# The Varieties of Contexts in Early Stuart Intellectual History


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*Discourse on history, law, and governance in the public career of John Selden, 1610–1635*. By Paul Christianson. London: University of Toronto Press, 1997. Pp. xiii + 451. ISBN 0 8020 0838 0. £48.00.

*Sovereignty and the sword: Harrington, Hobbes, and mixed government in the English Civil Wars*. By Arihiro Fukuda. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997. Pp. ix + 175. ISBN 0 19 8206836. £35.00.

*The intellectual origins of the English Revolution revisited*. By Christopher Hill. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997. Pp. xi + 422. ISBN 0 19 820668 2. £25.00.

*Constant minds: political virtue and the Lipsian paradigm in England, 1584–1650*. By Adriana McCrea. London: University of Toronto Press, 1997. Pp. xiii + 342. ISBN 0 8020 0666 3. £49.00.

*Sir Henry Vane, theologian: a study in seventeenth-century religious and political discourse*. By David Parnham. London: Associated University Presses, 1997. Pp. 370. ISBN 0 8386 3681 0. £39.50.

*King James VI and I and the reunion of Christendom*. By W. B. Patterson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Pp. xv + 409. ISBN 0 521 41805 4. £40.00 (pb, £15.95).

*Jacobean gentleman: Sir Edwin Sandys, 1561–1629*. By Theodore K. Rabb. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. Pp. xii + 412. ISBN 0 691 02694 7. £37.50.

*Francis Bacon*. By Perez Zagorin. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. Pp. xvi + 286. ISBN 0 691 05928 4. £35.00 (pb, £10.50).

A common theme which runs through all of these books is how to contextualize the ideas of individuals in a particular historical period. Often there is an attempt to identify a particular dominant context within which to locate an author's works: Glenn Burgess has argued strongly for the importance of common law as the dominant language of legal and political debate in early Stuart England. Johann Sommerville has stressed controversies over Bodinian theories of divine right monarchy and absolutism. Richard Tuck has drawn attention to the new humanism, centred on scepticism, the revival of Tacitus' writings and theories of *raison d'état*, while Markku Peltonen has emphasized the persistence of classical humanist discourse in early Stuart England. Several scholars, such as Anthony Fletcher, John Morrill, and Conrad Russell have seen the role of religious disputes rather than political controversies to be crucial in the debates leading up to the Civil War.[1]

[1] G. Burgess, *Absolute monarchy and the Stuart constitution* (New Haven, 1996); J. P. Sommerville, *Royalists and patriots: politics and ideology in England, 1603–1642* (London, 1999); Richard Tuck,

At the same time, however, it is clear that contemporaries such as Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, King James, or John Selden were receptive to a wide variety of intellectual influences and traditions, so that the concentration on a particular context in explaining their work runs the danger of obscuring the complexity of their intellectual background. Most of them cannot be categorized as adherents of either one set of beliefs or the other, but formed their own particular syntheses of the ideas to which they were exposed. To explain their arguments, therefore, it would not be sufficient to examine their relationship to a single intellectual tradition such as republicanism or Tacitism. Often it is particularly useful and interesting to understand the manner in which elements from different contexts have been joined together for a particular ideological or polemical purpose. Early modern authors practised an intellectual eclecticism, which frequently makes it difficult to describe them as representatives of one particular context or another. This problem of complexity in contextualizing the writings of particular thinkers is raised by the books discussed here.

The first edition of Professor Hill's *Intellectual origins of the English Revolution* appeared before the 'linguistic turn' had become fashionable and in the recent second edition of his book he retains his previous approach. The *Intellectual origins* is an analysis of the ideas of individuals within the context of economic development rather than intellectual history. In the new edition Hill has added thirteen – sometimes rather short – chapters to the original text, which included discussions of the thought of Sir Francis Bacon, Sir Walter Ralegh, and Sir Edward Coke. The new chapters reaffirm Hill's earlier interpretation of the Civil War as the English Revolution, that it was the first of the modern revolutions and looked forward to the French and the Russian Revolutions, and was the beginning of England's rise to commercial, naval, and imperial greatness. Its achievements were all central in the development of a modern society and included the regicide, the abolition of feudal tenures, the Navigation Act, and the clergy's loss of political power (pp. 288–90).

The foundation of the Revolution was economic change and development. The early seventeenth century in particular, he argues, was a phase of transition towards a newly commercial society. Propertied landowners were able to take advantage of this by producing for the market, but were faced with opposition from two quarters. These were, on the one hand, the crown and the bishops, who had an interest in upholding feudal tenures as a source of income, even though this impeded the commercial development of the countryside, and, on the opposite end of the social spectrum, copyholders, whose rights were not secure and who were unable to compete in the newly commercial society. These latter were evicted by the free-market landowners and migrated to the cities where they began to form the urban proletariat of the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century (pp. 285–6).

