

Beyond Good and Evil: Thinking with Moderates in Early Modern England

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It is a well-worn historiographical truism that early modern Europeans imagined their world in terms of binary oppositions. Leading historians of the 1970s like Peter Burke, Natalie Davis, and Robert Scribner, influenced by structuralist anthropology, suggested that early modern phenomena that defied twentieth-century logic—like the misrule of Carnival or belief that the pope was Antichrist—could best be understood as symbolic systems of inversion.¹ Then in a seminal 1980 article and in his 1997 landmark book *Thinking with Demons*, Stuart Clark argued that binary oppositions were the fundamental building blocks of distinctively early modern thought, “one of the distinctive mental and cultural traits of the age.” Clark argued that binary oppositions represented “an entire worldview,” a “conceptual language presupposed” in every field of human endeavor, constituting the way the “world [was] accustomed to think.”² Early moderns believed that the universe and the mind of God forensically divided good

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¹ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1978), 185–91; Natalie Zemon Davis, “Women on Top,” in her *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, CA, 1975); Robert Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge, 1981).

² Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997), 35, and “Inversion, Misrule, and the Meaning of Witchcraft,” *Past and Present*, no. 87 (May 1980): 98–127, quotations at 105, 113, 117, 127.

Journal of British Studies 49 (July 2010): 488–513

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from evil and order from disorder, with every negative principle the complement of the positive.³

This model was nowhere embraced more enthusiastically than among historians of Tudor-Stuart England. For Patrick Collinson, the puritan division of the cosmos into Christ and Antichrist was part of a “prevalent mental and rhetorical habit of addressing every proposition or topic of investigation in terms of its contrary or antithesis, the method of binary opposition.”⁴ For Peter Lake, English Protestants saw popish conspiracies around every corner because they constructed popery as the inverse of true religion, an antireligion that corrupted all it touched. As such, binary oppositions helped explain how a society so committed to consensus experienced ideological fragmentation: the logic of polarities required every position to be either assimilated to truth or banished to falsehood, thus externalizing disunities rather than admitting their presence in the social body.⁵ Once the supremely useful notion of binary oppositions was available to English historians, moreover, it was quickly adapted to areas of scholarship far from its original provenance. So, for instance, Paul Slack argued that the Elizabethan distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor “produced a satisfying conceptual polarity, which appealed to a society accustomed to articulating its view of the world in terms of binary opposites.”⁶ Ian Archer, discussing Elizabethan views of crime, suggested that “the readiness with which contemporaries subscribed to the notion of a criminal counter-culture is another symptom of those mental frameworks inclined to think in terms of binary polarities that historians of ideas see as characteristic of the age.”⁷ Andy Wood argued that “early modern English women and men were prone to perceive of the world in terms of duality. . . . If this was true of religious and magical beliefs, it was equally true of social relations.”⁸

Thus an analytic framework anthropologists fruitfully applied to every society has become identified as a peculiar mental architecture of early modernity. Instances of writers dividing the world into polarities—Christ versus Antichrist, liberty versus tyranny, order versus disorder—are sometimes taken as unfiltered reflections of

³ “Dualism,” “binary oppositions,” and “polarities” describe different aspects of the same cognitive framework: “dualism” tends to emphasize the more technical division of the universe into God and the Devil, or spiritual and material forces; “binary oppositions” tends to emphasize the principle of inversion; “polarities” tends to emphasize opposite ends of connected phenomena. I have avoided using the term “binaries” on its own, since this would seem to imply a simple doubling; I have also avoided the term “Manichaeism,” since Manichaeism remained a heresy.

⁴ Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Basingstoke, 1988), 147–48. Yet in his article “‘A Magazine of Religion Patterns’: An Erasmian Topic Transposed in English Protestantism,” in *Studies in Church History*, ed. Derek Baker, vol. 14 (Oxford, 1977): 223–49, Collinson explored use of the Aristotelian golden mean and argued that the immoderate zeal of puritan theology can be contrasted with the imperative of moderation in puritan biographical writings.

⁵ Peter Lake, “Anti-Popery: The Structure of a Prejudice,” in *Conflict in Early Stuart England*, ed. Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (London, 1989), 72–106. However, for Lake’s many writings that seem to challenge the presumption of binary oppositions, see below.

⁶ Paul Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1988), 25.

⁷ Ian Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991), 205.

⁸ Andy Wood, “‘Poore men woll speke one daye’: Plebeian Languages of Deference and Defiance in England, c. 1520–1640,” in *The Politics of the Excluded, c. 1500–1850*, ed. Tim Harris (Basingstoke, 2001), 67–98, at 82–83.

the weltanschauung. Yet it is easy to show that early modern culture makers chose in different contexts to employ other frameworks that better suited their polemical needs. Most crucial among these alternative frameworks was the logic of moderation and the middle way.⁹ Alongside the dualist division of the world into good and evil, there was an equally ubiquitous recourse to the *via media*: every virtue was a middle way between two vices, balanced between excess and deficiency. Granted, there was still a contrariety implied here, but a contrariety utterly incompatible with dividing the world into positive and negative poles. Instead of constructing complementary principles that together filled the available space, the logic of moderation spent its creative energy on the space between the poles; evil was not the negative space of good but rather too much or too little of a good thing. So, for instance, a puritan who in one context denounced popery as an inversion of true religion might, in an attack on Quakers, argue that true religion was a middle way between superstition and irreligion. A republican who in one context denounced tyranny as the antithesis of liberty might, in an attack on the Levellers, argue that liberty was a middle way between tyranny and anarchy. A gentleman who in one context denounced the poor as the antithesis of all good order might, in an attack on the avarice of the nobility, identify himself with the middle sort and quote Proverbs 30:8: “Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me.”

