

Freedom of Speech in Early Stuart England

David Colclough

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The rhetorical lynchpin of this fascinating book's central argument is the concept of *parrhesia*, which is a Greek term that began life as a catch-all expression for the quality of speech belonging to citizens of the *polis* (6). Colclough implies that the tradition of *parrhesia* took a circular route via the freedom of expression inherent in the group rights of Greek citizens to the need for frank expression of unpleasant truths by courtiers to their rulers. This transition required that "frankness" be elevated to the status of a virtue once it became apparent that rulers did not always make decisions in the best interest of the state. After the Reformation in northern Europe this virtue evolved into a religious imperative in the face of sectarian persecution and in England, especially, this imperative naturally extended itself to the admonition of monarchs who encroached on their citizens' religious freedoms. Religious conflict led to war, war required economic investment and soon the religious imperative to oppose the wrong-headed heretic blended with a protestant parliament's right to admonish the monarch on purely secular matters. Thus, under the Stuarts, *parrhesia* eventually came to resume its original sense as the right and duty of a free subject to speak out in public without fear that his desire to preserve the common good would be prosecuted under laws aimed at the seditious and libelous. It is but a rising sense of the secular that enables us to recognize the change in values that led an onerous religious duty to become the unimpeachable liberal right we so casually assert today.

The lasting value of this work to contemporary scholarship rests on the solidity of Colclough's transitioning of *parrhesia* from a matter of a courtier's counsel into a generalized presumption to publicly critique the actions of an impersonal but powerful state. If he is correct then he has identified a tradition that highlights the essential role played by rhetoric in the critical tradition that remains synonymous with party-based representative democracy. That this tradition rarely saw itself as championing a revolutionary rights tradition is less important than the recognition that such was its eventual and cumulative effect. If not, then the links Colclough forges, while intriguing, add weight to the Platonic argument that suggests rhetoricians are anathema to the development of harmonious states.

While I am an enthusiastic convert to the narrative Colclough eventually weaves I have to point out that only a committed reader is likely to make it far enough into the book to be able to reach this conclusion. Until about halfway through, I felt that the book I was reviewing had switched dust-jackets with a similar work entitled *Parrhesia or the Outspokenness of Courtiers in Early Stuart England*. Had I not been trained as a historian rather than a straight-up political scientist, I would likely have discarded the book halfway through. Had I done so I would have lost a most valuable insight into the crooked tradition that eventually led us to the institution of one of our most cherished democratic values. It is clear by the end that the early part of the book is an essential platform upon which the author rests his case but there are few indications until midway into the text that such is the intention of the work. The problem is that the beginning of the book fails to make the project as clear as it should be and, given the controversy it seeks to ameliorate, this almost becomes a fatal flaw. Not until page 47 do we hear mention of the blending of "the assertion of the duty to speak the 'truth' whatever the circumstances" with the less Kantian sounding concern for "context-dependant counsel" that is the concern of the venal courtier. Since the major adjective under discussion is initially "frankness" it is easy to assume that the author's concern has less to do with the right to

speak truth to power than the polite avoidance of offense for strategic advantage. It is only on page 121 that Colclough address his thesis explicitly, when he acknowledges the “vigorous debate” that remains centred on the properly historical description of the role of parliament. Was it “primarily a place of political conflict or one of business and administration” (121)? From here on the reader can easily see that the confusion created by the divergent views of “virtue,” leading to “duty,” leading to “right,” that makes up the more familiar tale of the fall of James I and his progeny in the face of an increasingly assertive and confident Parliament is properly the story of the evolution of *parrhesia*. However, as I have suggested this revelation comes far too late into the work to have the thesis explicated for those who are engaged in the politics of free speech but are unfamiliar with the contingencies and ironies of history that led to its inception. Had the epilogue been substituted for the introduction most of these concerns would have been rendered moot but as the book stands it is an unnecessary and disturbing barrier to the interested layperson’s enjoyment of an extremely important work.

This caveat aside, Colclough has written an original, detailed and thoroughly convincing historical narrative that will reward the patient reader with a profound insight into a centrepiece of democratic theory. That it was part of a gradual historical development, absent of a single political genius operating on a *sui generis* insight but rather predicated on the unaccountable bravery and commitment of hundreds of largely forgotten individuals who combined their limited individual visions into a social edifice of lasting durability makes for a satisfying resolution to a hitherto profound democratic theory conundrum.

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Russia Transformed: Developing Popular Support for a New Regime

Richard Rose, William Mishler and Neil Munro

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This monograph analyzes major findings of fourteen years of public opinion research in Russia carried out under the New Russia Barometer survey research project, which Rose and colleagues conducted in conjunction with the Levada Centre in Russia. Rose, Mishler and Munro offer a clearly written, focused discussion that puts complex data into perspective. The work’s major contribution is its systematic evaluation of the evolution of Russian citizens’ political attitudes from 1992 to 2005. As the authors note in their dedication to the volume, their surveys included over 28,000 people across Russia (the methodology is outlined on pp. 70–75). As such, the book’s authority in providing an accurate reflection of citizens’ views is indisputable. Much to their credit, the authors render their findings readily understandable to readers who are not expert in survey research design or quantitative methods.

The authors contextualize their work by beginning with an assessment of the nature of Russia’s current political system. The authors reject the view that Russia is a transitional democracy as indecisive wishful thinking. Instead, they take a stand by claiming that Russia is a “plebiscitarian autocracy” (13), which under Putin has produced a certain degree of stability. They note that the coexistence of weak rule of law and limited political choices at the polls serve to make Russia neither a bona fide democracy nor a textbook case of an authoritarian state. Russia’s population, the authors argue, have become used to this state of affairs, and their overall compliance can largely be explained by the thesis that citizens instinctively relativize politics: many people accept the existing system because they see it as being somewhat better than either the Soviet regime or the most difficult years of the 1990s, when Boris