

## OTHER REVIEWS

*From Reformation to improvement: public welfare in early modern England.* By Paul Slack. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Pp. viii + 179. ISBN 0-19-820661-5.

In 1900 E. M. Leonard argued in her classic work, *The early history of English poor relief*, that the power and growing confidence of the early modern central state allowed the creation of an increasingly comprehensive social policy. Inspired by a Fabian agenda of social reform, Leonard's narrative provided a positive backdrop to the creation of the welfare state. Almost a hundred years later Paul Slack has turned this story on its head. In a beautifully researched account of the history of the English civil parish and the wide range of intermediate and non-governmental institutions through which early modern society responded to both the collective crises of plague and famine, and the individual everyday crises of poverty, he has rewritten the history of poor relief for a generation which has lost faith in the ability of the state to ameliorate the lives of its citizens.

*From Reformation to improvement* describes the development of the ideological and practical underpinnings of English social policy in the years between the Reformation and the mid-eighteenth century. Slack characterizes the early sixteenth century as a period dominated by the idea of the 'common weal'. Drawn in part from humanism, he describes this as a 'rhetorical slogan conferring legitimacy on almost any public activity' (p. 6), and concludes that while it represents an important linguistic development, it had only a marginal impact on the content of social policy. From here, in chapters on 'Godly cities', and 'Absolute power', Slack goes on to chart what he depicts as the mixed impact of puritanism and of the central state's attempts to reform and control local practice. In contradiction to Leonard, he concludes that none of these facets of social policy had a clear or unambiguous impact, and that the huge variety of institutional innovations, from workhouses to pest-houses and civic granaries were the outcome of forces too local and individual to easily lump into a single narrative. He seems more impressed by the intellectual, if not the practical, achievements of Samuel Hartlib and his associates, which form the substantive content of chapter 4, but returns to his earlier, rather down-beat assessment, in his description of the developments associated with the latter half of the seventeenth century, and the early eighteenth.

Throughout, Dr Slack is tremendously aware of the ambiguity and localism which characterizes developments in social provision and hedges his tentative conclusions with an impressive array of caveats and counter-examples. Unfortunately, this has the affect of undermining the power of the argument, and left this reader uncertain how this maelstrom of references was intended to be read. In part, this problem is addressed in the final chapter. This seeks to contextualize the preceding material and to relate it to a range of broader arguments based both in economic determinism and English particularism. Slack largely rejects the idea that social policy reflected broader economic transformations. But, he is likewise clearly uncomfortable with the notion that the almost uniquely comprehensive social provision of early modern England can be used to claim a particular historical significance for either the English or British state.

Perhaps the strongest case Slack makes is for the significance of the large number of non-governmental institutions created in both the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries,

and by extension the coherence of the period between. But as the fifteenth century does not form a part of the substantive content of the book we are asked to accept this argument on trust. In the end, Slack concludes that English social policy was in most respects similar to, or at least comparable with, that of most of the rest of Europe. And that while European particularism in relation to social policy might provide a convincing explanation for the development of aspects of world history, the English instance needs to be seen as simply one of a series of national pictures, rather than as a lone example. More than this, he argues that the innovations of central state policy which Leonard originally lauded, do not deserve the attention they have received, and that the social policy free-for-all of the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries need to be given greater prominence.

This book and its conclusions form a necessary and welcome revision to an older historiography which has in many ways outlived its usefulness. And its new reading of the period will find interesting echoes in contemporary politics. But, it is to be regretted that Dr Slack has not taken the opportunity to step substantially beyond the questions asked a hundred years ago. While it forms an excellent guide to the changing balance of authority between the central state, local government, and the plethora of quasi-governmental institutions which litter this period, for instance, it is much less concerned to analyse the nature of social authority and the exercise of power which this balance of authority represents. More problematic is the almost complete exclusion of perhaps the primary actors in this story: the poor themselves. In part, because this book is about social policy rather than poverty, this lacunae is understandable. But it is difficult to believe that the development of workhouses and granaries, pensions and hospitals was not substantially influenced and modified by the aspirations, ideologies, and behaviours of the end users. The poor's almost complete absence from this book makes it difficult to understand the forces which ensured that most early modern institutions floundered and closed within the life span of their founders. Without embedding the innovations and institutions described in the complex matrix of local communities, as opposed to the politics of local elites, it is difficult to see how we can understand either the changing tapestry of local practice, or the significance of those changes for a broader history of either the state, the economy, or social relations more broadly conceived.