The monarchy, the propertied landowners, and the underclasses who had lost out in economic modernization were the three main groups in conflict with each other in the English Revolution. All of these, Hill maintains, can also be described in terms of their religious beliefs. Royalists stood for the bishops' church, landowners for presbyterianism,

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*Philosophy and government, 1572–1651* (Cambridge, 1993); Marku Peltonen, *Classical humanism and republicanism in English political thought, 1570–1640* (Cambridge, 1995); A. Fletcher, *The outbreak of the English Civil War* (London, 1981); John Morrill, *The nature of the English Revolution* (London, 1993), esp. pp. 45–68; Conrad Russell, *The causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford, 1990).

and the underclasses for the radical religious (and religiously inspired political) sects such as the Quakers, Ranters, or Diggers. It would, however, be wrong to see religious differences as the cause of controversy. Religion, Hill argues, served as a means to articulate social and economic interests. 'Democracy of salvation went hand in hand with the political democracy of the Levellers, the economic democracy of the Diggers, and the immoralism of the Ranters' (p. 342). Or as he writes elsewhere (p. 333), '[m]any recognized that class politics were involved in religious disputes'. Among landowners the 'doctrine of probabilism helped by enabling pious landowners to treat their tenants in a way which would have been sinful a generation earlier' (p. 352).

Hill believes that Bacon's, Ralegh's, and Coke's ideas are to be explained against this background of economic change and general modernization. 'Separating – like Ralegh – first and second causes, and concentrating almost exclusively on the latter, Bacon virtually excluded God from the universe … God was still not mocked, but nature was controllable' (p. 198). The importance of Coke 'for our purposes' was that he first 'systematized English law and in the process continued and extended the process of liberalizing it, of adapting it to the needs of a commercial society. In so doing he had to challenge everything that impeded the development of a world in which men of property could do what they would with their own' (p. 228). In summary,

> the Protestant religion of the heart facilitates change in response to social pressures more than the Roman Catholic and Laudian religions of authority. The whole of Coke's work was an exercise in adapting the common law to meet the needs of a changing society … In science the victory of the experimental method over the authority of the Ancients made even more obviously for change. All these fitted the pragmatic attitudes of our merchants and craftsmen (p. 264).

To Hill, the ideas of Coke, Ralegh, and Bacon derive their meaning not from their intellectual context, but from the social and material interests they legitimate. It hardly needs to be said, however, that there are problems with this interpretation, because it is not always clear that political allegiance, religious belief, and material interests are aligned that neatly with each other. It might, for example, be asked why Bacon was such an ardent defender of royal privileges, if he was a modernizer.

Hill criticizes the late Sir Geoffrey Elton's argument that there was no 'high road to civil war'. But although most people would probably agree with Professor Hill that the Civil War was not entirely the outcome of accidents and contingent mistakes, few would see the increasing political tensions in early seventeenth-century England in the same socio-economic terms as he does. There were other important long-term factors which contributed to the outbreak of conflict.[2] These include the fiscal crisis of the crown, which was a structural problem bequeathed from Elizabeth's reign, though it was exacerbated by James's profligacy and by the pressures of military spending; and the fear of Counter-Reformation and popery, which appeared to be rearing their ugly head on the continent and caused English Protestants to regard themselves as an embattled outpost of the true reformed faith. In addition, the suspicion that James and especially Charles harboured sympathies for Roman Catholicism produced an explosive mixture of suspicion and fear, which appeared to be confirmed by contemporary events, such as the Thirty Years War and the Spanish Match. Most would agree that contemporaries' beliefs, including the religious beliefs which underpinned the fear of popery, deserve to be taken more seriously than they are in Hill's classic study and should be considered as more than an adjunct of socio-economic developments.

[2] J. Scott, *England's troubles* (Cambridge, 2000), ch. 4.

Two studies in which theological debate is given greater emphasis are W. B. Patterson's *King James VI and I and the reunion of Christendom* and David Parnham's *Sir Henry Vane, theologian*. While Parnham examines Vane's relationship to Calvinist orthodoxy and the religious radicals of the Civil War, Patterson concentrates less on domestic religious politics than on King James's projects for the reconciliation of the different confessions throughout Europe at a general council. Patterson describes in detail the network of irenicist scholars in the Republic of Letters, with which James was in contact. Johannes Kepler, for instance, at the court of the emperor Rudolph II (hardly a representative of Tridentine Catholicism) expressed his admiration for James. Isaac Casaubon, the French Huguenot and Europe's leading humanist scholar since the death of Scaliger, wrote a critique of the indirect power of the popes in temporals at James's request. One chapter is dedicated to the colourful figure of Marc Antonio de Dominis, former archbishop of Split, who after his arrival in England became a vigorous anti-Catholic polemicist, only to reconvert to Catholicism a few years later. The circle of irenicist authors also extended to Georg Calixt, the syncretist at the university of Helmstedt, David Pareus, the author of the *Irenicum*, in Heidelberg, and Hugo Grotius.