Of course, many scholars have noticed these claims to moderation and made them central to certain accounts of English history and identity. But most of these scholars have tacitly concurred that binary oppositions were the prevalent mental architecture of the period, insofar as they have wanted to identify “moderates” as somehow significant, genuine beacons of peace or heralds of Enlightenment. The self-proclaimed *via media* of the Church of England, for instance, was long understood as a singular rejection of Reformation conflict and is still taken as such by some scholars.¹⁰ Revisionist historians have cited early Stuart claims to moderation as evidence for an undercurrent of ideological consensus that resisted the centrifugal force of ideological conflict.¹¹ Intellectual historians have often traced the origins of the Enlightenment in England to the moderate strand of early modern religious thought associated with Arminianism and the Great Tew Circle.¹²

⁹ The most important work on this subject, to which I am deeply indebted, is Joshua Scodel, *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature* (Princeton, NJ, 2002).

¹⁰ For some variations on this theme, see, e.g., George Bernard, “The Church of England, c. 1529–1642,” *History* 75, no. 244 (January 1990): 183–206; Lucy Wooding, *Rethinking Catholicism in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2000), 89 and passim; Peter White, *Predestination, Policy, and Polemic: Conflict and Consensus in the Church of England from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge, 1992); Muriel McClendon, *The Quiet Reformation: Magistrates and the Emergence of Protestantism in Tudor Norwich* (Stanford, CA, 1999); W. B. Patterson, *King James VI and I and the Reunion of Christendom* (Cambridge, 1997).

¹¹ See, e.g., Glenn Burgess, *Absolute Monarchy and the Stuart Constitution* (New Haven, CT, 1996), 209 and passim; Malcolm Smuts, “Force, Love and Authority in Caroline Political Culture,” in *The 1630s: Interdisciplinary Essays on Culture and Politics in the Caroline Era*, ed. Ian Atherton and Julie Sanders (Manchester, 2006), 28–49, at 29–30 and 44–45; Kevin Sharpe, *Criticism and Compliment: The Politics of Literature in the England of Charles I* (Cambridge, 1987), 16, 33, 285–86.

¹² Foundational in this regard was H. R. Trevor-Roper, “The Religious Origins of the Enlightenment,” first published in 1956, reprinted in his *The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York, 1969). More recent versions include J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 1, *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737–1764* (Cambridge, 1999), esp. chap. 2;

The implication is that the habit of binary oppositions, once identified, can somehow be implicated in or blamed for the violence of the age, while the dissolution of polarities and the rise of moderation as an alternative worldview presaged the advent of ideological peace. As Stuart Clark put it, “Religious life does not have to be a war of opposites; it eventually tolerated latitude and pluralism.”¹³ There is a strong teleology here, a sense that early modernity remains comfortably other, and its violence remains at a safe distance because its underlying assumptions were denaturalized with the Enlightenment.

Contrary to this tradition, a number of English historians have begun to explore ways that moderation could provide its own framework for conflict. The trailblazer is Peter Lake, who, despite his emphasis on binary oppositions in several important articles, has argued convincingly that debates between puritans and conformists from the Elizabethan accession to the Civil War can be seen as battles over moderation.¹⁴ Lori Anne Ferrell has argued that within the religious texts of James I’s reign, “carefully crafted rhetorics—aimed at unifying the Church by promoting ‘moderation’—in actuality constructed the stereotype of ‘Puritanism’ that destroyed the political coherence of the early Stuart Church.”¹⁵ Gregory Dodds has shown how Laudian appropriations of moderation were at the heart of Arminian attacks on predestination.¹⁶ Richard Ashcraft has shown that claims to moderation by latitudinarians in the Restoration were coded arguments that nonconformists could never be “rational.”¹⁷

John Robertson, *The Case for Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2005), e.g., 15; Frederick Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defense of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), esp. chap. 3; Blair Worden, “The Question of Secularization,” in *A Nation Transformed: England after the Restoration*, ed. Alan Houston and Steve Pincus (Cambridge, 2001), 20–40, e.g., 38.

¹³ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 94. Needless to say, a critique of the violence of binary oppositions also lies behind much of the attempt to “deconstruct” such binaries in poststructuralism and post-colonialism.

¹⁴ Peter Lake, “The Moderate and Irenic Case for Religious War: Joseph Hall’s *Via Media* in Context,” in *Political Cultures and Cultural Politics in Early Modern England: Essays Presented to David Underdown*, ed. Susan Amussen and Mark Kishlansky (Manchester, 1995), 55–83, “Joseph Hall, Robert Skinner and the Rhetoric of Moderation at the Early Stuart Court,” in *The English Sermon Revised: Religion, Literature and History, 1600–1750*, ed. Lori Anne Ferrell and Peter McCullough (Manchester, 2001), 167–87, “Order, Orthodoxy and Resistance: The Ambiguous Legacy of English Puritanism, or Just How Moderate Was Stephen Denison?” in *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland*, ed. Michael Braddick and John Walter (Cambridge, 2001), 206–26, *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London, 1988), e.g., 24, and *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge, 1982), passim but, e.g., 145–50, where he subtly argues that puritan claims to ethical moderation represented a sort of zeal against the flesh, a middle way between withdrawal from the reprobate world and submergence in it.

¹⁵ Lori Ann Ferrell, *Government by Polemic: James I, the King’s Preachers, and the Rhetorics of Conformity, 1603–1625* (Stanford, CA, 1998), 5. For the same period, the aggressive claim to moderation by the puritan Andrew Willet has been described in Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600–1640* (Cambridge, 1995), 20, and introduction passim.

¹⁶ Gregory Dodds, *Exploiting Erasmus: The Erasmus Legacy and Religious Change in Early Modern England* (Toronto, 2009), esp. chap. 6.

