historians' discussions of radicalism, and the sorts of problems that arise from the use of the term as a label for political ideas and activity.

II

Much of the historical interest in 'radical' political thought (and activity) has developed since the 1950s and 1960s, and much of this interest has taken the form of *recovery*. The effort at recovery certainly goes back much further, at least to the late Victorian period; but was greatly aided by the interest that historians have developed more recently in 'history from below'. In the 1930s and 1940s, when A. L. Morton and his fellow Marxist historians embarked on the search for 'a people's history of England', the discovery of popular radicalism was itself a radical activity with political purposes. That has remained true of later developments, like labour history and the history of working-class movements. Certainly, they have not been the province of Marxists alone; but they have remained areas of scholarship attractive to those with some sympathy for radical politics. As Bryan Palmer has said of E. P. Thompson, he 'staked a historical claim for his own allegiance to

an antinomian tradition that reached through the ranting impulse of sixteenth-century dissent into sects such as the Muggletonians'.²

It would be pointless to bemoan this fact. New areas of history are generally opened up by scholars whose motivations lie in the present rather than the past. Were it not so, historical scholarship really would be the province of Scott's and Carlyle's 'dry-as-dusts'. But, of course, these motivations do not provide a justification for the field. History develops as scholars refract the past through the changing concerns of the present; but it is always necessary to judge and assess the results by proper scholarly means. Frequently the enthusiasms that create new areas of interest also distort them; and then a second phase gives way to the first. It is arguable that the history of radicalism has had that second phase artificially truncated. Shifting concerns have led to the decline of labour history, Marxist history, and so on, before the assessment and absorption of their results had been completed.

The Marxist recovery of English radicalism

Though the radical dimensions of the English past, and especially of the English Revolution of the 1640s and 1650s, never altogether disappeared from view, it was in the twentieth century, and largely by Marxist and socialist historians, that the history of radical groups was recovered and constructed.³ Central to this process (chronologically as well as in achievement) was the work of the Communist Party Historians' Group (CPHG), which flourished for a brief decade (1946–56), but had a remarkable impact on English historiography.⁴

Perhaps the most important thing to appreciate about the work of the British Marxist historians is that it is inspired by a good deal more than Marxist theory. In one of the bitter arguments that have from time to time fractured the British Left, Perry Anderson defended the claim that E. P. Thompson's work had 'cultural nationalist' elements.⁵ Thompson did not take the charge well; but it nonetheless identified a feature of his work, and that of other early Marxist historians, from which much richness, depth and resonance have been derived. One of the central achievements of the British Marxist historians, in Harvey Kaye's assessment, 'has been the recovery and assemblage of a "radical-democratic tradition" in which have been asserted what might be called "counter-hegemonic" conceptions of liberty, equality, and community'. This is 'a history of popular ideology standing in dialogical relationship to the history of politics and ideas', running from the peasants' rising of 1381, through

Levellers, Diggers and Ranters, through Wilkes and the London crowds of the eighteenth century, to Chartism and beyond.⁶ Appreciation of this point has been best addressed in the literature about E. P. Thompson, in whose work it is unmistakable, and, whose final posthumous work on William Blake seems to have addressed at the end some of his own deepest inspiration. While his chief interest was in an antinomian 'tradition' originating in the seventeenth century, and in the radicalisms of romanticism, Thompson could also appeal to 'the long and tenacious revolutionary tradition of the British commoner', 'a dogged, good-humoured, responsible tradition: yet a revolutionary tradition all the same'. From Levellers to Chartists, this tradition was chiefly one of 'moral revolt'. Careless of theory but resilient and humane, it sounds a lot like Thompson himself.⁷

But the impulse to recover a radical tradition in the English past was by no means unique to Thompson. It lay behind much of the historical thinking that surrounded the formation of the Communist Party Historians' Group. The group began as a collective endeavour to update A. L. Morton's pioneering work *The People's History of England* (1938), and at the heart of this endeavour was the further recovery of a native English radical tradition.⁸ Dona Torr, reviewing an early edition of the writings of Gerrard Winstanley, proclaimed that 'the political history of the English working people began 300 years ago'. It was a slightly odd tradition that began in the mid-seventeenth century: 'The stream went underground. But many generations later the democratic demands of the Levellers arose again to powerful in Chartism, while Owen (through Bellers) recreated Winstanley's communism. This is our heritage.'⁹ One might wonder where, exactly, underground was, but the important sentence here is the last. The core historical project lay in the relationship of present to past embedded in the recovering of a radical or revolutionary heritage that could make communism not an alien, foreign and unpatriotic implant into the green and pleasant lands of the sceptred isle but a suppressed, native tradition. Daphne May made the point emphatically:

The Levellers were defeated. Two hundred years later, however, the working class, the Chartists, put forward similar demands which, as the result of hard prolonged struggle, have been substantially realised. In face of the workers, the capitalists have had to retreat. Bourgeois historians have tried to gloss over the revolutionary struggles of our people, and to present the growth of democracy as the story of 'freedom broadening slowly down, from precedent to precedent', thanks to our enlightened rulers. That leads to the conclusion, so convenient for

the ruling class, that the Communists with their nasty talk about class struggle are 'alien' to English politics. The fight of the Levellers (and many similar battles) demonstrate the opposite: that it is precisely the Communist Party which is the true heir and successor of the most heroic champions of liberty in the past.¹⁰

Christopher Hill pushed back further. 'The people of England', he maintained, 'have a past of which they may be proud – a history of working-class struggle... and of struggles for democracy earlier'. They should celebrate in remembering 1649 'the creative vision and capacity of the common people of England'. But the Levellers did not invent English radicalism *ex nihilo*, for they 'inherited... the medieval peasant tradition of revolt against landlords'. It was important to Hill, too, to be able to deny the claim that 'when twentieth century democrats or Communists claim kinship with Lilburne or Winstanley... we are like *nouveaux riches* trying to establish "a spurious pedigree"'.¹¹ His early essay on 'The Norman Yoke', first published in 1954, identified a distinctively native tradition of opposition and subversion, rooted in the continuity of the Norman Yoke motif and its account of a lost age of freedom and well-being. Hill traced this tradition from the late middle ages, through its heyday in the seventeenth century, and then into the nineteenth century, when it was to be replaced by modern socialist ideas.¹² The people's history that Hill and others in the CPHG were building, one recent and largely sympathetic commentator has noted, was one 'in which the class character of earlier rebels, revolutionaries and popular leaders was obscured by regarding them all as representatives of a national revolutionary tradition'.¹³

These views and this aspiration to a revolutionary heritage are embedded in some of the most widely read Marxist historical writings. The source of the spring that nourished the recovery of England's revolutionary past was A. L. Morton's *People's History*, but it must be admitted that this book itself did relatively little to identify a radical tradition in the English past. It was more concerned to tell the history of England as a history of class struggle, and to assess the changing character of social classes over time.¹⁴ Some of Morton's later work, though, sounds a note that echoes in the writings of Thompson, Hill and others. His study of English utopian writing linked ideas across time in a variety of ways, indicating, for example, the persistence of ideas about Cockayne (the land of plenty) through time, and finding that its late medieval form 'anticipate[s] some of the most fundamental features of modern socialism' as well as 'foreshadowing... Humanism, the philosophy of

the bourgeois revolution'.¹⁵ Links could be drawn between the 'simple men' who had written of Cockayne, and future utopian writers, including Thomas More and William Morris.¹⁶ Morton was not insensitive to intellectual change, generated by changing class structures and alliances, but there were important lines of continuity running through the dialectical history that he wrote. Thus, in one formulation, Thomas More is said to bring together Plato's 'aristocratic communism' and the 'primitive communism' of the medieval peasant, and is the link that binds both to modern 'scientific socialism'. More and the utopian socialism that he represented formed only one of the sources of modern socialism; but the other, a popular socialism, also had a long tradition from Munzer, through the Levellers, the French Revolution and the Chartists. One of the key differences between modern socialism and earlier socialism was that the latter could exist only in dream; but for modern socialism, the dream had become realizable. Fantasies were now being translated into facts.¹⁷ In his study of William Blake, Morton delineated a broadly similar pattern. Blake himself was firmly located in an 'antinomian' and Ranter tradition, and the essential ideas in his writings could be found in the pamphlets of the English Revolution. But there was a much broader tradition than this, European as much as English, and 'with a continuous existence of several centuries':