This community of irenicist authors tends to be overshadowed by the growing confessional antagonism prior to the Thirty Years War, but the irenicist alternatives need to be understood to construct a complete picture of the era. In this respect *King James VI and I* is a very useful study, but Patterson's obvious strong sympathy for King James and ecumenism causes him to overestimate the importance of James's religious projects. At the outset Patterson declares that King James, contrary to his reputation, was a resourceful, flexible, and energetic political leader. His project of reuniting the different faiths, to Patterson, displays these qualities of statesmanship. James, he suggests, between 1603 and 1618 pursued a viable plan for confessional reunion, which was foiled only by the unfortunate outbreak of the Thirty Years War.

When Patterson writes, for example, that '[d]espite King James' efforts to prevent it, war broke out in Europe in 1618' (p. 293), this seems to reflect a belief that James had a realistic chance of convening a general council and influencing European affairs, and that religious disagreement was the main obstacle to peace in Europe. It was, however, always extremely unlikely that a general council would be convened. If it had been convened it would probably not have arrived at an agreement. Finally, religious differences of opinion were not the sole factor leading to war. They could rarely be separated from contemporaries' perception of their political interests. Although there is no reason to assume that James's interest in confessional reunion was not genuine, irenicism and ecumenism must be set alongside those non-religious factors which contributed to the outbreak of war. It is unlikely that James's ecumenical efforts could have had any significant influence on the Bohemian constitutional and religious crisis, for example, which led to the outbreak of hostilities. James's irenicism should also be balanced against the other considerations which influenced his decisions on foreign policy.

It is not evident what James could have done to influence the course of events in Europe decisively. James's power on the continent was limited, especially because of the fiscal crisis of his own state. Nothing illustrated his impotence more brutally than his inability to come to the help of his daughter and her husband, Frederick of the Palatinate, defeated in the Battle of the White Mountain, whose principality was overrun by a Spanish army. James's parliaments were unwilling to grant any money,

however much they warned of the dangers of popery abroad. The only military expedition, in 1624, ended in a fiasco. However interesting James's plans for reunion are, their importance in European confessional and secular politics should not be exaggerated.

David Parnham's *Sir Henry Vane, theologian* is a study of Vane's theological thought. Like Patterson's book it is a useful reminder of the importance of theological discourse, which all too often is neglected. Parnham aims to correct the view of Vane as an example of some of the more bizarre varieties of Civil War and Interregnum radicalism. Vane was keen to dissociate himself from 'heretics' like the Ranters, Familists, Quakers, Mortalists, and Fifth Monarchists. But he was also critical of orthodoxy. Instead, Parnham argues, Vane's theology was an attempt at finding a middle way between the radical sectarians and the orthodox church (p. 265).

Parnham illustrates his view with a detailed examination of Vane's theological languages. A pervading theme here is Vane's opposition between (true) 'spiritual' and (false) 'literal' faith. This is important, for example, in understanding his attitude towards the secular magistrate's role in religious affairs. Vane insisted that the magistrate should have no religious powers at all, contrary to the ideas of godly rule championed by people like Cromwell. Faith, to Vane, required the illumination of the human soul by God, but this could not be brought about by the outward rule of the magistrate. This only produced 'uniformity in the letter', not the 'uniformity of the spirit', which characterized a true Christian church (p. 116). Moreover, the illumination of believers took place in several degrees. The magistrate could 'neither know these *degrees* [sc. of spirituality], nor make one *Rule* for all men that are under several *measures* of the *discoverie* of God at the same time' (p. 25). In the millennium godly magistrates would rule in state and church, but before that time any attempt by the magistrate to do so ended in the persecution of the true spiritual saints by an institutional church allied with the secular magistrate. Together they tried to force a literal, dogmatic orthodoxy on believers instead of the true spiritual faith, which could not be inculcated by force.

Like many other spiritualist authors, such as Christian Hoburg or Joachim Betkius in Germany, Vane identifies the Constantinian revolution of the fourth century as the origin of this corrupt alliance. Before then the spiritual members of the church had only been persecuted by the heathen emperors. The extension of toleration to the Christian church by Constantine marked not the triumph of true religion, but the creation of an institutional church, with a literalist understanding of faith, which soon joined forces with the secular magistrate to persecute the true Christians. This alliance, Vane believed, was continued under both Charles I and Cromwell. In this respect the two did not differ.