¹⁷ Richard Ashcraft, “Latitudinarianism and Toleration: Historical Myth versus Political History,” in *Philosophy, Science, and Religion in England, 1640–1700*, ed. Richard Kroll, Richard Ashcraft, and Perez Zagorin (Cambridge, 1992), 151–77. See also Richard Kroll, “Introduction,” 1–30 in the same volume, at 16–24, for trenchant comments along the same lines.

The present article builds upon this literature, arguing in more general terms that moderation served as a crucial enabling logic for English religious conflict and analyzing some of the contours and dynamics of this logic. Since antiquity, there have been (at least) two parallel rhetorical strategies available for the moral justification of controversial positions: opposition to evil and the mean between extremes. Both were available in the early modern period, and neither had a monopoly on violence or intolerance. So the question becomes, why at particular moments of religious debate did people choose one mode of argument over the other? Part of the answer, unoriginal but far too rarely noted, is that the language of moderation created a moral continuum from excess to deficiency, forging a double-edged polemical sword that was perfectly suited to Reformation controversy. For while there were sometimes moments of clarity when reformers imagined themselves opposed simply to the unreformed, often it was polemically essential to limit reform and bridle religious revolution. But another part of the answer, what gave moderation its subtle violence, is that moderation first and foremost meant governance: restraint of the unruly passions, affections, and appetites to which human beings are prone. This meant not merely self-restraint in the modern sense of the term but also the restraint of others, the moderation of society's unruly members to bring the commonwealth to a middle way. Moderation's essence was not only peace but coercion, not only a state of equipoise but an act of control. It was this aggressive character of the middle way that allowed polemicists and politicians to organize their most destructive principles not as uncompromising binary opposition but as irenic moderation. Thus, if Stuart Clark has taught us to "think with demons," this article is intended to suggest we must also learn to "think with moderates," for it was in moderation that early modern England's most dangerous demons lay.



Before coming to the violence of the *via media*, I want to begin by critiquing the idea that binary oppositions uniquely or preeminently structured early modern thought. To do so, I want to focus on the particular claims for binary oppositions made by Stuart Clark and to build up a parallel argument for the role of the middle way. But I want to stress that I am in no way devaluing Clark's arguments about witchcraft, a subject on which I have no expertise. My goal is rather to suggest that when early modern writers employed the language of dualism, or when they employed the language of moderation, they were making a choice based upon the perceived suitability of a particular rhetorical strategy.

To very briefly summarize Clark's argument: oppositional thinking was an inheritance of early modernity from the ancient world. So, for instance, "both Plato and Aristotle endorsed a theory of the generation of opposites from opposites," and Aristotle in particular argued that all change was "matter moving between the contrary poles represented by the possession or privation of some form or forms." Later Christian metaphysicians, notably Augustine and Aquinas, adopted this formulation to explain the corruption of the created world without marring the perfection of the creator; binary oppositions were thus placed at the foundation

of Christian cosmology.¹⁸ For early modern Christians, then, “since contrariety characterized the logic of the creator’s own thinking, there was nothing to which it could not in principle be applied,” whether physics, medicine, magic, astrology, psychology, or ethics.¹⁹ So, for instance, the sixteenth-century French classical scholar Louis Le Roy argued that “all sciences consist of the ‘comparing of contrarities.’” According to Clark, “Le Roy’s ideas about a substantive contrariety in all natural, intellectual, and social phenomena were typical of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century accounts of universal order.”²⁰ As a result, “most routine discussions of psychology and good conduct in this period drew incessantly on simple dichotomies, for example between reason and passion, the spirit and the flesh, the soul and the body, and, of course, right and wrong.”²¹

Clark provides examples from diverse fields of human endeavor. In behavioral manuals, for instance, every duty was contrasted with its “contrary aberration,” while in rhetorical manuals “antithesis” was said to be among the best methods of argument.²² In political theory the paradigmatic good ruler “was to be contrasted with his opposite, whose government was in every respect contrary to the good.”²³ Most importantly, the great ideological rupture of the Reformation generated an enormous reliance on binary oppositions: not only did the Protestant doctrines of original sin and election stress “judgment by absolute extremes,” but the eschatological fervor of the Reformation informed a new emphasis on the final battle between Christ and Antichrist foretold in the book of Revelation.²⁴ English puritans in particular were “incapable of any subtlety in categorizing their foes” and hence “transformed them all into ‘papists,’ ‘atheists,’ and, in the political sphere, ‘malignants.’”²⁵

Clark’s analysis, whose nuances this brief summary cannot hope to encompass, constitutes a compelling portrait of Western intellectual developments and the characteristic worldview of pre-Enlightenment Europe. The problem is that an almost precisely parallel portrait could be drawn in which, instead of polarities of good and evil, the characteristic worldview of early modernity stressed the middle way between extremes. Polarities are present in this alternative picture, but instead of positive and negative poles, here all poles are by nature negative; polarities represent not a stark choice between opposing shores but an imperative to sail between them.

If we begin, as Clark does, with the classical tradition, Aristotle based much of his *Nicomachean Ethics* on the idea that every virtue constituted a golden mean between two vices, one of excess and the other of deficiency; in virtue, as in the arts, “excess and deficiency destroy success while the mean safeguards it.”²⁶ Aristotle also applied this notion of mediocrity to the physical world. In geographical writings he argued that the earth contained two habitable sections, one in the

¹⁸ Clark, “Inversion,” 105.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 106–7.

²¹ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 48–49.

²² Clark, “Inversion,” 108.

²³ *Ibid.*, 112.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁵ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 63.

²⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Oswald (New York, 1962), 42–43.

northern hemisphere and one in the south, each of which was a moderate middle way between uninhabitable “frigid” and “torrid” zones above and below.²⁷ In medicine, following Hippocrates, Aristotle argued that just as “the nature of moral qualities is such that they are destroyed by defect and by excess,” so it is “in the case of strength and of health”: “Excess as well as deficiency of physical exercise destroys our strength, and similarly, too much and too little food and drink destroys our health.”²⁸

Many classical thinkers developed Aristotle’s commonplace that extreme polarities were dangerous. Seneca’s Oedipus, for instance, was warned to run his life “in middle course” like Daedalus who, “balancing a middle path, stopped midway of the clouds.”²⁹ Horace began one of his odes by praising the seaman who neither steers too boldly into the deep nor stays too close to treacherous shores but “loves the golden mean.”³⁰ Sometimes the middle way applied directly to religion. Plutarch, for instance, wrote, “Some people, when running away from Superstition, fall headlong into Atheism, both rugged and obstinate, and leap over that which lies between the two, namely, true Religion.”³¹

The Fathers of the Church inevitably absorbed much of this classical interest in moderation; it is useful to concentrate on St. Augustine because his name is so closely associated with dualism. Augustine imagined Christianity as a middle way between opposite heresies and warned, “Fleeing as it were Charybdis, thou rush upon Scylla.”³² In describing the opposite Christological heresies of Arians and Sabellians, he argued that the Catholic faith had “between both errors held the truth. . . . Thou midway between these, what sayest thou? Thou hast shut out the Sabellian, shut out the Arian also.”³³ Later in the same commentary he wrote, “We are opposed by two different classes of heretics, who, by each of them holding only to one clause, run off, not in one, but opposite directions, and wander far from the pathway of truth. . . . Midway between the two is the path you have left.”³⁴ In his *De fide et operibus*, Augustine wrote that “an immoderate interpretation of true doctrine is often the occasion of false doctrine. For men go astray when they do not keep to a middle course in their thinking. . . . As for ourselves, we think that the true doctrine is had in moderation.”³⁵ Augustine, it appears, was in many contexts no Augustinian.

Given this background, moderation saturated early modern English thought, even in precisely the areas where Clark saw the primacy of opposing principles of good and evil. On the question of political theory, Clark described a framework

²⁷ E. H. Warmington, ed., *Greek Geography* (London, 1934), 231–32; E. H. Bunbury, *A History of Ancient Geography*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York, 1959), 1:395–403 and 2:223–28.

²⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 35–36.

²⁹ *Seneca’s Tragedies*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Frank Miller (London, 1917), 1:511.

³⁰ *Horace’s Odes and Epodes*, ed. and trans. David Mulroy (Ann Arbor, MI, 1994), 110 (Ode 2.10).

³¹ From “On Superstition,” in *Plutarch’s Morals: Theosophical Essays*, ed. and trans. Charles William King (London, 1908), 275. For a discussion of similar sources, see Scodel, *Excess and the Mean*, 33.

³² Augustine, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John*, trans. John Gibb, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1873–74), 1:467 (36.9).

³³ *Ibid.*, 1:476 (37.6).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:260–61 (71.2). In his *De bono conjugali*, Augustine made a comparable middle way between the Manichaeans and the Jovinianists on the issue of virginity.

³⁵ Augustine, *On Faith and Works*, trans. Gregory Lombardo (New York, 1988), 4.5–5.7.

that imagined tyranny as the polar inverse of good government.³⁶ No doubt, this construction was useful in some polemical circumstances, but in other contexts like the English Revolution, far from good government conventionally being seen as the opposite of tyranny, it was typically defined as a middle way. The parliamentarian Henry Parker, for instance, wrote, “Long it was ere the world could extricate itself out of all these extremities . . . to avoid the danger of unbounded prerogative on this hand, and of excessive liberty on the other.”³⁷ The republican Marchamont Nedham described the English Commonwealth as “the only bank which preserves us from the inundation of tyranny on the one side and confusion on the other.”³⁸ John Lilburne and his fellow Levellers admitted, “Though tyranny is so excessively bad, yet of the two extremes, confusion is the worst.”³⁹ In 1656, Michael Hawke argued that the Cromwellian protectorate was a perfect “mean between an abrupt service under the dominion of a tyrant, and dissolute licentiousness.”⁴⁰

Clark also emphasized the role of binary oppositions in Renaissance rhetoric, where “contrariety was the essence of several of the most important figures or tropes for the ‘colouring’ of discourse discussed by textbook rhetoricians.” Writers exalted technical devices like *antitheton*, *contrapositum*, and *antiphrasis*, and Henry Peacham suggested in *The garden of eloquence* (1577) that “antithesis” was one of the best and most popular methods for garnishing orations.⁴¹ Yet while Peacham praised antithesis, another authoritative text of Elizabethan rhetoric, George Puttenham’s *The arte of English poesie* (1589), condemned its overuse as immoderate: “Isocrates the Greek orator was a little too full of this figure and so was the Spaniard that wrote the life of Marcus Aurelius, and many of our modern writers in vulgar use it in excess and incur the vice of fond affection.” Another Elizabethan writer on rhetoric, John Hoskins, described the popularity of a different figure which produced a golden mean: “Synoeciosis is a composition of contraries, and by both words intimateth the meanings of neither precisely but a moderation or mediocrity of both; as *bravery* and *rags* are contrary, yet somewhat better than both is a *brave raggedness*. . . . This is an easy figure now in fashion.”⁴² George Puttenham likewise described *paradiastole* as the figure used when “moderation of words tend to flattery, or soothing or excusing.”⁴³

If we move from subjects to persons, Clark takes Francis Bacon as an avatar of dualist principles, writing of “armies of contraries in the world, as of dense and

³⁶ Clark, “Inversion,” 112, and *Thinking with Demons*, 73.

³⁷ Henry Parker, *Observations upon some of His Majesties late answers and expresses* (London, 1642), 14.

³⁸ Marchamont Nedham, *The case of the Common-wealth of England stated* (London, 1650), 87–88.

