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Julia Rudolph. *Revolution by Degrees: James Tyrrell and Whig Political Thought in the Late Seventeenth Century.* Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. viii + 231 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-333-73659-3.

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The Moderate Revolution of 1688/89

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While short in duration, the Revolution of 1688/89 has long been the focus of continuing controversy. Throughout the 1690s, tracts by Whigs (of all varieties), Tories, nonjurors, Jacobites, and others continued to debate the meaning of the events of 1688 and 1689. As one pamphleteer put it, "one submits to Providence, another to a usurper, another to king *de facto*, another to a conqueror: one says King James left us; another, we turned him out."[1] The facts of the Revolution are not in dispute; the rationalizations and its implications are. How did the English manage to justify the replacement of a legitimate king, James II, with the dual monarchy of William III and Mary II? What exactly were the political implications of the abdication/vacancy formula enshrined in the Declaration of Rights? Had James II conveniently withdrawn of his own accord or had the people pushed him out? If so, exactly who constituted "the people"? And did James's "vacancy" lead to dissolution of power to "the people," broadly defined, or simply their representatives in parliament?

The vagueness of the abdication/vacancy formula has often led historians to argue that the Whig defense of the Revolution was a rather fuzzy if not confused set of "verbal subterfuges."[2] Julia Rudolph's book claims the contrary. The Whigs of 1688/89 were not confused, mistaken, or victims of self-deception. "In fact," writes Rudolph, "the Whigs left some theoretical uncertainty in their Revolution principles in the interest of politics and peace, and their ideas survived because of this ambiguity and flexibility." "Whig theory," she writes, "was important, influential, and even successful" (pp. 11-12). Leaving aside the problems of definition for a moment, Rudolph's intention of making sense of the Whig defense of the Revolution, rather than dismissing it as incoherent or lacking insofar as it compares to the political thinking of John Locke, is certainly laudable. So too is her analysis of the political thought of James Tyrrell, the focus of this study, whom she sees as the "real theorist of the Whig Revolution" (p. 148).

Locke's old Oxford friend, James Tyrrell, has not been ignored by scholars of political thought.[3] But he is certainly deserving of Rudolph's close analysis. Tyrrell's *Bibliotheca Politica: or an Enquery into the Ancient Con-*

stitution of the English Government ... in Thirteen dialogues (1694; a fourteenth dialogue concerning the "murder of Charles I" was published in 1702) stands as a compendium of Whig thought, allowing Rudolph to describe it as a "paradigmatic expression of Whig historiography and constitutional theory" (p. 17). Ultimately, Rudolph argues that Tyrrell successfully combined theories of contract and resistance with claims of continuity and conservation. Tyrrell embodied the acceptable face of the Revolution. His ability to place the Revolution well within the frame of the ancient constitution proves that the "common law mentality" (Glenn Burgess's phrase) resonated into the second half of the century.[4]

While Tyrrell's 1681 response to Filmer, *Patriarcha non Monarcha*, backed away from making a case for popular resistance, by the 1690s Tyrrell was arguing that resistance to James II had been fully justified and had in fact preserved England's ancient constitution. He also affirmed the concept of the devolution of power. But, Rudolph argues, he tried to temper and modify the more radical implications of devolution by appeals to past precedents and in particular by defining what he meant by "the people." Tyrrell obsessed over this latter point. Rudolph argues that Tyrrell ultimately came to the conclusion that "the people," who could justifiably resist tyranny and to whom sovereign power devolved in such cases, were the "considerable part" of the people led by the gentry and the nobility (p. 133). But who were the "considerable part" of the people? I think Rudolph is a bit more ambiguous here then she need be. Tyrrell repeatedly asserted that by "the people" he meant the "whole community, consisting of clergy, nobility, and commons."[5] I would maintain that such a broad definition of "the people" actually did little to "temper" or "limit" the radical implications of Tyrrell's political thought. But Rudolph's Tyrrell is a very moderate Tyrrell, staying well within the ancient constitutional framework, nonetheless.

Rudolph's discourse analysis is informed, straightforward, and wonderfully jargon free. Her greatest contribution is to see the Whig defense of the Revolution put forward by the Conventioneers not as duplicitous, dishonest, or incoherent but as a successful compromise born out of political expediency and real theoretical principles. I found her discussion linking the debates in the Convention and public discourse in the 1690s particularly illuminating. Her final chapter on Tyrrell and Locke will be of particular interest to Locke scholars. On the other hand, I did find some of Rudolph's claims questionable. First is the problem of definition. "Whigs" came in various stripes in the 1680s and 1690s. They held varying views on almost everything from toleration to resistance to the succession crisis. And they certainly did not all agree on what happened in 1688/89. There were Whigs, more radical than Tyrrell, who did not accept the interpretations of the Conventioneers. The Reverend Samuel Johnson thought the abdication/vacancy formula was a complete farce, disseminated "to cover the doctrine of passive obedience ... notwithstanding the Prince and the whole nation engaged in resisting oppression and defending their rights."[6] Further, there were Williamite Whigs who did their utmost to forward what may truly have been the most successful justification of the Revolution in the 1690s, providentialism.[7]

Finally, it is really difficult to say which defense of the Revolution was the most appealing or successful in the 1690s or after, particularly since Rudolph does not provide any evidence as to how Tyrrell was received or read, or what his legacy was in the eighteenth century. It seems to me that different explanations of the Revolution resonated with the reading public at different times and among different groups. While I do not wish to detract too much from what is a fine study of political thought, I do think it is hard to claim "success" for one reading of the Revolution when there is no contemporary proof of how Tyrrell was received or read in the long eighteenth century.

Notes

[1]. N.N., *A Letter from Oxford concerning Mr. Samuel Johnson* (1693), p. 10.

[2]. Julian H. Franklin, *John Locke and the Theory of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 115.

[3]. Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 73-76, *passim*; J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957; A Reissue with a Retrospect, 1987), particularly, pp. 346-348; Martyn Thompson, *Ideas of Contract in English Political Thought* (Garland, 1987), chap. 10; Rachel Weil, *Political Passions: Gender, the Family and Political Argument in England, 1680-1714* (Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 35-43, 57-73; Melinda Zook, *Radical Whigs and Conspiratorial Politics in Late Stuart England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 1999), pp. 175-87; and Janelle Greenberg, *The Radical Face of the Ancient Constitution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 280-6.

[4]. Glenn Burgess, *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 1992), pp. 230-231. Also on this point, see Janelle Greenberg who argues that ancient constitutionalism reached a "zenith" with the Revolution of 1688/89. *The Radical Face*, p. 280.

[5]. Tyrrell, *Bibliotheca Politica*; 10th Dialogue, title page, verso.

[6]. Samuel Johnson, *An Argument Proving that the Abrogation of King James by the People of England ...* (1693) in the *Works of Samuel Johnson* (1710), p. 262.

[7]. On this point, see Tony Claydon's analysis of the Williamite propaganda of Gilbert Burnet and company in his *William III and the Godly Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

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