Closely linked to Vane's argument about the role of the magistrate were his scriptural hermeneutics. Vane sought to mediate between an orthodox apophatic and a radical kataphatic theology; between, that is, a notion of the mysterious beyondness of God, and a notion of the accessibility of knowledge of the divine. He stressed the impossibility for any believer to have a positive and truthful knowledge of God, who was inscrutable and incomprehensible and whose qualities could only be expressed negatively. A kataphatic knowledge, however, was possible to the extent that God revealed himself in his mediator, Christ, who could be known by a spiritual person. This meant that Vane did not completely reject the letter of Scripture, but he believed that Scripture could only be interpreted properly by 'spiritual' men. The literalist, dogmatic interpretation

of Scripture was the work of 'natural', that is, unregenerate man. While humans could never know the Godhead, they could, if they were sufficiently spiritual, know the mediator. Scripture, to Vane, was largely an allegory. It did not deliver adequate signifiers, but 'types, letters, shadows, resemblances, rhetorical figures; and significant expressions' (p. 157).

Parnham also examines Vane's views on the Trinity and his covenantal theology. To Vane the relationship between the two covenants, Moses' covenant of works and Christ's covenant of grace, illustrated the role of good works in achieving righteousness. This was important, because Vane 'wanted to affirm the importance of works righteousness while ensuring that justification was grounded in grace and not works' (p. 221). Works (which had already been prescribed by Moses) were, in Vane's opinion, performed by the believer, but they were not to be relied on. Without grace, offered by Christ, they did not contribute to salvation. Only in the spiritual, regenerate believer therefore were good works efficacious.

Parnham's book is an important addition to the literature on Vane. Parnham's style unfortunately is not always very lucid. Sentences like the following should be avoided: 'This is so because the letter conveyed information about types whose meanings were unpacked in a scheme of soteriological progression which bestowed minimal value upon the fleshly and the typical, and which found incorruptible faith, and its cognates, enunciated in the spiritual and antitypical' (p. 118). Vane was infamous for the obscurity of his writings and it is a pity that Parnham followed the subject of his study in this respect. It would also have been interesting if Parnham had combined his study of Vane's theology with an analysis of some of the other contexts of his work. Theology may be indispensable to understanding Vane's thought, but it is probably not the only relevant context for his ideas. More could, for example, have been said about Vane's republicanism and its relationship to his theology. More information about the relationship of Vane's thought to political history and Vane's biography would also have been helpful.

Traditions of classical humanism and republicanism have received considerable attention in recent interpretations. Fukuda's *Sovereignty and the sword: Harrington, Hobbes, and mixed government in the English Civil Wars* is an example. Fukuda's work is an examination of Harrington's thought on mixed government, for which the Roman republican constitution was the model, in the context of his engagement with the ideas of Thomas Hobbes. Harrington took Hobbes's theory very seriously and Harrington's argument on the mixed constitution, Fukuda maintains, must be seen as a response to the perceived inadequacies of Hobbes's ideas.

Both Harrington and Hobbes were preoccupied with the danger of anarchy as the result of constitutional collapse and civil war. To Hobbes the solution to this problem was a theory which would preclude the possibility of resistance to the sovereign altogether. The main cause of anarchy was the appeal of subjects to their consciences, so that it was vital for subjects to surrender their private judgement on the means of self-preservation to the sovereign (pp. 46–7). This contradicted both royalist (Ferne) and parliamentarian (Hunton) writers who explicitly permitted subjects to follow their consciences if constitutional arrangements broke down (pp. 33–7).

Harrington was interested in solving the same problem: the threat of anarchy which followed from constitutional collapse. The fault in Hobbes's argument, however, Harrington believed, was exposed by the dissolution of the Rump parliament in 1653 (p. 70), the Rump being an example of a Hobbesian sovereign, whose rule was based on

conquest. What Hobbes, according to Harrington, had not taken into account, was that the sovereign's power depended on the military, so that the question of actual control over the army was critical to the sovereign's ability to maintain himself in power. The Rump parliament did not control the army and therefore could be dissolved by it.

The answer to control of the army, Harrington wrote, lay in men's dependence on riches, especially land. The more land a person owned, the greater his empire. Political power followed landownership. After the fall of the feudal lords at the end of the Gothic age land was widely distributed: 'the whole people be landlords' (p. 86). The situation resulting from this is almost that of a Hobbesian state of nature with a multitude of individuals who are all equally powerful. The difference to Hobbes is that Harrington believes there can be no establishment of a single sovereign over such a people, let alone by military conquest, because military power depends on landownership and land is equally distributed. This is why the Rump parliament failed. It could not rule by fear because it did not control the military, and it did not own the territory required for ruling the military by 'necessity', that is material dependence (p. 88).