³⁹ Andrew Sharp, ed., *The English Levellers* (Cambridge, 1998), 162.

⁴⁰ Michael Hawke, *The right of dominion, and property of liberty* (London, 1656), 104.

⁴¹ Clark, “Inversion,” 108.

⁴² These examples are cited in Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge, 2002), 93–94. The latter quotation is from John Hoskins’s influential manuscript work *Directions for Speech and Style* (c. 1599).

⁴³ Cited in Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996), 153. For classical works of rhetoric stressing moderation, see, e.g., Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, trans. H. E. Butler, 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1920–22), 4:209; Aristotle, *Treatise on Rhetoric*, trans. Theodore Buckley (London, 1853), 62; Pseudo-Cicero, *Ad C. Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge, MA, 1954), 355.

rare, hot and cold, light and darkness, animate and inanimate, and many others, which oppose, deprive, and destroy one another in turn.”⁴⁴ Bacon indeed often described the world in terms of opposites, but in many contexts virtue lay at the golden mean. So, for instance, on religion Bacon described James I as a “wise, equal, and Christian moderator . . . disposed to find out the golden mediocrity in the establishment of that which is sound, and in the reparation of that which is corrupt and decayed.”⁴⁵ On experimental method, Bacon decried two failures on opposite sides of the truth, the endless disputations of Greek philosophy and the unguided fumbblings of the alchemists: “One is a loud crying folly, and the other is a whispering folly. The one is gathered out of a few vulgar observations, and the other out of a few experiments of a furnace.”⁴⁶ Bacon also recommended strategic moderation for courtiers in his *Aduancement of learning* (1605), advocating “a good mediocrity in liberty of speech and secrecy” and “a good mediocrity in the declaring or not declaring a mans self.”⁴⁷ Most strongly, Bacon praised moderation in his *De sapientia veterum*, translated by Arthur Gorges as *The wisdom of the ancients* (1619), in a section entitled “Scylla and Icarus, or the Middle Way”: “Mediocrity or the middle way is most commended in moral actions, in contemplative sciences not so celebrated though no less profitable and commodious; but in political employments to be used with great heed and judgment. The ancients by the way prescribed to Icarus noted the mediocrity of manners; and by the way between Scylla and Charybdis (so famous for difficulty and danger) the mediocrity of intellectual operations.”⁴⁸

Many more examples could easily be offered, and indeed much further evidence from religious controversy will be adduced below. But rather than belaboring my negative argument, I want instead to turn now to my positive argument about the ways moderation structured English Reformation conflict.



Moderation had a variety of interconnected meanings in early modern England, centered on ideas of restraint, limitation, governance, or control. Paradigmatically this meant self-restraint, the governance of the passions or affections by reason. So, for instance, Robert Boyle wrote in his “Aretology” (c. 1645) that “the principal office of virtue is to regulate the passions of the mind and make them conformable to the laws of moderation,” while the dissenting minister John Flavel wrote in his *Husbandry spiritualized* (1669), “Tis hard, in the midst of so many

⁴⁴ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 46.

⁴⁵ Francis Bacon, “Certain Considerations Touching the Better Pacification and Edification of the Church of England,” in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. Basil Montagu, 3 vols. (Philadelphia, 1853–57), 2:421.

⁴⁶ Cited in Eric Ash, *Power, Knowledge, and Expertise in Elizabethan England* (Baltimore, 2005), 196.

⁴⁷ Francis Bacon, *The tyvoe booke of Francis Bacon: Of the proficience and aduancement of learning* (London, 1605), sigs. BBB4r and CCC4r–v.

⁴⁸ Francis Bacon, *The wisdom of the ancients*, trans. Arthur Gorges (London, 1619), 144–47. For the original Latin, see Francis Bacon, *Francisci Baconi de Verulamio, summi Angliae Cancellarii, De sapientia veterum, liber* (London, 1634), 166–69.

tempting objects, to keep the golden bridle of moderation upon the affections.”⁴⁹ It was in this sense of bridling the affections that “moderation” could sometimes mean forbearance or prudence, the quality of remaining calm, reasonable, or controlled, as in its modern sense. For instance, a manuscript from the early 1650s entitled “The Excellency of a Christian’s Carriage in Reference unto Extremes” advised a middle way between zeal and prudence: “A Christian that can keep between both these extremes is taught to know when it is a time to speak and when it is a time to forbear.”⁵⁰ For good or ill, these calls for self-restraint were part and parcel of early modernity’s “civilizing process,” disciplining readers to internalize ideas and behaviors that the state was incapable of enforcing.⁵¹

Yet moderation also meant external restraint, quintessentially the kind enforced by authority upon those unable to moderate themselves; as Richard Tuck has noted, the same moderation by which individuals “governed” their affections was also used to “govern” members of the state and keep them in order.⁵² So, for instance, a 1559 translation of Johannes Ferrarius’s *De republica instituenda* stressed the role of the prince “in whose government the whole moderation of the common weal consisteth.”⁵³ Edward Forset described how sovereigns “uphold their government in a strict steadiness, tempering all extremities with an evenness of moderation.”⁵⁴ In the smaller commonwealth of the family, Gerard Winstanley claimed that fathers must whip children who offend because “the rod is prepared to bring the unreasonable ones to experience and moderation.”⁵⁵ For the Elizabethan bishop Thomas Bilson, episcopacy was the “fatherly moderation” of the bishops over the ministry, for, “Where no man doeth govern, what order can be kept? Where no man doeth moderate, what peace can be had?”⁵⁶ Thomas Nash likewise advised “moderation” in the sense of coercive limitation in response to Martin Marprelate’s polemical excesses: “It is not the spirit of mildness that must moderate the heart of folly; dogs must be beaten with staves, and stubborn slaves controlled with stripes. Authority best knows how to diet these bedlamites.”⁵⁷ This too was a kind of peacekeeping, but of a distinctly authoritarian kind, and Nash’s image

⁴⁹ *The Early Essays and Ethics of Robert Boyle*, ed. John Harwood (Carbondale, IL, 1991), 13; John Flavel, *Husbandry spiritualized, or The heavenly use of earthly things* (London, 1669), 38.