This book represents a wonderful body of scholarship, which will form an Aladdin's cave of historical material for future writers and will be required reading for anyone interested in the history of social policy. It also substantially transforms our understanding of the relative importance of the central state and local and non-governmental social policy initiatives. But until this new narrative is embedded in a more comprehensive social history of poverty, and of the interaction between social policy and the poor, we will have access to only a small part of the important story early modern poverty and poor relief has to tell a modern audience.

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*Protestantism and national identity: Britain and Ireland, c. 1650–c. 1850.* Edited by Tony Claydon and Ian McBride. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Pp. xi + 317. ISBN 0-521-62077-5. £40.00.

The shift in status of the eighteenth century, from 'pudding time' to *plat du jour*, as catalysed by the works of J. C. D. Clark and Linda Colley, has led religion and nationalism to become dominant staples on the historiographical menu. *Protestantism and*

*national identity: Britain and Ireland, c. 1650–c. 1850* is a collection of twelve essays which seek to explore, respond to, and challenge not only the agenda initiated by Clark and Colley, but also the growing historiography surrounding their respective contentions.

The volume's central theme is the difficulty arising from the portrayal of Protestantism and anti-Catholicism as monolithic ideological blocs, which bound the British into nationhood. Not only were British Protestant groups as frequently at odds with each other as with 'the other', but neither can the force of anti-Catholic sentiment be assumed to be inherent within all Britons. Whilst Colin Haydon again demonstrates the strength of anti-Catholic feeling and argument in eighteenth-century society, he also highlights that anti-Catholicism was not ubiquitous to the same degree amongst all sections of the population: it was more fervent amongst certain denominations and trades (such as nonconformists, soldiers, and sailors), and in particular geographical areas. Popular Jacobitism could also quell the vehemence of anti-popery. Jeremy Black draws attention to the potential difference between the printed and public culture of anti-popery and the practice of personal hostility towards Catholics. Toby Barnard shows, in his essay on Protestantism and Irish identity, that sociability between Protestants and Catholics did occur during certain decades in the eighteenth century, although this appears to have diminished later. But Protestantism itself did contribute to shaping some sense of national worth. David Allan concludes that it was Scottish Protestant history, in particular, which gave Scots a Scottish (and from that a British) identity in a Scotland which then lacked a resident monarch or legislative body. Kathleen Wilson indicates, in an essay concerning English reactions to the South Sea islanders, that it was Protestant missions to this far-flung 'other' which gave the English a sense of national superiority.

If attitudes concerning the domestic 'other' in the 'long eighteenth century' were more ambiguous than has been argued previously, so too were feelings towards continental Europeans, and one of the major strengths of the volume is its willingness to engage not only with the religious histories of the British Isles, but those of mainland Europe too. As the editors remind the reader in their lucid introduction to the work, the early modern godly sometimes found it easier to identify with like-minded Protestant brethren outside the British Isles than their own countrymen. This internationalist outlook to religious and political life and thought is brought home in several essays. Brian Young describes how the English clergy invoked other Europeans for theological support, and even glanced at Gallicanism to define Anglicanism, in his chapter concerning the eighteenth-century Church of England. Jeremy Black calls for, and provides partly, a mainland European context to the theme. He argues that what is most striking is the complexity of religious beliefs and practice within European countries, a situation created by improved communications and the varying cultures and ethnicities within dynastic states. It was also occasioned by the increasing awareness of rulers of the urgency for toleration for reasons of military security in an age when successful warfare demanded the resources of a whole society. As in Austria, Prussia, and Russia, by the late eighteenth century Britain, likewise, was pursuing a trend of weakening the authority of the established church in order to achieve maximum military muscle.