It was a revolutionary tradition, tenaciously held by the descendants of the small tradesmen and artisans who had formed the extreme left of the Commonwealthmen: few things are held more tenaciously than such a tradition with the vestiges of a past glory about it, and if it was dying in Blake's time, this was only because it was being replaced by the more positive, powerful and apposite radicalism of Wilkes, Paine and Place. Blake's life and work, among other things, illustrate the conflict between these old and new trends in English radicalism – he himself attempted but never quite managed to reconcile them.¹⁸

Christopher Hill's major study of the radicalism of the English Revolution, *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972), though it continued the search for a radical pedigree, beginning with the proud boast that 'popular revolt was for many centuries an essential feature of the English tradition',¹⁹ was largely unconcerned with issues of continuity and transmission. Assessing the impact of earlier ideas on the eighteenth century, he remarked, 'We need not bother too much about being able to trace a continuous pedigree for these ideas. They are the ideas of the underground, surviving, if at all, verbally: they leave little trace.'²⁰ This was a dangerous position, for Hill had little doubt that there was a continuous pedigree, and his remark might be read as an attempt to insulate that

belief against the demand for evidence. He returned to the theme, although a few years later, in an essay 'From Lollards to Levellers', published appropriately in a collection honouring A. L. Morton.²¹ This was, as Hill acknowledged, an inconclusive sort of essay – evidence again proved more elusive than he would have liked – but it was nonetheless alive with the possibility that an underground heretical and seditious tradition stretching from the later middle ages to the end of the eighteenth century might have existed.

Three approaches to radicalism: critique of the Marxist recovery

Historians should always be on the lookout for 'how' questions: take care of the 'hows', and the 'whys' will look after themselves. The people's (radical) history that emerged from the work of the CPHG and the historians associated with it raises a number of important 'how' questions.

It is possible to define at least three different approaches to radicalism, all of them with very different implications for our understanding of the subject.

The approach that has dominated the field, especially amongst the British Marxist historians, has constructed radicalism as an ideological tradition that has existed since (perhaps) the late middle ages. It rests upon a *substantive* definition of the term, in which radicalism is defined by identifying its core content. This remains relatively unchanged over time, and is transmitted from generation to generation. Witness, for example, E. P. Thompson's claim that 'it is above all in Bunyan that we find the slumbering Radicalism which was preserved through the eighteenth century and which breaks out again in the nineteenth'.²² There is an assumption that radicalism is a consistent ideology with an underground existence over many centuries. Earlier and later radicals, who believe and do recognizably the same things, are part of the same tradition. So committed was Thompson to this view that he was able to suggest that, because antinomianism is found in the age of William Blake, then it must have existed amongst the radicals of the English Revolution. On that basis one could dismiss Colin Davis's arguments for the non-existence of an antinomian Ranter sect.²³ The argument is extraordinarily revealing of the depth of Thompson's commitment to the existence of a radical tradition, which here becomes an article of faith, in proud defiance of the historian's usual sense that you need contemporary evidence to prove that something happened.

This approach to radicalism usually gives it a class location. The continuous history of the radical tradition could, for those who adopted this approach, be rooted in the life-experience of peasants, proletarians and other subaltern classes, and so in class analysis could be found the natural explanation for it. Thus Christopher Hill could write, as we have seen, of a popular underground tradition of protest in ways that assumed hidden links and continuities between particular outbreaks of radical protest from the Lollards to the Levellers, and (no doubt) beyond. This is so in spite of two things (a) that Lollards and Levellers are as dissimilar as they are similar; and (b) that there is at best very limited evidence to support the idea of an historical continuity between the two.²⁴

A second approach has been developed out of dissatisfaction with the first. It rests on a *functional* definition of radicalism, and has perhaps been most explicitly formulated by Colin Davis.²⁵ This approach defends the application of the term radicalism to diverse phenomena, even before the term itself became current in the early nineteenth century; but it need not assume any real historical connection between different examples of radicalism. It need not link them into a single continuous tradition of popular protest. Rather, it lays down basic functional criteria for recognizing radicalism, and suggests that any political ideas or activity that matches them can be understood as an instance of radicalism.

In Davis's early formulation a radical ideology needs to do three things. (1) It must delegitimize an old socio-political order; (2) it must re-legitimize an alternative or new socio-political order; and (3) it must provide a transfer mechanism that will change things from the old to the new. Many of the papers that follow are written with explicit or implicit acceptance of an approach like this, though not necessarily with any debt to Davis's work, and it has arguably become the most common of all outside Marxist circles.

However, functional approaches are not beyond criticism. Conal Condren is, perhaps, the leading theorist of a third approach, and he roots it in a critique of both substantive and functional understandings of radicalism.²⁶ We might term this third approach *linguistic*, for it rests heavily on a close study of word usage. Ultimately, it suggests that we should not use the term radicalism to describe any phenomena before the term was invented. To do so obscures the historical significance of the emergence of the word. But, beyond that, it misdescribes earlier ideas. Condren has especially emphasized the fact that, while the term radical suggests the willing and enthusiastic acceptance of innovation, pre-modern societies were more or less universally hostile to innovation,

and thus to 'radicalism'. Those whom we call radical are the ones who have failed to make themselves look acceptable to their contemporaries, though invariably they have tried hard to do so. They have, in other words, tried hard not to be radicals. The key point in this is that any description of sixteenth- or seventeenth-century people as radical must misdescribe their language – and possibly as a result (though Condren is more cautious) their *intentions* too. They cannot and did not intend to be what we mean by the term radical. They thought of conserving and renovating, not of innovating. On the whole, they did not believe that change – fate or providence – was something amenable to human control. Thus, there is a dramatic difference between pre-modern ideas and modern ones, and applying the term radical to them (still more, linking them into a common tradition) obscures this fact altogether. In the essays that follow, Jonathan Clark, in particular, has given an historical exemplification of this approach.

III

Four particular problems

The three approaches outlined carry with them different attitudes to four topics that have been central to the history of radicalism, and it is worth identifying and commenting on each of these topics because they run in various ways, through many of the essays that follow. The key purpose is to identify the questions with which to interrogate the histories of radicalism that have been produced through the twentieth century.

Historical transmission

There has been a marked tendency, especially with the substantive approach, to understand the transmission of radicalism through time as a relay race, in which the baton of radicalism is passed on, hand to hand, down the generations. The baton, of course, stays the same, while those who carry it change. Certainly, some continuities can be found in 'radical' protest (the demand for universal manhood suffrage or for frequent parliamentary elections); but a number of points can be made. First, to concentrate on similarities can be to ignore even greater differences. Second, it is possible that 'radicals' at various times actually picked up ideas not from those before them in the radical tradition, but from the political culture that surrounded them. One of the effects that comes from postulating a radical tradition is that it divorces those in it from

their contemporaries; yet, from the Levellers onwards, there is evidence to suppose that most 'radicals' relied on the exploitation of a common stock of ideas that they shared with 'non-radicals'.