⁵⁰ Bodleian MS Rawl. C. 214, fol. 53r, “The Excellency of a Christian’s Carriage in Reference unto Extremes,” undated but from internal evidence probably written in the 1650s.

⁵¹ Philip Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution: Calvinism and the Rise of the State in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago, 2003); Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford, 1994); Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago, 1991), 87–104, and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1979). See also the considerable literature on confessionalization in the European Reformations, beginning with the works of Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhard.

⁵² Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651* (Cambridge, 1993), preface, xiv.

⁵³ *A vvoorke of Ioannes Ferrarius Montanus, touchynge the good orderynge of a common weale*, trans. William Bavand (London, 1559), fol. 166v.

⁵⁴ Edward Forset, *A comparatiue discourse of the bodies natural and politique* (London, 1606), 31.

⁵⁵ Gerard Winstanley, *The law of freedom in a platform, or True magistracy restored* (London, 1652), 40.

⁵⁶ Thomas Bilson, *The perpetual gouernement of Christes Church* (London, 1593), preface, sig. TT4r and 2.

⁵⁷ Thomas Nash, *An almond for a parrat, or Cutbert Curry-knaues almes Fit for the knaue Martin* (London? 1589?), fol. 16r.

of enforced “dieting” to rebalance the humors of madmen suggests how easily the line between internal and external moderation could blur.

Since moderation was generally understood as restraint—a limitation but not an absence or eradication—it was virtually inseparable from ideas of middle ways and golden means. Moderation meant neither too much nor too little but just the right amount, and as such it was almost always virtuous, not to be confused with the false moderation of the Janus-faced hypocrite or politic Machiavellian. This emphasis on the virtue of moderation of course presented difficulties for religious theorists, since numerous biblical verses, and the weight of “Augustinian” tradition, taught early modern Christians that “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23) and that the world was a battlefield in a cosmic struggle between good and evil. There could be no moderation or middle ground between Christ and Antichrist, as the angel of God told the Church of Laodicea: “I know your works, you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:15–16). Yet despite this binary framework and the ubiquitous use of “lukewarm” or “neuter” as pejoratives, English clerics also relentlessly underscored their own moderation, stressing that error had a direction as well as a magnitude, for the devil was a clever foe who employed divergent and contradictory weapons from opposite “sides” of the truth. The tension between these tendencies was neatly captured by John Boys, who wrote in 1610 that “the liturgy of the Church is crucified between two malefactors: on the left hand the papists, on the right hand schismatics,” but to explain this complex relationship he referred to the scriptural example of “Samson’s foxes” from Judges 15: “These foxes . . . are tied together by the tails, although by their heads they seem to be contrary; combined in faction, however different in faith.”⁵⁸ Other writers were less ambivalent. Josiah Hunter wrote in 1656, “Christ is always crucified between two thieves, that is, truth suffers between two extreme errors.”⁵⁹ John Ponet argued from exile in 1556, “Some there be that will have too little obedience, as the Anabaptists. For they, because they hear of Christian liberty, would have all politic power taken away, and so indeed no obedience. Others (as the English papists) rack and stretch out obedience too much, and will needs have civil power obeyed in all things, and that whatsoever it commandeth, without respect it ought and must be done.”⁶⁰ The puritan George Gifford’s *A short treatise against the Donatists of England* (1590) described how the devil used two opposite sorts of sinners, “the tyrants and heretics”—that is, Catholics and separatists—to challenge the Church: “By the one sort he doth breathe out terror, and as it were spit fire. By the other he speweth up deadly poison and casteth his poisoned darts.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ John Boys, *An exposition of al the principal Scriptures vsed in our English liturgie* (London, 1610), sig. A3r–v. I owe this reference to Charles Prior. In a slightly different metaphor, Archbishop Whitgift distinguished between the papal “head” of Antichrist and the Presbyterian tail, “for the tail of the beast (as learned men say) be false prophets, hypocrites such as stir up schisms and factions among true Christians and by pretense of zeal . . . seek to draw into the Church Antichrist backward”; see Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans?* 24.

⁵⁹ Josiah Hunter, *Loves companion, or A short treatise of the nature, necessity, and advantages of moderation* (London, 1656), sig. A2r.

⁶⁰ John Ponet, *A shorte treatise of politike pouuer* (Strasbourg, 1556), sig. C8r–v.

⁶¹ George Gifford, *A short treatise against the Donatists of England, whome we call Brownists* (London, 1590), sigs. A1r–A2v.

It should perhaps already be clear from these examples that, as Peter Lake and others have shown, moderation was a rhetorical weapon: to structure religion upon a spectrum was intrinsically relational, so that every claim to the golden mean depended upon the vilification of extremists on the margins as thieves, poisoners, foxes, torturers, or dragons. But besides the rhetorical aggression of these statements, their real-world violence must also be recognized. Ponet's middle way between too little and too much civil obedience recommended armed insurrection against Mary Tudor. Gifford's middle way between Catholicism and separatism was written at a moment when the separatist leaders Henry Barrow and John Greenwood rotted in prison; Gifford's text both authorized his patron Lord Burghley not to protect the separatists and also helped save Gifford from their grisly fate on the gallows in 1593.