Although the corpus of the volume maintains the contention that Protestantism and anti-Catholicism operated as creators of national awareness, space is allowed to dispute it. Tim Harris stresses, in his chapter on political identity, religion, and the British dimension, that there was no unifying ideology in the divided society of late seventeenth-century Britain. Anti-exclusionists were less frightened by a Catholic successor than by

the potential devastation which their opponents might wreak. Anti-popery and Protestant sentiment cannot necessarily be assumed. A variation on this theme is pursued most extensively by Steven Pincus. Whilst admitting that Protestantism was a major factor in the 1688–9 Revolution, he argues that the Revolution was essentially a ‘nationalist’ one. It was designed to protect English political liberties and institutions from a Francophile king who was, incidentally, a Catholic. English Francophobia was fuelled by perceptions that France aimed at ‘universal monarchy’ rather than by xenophobia or anti-Catholicism. The English were far from seeing the wars against France as Protestant crusades and rejected Louis XIV’s claims that the conflict was a religious one. Indeed, English Catholic allies, such as the emperor, gave the struggle a multi-confessional complexion.

*Protestantism and national identity*’s most significant merit lies in the contributors’ sensitivity to the nuances of time, region, and status with regard to Protestantism, anti-Catholicism, and nationhood. The work demonstrates the desirability for future writing on the subject to see Protestantism and anti-Catholicism as liable to fluctuation, intensification, and deprecation even within a period, and moreover the necessity of viewing such sentiments within the more personalized contexts of social and economical status, and geographical area. Indeed, the extent to which inhabitants identified with county rather than country, and with local beliefs, myths, and traditions, is worthy of exploration in this respect, and whether locality promoted or demoted the emergence of a wider feeling of patriotism or nationality. In line with most recent historiography of the eighteenth century, the contributions to *Protestantism and national identity* are very much focused upon ‘the people’, be they Haydon’s Whitby ship carpenters who hunted down papists with cleavers, or Pincus’s print-orientated, coffee-house-frequenting, politicized public, or, indeed, Wilson’s pantomime audiences. Whilst such an approach is salutary, older historiographical foci, such as the monarch and aristocracy, ought not to be ignored. In particular, the capacity for ‘dynastic Protestantism’ must not be underestimated, as engendered, for example, by the marriages of George II’s children to Protestant royal families, or later eighteenth-century enthusiasm for George II’s nephew, the martially successful Frederick ‘the Great’ of Prussia. The volume provides no unified conclusion to the problem of Protestantism and nationalism, with authors both emphasizing and disputing the importance of religion in the ‘long eighteenth century’. But this open acknowledgement of the complexities of the subject should be valuable to the further development of the debate, and by collecting the various contentions under one canopy, the volume is endowed, additionally, with a welcome utility for those who are conversant with its themes, as well as for those who are not. Overall, *Protestantism and national identity* provides an incisive and, at times, controversial exploration of the role that Protestantism performed in forging nations.

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*Freedom from fear: the American people in depression and war, 1929–1945*. By David M. Kennedy. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. Pp. xviii + 936. ISBN 0-19-503834-7. £30.00.

David Kennedy has produced a distinguished contribution to the ‘Oxford History of the United States’, a putative eleven-part series whose previously published volumes include prize-winning masterpieces by James M. McPherson and James T. Patterson.

*Freedom from fear*, like those books, is long but never drags. In part that may be ascribed to the intrinsic interest of Kennedy's story, which takes in the Depression, the New Deal, and the Second World War, and which has as its central figure the titanic Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Still, plenty of dull books have been produced on these subjects, and it is the author's skill as storyteller and historian that does most to sustain the reader's interest through nearly a thousand pages.

Kennedy writes with striking elegance and care. Here is a writer who loves words, and one senses his striving for prose to match the luxurious scope afforded by his commission. A few examples must suffice. Early on, Roosevelt's faithful aide Louis McHenry Howe is characterized as 'a crater-eyed, gnarled, wheezing homunculus' (p. 96). A little while later, Kennedy writes of an agriculture industry that encompassed 'shoeless sharecroppers and lordly latifundiaris' (p. 124). And as for the man who directed agriculture policy under FDR, Henry Wallace, he appears as 'a dreamy rustic, an awkward and swankless bumpkin, a pixilated hayseed' (p. 206). Even that rare reader who is familiar with Kennedy's entire story should learn some new words.

When Kennedy notes that brain-truster Rexford Tugwell possessed the 'master teacher's repertoire of similes and metaphors' (p. 122) he might just as easily have been writing of himself. To take just one typically pleasing example, he describes Roosevelt's mind as 'a spacious, cluttered warehouse, a teeming curiosity shop continuously restocked with randomly acquired intellectual oddments' (p. 112). Occasionally, the rhetorical flourishes are a bit much, veering into self-indulgence and parody: Tammany Hall is described as 'the ultimate, ball-jointed, air-cushioned, precision-tooled, self-oiling, thousand-kilowatt urban political machine' (p. 145). But on the whole, readers will be delighted by Kennedy's anecdotes, pen-portraits, and by his 'richly stocked lexical inventory' (to borrow words that he applies to the mineworkers' leader, John L. Lewis).

