

the Huntington, the Folger, and elsewhere. In a hypertext publication, such records can be added without ado. (Full disclosure: I am currently nearing completion of an “Index” of works censored 1641-1700 that will be published online.)

Equally important, hypertext publication can have a democratic dimension. It doesn't always these days: Early English Books Online (EEBO), Eighteenth Century Online (ECCO), and other online subscription services are astronomically expensive and have created a class system within academia. But the British Library has made the English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) publicly accessible ([estc.bl.uk/](http://estc.bl.uk/)), and British History Online has made a trove of primary and secondary documents available gratis ([www.british-history.ac.uk/](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/)). Indeed, ESTC is rendering the Wing volumes and even the Wing CD-Rom obsolete, for, as we have noted, with an online publication new entries can be added, and a revised “edition” produced, with just a few keystrokes. And the more widely available a resource is, the more readily it can be corrected.

Nonetheless, Bell deserves the gratitude of all book historians and scholars of the early modern period. The three-volume set that she has brought to fruition is a marvelous resource, and, despite the high cost of the collection, no library that is serious about the study of book history can afford to be without it.

Conal Condren. *Argument and Authority in Early Modern England: The Presupposition of Oaths and Offices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. x + 399 pp. \$95.00. Review by PETER JOSEPHSON, SAINT ANSELM COLLEGE.

If Conal Condren's claim in *Argument and Authority in Early Modern England* is right, then almost everything political theorists think they know about early modern England is wrong. “[W]e might dispense with the organising notion of early modern political theory” (10), he writes, either because the early modern framework is misleading or because politics and theory were not really what was at stake in those contentious times. “[O]ffice is what matters,” and any evaluation of political thought should properly be subordinated to the central idea of office (7, 197, 343). (Condren thus rejects Aristotle's claim, that politics is the authoritative good and that offices are subordinate to

the regime.) Office matters because the disputes we observe in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England concern claims about the duties, rights, and privileges of office-holders; such claims are driven by events rather than by theories (160). Sometimes Condren's claims are quite startling, but this is a valuable work for reminding readers that the concepts we think of as modern (the self, the individual, the private) are really quite different from the concepts that marked the pre-modern world (concepts like honor and duty), and he urges us not to collapse the modern into an earlier world that is foreign to it.

Condren's work is organized in three sections. The first establishes the pervasiveness of the language of office and the fluidity of the meanings and conceptions attached to it. The second examines particularly the casuistry concerning thinking about authority and (for lack of a better term) political office. The third describes the debate and development surrounding the use of oaths of office in the seventeenth century. His reevaluations and analyses of contending claims about office, *personae*, and oath-taking are provocative and insightful. Many readers will be especially intrigued by his helpful readings of Shakespeare's histories, and his accounts of the "offices" of poet and actor unveil something important about the development of early modernity that other scholars have simply missed.

Condren is especially concerned to refute claims of some theorists to find the manifest footsteps of republicanism and liberalism in (very) early modern political thought. Condren is correct in critiquing our propensity to impose general "isms" or invented categories on the ideas of the past (republicanism, liberalism, capitalism, and so on) instead of reading the texts with particular care for what is in them (2-3, 37, 213); too often such efforts contribute little to real understanding, or result in a new "scholasticism" that seems quite removed from the world we live in, or—more to the point—the world of the men and women we study. As Condren observes, "we can get a long way in early modern political theory without automatic recourse to ideological modelling" (351). Condren is careful not to impose his own ideological model—a model of office—on the history he relates. Yet his fine work is not always entirely successful on these terms. First, his care in this regard prevents him from pursuing an analysis of meaning very far. As Condren admits, much of this book is a "descriptive synopsis" (351). Second, Condren is not immune to venturing to read history through a 20<sup>th</sup> century lens: the late seventeenth-century Bishop John Sharp asks a

“Wittgensteinian question” about the use of the word conscience (133); the work of John Donne leads ultimately to Foucault (173); “Derridean theory” is applied to works of the fifteenth century (286-7). Condren’s readings here are, I think, perfectly reasonable (one reason—not the only one—to read these works is to understand the development of our own conceptions), though such comments are sometimes difficult to explain methodologically given his critique of current trends of analysis.

At times readers may wonder whether the language of office describes so much (almost everything) that it explains very little. The idea encompasses the work of actors, poets, philosophers, parents, children, scavengers (57) and farmers (21). When Condren suggests that the tension over conflicting obligations is better understood as a tension between conflicting offices (31, 41-2), it is not entirely clear what he has clarified for us. It is not always clear what he means by politics when he rejects certain political readings of texts (214-16, 222-3). He treats the idea of the political as a foreign concept to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in spite of the work of Aristotle. He argues that the distinction of public and private is a modern imposition in pre-modern understanding, in spite of Socrates’ concern to draw and maintain such a distinction. On occasion his own readings seem to idealize, and thus obscure, the political in the writings of Machiavelli and (to a lesser degree) Francis Bacon. Twice he tells us that Machiavelli disapproves of Agathocles (86, 222). In fact, immediately after Machiavelli tells us that we “cannot call” what Agathocles did “virtue,” Machiavelli himself does call it virtue (*Prince* 8). Condren holds that Machiavelli’s concern is for the office of the soldier (which for Condren is not a political office); he apparently misses (or dismisses) that Machiavelli uses the language of arms and militia to speak metaphorically about other things, including natural philosophy (220-222). Bacon’s discussion of counsel receives a similar treatment.