At the heart of arguments for religious moderation were notions of excess and deficiency. On a host of different issues—the sacraments, free will, Christology, and so forth—Catholicism was depicted as lacking some essential quality while Anabaptism contained an excess of that quality, or vice versa. So, for instance, in the mid-Tudor period many Reformed authors attacked the Anabaptist belief in the so-called celestial flesh of Christ—the idea that Christ did not take his body from Mary or other corrupt humanity but brought it with him from heaven—as effectively denying that “Christ is come in the flesh.” By contrast, those same authors attacked Roman Catholics for their “carnal understanding” of Christ's presence in the sacrament. On one side was too much emphasis on the spiritual, and on the other side too much emphasis on the carnal; true religion lay in the *via media*.⁶² A more general notion of excess and deficiency, adopted from Plutarch and others, was that true religion was a middle way between superstition and irreligion, between too much religion and too little; it was precisely the notion of excess that put the “super” in “superstition.” So, for instance, Richard Hooker associated superstition with “superfluity in religion,” which he took to be the “contrary hand” from atheism.⁶³ Again, all these claims to religious moderation were quite plainly attacks upon what they counted as extremes; because moderation was a relative understanding of virtue, the centrality of one position implied the marginality of others.

This framework of excess and deficiency suggests a more general model for how and why moderation was employed in some circumstance in preference to binary antitheses: it was an argument for limitation, an attempt to apply brakes to religious change. This braking was necessary for nearly all early modern reformers at different polemical moments, and indeed Roland Bainton long ago suggested that every reform movement inevitably describes itself as a *via media* between the body they are reforming and “an unstable fringe” pushing for more.⁶⁴ Erasmus imagined himself between Rome and Luther and argued, “The wise navigator . . . steers a middle course between two evils.” Luther sought to “stay in the middle road”

⁶² I. B., *A bryefe and plaine declaracion of certayne sente[n]ces in this litle booke folowing to satisfie the consciences of them that haue iudged me therby to be a fauourer of the Anabaptistes* (London, 1547), sigs. B1r and B8r-v.

⁶³ Richard Hooker, *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker (WRH)*, ed. W. Speed Hill, 7 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1977–98), 2:27–8 (V, 3.1–3.2).

⁶⁴ Bainton, “Luther and the *Via Media* at the Marburg Colloquy,” in *Studies on the Reformation* (Boston, 1963), 46–47.

between Rome and Huldrych Zwingli on the Eucharist.⁶⁵ The Strasbourg radical Fridolin Meygar believed that the Anabaptists were “a middle way between the papacy and Luther,” while the spiritualist Anabaptist Caspar Schwenckfeld described his movement as a middle way in sacramental theology.⁶⁶ The whole history of the Reformation can productively be read as a history of attempts to stop religious change as much as attempts to produce change. But crucially, these attempts were closely associated with governance: within orderly Reformations, moderation meant calling upon the authority of ministers or magistrates to moderate the unbridled passions of those unwilling or unable to moderate themselves.

Of course, the application of brakes necessarily generates heat, and when the state applied those brakes it could produce enough heat to burn people. The clearest example occurred on 30 July 1540, when Henry VIII simultaneously executed three Protestants for heresy and three Catholics for treason as a material representation of his government’s religious moderation. The ostensible rationale for this *via media* had been provided on 12 April 1540, when Thomas Cromwell announced the king’s agenda in a speech to parliament:

The rashness and licentiousness of some, and the inveterate superstition and stiffness of others in the ancient corruptions, had raised great dissensions to the sad regret of all good Christians. Some were called papists, others heretics; which bitterness of spirit seemed the more strange, since now the holy scriptures, by the king’s great care of his people, were in all their hands in a language which they understood. But these were grossly perverted by both sides, who studied rather to justify their passions out of them than to direct their belief by them. The king leaned neither to the right nor to the left hand, neither to the one nor the other party, but set the pure and sincere doctrine of the Christian faith only before his eyes, and therefore was now resolved to have this set forth to his subjects without any corrupt mixtures.⁶⁷

External moderation was needed here precisely to restrain the “passions” of both sides, a moderation inseparable from coercive violence. This was why the only solution to England’s religious crisis was a settlement dictated by the government, refusing any “corrupt mixtures” from either side: when Cromwell condemned the “bitterness of spirit” with which people called each other “heretic” and “papist,” he implied that the government’s own continuing policy of condemning people to death for heresy and papistry was not excess but moderation. As a statement of the king’s desire for a *via media*, then, it is worth noting how aggressive this statement was, managing in a brief paragraph to attack virtually everyone in England as either licentious or superstitious. The middle way, in this view, was wide enough only to encompass Henry VIII’s own rapidly expanding person, and it should be no surprise that its lessons were written in blood. Moderation was governance, and governance was moderation.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Tom Brady, “Architect of Persecution: Jacob Sturm and the Fall of the Sects at Strasbourg,” in his *Communities, Politics and Reformation in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, 1998), 137; David Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings: From Geiler von Kaysersberg to Theodore Beza*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2001), 134.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Stanford Lehmborg, *The Later Parliaments of Henry VIII, 1536–1547* (Cambridge, 1977), 90. This is a translation of the Latin in the *House of Lords Journal*, 1, 128–29, consulted online at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=30888>. The extant text is probably not a verbatim transcript of the speech.