A third point might be to consider an alternative mode of transmission altogether. This might draw upon the recent historical interest in reading habits and memory. It might stress the iconic significance of radical figures and a radical tradition. The key point is that, simply because later radical writers looked back on their predecessors and constructed a tradition in which to place themselves, there is nonetheless no reason to accept this as a real historical tradition. People remember the past inaccurately; they read creatively. What is particularly needed is a history of the way nineteenth-century radicals looked at the past. In so far as we have this, in Timothy Lang's book, we discover that when early Victorian radicals looked at the English Revolution, they tended to admire Hampden and Pym, not Lilburne and Winstanley.²⁷ The radicals, in their eyes, were Cromwell and the Independents, not Christopher Hill's plebeians. This changed over time, and we need to understand the changing status of iconic figures in this process. Very likely, in the end, we shall discover that the radical tradition identified by the British Marxist historians is but the last of a long series of attempts by radicals to identify a self-justifying tradition for themselves. Each of the attempts is of historical importance; but none of the traditions constructed actually existed until remembered and invented by politician or historian. Tradition has become mythology. A canon of radical writers is created, and the works in it read, reread, and misread.

This leaves us with the possibility that there was no significant continuity or transmission in the past – no radical tradition – and that such a thing has been created only in retrospect by radical historians writing their own pedigree. The result is history written with passion – but is it history that is reliable? Alternatively, is all historical writing prone to the same problem?

Radical ideas and social history

The history of radical thought and activity has been closely associated with social history, in the belief that radicalism was a class ideology. A number of difficulties immediately arise. In particular, when did class societies emerge? When is it appropriate to discuss politics in class terms? Whatever answer we give to that question, a good many historians (other than Marxists) might be prepared to believe that at least at the

beginning of our period, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, class analysis is at best misleading.

This is important because of the problem of class-consciousness, and the links between that and the problems of radical intention suggested by Condren. It may make sense to talk of classes unaware of themselves; but for the historian of ideas and politics there will be something unsatisfactory in this. If class is to play an explanatory role in their work, then it needs to be linked to class-consciousness. Men and women need to be aware of and able to articulate their class identity and grievances. There is much evidence to show that they were not so able in early modern England, and that class has only limited explanatory value for the period.

If there is any truth in this, then a further point can be added to Condren's analysis. For many who adopt the substantive approach, radicalism is class-based protest. But, in fact, it is doubtful whether many early modern people constructed their social world in class terms, and therefore doubtful whether they could have intended to articulate a class protest. This does not, of course, mean that they could not make any social protest. But it does mean that they did not do so in the interests of a social class, but in some other way. This has important implications for our understanding of both the content and purpose of their thought and activity. The most recent work may, to a degree, be reversing some of this, but the problematic relationship of intellectual and ideological identity to social identity remains.²⁸ One approach – pregnant with possibilities for the history of radicalism (as indicated in Colin Davis's contribution to this book) – is *via* the idea of the 'unacknowledged republic', which captures the sense that a high proportion of English adult males, down to the level of the village and parish, were involved in their own self-government. If this were so, then the history of radicalism as a battle between the included and the excluded might need to be rethought.²⁹

Religion

In his 1940 review of Christopher Hill's early work, George Orwell remarked that 'the main weakness of Marxism [is] its failure to interpret human motives. Religion, morality, patriotism and so forth are invariably written off as "superstructure"'.³⁰ It was religion that he had most in mind on this occasion, and it was to be religion that unsettled many Marxist approaches to England's radical past. There was always a tendency – perhaps not inevitable and certainly not uniform – to ignore the religious motivations of supposed radicals, and to attribute to them instead more modern-seeming concerns with social equality and

political democracy. Or, perhaps more accurately, the modern (and secular) elements in these thinkers were accorded greater attention and weight than the early modern (and religious) ones. In the *ancien régime* world, did political and social conflict occur between social classes, or fractions of them, or between confessional groups? If the latter, then religion rather than class could be considered the key explanatory context for politics and political thought. This problematic idea, briefly sketched, provides one possible alternative to class-based analysis. It is arguable that all significant political conflict in the early modern period occurred between groups whose difference was primarily confessional. In this world, what we take to be radicalism was most often the dramatic political impact of extreme religious beliefs, beliefs that were followed sometimes without regard for political and social order. What distances this from modern radicalism is the fact that it was often unpolitical or even antipolitical, relying not on human agency but on God to transform the world. It was animated not by a vision of human freedom and equality, but by a vision of community with God. Glenn Burgess's chapter below applies this understanding to the English Revolution.

Indeed, if this is so, we might expect radicalism when it does emerge to be irreligious. Aware of the point, perhaps, Christopher Hill has tried hard but unsuccessfully to find irreligion in the English Revolution. This is a sign of the danger of prematurely identifying radicals: they find themselves forced to live up to a label of someone else's choosing. Modern radicalism has, indeed, often been irreligious; and in an earlier phase associated with heresy. Religion must be central to it, for you cannot have a radicalism resting upon human agency unless an antidote is found for the opium of the people. This need not lead to atheism or irreligion proper, but it most probably will lead to a critique of what are perceived to be the stupefying effects of religion, and a defence of the capacity of human beings to control and perfect their own affairs. We need to ask, then, when such a critique became available; and to understand the differences between modern political radicalism and the religious challenges to authority of the post-Reformation period.

Language and anachronism

The most fundamental of the problems raised by the differing ways in which radicalism can be approached concerns the historian's use of language. To what extent is the historian obliged to understand the past using concepts and/or language that were available to people in the past? To what extent is conceptual anachronism an enriching

imaginative device that can help the historian to understand people in the past differently (better? more deeply?) from the ways in which they understood themselves?

Peter Munz, using Popper to transform Max Weber's distinction between *verstehen* (understanding) and *erklären* (explaining), has suggested that:

If one is using the laws the people one is writing about would have used, one is understanding them because one is explaining them the way they themselves would have explained themselves. If, on the other hand, one is using general laws which are accepted and current in one's own modern world, one is interpreting the people of the past, because by explaining them to ourselves rather than explaining them in the way they would have explained themselves to themselves, one is foisting something on them they themselves had not thought of; and hence, one is literally interpreting them.³¹

Though Munz is here concerned with the historian's use of causal explanatory laws, the distinction he makes is applicable to the use of concepts and words. A moment's thought makes it clear that the historian has both to understand and to explain, though not necessarily at the same time. It follows that it cannot be the case that conceptual and linguistic anachronism is in itself evidence of poor historical practice. Historians have, for example, advanced a great many explanations for why a considerable number of early modern women were executed for the crime of witchcraft. Historians may seek to understand the contemporary belief that they were executed because they were witches, perhaps as a result of entering into a pact with Satan; but none would consider that understanding to provide an explanation of what happened.³² The historian's knowledge is primarily the knowledge of the outsider and not the insider, and as such it must explain as well as understand. In seeking to explain, the historian cannot be bound by the language and concepts of the past.