What emerges, almost in spite of Condren’s zeal, is an affirmation of the theorists’ view of Hobbes and Locke (and Algernon Sidney) as articulating a new idea of individual, state, and society. (Condren explains the rise of contract theory as an effect of the discovery of America, and the growing emphasis on consent and toleration as effects of the dispute over coronation oaths at the ascension of William and Mary (264, 259-60, 268). Condren tells us that the modern distinction of public and private emerges at the end of the seventeenth century (94, 205); in the late seventeenth century Sidney and others

first “sustain” a negative concept of liberty (90); following Hobbes, Locke develops a modern theory of the self and conscience (122, 134-5, 141-3); though they do not justify rebellion, Hobbes and Locke do articulate a right of self-defense and resistance (205-6). To be sure, for Condren Hobbes and Locke are not representative of the period (265). But this only emphasizes the innovation in their thinking. Condren’s own history suggests that Hobbes and Locke mark a significant departure from what came before them; we disagree only about the cause of their departure.

Through this approach Condren too easily collapses political philosophy into ideology. The modern state was not shaped by theory, he argues, but through practical contests over the meaning of office. Philosophers like Hobbes and Locke do not so much produce new political ideas as their ideas are products of dynamic social milieux; theories of rights and interests, and modern ideas of politics and liberty, do not drive political action as much as they are driven by it (23, 71, 344-6). This is plausible, and any political theorist worth his salt should be aware—as Aristotle was—that political philosophy lives on the border of practice and theory. But, unlike Aristotle, this approach means that Condren does not really take the claims of political philosophy seriously; one might go so far as to say that for the historian there is no such thing. (That fits very nicely, actually, with our contemporary suppositions.) For Condren, political theory is merely ideology, a “juvenile discipline” that in the last hundred or hundred and fifty years has “fabricate[d] . . . a near two-millenia achievement of (western) civilisation.” It is a convenient “teaching device” that sells books to students, but it is not true (347, 351). This is all the more puzzling because Condren co-edited a very good volume (*The Philosopher in Early Modern Europe: The Nature of a Contested Identity*) on changing self-conceptions of the philosopher in the seventeenth century. It is true that in the early modern era philosophers increasingly thought of themselves as engaged in practice, and aimed at useful work; Condren takes that to mean that they were not motivated most by the love of wisdom, but by the love of country or by an ambition to serve. But this misses the joy of Baconian science, and Locke’s claim that he is a “lover of Truth for Truths sake” (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 4.19.1). It misses Machiavelli’s declaration that “it is good to reason about everything” (*Discourses* 1.18). Condren’s descriptions of claims surrounding offices cannot tell us much about the truth of those claims, because he has begun by denying that they are true. If Condren is right, then

it is apparently impossible for us to think philosophically about politics; if Condren is right, we cannot know what is true.

Edward Vallance. *Revolutionary England and the National Covenant: State Oaths, Protestantism, and the Political Nation, 1553-1682*. Rochester: Boydell Press. 2005. 263 pp.. \$95.00. Review by ROBERT LANDRUM, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA BEAUFORT.

In *Revolutionary England and the National Covenant*, Edward Vallance announces his intention in the Introduction: the work is a “study of the significance of the *idea* of an *English* national covenant” (1, italics added). It reveals, among other things, a longstanding English covenanting tradition, one that existed alongside and in conjunction with the Scottish tradition of personal bonds that culminates in the National Covenant of 1638.

According to most traditional narratives, the Scots take credit for the covenanting movement of the mid-seventeenth century. This tale would have the Covenant emerge, fully-formed, from the tortured head of Archibald Johnston of Wariston, sweep Scotland in a wave of millenarian enthusiasm, and be foisted on England through the device of the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643. That treaty, the price of Scottish participation in the English civil war, bound both nations in a civil union and obliged Parliament to reform the Church of England according to “the word of God and the example of the best reformed churches.” By this telling, the English emerge as rational actors, pragmatic politicians caught up in a nasty war with their own king. The Scots, by contrast, are beholden to an apocalyptic Calvinist fanaticism, drafting national oaths, press-ganging the unwilling, and calling God to witness and enforce it all.

This is a convenient anglophile narrative, useful to insulate the English from the obsessions of foreign zealots. It is, however, a telling that has been buried by a generation of scholarship. In his important new study, Vallance adds another nail to the coffin of the traditional Whig narrative. Vallance demonstrates that the several Covenants of the seventeenth century had a long genesis in England, and that millenarianism was present on both sides of the Tweed. Identifying the origin-state of the Covenants, he says “is pointless given the degree to which it was a part of a shared Anglo-Scottish Protestant