The question in such a state of equality was how to construct political institutions that guaranteed stability without the existence of any military power strong enough to govern. The answer, Harrington argued, lay not in 'necessity' or Hobbesian fear, but in 'interest' (p. 93). Government had to be constituted in such a way that nobody had an interest in sedition. This was to be achieved with a particular form of mixed government, for which he claimed to draw the inspiration from Polybius, Scipio's Greek captive, who maintained that Rome had found the means to stop the *circuitus civitatum*, the endless degeneration of one simple form of government into another. Harrington's theory of mixed government differed markedly from earlier English ideas of mixed government, such as John Fortescue's conception of England as *dominium politicum et regale*. In Harrington's theory the central principle was not a restriction of the powers of the sovereign by laws as much as a distribution of the functions of government.

The legislature had to be bicameral, one chamber entrusted with debating proposals, the other with resolving what to pass into law. Harrington compared this arrangement to two girls sharing a cake. If one of them cut the cake and the other chose her piece, it would be in the interest of the former to make the two pieces as nearly equal as possible (p. 99). The debating chamber would represent the aristocratic element of the constitution, the resolving chamber the democratic element, while the magistracy would constitute the monarchical element. To make this scheme function it was crucial to exchange the members of the different parts of government periodically, in order to preserve the equal interest of all members of the commonwealth and prevent the formation of special interests (p. 109). The result, Harrington believed, was not, as Hobbes had wanted it, that the people *could* not resist government, but that they *would* not do so, because they had no interest in doing so (p. 125). This form of mixed government represented the application of 'ancient prudence' the 'art whereby a civil society of men is instituted and preserved upon the foundation of common right or interest' (p. 71). This contrasted with 'modern prudence', the 'art whereby some man, or a few men, subject a city or a nation, and rule it according unto his or her private interest' (p. 71). Harrington hardly commented on modern prudence, which he apparently did not even think worth refuting, but he respected Hobbes as a theorist who tried to solve the problem of anarchy by rejecting ancient and modern prudence alike and constructing an entirely different political theory. Fukuda's argument is clear and persuasive and a convincing attempt to locate Harrington's ideas on a particular subject

in a specific polemical context. It is also a more charitable interpretation of Harrington's relationship to classical republicanism than that offered by Jonathan Scott, who wrote that Harrington '[u]pon the altar of peace … sacrificed the moral and participatory bases of the classical republican tradition'.[3]

Sir Francis Bacon has been interpreted as an example of a series of different contexts. Richard Tuck has described him as a Tacitist,[4] Markku Peltonen as a thinker deeply influenced by classical republicanism.[5] Perez Zagorin, however, takes a more traditional approach. One of the main motives for Zagorin's study is his belief in Bacon's 'importance in human civilization as a prophetic thinker' (Zagorin, p. ix). Bacon's scientific inquiries, according to Zagorin, were guided and motivated by the optimistic desire to elevate the human condition through the increase and application of knowledge. Scientific knowledge would grant humans control over nature and allow them to direct it to their benefit (see ch. 3).

One of Zagorin's main concerns is to defend Bacon against the charge of 'naive inductionism', levelled at him by Karl Popper. Another is to contradict the Frankfurt School's portrayal of Bacon as the first uncritical believer in the benefits of technological progress. Zagorin maintains that it would be anachronistic to criticize Bacon for failing to note the disadvantages of technological advances, at a time when disease and death were omnipresent. Bacon, Zagorin concludes, was a humanitarian and held a fully developed optimistic conception of scientific progress (p. 203).

However, the importance or even relevance of this emphasis on Bacon's modernity in interpreting his thought is questionable. It is, for example, a little surprising that Zagorin should write that '[h]idden in this thought, although beyond the author's [Bacon's] ken, is the foreshadowing of inventions like electric light, radio, synthetic fibres and materials' and other modern innovations (p. 94). Zagorin's emphasis on Bacon's modernity leads him to project modern ideas into Bacon's work, which are not always necessarily to be found there. One such idea is the freedom of inquiry in the sciences. According to Zagorin, Bacon's natural philosophy was deeply anti-authoritarian, yet an examination of Bacon's *New Atlantis* suggests a rather different picture. As Julian Martin has pointed out,[6] Bacon wanted scientific inquiry to be strictly regulated and performed by people especially selected for this task, not by anyone who wanted to. In the *New Atlantis* new knowledge about the natural world was produced through a chain of committees, each of which processed information provided by an earlier group of brethren. At the beginning of the chain stood twenty-one 'brethren' who were devoted to collecting information, largely from books, rather than experiments. Their findings were passed on through several committee stages and increasingly generalized until finally three 'Dowry-Men, or Benefactors cast about how to draw out of them things of use and practice for man's life, and knowledge as well for works as for plain demonstrations of causes, means of natural divinations, and the easy and clear discovery of the virtues and parts of bodies'.[7] Then group consultations took place to decide which of the results to publish and which to keep secret.[8] This had little

[3] J. Scott, 'The rapture of motion: James Harrington's republicanism', in N. Phillipson and Q. Skinner, eds., *Political discourse in early modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 139–63, at p. 162.