To clarify this matter further it is worth distinguishing the explanation of human action from the explanation of other historical phenomena. The demographic historian, concerned with measurable and long-term patterns, extracted using various techniques from recalcitrant data, need not worry about the explanation of human action – at least not in the first instance. In explaining how human beings act – and we can consider for these purposes writing and speaking to be forms of action – it does seem important to ensure that the historian's conceptual vocabulary does not clash with the conceptual vocabulary of the past in such a way that historical explanations necessarily imply a false understanding of the

ways in which people in the past saw their own worlds. This, it seems to me, is at the heart of the debates in this book. Does using the concept of 'radicalism' to group, link and explain thoughts and actions that took place before the early nineteenth century necessarily falsify the past? To what extent are we entitled (or obliged) to translate the actions and thoughts of people in the past into a vocabulary located in the present? Clearly, the answer must be – to quite a considerable extent. Historians can do nothing else if they are to represent the past to the present. Where then are the limits to be drawn – when does anachronistic language become a problem?

IV

There are many questions here, and none of them is intended to belittle the pioneering work of the historians of the Communist Party Historians' Group, and others whose passion for the radicals of the past was inspired by their commitment to a radicalism of the present. It is time, though, to take stock of this historiography, and to argue over its legacy. Let the debate commence.

NOTES

- 1 <http://www.rhs.ac.uk/bibl/>
- 2 Bryan D. Palmer, *E. P. Thompson: Objections and Oppositions* (London, 1994), pp. xii–xiii.
- 3 See for example Blair Worden's account of the historical fortunes of the Levellers in his *Roundhead Reputations: The English Civil Wars and the Passions of Posterity* (London, 2001), ch. 12.
- 4 Important accounts of the CPHG are Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Historians' Group of the Communist Party', in Maurice Cornforth (ed.), *Rebels and their Causes: Essays in Honour of A. L. Morton* (London, 1978), pp. 21–47; Bill Schwarz, "'the People" in History: The Communist Party Historians' Group, 1946–56', in R. Johnson, et al. (eds.), *Making Histories: Studies in History-Writing and Politics* (London, 1982), ch. 2; and Alistair MacLachlan, *The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary England: An Essay on the Fabrication of Seventeenth-Century History* (Basingstoke, 1996), ch. 3.
- 5 Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (London, 1980), ch. 5, pp. 146–7.
- 6 Harvey Kaye, 'E. P. Thompson, the British Marxist Historical Tradition and the Contemporary Crisis', in Kaye, *The Education of Desire: Marxists and the Writing of History* (New York, 1992), p. 101.
- 7 Thompson quoted in Bryan D. Palmer, *E. P. Thompson: Objections and Oppositions* (London, 1994), p. 79.

- 8 The other core text, which led to a famous debate on the transition from feudalism to capitalism, was Maurice Dobb's *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (1946). The issues raised by it can be seen making an earlier appearance in the debate on Hill's *English Revolution* (1940) in the pages of *Labour Monthly*, 22 (1940), pp. 558–9, 651–5; and 23 (1941), pp. 90–3; while the collective statement of debates in the CPHG, 'State and Revolution in Tudor and Stuart England', *Communist Review*, July 1948, pp. 207–14, indicates the importance of the matters raised in Dobb's book to the Group. The transition debate is collected in Rodney Hilton (ed.), *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London, 1978).
- 9 Dona Torr, 'Book Review', *Labour Monthly*, 26 December 1944, pp. 383–4.
- 10 Daphne May, 'The Putney Debates', *Communist Review*, January 1948, p. 27.
- 11 Christopher Hill, 'History and the Class Struggle', *Communist Review*, March 1949, pp. 476–8.
- 12 Christopher Hill, 'The Norman Yoke', in Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in the Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, (Harmondsworth, 1986), ch. 3; earlier version in J. Saville (ed.), *Democracy and the Labour Movement: Essays in Honour of Dona Torr* (London, 1954), pp. 11–66.
- 13 Ann Talbot, "'These the Times . . . This the Man": An Appraisal of Historian Christopher Hill', from the World Socialist Website (www.wsws.org), at <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/mar2003/hill-m25_prn.shtml> accessed 05/01/2005.
- 14 Harvey J. Kaye, 'Our Island Story Retold: A. L. Morton and "The People" in History', in Kaye, *Education of Desire*, ch. 5.
- 15 A. L. Morton, *The English Utopia*, (London, 1952, reprinted 1978), pp. 32–45, esp. 43, 45.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 76–7, 179, 275.
- 18 A. L. Morton, *The Everlasting Gospel: A Study in the Sources of William Blake*, (New York, 1966), pp. 11–12.
- 19 Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 13.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 381.
- 21 Christopher Hill, 'From Lollards to Levellers', in Maurice Cornforth (ed.), *Rebels and their Causes: Essays in Honour of A. L. Morton* (London, 1978), pp. 49–67.
- 22 E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1968; original ed. 1963), p. 34.
- 23 E. P. Thompson, 'On the Rant', in Geoff Eley and William Hunt (eds.), *Reviving the English Revolution: Reflections and Elaborations on the Work of Christopher Hill*, (London, 1988), pp. 153–60; J. C. Davis, 'Fear, Myth and Furore: Reappraising the "Ranters"', *Past & Present*, 129 (1990), pp. 79–103.

- 24 An interesting reflection on relevant issues is now Andy Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2002).
- 25 J. C. Davis, 'Radicalism in a Traditional Society: The Evaluation of Radical Thought in the English Commonwealth 1649–1660', *History of Political Thought*, 3 (1982), pp. 193–213.
- 26 Conal Condren, 'Radicals, Conservatives and Moderates in Early Modern Political Thought: A Case of the Sandwich Islands Syndrome?', *History of Political Thought*, 10 (1989), pp. 525–42; Condren, *The Language of Politics in Seventeenth Century England* (Basingstoke, 1994), ch. 5.
- 27 Timothy Lang, *The Victorians and the Stuart Heritage* (Cambridge, 1995).
- 28 This is a rapidly developing and changing field. Perhaps the most important work has been that of Keith Wrightson on the language of social description. His recent work is pulled together in Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain 1470–1750* (New Haven, 2000).
- 29 Michael Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England c.1550–1700* (Cambridge, 2000); Steve Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, 1550–1640* (Basingstoke, 2000); Mark Goldie, 'The Unacknowledged Republic: Officeholding in Early Modern England', in Tim Harris (ed.), *The Politics of the Excluded c.1500–1850* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 153–94.
- 30 *New Statesman and Nation*, 24 August 1940.
- 31 Peter Munz, *Beyond Wittgenstein's Poker: New Light on Popper and Wittgenstein*, (Aldershot, 2004), p. 45.
- 32 For some provocative reflections, though, see Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth Century Representations*, (London, 1996).

