

Mapping Networks and Practices of Political Exchange in Europe, c. 1650 – 1750

A scenario for a symposium
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We should like to address the period c. 1650-1750. It might be tentatively suggested that after the termination of the Thirty Years War at Westphalia (1648), there ensued civil wars in the British and French monarchies, after which the latter approached the political and cultural domination of the age of Louis XIV. The British monarchies restored in 1660 came close to being absorbed into the French orbit, but after the “Anglo-Dutch moment” of 1688-89 entered (none too willingly) into the Dutch and Austrian alliance formed to resist its hegemony. Their political desertion of this alliance in 1713 led to the “Europe” shaped by the Treaty of Utrecht, whose ideology was that of a “republic” or “confederation” of states as an alternative to “universal monarchy.” What we know as “Enlightenment” was in part a reflection of this European order, in which religious, civil, and mercenary warfare were held to have been superseded by an alliance between states and civil society, commerce, culture, and philosophy. Since the British kingdoms were active in shaping this order, we are dealing with a period in which “British history” is active within “European,” and the questions asked at our earlier symposium can be answered more specifically than was perhaps then possible.

The earlier symposium ended where the next might begin: with an enquiry into the complex phenomenon of the life and work of Thomas Hobbes—that is, into the relations between Hobbes writing in English and read in a regicide England wrestling with the problems of obedience and allegiance to *de facto* authority, and Hobbes writing in Latin and soon translated into French (and other vernaculars). Hobbes is read by a diversity of publics (the Dutch is a significant one) disposed by their historical situations to receive different answers to different questions; is there a shared philosophical deep background which can be used to re-write these histories? Most replies to him in English are written by clerics of the Church of England, disestablished in the 1650s and re-established in the 1660s; one might offer to defend—and thereby invite others to assail—the thesis that the position and character of this Church remain the key to a great part of English political debate during the “long eighteenth century.” The “absolute,” meaning the non-resistible, monarchy proclaimed in 1660, and not fully repudiated in 1689, is largely an Anglican construction—or can we find French, Spanish, or Lutheran “absolutist” inputs to the ideology of the restored Stuart kingdoms? And if the emphasis lies on Anglicanism in England, what is happening to post-Covenant Presbyterianism in Scotland or semi-repressed Catholicism in Ireland? In the era before 1640, it was necessary to ask whether the peculiar structure of the Church of England did or did not set it apart from the collisions between Tridentine Catholicism and Genevan Calvinism, generating conflicts of a peculiarly British kind; though even then the phenomenon of Arminianism raised questions difficult for historians to answer. After 1660, the scene may be thought to change, as a mainly Gallican Catholicism entertains hopes of subjugating and ultimately absorbing Anglicanism, and a post-Laudian episcopate must agree on its responses—or are they preoccupied with their attitude towards a rapidly changing Dissent? The question becomes acute towards 1685, as the Church must decide on its obedience to a Popish but irresistible successor.

There is a tendency at present to equate English “absolutism” with its ecclesiological dimension, though this may do less than justice to unfashionable but unignorable “constitutionalism” (making possible the equation between “popery” and “arbitrary government”). It may also ignore the question of court culture; what did French models mean to English monarchy, and are there equivalents to the massive brigading of culture under royal control which made possible the identification between absolutism and Enlightenment we find in

Voltaire's *Louis XIV*? If there are, they may have to do with Royal Society and "new philosophy," and if we are moving towards an age in which Bacon, Newton, and Locke are the recognized philosophers of European Enlightenment, we have not arrived at one in which Newtonians were necessarily Whigs. One of us has coined the term "the conservative Enlightenment," which can denote an alliance between the highest Churchmanship and the emergent focus of "civil society." There were strains within this alliance, between grace and law, spirit and matter, Son and Father; and we have to take account of perhaps a century of recurrent Trinitarian debate, in which it is important to note that the heterodox position could as well be Platonist and Arian as Socinian and Deist—though a truly radical libertinism can appear from the latter. It is worth asking at this point what was going on in Scotland, where there were pressures both for and against a possibly Covenanting reliance on the absolute decrees of grace. In the Gallican and Jansenist Catholicism of France, conflict between authority and tradition was producing the disquieting Church histories of Richard Simon and Denys Petau, not unnoticed in Britain.