[4] Tuck, *Philosophy and government*, p. 108.

[5] Peltonen, *Classical humanism and republicanism*, ch. 4.

[6] Julian Martin, *Francis Bacon: the state, and the reform of natural philosophy* (Cambridge, 1992), esp. ch. 6.

[7] Ibid., p. 137.

[8] Ibid., p. 138.

to do with modern scientific freedom: Bacon was always suspicious of 'voluntaries', natural philosophers who were not selected to conduct scientific inquiries.

Martin's interpretation also resolves what appears to Zagorin to be a contradiction in Bacon's life. According to Zagorin, the humanitarian impulse in Bacon's thought stood in contrast to his hard-headed pragmatism in politics. Left without an income after his father's death, Bacon's life was dominated by the search for advancement. He associated himself with the earl of Essex, but ruthlessly distanced himself from him again, when Essex fell into disgrace. Zagorin describes his book on Bacon as a study of his 'split lives', those of the humanitarian scientist, who believed in free inquiry and progress, and of the opportunist politician, who reasserted traditional hierarchy and authority in government.

> Bacon's vision thus paradoxically combined a perception of the dynamic possibilities inherent in a renovated natural philosophy and the supposition of the continuance of Europe's hierarchic society … It did not occur to him to wonder whether a dynamic science such as he desires could coexist indefinitely with the traditional society and polity or the values that sustained them (p. 225).

Others, Zagorin argues, later drew these radical political implications from Bacon's natural philosophy.

The paradox it seems, has been created more by Zagorin's interpretation than by Bacon himself. Bacon's model for collecting knowledge of the natural world is strikingly similar to Bacon's scheme for law reform and strengthening the prerogatives of the crown. As Martin writes, Bacon assumed the nature of the common law to be similar to that of the laws of nature. He believed that much of the common law was hidden, that it was rational, and that men learned in the law could discover it. The same was true of the natural world; the principles of nature were hidden, yet they were capable of being discovered by the learned and licensed investigator.[9] Bacon announced his project of legal reform already in his *Maxims of Law* of 1596. His aim, he said, was to 'reduce them [the laws] to more brevity and certainty; that … the snaring penalties that lie upon many subjects [be] removed; the execution of many profitable laws revived; the judge better directed in his sentence; the counsellor better warranted in his counsel; the student eased in his reading'.[10] Bacon's hope in making the law more certain and accessible was to consolidate royal power through control over the law. Opposed to this was Coke's insistence that understanding and applying the common law required the artificial reason of the learned lawyer, whose mind was steeped in the technicalities of the law. Zagorin's argument that there is a contrast between Bacon the scientist and Bacon the politician, therefore, seems less convincing and appears to dissolve on closer examination. Zagorin briefly refers to Martin's work, but a more direct discussion of Martin's arguments by Zagorin would have been welcome.

The potential problems of focusing on a single context in analysing the ideas of a figure like Bacon are brought out by Adriana McCrea's *Constant minds: political virtue and the Lipsian paradigm in England, 1584–1650*. McCrea's book is a study of the ideas of Francis Bacon, Fulke Greville, Walter Ralegh, Ben Jonson, and Joseph Hall in the context of Lipsianism. There certainly are elements which could be described as Lipsian in the works of all or most of these thinkers, but McCrea does not really succeed in isolating a strong, coherent tradition of Lipsianism in English thought at that time, though she claims that Lipsianism was 'coming to dominate, in growing proportions, the tenor of

[9] Ibid., p. 168.

[10] Ibid., p. 116.

English political discourse' (p. 169). As a result she stretches the definition of Lipsianism to such an extent that it becomes a somewhat fluid concept, which covers opinions not usually included in the category of Lipsian, Tacitist or neo-Stoic thought. She identifies signs of Lipsianism in her authors' works, even if there is only a vague similarity to Lipsius's ideas, which might be derived from a different source.

To some extent McCrea's 'less cautious' (Prologue, p. xxix) use of the term Lipsianism seems to be a deliberate approach, which, she hopes, will shed new light on the works she discusses. It is, however, not entirely clear what benefits this brings. The writings and lives she examines, she argues, are 'polysemous' (p. xxix), their meaning depending on the questions being asked of them. It is, however, sometimes difficult to see how she arrives at the answers she gives to the questions she poses.