A Politics of Emergency in the Reign of Elizabeth I

Stephen Alford

In the third volume of his *Political Disquisitions* the Scottish philosopher James Burgh explored the historical dimensions of his call for the reformation of parliament. 'Before all other things', he wrote, 'there must be established a GRAND NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RESTORING THE CONSTITUTION' as a statement of the established right of the English people to act in an extra-parliamentary way.¹ Working primarily from the British histories of David Hume, Burgh rehearsed some of the radically defining moments in the historical relationship between monarch and subject, from the barons' opposition to King John – 'the first attempt toward an association for a plan of liberty, according to Mr *Hume*' – to the proposal for a 'grand national association against popery' in 1680. For Burgh a purpose of these associations was the protection of protestantism; another was the safety of the crown. He recorded two other examples: a 'general association all over *England* for the defence of *Elizabeth*' in 1586, and 'afterwards for that of *William* and *Mary*'.²

James Burgh's account of these bonds between subject and monarch (or subject and subject) was naively simplistic, driven by a notion of historical progress and development which was deeply anachronistic.³ Popular action in the sixteenth century, in the sense that Burgh understood it, did not exist, because the social and political structures of the Tudor polity were radically different from those of the late eighteenth-century state. The Elizabethan Bond of Association of 1584 (Burgh miscalculated the year) was not, in its origin, a popular or spontaneous response to crisis; nor was it a conscious alternative to parliamentary action. The text of this 'Instrument of an association' committed its signatories 'to thuttermoost of their power at all tymes to withstand, pursue, and suppres all maner of persons that shall by any meanes intend and attempt any thing dangerous or hurtfull to the honours, Estates, or persons of their Souveraynes'.⁴ It was an

orchestrated political statement of intent. 'Master secretary', William Cecil Lord Burghley, wrote to Sir Francis Walsingham 'late at night' on the day they had affixed their seals and added their signatures to the document, 'consideryng that this Association accorded uppon as yow know, is to be made publicque, by reason manny sortes of persons by degrees of offices and callynges, ar lyke to be partyes in the societe.'⁵

But the thrust, if not the detail, of James Burgh's interpretation of the Elizabethan Bond was perceptive and, in its own way, quite accurate. 'The Instrument of an association' was written and circulated to bind subjects into a common 'society' or 'fellowship' designed to protect the crown. It was also, by implication, strongly Protestant; a reaction to – and a protection against – the ideological divisions of continental Europe, the Catholic challenge to the legitimacy of Elizabeth I's queenship and the claim of Mary Queen of Scots; or, as the Bond put it, 'for the furtherance and advancement of som pretended titles to the Crown of this Realm, it hath ben manifest that the Life of our gracious Souverayn Lady Quene Elizabeth hath ben moost traiterously and devilishly sowght'.⁶ This sense of danger had been with the regime since its inception in 1558, and it developed a definite intellectual and political form during the first Elizabethan decade.⁷

In fact, Elizabethan politics, and the political thinking that underpinned it, was a remarkably subtle mechanism. I would like in this chapter to explore the relationship between the mental world of Elizabethan councillors, the complexity of their inherited political thought, the broader implications of documents like the Bond of Association and 'A necessary consideration of the perillous state of this tyme' of 1569, the blueprint for 1584. There was a quite radical dimension to the politics of Elizabeth's reign. The basic proposition was that divinely ordained royal authority had a purpose. That purpose was the destruction of idolatry and its agents. A defined purpose became a mark against which to measure the exercise of kingly power; and royal authority measured was, fundamentally, royal power critiqued. This was a position shared by some of the most subversive writers and preachers of the 1550s and members of the Elizabethan regime's political establishment. There was also, by the 1560s, a clear notion of the principal duty of the members of (to borrow a phrase from the Instrument of Association) 'any Christian Realm or civile Societe'.⁸ This was the defence of the kingdom's Protestant settlement: with or without the active participation of the queen, by subjects who were defining themselves as the citizens of a polity developing into a state in its modern sense.

I

The sixteenth century can look remarkably unradical. Strongly bound by hierarchy and an emphasis on order and social degree, successive regimes seem to have had an unlimited capacity to preach the virtues of obedience to established authority. John Cheke, for example, wrote his *The Hurt of Sedicion* against the rebels of 1549, but it was reissued in 1569, 1576 and 1641, 'Whereunto is newly added by way of Preface a briefe discourse of those times, as they may relate to the present'.⁹ Raphael Holinshed printed Cheke's text in the editions of his *Chronicles* in 1577 and 1587.¹⁰ Both Thomas Cranmer and Heinrich Bullinger published and preached on obedience during the reign of Edward VI.¹¹ But popular rebellion was only one form of radical action – and Tudor rebellions generally failed.

More effective and significant were critical readings of the nature of the polity which came from within the kingdom's 'political society'. Here, Tudor political culture can be deceptive. English thinking in the sixteenth century was active and responsive: it developed in a complex way, rested on a number of theses and counter-theses of the nature and exercise of political power, and depended heavily on political context.¹² In 1550, for example, Bishop John Ponet of Rochester preached on the authority of the king as supreme head of the church on earth next under God.¹³ John Ponet the Marian exile, on the other hand, constructed a devastating critique of monarchy, clearly driven by the English political scene. These ideas must have been accessible to him during the Edwardian years, even if their implications were not immediately clear or obvious. *A Shorte Treatise of Politike Power* (1556) deployed scriptural text, natural law and English constitutional precedent to argue, ultimately, that royal power could be constrained.¹⁴ For Ponet, human authority divinely ordained and the consent of a people to their governors could coexist. He took one of the most conventional platitudes of innumerable sermons and books on obedience to the powers that be ordained of God – that governors were ordained for the wealth and benefit of the people and for the preservation of the commonwealth – and transformed it into a basic test of the legitimacy of authority.¹⁵ The crucial point was that this test could be applied by God in the afterlife and by subjects on earth.

John Ponet presents an interesting case study. Chaplain to Thomas Cranmer and Edward VI, he symbolized the Edwardian and Elizabethan political elite at its most connected. The Edwardian and Elizabethan MP Sir Peter Carew may have been involved indirectly in the composition of *A Shorte Treatise of Politike Power*.¹⁶ John Jewel,

later an Elizabethan bishop of London, was in Strasburg with Ponet.¹⁷ Anthony Cooke – the father-in-law of William Cecil and of Elizabeth I's lord keeper of the great seal, Nicholas Bacon; and of the Elizabethan diplomat Henry Killigrew – bought Ponet's library after his death in 1557 and seems to have edited some of his work for publication.¹⁸ Even in his thought, there is some serious common ground between Ponet and his apparently more conservative contemporaries. On a broad level of political analysis (even, arguably, at his most radical) Ponet strikes some familiar chords. His critique of the absolute power of monarchs, for example, rested on a number of assumptions. He argued that God's law, 'by which name also the lawes of nature be comprehended', was made solely by God, and so kings and princes 'are not joynd makers herof with God'.¹⁹ So 'this absolute autoritie which they use' had to be either maintained by the reason of man or a usurpation of God's will.²⁰ Absolute power meant, for Ponet, the freedom to dispense with laws, 'and frely and without correction or offence doo contrary to the lawe of nature, and other Goddes lawes, and the positive lawes and customes of their countreyes, or breake them'.²¹ 'Absolute' may not have been a word other writers would have chosen to deploy in this context, but, like Ponet, they would have found the notion of unlimited political power objectionable.