It may be possible to think of a *crise de la conscience protestante* deriving, in large part, from the events culminating in the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1683. To Voltaire, writing in the next century, this seemed one of the acts of state intolerance—the suppression of Port Royal being the other—which led Louis XIV's monarchy to desert the cause of Enlightenment (as Voltaire saw it) and accept the *Bull Unigenitus*. To Protestants nearer the time it meant the Huguenot diaspora of which many members gathered in the Netherlands to give their own meaning to the term *république des lettres*. Here there was fought out the collision between Bayle and Jurieu which became a debate as to whether the war that began in 1688 was to be another war of religion, or was to employ the authority of the state and the philosophy (or theology) of toleration in disarming the powers of persecution, whether Catholic or Calvinist. Huguenots found themselves among Dutch Remonstrants (Limborch) and were joined by Swiss (Le Clerc) opposed to the *Confessio Helvetica*, and by English (John Locke) and Scots (Gilbert Burnet) working out their response to the monarchy of James II. The last-named had come within sight of civil war in 1680 and again in 1685, but their behavior in exile may be viewed as part of a general debate among Protestants, producing among other effects a tolerant and liberal, leading to a critical and anti-dogmatic, leading to an anti-patristic and anti-trinitarian, series of religious attitudes, immensely complex in its workings out but of great importance in the history of Enlightenment. Into this history may be keyed in the independent phenomenon of Spinozism, not Christian in its origins but requiring Christian contexts to explain its immediate and universal impact.

The involvement of all three British kingdoms in this complex of debates may be traced, ranging from conversion to Catholicism (James II, John Dryden) to extreme, probably Spinozist and possibly atheist, libertinism, often known as deism—as in the cases of John Toland and Anthony Collins, held to be the British contribution to radical Enlightenment. There may be traced the career of Locke, the English philosopher who has the greatest European impact; but perhaps it was only in the years of exile that he became a philosopher, i.e. the author of the *Essay on Human Understanding*. The Laslett revolution continues to relegate his *Treatise of Government* to an English context of the very early 1680s, and when the *Second Treatise* appears in Huguenot translation it may have seemed a radical resistance tract of the school of Jurieu. Locke returned to England with Mary of Orange, and played there an ambiguous role—admired by Whigs for refuting Filmer but mistrusted as having advocated a dissolution of government; welcomed by latitudinarians as the author of a philosophy equally hostile to transubstantiation and enthusiasm, but mistrusted as possibly Socinian enough to support a closet unitarianism. Such was his English role; his part in the history of European philosophy must be recounted, probably in discontinuous terms.

The impact of the revolutions of 1688-89 on the Church of England, the Church of Ireland and (in a distinct history) the Church of Scotland is becoming known, and may need further linkages with the history of other European churches, as well as of European philosophy. Their impact on state structures in the British monarchy must be differently related. A school of American historians may at this point demand a history of liberalism, but the emphasis of the Anglo-European history we are seeking to pursue has fallen on the genesis of the British military and fiscal state, formed in the first instance to further British involvement in the wars of Europe, though its long-term effects were to be felt, and enlarged, in the oceans, the Americas, and India. Here a history of domestic debate has begun to be written, as from 1698 to 1713 publicists argue over the new forms of government emerging in the fiscal-military state, and begin to see them as products of a revolutionary change in English, British, and European and (as we reach the High and Scottish Enlightenments) human history. There are new ways of thinking, but particularly in England, they must co-exist with debates in church and state inherited from the past; if we are looking at a re-Europeanization of the kingdoms, it is not yet clear how far this entailed a re-examination of their place in Europe (though Rymer's *Foedera*, a documentary history of the *English Crown* in its external relationships, has yet to achieve its place in the history the Center studies). There is a history being written of international law and the theory of international relations, and as this progresses past Grotius to Pufendorf and Vattel, the British Kingdoms will assume their place.

Additionally, but closely connected, there is the history of a politics of culture. It can be argued that the revolutionary change preceding the Enlightenment was the perception of society as civil and commercial, with the discovery that in a society at once commercial and courtly, systems of polite manners were of certain importance. Conversation substituted itself as philosophy and for theology, and if Defoe was read outside England only as the author of *Crusoe*, Shaftesbury and probably Addison were English philosophers of culture widely read across Europe. Enlightenment developed into a mutual scrutiny between France and England, and Montesquieu's *Esprit des Lois* and Voltaire's *Essai sur les Moeurs* were heavily dependent on their scrutiny of English manners. By the end of the century, Burke was proclaiming that a historically rooted system of manners distinguished modern Europe from classical antiquity and the civilizations of Asia, and that Revolution aimed at its subversion. Here "political thought" begins to mutate into philosophy of history, and departs from its classical and medieval foundations.

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