To McCrea, Bacon's emphasis on the applicability of learning, for example, is an example of Lipsianism, although this is a general theme in critiques of scholasticism, which need not be related to the new humanism. Bacon, McCrea argues, exhibits a 'Ramist perspective on the "proficiency" of learning and a Lipsian quest for the "amendment of the mind"' (p. 95). It is not clear, however, that the 'amendment of the mind' is necessarily a Lipsian demand, and it is surely a little speculative if McCrea simply identifies this 'amendment of the mind' with Lipsian *constantia*, without providing textual evidence (p. 96). When Ralegh called monarchy 'the best Regiment, which resembleth the sovereign Government of God himself', McCrea argues, he was echoing many writers, 'including Lipsius' (p. 56). Even though these views on monarchy may resemble those of Lipsius, this is not strong evidence for identifying Ralegh as a Lipsian.

'Lipsianism' turns into a very protean entity in McCrea's analysis and thus loses some of its explanatory value. Lipsianism in England appears as an argument for civic participation and even republicanism, and any references to Stoic authors in her interpretation are often interpreted as signs of Lipsianism (pp. 83, 100). The question, however, then is, how specifically Tacitist or Lipsian these arguments still are. Usually, Tacitism in the early modern period is seen as an intellectual tradition which emphasized self-preservation and political quietism as guiding principles in an uncertain world.[11] McCrea appears to use Tacitism and Lipsianism in this sense in part of her work, especially when she stresses the way in which all of the figures she has studied were forced to confront adversity and rapid changes of fortune. Then, however, this Tacitism is depicted as a demand for civic virtue rather than constancy. In the seventeenth century Tacitus's analysis could of course be read as a critique of monarchical power and as a call for a return to republican virtue, but what then distinguished this early modern Tacitism from classical republican arguments? Early modern Tacitism and Lipsianism in McCrea's account lose much of their distinctiveness.

McCrea uses biographical information to support her interpretation of Bacon, Ralegh, Greville, Jonson, and Hall as Lipsians. She explains her approach in the Prologue as an attempt to get 'under the author's skin' (p. xxvii) by examining their lives, not just their writings. Although it is interesting and important to relate biographical information to a person's writings, McCrea perhaps sometimes places too much weight on biographical evidence. The demonstration that they were Tacitists or Lipsians at all thus sometimes seems to depend on biographical circumstances rather

[11] Cf. Tuck, *Philosophy and government*.

than textual evidence, although biographical information can really only offer an explanation *why* a person thought in a particular way, not *that* he or she did so.

Another figure sometimes associated with the new humanism is John Selden. In his *Philosophy and government* Richard Tuck has stressed the Tacitist elements in Selden's thought and Selden's role in the development of modern natural law theory, derived from Grotius.[12] Paul Christianson's aim in *Discourse on history, law, and governance in the public career of John Selden, 1610–1635* is to show that Selden's interest in natural law and his Tacitism belong to a later stage in his career than Tuck maintains. The impression that Selden was a natural law theorist from early on, Christianson writes, has to a large extent been created by the use of his *Table-talk*, dating from the 1640s, in interpreting his earlier thought. Christianson's thesis is that Selden only takes up Grotian natural law theory from the 1630s, when he published the reworked version of the *Mare clausum*, originally written (but not published) in 1619.

Christianson's main focus is on the relationship of Selden's ideas on legal history to his parliamentary career. The book is divided into three parts, the first of which contains an analysis of Selden's pre-1620 writings, such as the *Jani anglorum facies altera* (1610), the *Historie of tithes* (1618) or the first edition of the *Titles of honour* (1614). Christianson's interest here is in Selden's defence of the ancient constitution, particularly his discussion of the impact of the Norman Conquest. Although Selden had presented the Conquest as a major alteration in England's legal system in the first edition of his *Titles of honour*, in the *Historie of tithes* he emphasized the continuity of the common law before and after the Conquest, comparing it in a famous image to the ship of the Argonauts, which was continually repaired during its voyage and returned to port different in substance and yet the same.

Christianson then turns to Selden's parliamentary career between 1621 and 1629, when Selden's legal and historical expertise became invaluable in the disputes between king and parliament. Common law, Christianson argues, was the language in which disputes between crown and parliament were articulated. Selden's contributions did not reflect an abstract conception of 'liberty', but were always arguments about questions located in a specific historical and geographical context. Christianson examines Selden's role in the case of Sir Robert Howard, the impeachment of Buckingham, the Five Knights Case, the debate over martial law, and the case of the merchant John Rolle, whose goods were seized for the non-payment of tonnage and poundage, when Selden championed the defence of the liberties of the subject and of parliamentary privilege against the perceived conspiracy of royal servants to change the ancient constitution.