The nature of a monarch's power was a complex issue, and one which had long exercised the minds and pens of common lawyers. For John Ponet, the absolute power of princes and governors was morally unacceptable. Similarly, a common lawyer like James Morice acknowledged the fundamental and extensive prerogative powers of the crown but, using the work of Bracton and Fortescue and a corpus of statute law, defined the *exercise* of those powers very carefully.²² In a lecture on the prerogative delivered in the Middle Temple in 1579, Morice explained that sovereign rule and absolute authority had often 'burst forth into hatefull Tirannye and Insolent Oppression' because, quite simply, princes were neither immortal nor immutable. So a better kind of monarchy had been established by common assent, whereby kings were guided by the law. The English monarch was not limited like a Venetian duke or a king of Sparta, but the exercise of sovereign authority was influenced in ways that reflected the needs and concerns of his subjects. On laws affecting the life, lands and goods of subjects, or the money they paid in taxation, the members of the body politic offered their counsel and consent. Parliament was 'the greate counsell of the Prynce and of the Realme': an expression of royal power and a point of contact between subjects and monarch.²³

Although the worlds of Fortescue and James Morice and John Ponet appear, on the surface, to have been unimaginably distant, Ponet was nevertheless sensitive to these distinctions. He argued that there were two kinds of monarch: those who independently made the laws of their countries 'bicause the hole state and body of their countrey have geven, and resigned to them their authoritie so to doo'; and governors 'unto whom the people have not geven suche autoritie, but kepe it them selves'. Ponet denounced the first sort of kings as tyrants. But the authority of his second category derived from what he called 'the mixte state'.²⁴ This notion of 'mixed' government reflects the complexity of sixteenth-century notions of the location of political power, and it became, in many ways, a rallying cry of early Elizabethan writers and politicians. For Ponet, the 'mixte state' of the three distinct polities of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy had been by experience 'judged to be the best sort of all', because mixed commonwealths survived.²⁵ Sir Thomas Smith endorsed the mixed polity in his *De Republica Anglorum* (1565).²⁶ So did John Aylmer who, in 1559, described England not as 'a mere Monarchie, as some for lacke of consideracion thinke, nor a meere Oligarchie, nor Democratie, but a rule mixte of all these, wherein ech one of these have or shoulde have like authoritie'. The concept found its physical form in parliament, 'wherin you shal find these 3 estats'.²⁷

In his essay on 'The Monarchical Republic of Queen Elizabeth I', Patrick Collinson explored Aylmer's defence of Elizabeth's fitness to rule (essentially that the kingdom was governed on her behalf) and pointed to the 'republican' implications of Aylmer's emphasis on mixed polity.²⁸ And these implications have deep resonances. Commentators like Aylmer must have understood the implications of this political model of the kingdom – in essence Sir John Fortescue's *dominium politicum et regale* at its most extreme. In 1573 the puritan Thomas Cartwright used the model of the mixed polity of the commonwealth to construct an equivalent constitution for the English church.²⁹ In doing so, he effectively challenged the notion of the absolute sovereignty of Elizabeth in matters ecclesiastical and temporal. It was a critique of royal power that Archbishop John Whitgift of Canterbury understood only too clearly.³⁰ In a published reply to Cartwright, Whitgift admitted that parliament represented the estates of the realm but maintained that because 'the judgements, confirmation, and determination resteth in the Prince, therefore the state is neyther Aristocratie, nor Democratie, but a Monarchie'.³¹ But it was Cartwright's model, rather than Whitgift's, which underpinned the Elizabethan political creed of William Cecil

and the analyses of authors as diverse as Thomas Smith, John Aylmer, John Ponet and Richard Hooker. For John Guy, this shared assumption represented 'the most powerful and subversive critique of the monarchy of Elizabeth I', a critique which 'emanated from the very heart of the regime'.³²

John Ponet demonstrated how it was possible to construct a stunning analysis of the aims and limits of political authority. Working from conventional assumptions – that human authority was instituted by God for the wealth and benefit of all, and that it was the duty of governors to maintain justice, defend the innocent and punish the evil – Ponet demonstrated that 'Common wealthes and realmes may live, when the head is cut of, and may put on a newe head, that is, make them a newe governour, whan they see their olde head seke to muche his owne will and not the wealth of the hole body'.³³ This conclusion rested on a reading of principles of political action which were subtle and highly ambiguous. But probably the most important point to grasp is that by the reign of Elizabeth the impact of political writing in the 1550s had done two things: first, it had encouraged authors like Ponet, John Knox, Christopher Goodman and (from a different perspective) John Aylmer to explore the nature of monarchical regimes; and second, it had encouraged these writers to take as their test of legitimacy a commitment to God. The 'true' religion became the prescriptive and authoritative guide to the actions of human governors.

II

This ideological reading of the nature of monarchy had complex origins. During the reign of Edward VI, writers and preachers emphasized the relationship between their own godly Protestant monarch and Old Testament models of reforming kings. Like eight-year-old king Josiah (2 Kings 22–23), Edward presided over the destruction of idolatrous images and the rediscovery of the book of the law. In court and public preaching, biblical translations and Edwardian printing, Josiah became a key element in the regime's presentation of itself, a providential mark of the authority of God in the reformation of the kingdom, and a counter to the insecurities of royal minority.³⁴ The implications of this ideological model of monarchy revealed themselves during the Marian half decade. Although historians have recognized that commentators like Ponet and Christopher Goodman wrote explicitly on subjects' obedience, it is easy to miss the implicit theme of Goodman's *How Superior Powers O[u]ght to be*

Obeyd of Their Subjects (1558) or John Knox's *The First Blast of the Trumpet* (1558). The Marian exiles had inherited from the Edwardian years strong notions of what regimes should and should not do. Although the nature of an individual's obedience to authority appears as a key theme in the writing of the period, so too does the template for a regime acceptable to the godly. When Christopher Goodman noted that 'To obey is good, but whome, wherein, and howe farre, ought to be considered', he encouraged his readers to ask searching questions about the essential nature of the polity in which they lived.³⁵

The legacy of writers like Anthony Gilby, Christopher Goodman and John Knox was Elizabethan rather than Marian. In 1567 the Catholic Thomas Stapleton used passages from the works of Gilby, Knox, Goodman and Goodman's editor William Whittingham to demonstrate that the Protestants of Geneva wanted 'not only to deprive the Quene of her title of the Supremacy in causes Ecclesiasticall, but even in temporal too, and from al government'.³⁶ This was a conscious misunderstanding of the relationship of these men to Elizabeth – she was, after all, a monarch they found confessionally acceptable – but it was a point made by Stapleton with some justification. Patrick Collinson believes that 'the polemical critique of monarchy' is a more appropriate term than 'resistance theory' for the quite radical readings of political power presented by Protestant writers and politicians.³⁷ Elizabeth's subjects did not resist their queen but 'it does not follow that there was no ideological capacity for resistance'. Monarchy as 'a ministry exercised under God and on his behalf – in effect, the monarch as an accountable public officer – was a notion widely and commonly shared'.³⁸

For Protestants the destruction of idolatry became the defining mark of acceptable kingship. Christopher Goodman turned the conventional model of counsel on its head when he wrote that the office of royal counsellors was 'to brydle the affections of their Princes and Gouvernours, in geving such counsele as might promote the glorie of God; and the welthe of their contrie'. The antithesis of this was Mary Tudor, 'their ungodlie and unlawful Governesse, wicked Jesabel'.³⁹ Like Jezebel and 'ungodly Athalia' (2 Kings 8, 11; 2 Chronicles 21, 22), 'instrumentes of Satan, and whippes to his people of Israel', Mary was a hypocrite and an idolatress.⁴⁰ For Goodman, the 'end of all offices' – of councillors, noblemen, rulers, justices, mayors, sheriffs, bailiffs, constables and gaolers – was humbly to promote God's glory 'and to defende all those whom he committed to your charge'. The kingdom's officers had betrayed their trust by banishing God's truth and changing religion into superstition

and the true honouring of God into blasphemous idolatry.⁴¹ These godly duties were taken equally seriously by the MPs and bishops of the parliamentary session of 1572. They condemned Mary Queen of Scots for the crime of idolatry in terms which were identical to Christopher Goodman's 1558 reading of one of their major texts, Deuteronomy 13.⁴²