What of the argument? Here, there are few surprises. For one thing, he is more interested in telling a good story than in engaging in theoretical or historiographical debate, a fact that will vex some of his peers but please the more general audience at which this series is also aimed. For another, one wonders how much there is left for a liberal historian of the Roosevelt era to say, especially in a general synthesis of this kind. Probably not much, although future historians of the subject, seeking fresh approaches, might benefit from recent innovative work in the social sciences by the likes of Sidney Milkis, Theda Skocpol, and David Plotke.

But if the argument is familiar, it is more than style that lends vitality to Kennedy's writing. Especially where he is concerned with rather technical matters (monetary policy, constitutional law, military strategy, the building of the atomic bomb) one is struck by the care that the author has taken to master difficult literature and render it accessible. But also notable is his willingness to go beyond the scholarly sources. To give just one example among many, a virtuoso analysis of American society at the dawn of the depression is buttressed less by the conventional secondary literature than by such contemporary sources as the Lynd's sociological study *Middletown*, and the Hoover-commissioned survey, *Recent social trends*. The result is a wonderfully fresh portrait of the world that the Depression and the New Deal overturned. Such published contemporary sources take the place of the manuscript collections that Kennedy would have used in a scholarly monograph, allowing him the same kind of unmediated access to the historical world that he wishes to recapture. They also lend new life to a story that could easily sound wearily familiar.

*Freedom from fear* is really two books in one volume, chronologically divided by the outbreak of the Second World War. The first 400 pages deal with the Depression and its consequences, emphasizing the mood and energy of the New Deal as much as its substantive achievements, which he sees as significant but limited. The balance of the volume deals almost exclusively with the war against Nazism, focusing initially on the tenacity of isolationism in the United States, and subsequently on the extraordinary mobilization of men and resources that accompanied America's prosecution of the war after Pearl Harbor.

There are not many 'bridges' between the two parts of the story. For the most part, this reflects the obvious starkness of the shift in political priorities that took place in 1938–9. Still, one might wish that a somewhat greater attempt had been made to knit the two halves together, for example by paying more attention to the way in which executive reorganization, bureaucratic entrenchment, and war mobilization helped consolidate the portentous expansion in the American state that had occurred under the New Deal, despite the waning of the reformist impulse. Kennedy shares the common view that the New Deal was 'a walking corpse' after 1938, but could one not argue that in some respects the war lent new legitimacy and permanency to big government? If so, then this is a theme worth probing, but it is not really addressed in the author's one chapter devoted to the 'home front', or in his conclusion.

Two themes that *do* feature in each part of the book, and which lend some important integration to the volume as a whole, are Franklin Roosevelt's extraordinary leadership skills (familiar enough but never perhaps more vividly portrayed), and the common theme of an all-consuming struggle against adversity. Roosevelt the war leader comes across as being at least as remarkable a figure as Roosevelt the New Dealer. During the two years before Pearl Harbor, he showed great tenacity and strength of character in choosing to confront, rather than capitulate to, isolationist sentiment within the country. At the same time, he also displayed characteristic political cunning, knowing just how far he could go without provoking a destructive counter-reaction.

Equally arresting, at least until the terrible waning of his strength during the last year of his life, was Roosevelt's self-confidence as commander-in-chief. He was quite prepared to stand up to such imposing military men as George Marshall and Dwight Eisenhower, for example over the supplying of Britain in 1940 (which Marshall felt to be futile), and the North Africa campaign of 1942 (opposed by both Marshall and Eisenhower). Not many recent Presidents have been possessed of this degree of 'inner-direction'.

Kennedy's account of America's war, even more than his analysis of the depression years, is a *tour de force*, his detailed accounts of individual military engagements possessing tremendous authority and dramatic power. All in all, *Freedom from fear* is an extraordinary triumph. One can quibble about matters of detail, and inevitably each reader will have different preferences in terms of the weighting of the story. But David Kennedy has written a massively authoritative and compellingly readable account of one of the most formative periods in American history.

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