The final section of the book is an analysis of Selden's writings after 1629, which as Christianson points out, continued his previous concerns. There are detailed expositions of Selden's argument in the second edition of his *Titles of honour* of 1631 as well as the *Mare clausum*. As in his earlier writings Selden was keen to criticize the universalist pretensions of Roman lawyers and defend the particularity of the common law, which he maintained was an application of natural law to English circumstances.

Christianson's exegesis of Selden's writings is very comprehensive and could perhaps have been shortened. He illustrates the relationship between Selden's parliamentary activities and his legal historical writings very clearly. It is of course nothing new that Selden defended the ancient constitution against suspected royal encroachments, but

[12] Ibid., pp. 205ff.

the particular circumstances of his defence deserve some attention. Another point stressed by Christianson is the 'sophistication' of Selden's legal–historical defence of the English constitution, especially Selden's use of continental sources in relating English developments to those in other states.

Selden's use of natural law theory, according to Christianson, developed only from the 1630s. It is true that the most Grotian among Selden's surviving pieces, the *Mare clausum*, dates from 1635, though it is not known how much exactly Selden revised his lost first version which dates from 1619. It is probably a little difficult to tell whether Selden's *Mare clausum* of 1635 really represents a shift towards natural law theory in his thought. Although there appears to be no strong evidence that Selden was interested in natural law theory before about 1630, it is probably also difficult to exclude any such interest, especially as the first version of *Mare clausum* is lost.

Another figure who played a prominent role in the early Stuart parliamentary politics until 1629 was Sir Edwin Sandys. Theodore Rabb's biography of Sandys is a detailed study of his career in the Commons and also in the Virginia, Bermuda, and East India Companies. Like Bacon, Sandys rose to political importance relatively late, in his early forties. Unlike Bacon, however, Sandys's literary and philosophical output is limited. Before he achieved success in politics he had been a member of a fairly minor diplomatic mission to the Landgrave of Hesse, after which he went on a tour of several European states, visiting Geneva, Orleans, Paris, and, it seems, Italy. Sandys published a book based on the experiences of his travels, *A relation of the state of religion, and with what hopes and policies it hath been framed, and is maintained, in the several states of these western parts of the world*, an overview over the religious practices in Europe. By far the largest part of the book was dedicated to Roman Catholicism, unsurprisingly, given the perceived threat of the Counter-Reformation. The *Relation of the state of religion* was publicly burned in England within a month of being published in 1605, though the reasons for this are not entirely clear.

It is under James I and in the context of the increasing tension between king and parliament that Sandys found his political role. Sandys, Rabb argues, was one of the main authors of the Commons' increasingly vigourous opposition to the crown. Sandys's rise in parliamentary politics was 'a microcosm of the process whereby the Commons as a whole moved toward a new, self-contained authority' (p. 173). As Rabb points out, he took command of several critical issues in the first sessions of parliament. He became the Commons' chief spokesman on most major subjects they dealt with and was, for example, identified as the most virulent opponent of the Union between England and Scotland desired by James VI and I. Sandys threw himself into the dreary routine of daily business in the Commons with unflagging energy.

Sandys's success, Rabb believes, was based on his ability to articulate the concerns of the independent gentry. He also earned himself a reputation for 'moderation', which increased his usefulness in confrontations with the crown. In the Virginia Company Sandys tried to sustain the colony, despite Indian attacks, disease, and the return of many disappointed colonists to England, until disputes over the salaries of the staff managing the monopoly eventually led to Sandys's downfall.

One area which receives relatively little attention in Rabb's account is religion. Rabb raises it occasionally, but it would be interesting to know more about Sandys's position on questions of religious policy, especially as he seems to have had Arminian sympathies (pp. 41–2). In sum, however, this book is an extremely persuasive, informative, and lucid study of Sandys's life.

To what degree, then, is it possible or useful to focus on one specific context in explaining a set of ideas? It might be argued that for specific areas, such as legal thought, it is sufficient to concentrate on a particular context, such as Tacitism or the common law. Often, however, the boundaries between different contexts are highly permeable. Jonathan Scott, for example, has argued for the importance of Harrington's natural philosophy in understanding his republicanism.[13] Mark Goldie has pointed to the political importance of Harrington's ecclesiology.[14] While Sir Henry Vane is usually depicted as a republican, Parnham has shown the relevance of his theological thought to some of his political ideas. There are usually several contexts which are relevant to understanding an author's works. To varying degrees these books avoid or illustrate the pitfalls of an over-concentration on one context. A rigorous classification of a thinker as *either* republican *or* Tacitist *or* common lawyer *or* theologian makes it more difficult to understand the particular coherence the different parts of this thinker's work had and the polemical purpose they may have served.

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[13] Cf. Scott, 'The rapture of motion'.

[14] Mark Goldie, 'The civil religion of James Harrington', in A. Pagden, ed., *The languages of political theory in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 197–222.