These models and assumptions were deeply embedded in the Tudor consciousness. When the Edwardian regime deployed the biblical examples of Corah and Dathan (Numbers 16) against its internal enemies – the rebels of 1549, who resisted godly reformation – it did so with a consciously ideological purpose. Corah and Dathan were punished because they challenged the authority of Moses and offended God with idolatrous sacrifices.⁴³ Equally, Saul's failure to obey God in his campaign against King Agag and his presentation of 'burnt sacryfyces & offerynges' (1 Samuel 15) meant that he was stripped of his kingly power. The example of Saul was used to condemn rebellion in 1549. It was also deployed in the parliament of 1572 during its debate on the punishment of Mary Stewart. Saul had been deceived by the 'shaddowe of honor', but honour was not an excuse to avoid the execution of justice, 'for in deed execution of justyce upon any person whatsoever is and ever hath bene accompted honorable'.⁴⁴ Magistrates in commonwealths were ordained, 'accordinge to the greatnes of the offences, [to] repressse the wickednes of mankinde whereunto by corruption of nature they are inclined'.⁴⁵

The English translation of the Bible printed in Geneva in 1560 became a key Elizabethan text. There were strong ideological implications in its marginal notes on the cruelty of Jezebel, the refusal of David to kill Saul in a private cause (something which would have been acceptable as a public act), and the failure of Asa to execute his wicked mother.⁴⁶ The Geneva Bible's introduction to the book of Deuteronomy (an important Tudor text on the duties of kingship) discussed God's promise 'to raise up Kings and gouvernours for the setting forthe of this worde and preservation of his Churche'.⁴⁷ Just as important was the letter of dedication to Elizabeth I, in which the translators considered 'how muche greater charge God hath laid upon you in making you a builder of his spiritual Temple'. Josiah's destruction of idolatry was an instructive model. So was King Asa, who demonstrated that 'the quietnes and peace of kingdomes standeth in the utter abolishing of idolatrie, and in advancing of true religion'. Asa was a cautionary example. He began 'to be colde in the zeale of the Lord', feared the power of man, imprisoned the messenger of God and died after a period of war and oppression (2 Chronicles 14, 15).⁴⁸ This was not a fringe text. The letter to Elizabeth was printed in the editions

of the Geneva Bible produced in the 1570s and 1580s by Christopher Barker, printer to the queen and a man closely associated with her principal secretary Francis Walsingham.

The translators of the Geneva Bible addressed Elizabeth as the natural agent of reformation in the tradition of Jehosophat, Josiah and Hezekiah. Equally, the queen was the defender of the godly and the principal agent in the prosecution of idolatry. The author of one text from the parliamentary session of 1572 assumed that the person 'bound in conscience to proceed with severitie' against Mary Stewart was Elizabeth.⁴⁹ When the queen's almoner, Bishop Edmund Gest of Rochester, constructed a defence of English military action against Scotland in 1565, he began with the assertion that 'Every prince ought to defende Christis religion . . . not onelye to defende it in his owne contree but also in the cuntrye next by him'.⁵⁰ This argument 'pro defensione religionis' rested on the assumption that if 'inferiour magistrates' could act to defend God's religion 'much more maye an other prince'. Gest openly maintained that 'inferiore magistrates maye fight against there prince for the defence of goddes religion'.⁵¹ So the duty to protect true religion could be shared, potentially, by the monarch, the governors of her realm; even, perhaps, on the model of Christopher Goodman, local officers of the parish.

III

The notion of a collective responsibility for the protection of the kingdom and its religion was one of the themes of a major document prepared by Elizabeth I's principal secretary, William Cecil, in June 1569. Cecil divided the text of 'A necessary consideration of the perillous state of this tyme' into two parts. The second section offered a solution to what, in the first part of the document, was a disturbing assessment of the weaknesses of Elizabeth's kingdom in a hostile and conspiratorial Europe. The solution was a prototype for 1584: an association of the queen's subjects for the defence of the person of Elizabeth, the preservation of the common peace of the realm, and the conservation of its religion.⁵² The 'first and principall meane' to prevent crisis was the queen 'as the naturall head of all the Realme', who would, on the model proposed by Edmund Gest in 1565, help to protect the victims of religious violence and Catholic persecution on the continent.⁵³ The second line of defence – and the principal theme of the proposal – was the mobilization of the subjects of the crown for the defence of the realm.

'A necessary consideration' explored the strengthening of the relationship between monarch and subject, pushing it beyond the 'commen band which every subject by nature oweth to hir Majesty'.⁵⁴ This depended on a written statement of loyalty to the physical person of the queen, and, connected to that aim but distinguishable from it, the protection of the realm and its religion. In Cecil's summary of the bond's intentions, religion came first: 'mayntenance of Relligion, suerty of the Quenes person, Mayntenance and Contynuanse of the Monarchy, conservation of the subjectes in peace'.⁵⁵ The oath was, by implication, an oath to the queen; but it was also a promise which bound initiates 'to associat them selves with all estates of their degrees', so the relationships it encouraged were horizontal as well as vertical.⁵⁶ Like the Instrument of Association of 1584, which deployed the vocabulary of 'society' and 'fellowship', 'A necessary consideration' was a declaration of a mutual commitment to a common cause.

The paradox is that the Bond of 1584 and the proposal of 1569 enhanced the role of the individual in a 'Christian Realm or civile Societie' and helped to demarcate the nature of the Tudor state. 'State' has to be used carefully for the sixteenth century, but in the context of 1569 and 1584 it is an appropriate substitute for 'polity' or 'commonwealth'. This was perhaps not the state of Thomas Hobbes and Quentin Skinner, in which the 'artificial person of the state', rather than the person of the monarch or any corporate body of natural persons, bore sovereignty.⁵⁷ But it was something different from the traditional and inherited notion of the political body or realm residing within the physical person of the monarch. In plans prepared in 1563 and 1585 for periods of emergency interregnum, Elizabethan privy councillors tested some of the fundamental assumptions of their political world. Public office became, in effect, separable from service to a living monarch. Institutions of government which were in theory little more than extensions of royal power and authority declared themselves capable of outliving the queen. The exercise of royal power was detached from the person of the monarch. In the transition from the governance of the kingdom as the royal *estate* to the commonwealth as *state*, the ability of Elizabethan councillors to isolate sovereignty, their sense of what this meant in terms of the governance of the realm, and their willingness to become representatives of that power are undoubtedly significant.

Both the plan for association of 1569 and the Bond of 1584 helped implicitly to define the relationship between the subject and the political community of which he was a member. Subscription to the Bond was,

in theory, a matter of free and personal choice. Entry into 'this fellowshippe and societie' was a voluntary mark of an individual's loyalty to the regime.⁵⁸ 'A necessary consideration' was more prescriptive. In its model for the recruitment of local communities for the defence of the realm, it linked a subject's oath to his willingness to contribute money to the regime in a time of crisis. An individual who refused 'to associat him self in comen cause by oth and subscription' would be 'certified as a recusant'. But even a man who swore but failed to pay his contribution was liable to the same fate.⁵⁹ 'Recusant' is the key word here. In subscribing to the oath proposed for 1569, Cecil failed to distinguish between a commitment to the defence of the realm and the protection of Protestant religion in the kingdom – because, quite simply, the two were bound so closely together. The Elizabethan regime was extremely conscious of the religious loyalty of its political elite of senior clerics, noblemen and gentlemen at court and in the counties. 'A necessary consideration' established an important link between the regime's sense of ideological self identity and William Cecil's perception of subjects' capacity for political involvement: from privy councillors, bishops, noblemen, 'head gentlemen' and 'inferior gentlemen' to 'ecclesiasticall persons, merchantes, clothyers, farmors, howsholders and such lyke'.⁶⁰

