

Ethan H. Shagan. *The Rule of Moderation: Violence, Religion and the Politics of Restraint in Early Modern England*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. xiii + 382 pp. \$32.99. ISBN: 978-0-521-13556-6.

This study is richly stimulating, accessible, and refreshingly self-critical. The punning title encompasses moderation as measure and proper order. After outlining the work's scope, Shagan discusses moderation in contested ecclesiology, tracing the legitimating *via media* from the reign of Henry VIII, and then dealing with changes in both conformist and Puritan expressions of moderation. Throughout he stresses the fluidity of distinctions between politics and ecclesiology, and between moderation

as a social norm and an ordering of the soul. Four case studies follow: on imperialism as a form of moderation, even England's climate was suitably moderate (194); on the middle sort as an ethically sanctioned social group (he doubts its helpfulness); on republican liberty as by definition moderate; and on the promotion of toleration as moderation.

From partial origins in an Aristotelian mean (*mésos*), moderation became an often aggressively exploited currency of debate, used to disclose a virtuous ethos, and to denigrate contrasting, even invented, extremes (114). In the Foucaultian terms Shagan largely accepts, moderation was an emerging ideology of power (335–40). The vital shift was from internal moderation as a microcosm for wider relationships, to becoming a means of authorization for public activity (329–30). His narrative is explicitly genealogical and exhibits the tensions of this mode of writing. Thus he provides a powerful argument for a more critical attitude to the analytic categories through which historical evidence is presented — a convincing case against the anachronistic conflation of early modern and modern understandings of words like moderation, and a healthy skepticism toward teleological narratives terminating in a “slippery” (335) modernity. Yet he does not always practice what he preaches. The assertion that there was no distinction between the social and political elicits the puzzling inference that therefore the social was significantly political (222). If we should not assimilate early modern moderation to anodyne contemporary usage, we should presumably be even more careful with its later delineating categories of radicalism and conservatism, used throughout as trouble-free descriptors, but for belated scare quotes around “radical” (256).

Early modern intellectual history has been greatly preoccupied with ideology, and for all its iconoclastic ambition, this study conforms to conventional expectations. Largely taken for granted, ideology becomes a transhistorical category seemingly conflated with the evidence. What we might construe as an ideological outcome can be indistinguishable from attributed endeavor. It may be this genealogical streamlining that helps oversimplify the vocabulary of early modern argument, marring the interesting discussion of liberty. Certainly this was often situated between tyranny and anarchy (neither being exclusively political notions). These, however, easily collapsed into accusations of licentiousness, resulting in binary distinctions excluding a mean (a point touched on 43–44), while proclaimed liberty readily mutated into a duty, not something easily fulfilled moderately. Understandably, people were likely to defend liberty when they thought it insecure, but that is unreliable evidence for positing secure liberty as a distinct neo-Roman concept, a recent genealogical construct designed to challenge contemporary conceptions of negative liberty. Yet on this fugitive basis neo-Roman is redefined as moderate liberty. Shagan recognizes that advocacy of moderation was typical of immoderate times, but more might have been done to explore the circumscribing vocabulary of extremity, zealotry, and the rigid adherence to rules, sometimes called tyranny. Not all virtues (honesty, straight speaking) were easily promoted as moderation. More sustained treatment of this form of conceptual limitation would have been helpful, though awkward for the conversion of a portable, sometimes casually used rhetoric

into an ideology. Similarly, the fascinating account of a transforming imperialism remains in tension with the genealogical literature that seeks in it a coherent ideological project haunting modernity. Conversely, the discussion of toleration as boundary formation is particularly valuable because freed from the celebratory cocoon in which it is usually wrapped.

I found few infelicities (“different than,” 81) and ironically, the misuse of *elide* (29, 43, 178). There is some repetition (for example, at 112–13); and on adjacent pages the same passage is quoted twice (once without page reference, 206–07). Such blemishes suggest the need for a touch more editing. *Tyranny* and *anarchy* want proper entries in an erratic index. This, however, is to ask more of a very fine book, amply deserving the debate it seeks to stimulate.

CONAL CONDREN

University of Queensland