In his exploration of the later Elizabethan plan for interregnum, Patrick Collinson pointed to the concealment of citizens within subjects.⁶¹ The distinction is an important and real one. If the basic definition of a citizen is a member of a political community who has a defined role and an important part to play in the life and preservation of that community, then texts like the proposals for interregnum by council or oaths of association had some profound things to say about participation in the affairs of the realm.⁶² 'A necessary consideration' was a draft; but the Bond of Association was widely circulated and signed, *en masse*, both by local gentlemen of substance and by men who could make only marks on the returns.⁶³ This was certainly not citizenship classically conceived in the form reconstructed by Markku Peltonen, a citizenship of 'public virtue and true nobility based essentially on the classical humanist and republican traditions';⁶⁴ or a reflection of the mental world of Elizabethan governors like William Cecil or Nicholas Bacon, driven by classical notions of public duty.⁶⁵ Equally, Elizabethan writers examined the governance of towns as municipal communities.⁶⁶ But these explorations and traditions coexisted with less historically driven or classically conceived notions of the role of individuals within communities. When the 'chieffe inabitants' of Swallowfield in Wiltshire gathered in 1596 to establish

articles for effective self-governance, they produced a fascinating statement of the public responsibility of the 'company' in the creation of a disciplined Christian community and an efficient execution of the duties delegated to them by the crown.⁶⁷

IV

This desire to preserve an ordered Christian and civil society was an acknowledged aim of the Elizabethan associations. The analysis of England's situation presented by William Cecil in 'A necessary consideration' clearly acknowledged the broad implications of the Marian works of men like Christopher Goodman and the translators of the Geneva Bible – that a godly realm must protect itself against the threat of Roman idolatry and promote the true religion – and sets them in the international political context of the 1560s. According to Cecil, the Catholic powers wanted to force dissenting 'states' to reconvert to Rome. For Cecil, there was an intimate relationship between the Catholic church and those in authority, because, in enjoying the material benefits of the church, the temporal powers wanted 'the authority of this pompe of the Chirch of Roome to be still kept in hir worldly state, without regard of the forme of the primative Chirch'. Persecution had become the principal method of reimposing papal authority. It was clear that the attempts by the Catholic powers to reduce 'their owne subjectes to this romish obedience' would be extended to other countries.⁶⁸

The central argument of Cecil's paper was that England was the Catholic powers' principal target, the 'monarchy of Christendome of whose departure from Roome the Chirch of Roome hath ben most greved'. Foreign powers resented England's support for the persecuted godly of continental Europe. The fact was that the realm was 'so established by Lawes in good pollicy to remayne in freedome from the tyranny of Roome, and in constancy and conformity of true doctrine'. England was 'The best satled pollycy against Roome'.⁶⁹ It was, at its heart, a Protestant polity, and it is this clear confessional identity – this 'Protestant state of the realm', as John Guy has put it – which became the defining factor in the call for its preservation.⁷⁰ This principle underpinned Cecil's claim in 1570 that the English polity was ecclesiastically distinctive.⁷¹ And even *The Execution of Justice in England* (1583), in which Cecil argued that Catholics were not persecuted for their faith, established a strong relationship between claims of papal authority over England and the importance to a 'civil and Christian policy and government' of

a protection against foreign Catholic aggression and the destruction of rebellion.⁷²

The Elizabethan associations undoubtedly reflected the insecurities of continental politics and religion. One possible model for Cecil's draft of 1569 was produced in English translation in 1562 by one of the members of his household, the printer William Seres. The text of *The Treaty of Thassociation*, circulated by Louis de Bourbon, prince de Condé, explained why he and members of all estates had entered into 'Association' for the maintenance of the honour of God, the 'quiet' of the realm and the defence of the king.⁷³ The document justified the actions of the participants and bound them by oath into 'a felowship from hencefoorth of a holy companye one towards another'.⁷⁴ As accessible to the Elizabethan regime were Scottish bonds of loyalty and revenge. In early modern Scotland, maintenance and protection were offered to men in return for service, counsel and a promise to keep their lord from harm. The bond could also represent an expression of purpose between men of equal social status, and there was an increasingly complex relationship between political alliance and public religious statements during the period of French occupation in the 1550s and Mary Stewart's personal rule in Scotland a decade later. The bond of Henry Lord Darnley in March 1566, with its promise to kill a number of 'privey persons' around the queen (principally David Rizzio) was a blunt but significant political statement. Equally, the 'band' of June 1567, sworn to revenge the murder of Darnley, bore some similarities to the English Instrument of Association.⁷⁵

The impact of the Elizabethan Bond of 1584 was profound, both culturally and practically. Just over a century after its promotion, the text was used in 1696 as a model for an association to defend William III against the Jacobite threat.⁷⁶ The text of 1584 was printed as a pamphlet and circulated with a title which reflected the regime's heavy emphasis on the defence of Protestantism. 'The Instrument of an association for the preservation of her Majesties Royall person' became, in its Williamite incarnation, *A True Copy of the Instrument of Association . . . against a Popish Conspiracy*.⁷⁷ The Association of 1696 was given statutory backing with an act for the security of King William's person and of his government. This statute offers two insights into the importance of the politics of association and the political implications of a public declaration of loyalty to the crown. The first is that the security of the regime is conceived in explicitly Protestant terms. The 'Welfare and Safety of this Kingdom and the Reformed Religion' were seen to depend directly 'upon the

Preservation of Your Majesties Royal Person and Government'.⁷⁸ Reinforced by the oaths of supremacy and allegiance of 1689, the oath of association became a qualification for office. A refusal to swear the oath exposed an individual to 'the Forfeitures and Penalties of *Popish* Recusants Convict'.⁷⁹ The message of 1696 was clear: the security of the state rested on a Protestant kingdom with a Protestant king.

James Burgh explored this relationship between the association and the challenge to popery, but one example he did not use – and one which would have supported his notion of the association as a mechanism for independent action – was the declaration of the inhabitants of Maryland against their governor, Lord Baltimore, in 1689. The hundred years between the Elizabethan Instrument and the Glorious Revolution seem almost to disappear in the declaration's complaint that places of worship notionally dedicated to 'the Ecclesiastical lawes of the Kingdom of England' were instead 'converted to the use of popish Idolatry and superstition'. The link between tyrannical government and Catholicism is often implicit rather than explicit in Elizabethan writing, but by 1689 there was a clear relationship between arbitrary government and the popish subversion of the community.⁸⁰ Cecil's draft association of 1569 and the Instrument of 1585, using a shared vocabulary of fellowship and society, presented opportunities for political involvement and, importantly, linked that involvement to the protection of authority and true religion. The Maryland association, as a document subscribed by the persecuted, worked in reverse. The popish and arbitrary actions of their governor removed from the signatories their obligation to obey. They considered themselves 'discharged, dissolved and free from all manner of duty, obligation or fidelity to the Deputy Governor or Chief Magistrate here', because those in authority had 'departed from their Allegiance (*upon which alone our said duty and fidelity to them depends*) and by their Complices and Agents aforesaid endeavoured the destruction of our religion, lives, libertys, and propertys all which they are bound to protect'.⁸¹ In the Maryland declaration, the protection of the Protestant state of the realm met a critique of authority made unacceptable by its ideology.

v

Radicalism or loyalism? The defence of personal monarchy or the protection of the state? The subordination of subject to monarch or the definition of the individual as citizen? It is predictably difficult to impose on the politics and political thought of the second half of the