One thing that made moderation such a ubiquitous polemical weapon was its relativism—there was virtually no position that could not in theory be redescribed as excessive by its enemies in defense of their own moderation—and occasionally observers noted what a dangerous chameleon the *via media* turned out to be. The Anglican royalist writer Richard Perrinchief, for instance, noted with exasperation in his *Samaritanism* (1664) that without some pure scale on which to measure moderation, “it is in the power of any man to declare and denominate a thing extreme, by his own act of extremely departing from it, as easily as it is in his power, by turning himself about, to cause a thing to stand to the left or right hand.” Perrinchief thus eloquently condemned the all-too-easy politics of moderation:

Unless therefore men shall first agree upon a rule and standard to measure opinions and actions and accusations, besides what is famed or defamed for extreme, it is vain and foolish to talk of moderation or extreme. . . . For first, Judaism may be said to be a mean between Mahometism and Christianity; popery a mean between Judaism and Socinianism; and the English Reformation a mean between popery and puritanism. And, if we must be forced to further moderation still, Independency will be found a mean between Presbyterianism and Episcopal government, as Presbyterianism is a mean between Episcopacy and Independency, and Independency is a mean between Presbytery and Anabaptism, and Anabaptism a mean between Independency and Quakerism, and so on, til the wit of man shall be able to invent no more extremes.⁶⁸

Despite this relativism, however, it is not my claim that moderation was significant merely because everyone used it to attack whomever they despised. Rather, claims to moderation proved so significant precisely because the Reformation in England, arguably more than anywhere else, was always at heart about governance, and governance *was* moderation. That is, the English Reformation became identified with moderation and the *via media* not because it was incomplete, compromised, or reasonable, but because it was so very governmental. Over the century and a half between the break with Rome and the statutory normalization of limited (that is to say, moderate) religious toleration, the conflicting middle ways and golden means canvassed by English religious controversialists were part and parcel of a debate about how the church should be governed. While different participants had vastly different views of how and when order should be enforced, they agreed that governance itself—from the Royal Supremacy to Presbyterian discipline to democratic votes of excommunication by Congregationalist brethren—was the essence of moderation, limiting or controlling the centrifugal force of human corruption within the church.

Ecclesiological debates, like debates over civil government, were saturated with the language of Aristotelian political theory, sometimes stressing the mixture or balance of estates as a species of moderation, sometimes praising aristocracy in the church as a middle way between monarchy and democracy, sometimes stressing the need for a middle way between tyranny and anarchy in the ecclesiastical polity. To begin with Elizabeth’s reign, the conformist John Bridges argued that gov-

⁶⁸ Richard Perrinchief, *Samaritanism, or A treatise of comprehending, compounding and tolerating several religions in one church* (London, 1664), 12–13.

ernment by bishops was “*in medio*” between Presbyterian “confusion” on the one hand and the “tyranny” of Roman Antichrist on the other hand, a “mediocrity of justice between *minus* and *nimum*.”⁶⁹ The Presbyterians insisted that all ministers were equal and that any superiority of one over another was popish tyranny; for Bridges, by contrast, the problem with the papacy was not superiority per se but “excessive superiority,” and as long as bishops maintained authority over their ministers without claiming universal authority it was no tyranny but moderation.⁷⁰ Indeed, episcopal authority *was* moderation, the capacity to moderate schism or error, hence the Reformed Church “confutes the immoderate pride of the pope, but denieth not a moderate superiority in the ministry.” “Moderate superiority” here meant simultaneously a limited superiority and a coercive superiority, the authority to moderate the ministry in their dioceses but not the “unbridled tyranny” or unlimited authority to govern all the world claimed by the pope.⁷¹

Elizabethan conformists also sometimes used the language of mixed estates and the necessity of the bishops to balance anarchic and tyrannical tendencies in the church. Richard Hooker, for instance, argued that in the church, as in the state, “peace and justice are maintained by keeping all estates as it were in balance” and hence “as the whole body politic wherein we live should be for strength’s sake a threefold cable, consisting of the king as a supreme head over all, of peers and nobles under him, and of the people under them; so likewise, that is in this conjunction of states, the second wreath of that cable should, for important respects, consist of the lords spiritual as temporal.” This led directly to an extraordinary panegyric to episcopal rule as the essence of moderation in the Christian commonwealth: “Prelacy, the temperature of excess in all estates, the glue and solder of the public weal, the ligament which tieth and connecteth the limbs of the body politic each to each other.”⁷²

After 1640 the importance of aristocracy in the church became a leitmotif of episcopalianism. Sir Thomas Aston in 1641 described the bishops as “the ballast which have poised the barks of monarchy to sail safely in the sea of the vulgar, whose piety and wisdom first prescribed the medium twixt tyranny and anarchy. Till bishops helped to reduce the unbounded wills of princes to the limits of laws, kings were tyrants; and wherever they are not, there ever follows a popular [government] (which is worse than a tyranny).”⁷³ Conformists could also use this line to defend episcopacy while denouncing the excesses of particular bishops. In 1640, for instance, the transplanted Huguenot Pierre du Moulin, brandishing his newly minted doctorate in divinity from Cambridge, defended modified episcopacy in terms that bitterly condemned Archbishop Laud: “The government of the Church ought to be aristocratical to avoid the two extremities of democratical confusion and monarchical absoluteness, both condemned by the word of God. But our bishops have made episcopacy purely monarchical, whatsoever they pretend to the contrary. The solitary and independent power of the bishops I take to be the cause

⁶⁹ John Bridges, *A defence of the government established in the Church of Englande* (London, 1587), 80.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 321, 324.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 346–48. See also 285 for a discussion of “moderate order.”

⁷² *WRH*, 3:394 (VIII, 6.7), 3:261–63 (VII, 18.10–18.12). See Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans?* 218–19.

⁷³ Thomas Aston, *A remonstrance, against presbitery* (London, 1641), sig. *1v.

of all our diseases.”⁷⁴ The Anglican royalist John Bramhall, responding to Catholic attacks on the Church of England in 1656, defended episcopacy: “A tyranny and an anarchy are the two extremes. The Church may shake off tyranny and yet not vanish into a pure anarchy, nor the frame thereof be utterly dissolved. . . . Between a tyranny and an anarchy, there is an Aristocracy, which was the ancient regimen of the Church; they know no monarch but Christ their spiritual king.”⁷⁵ As Francis Oakley has shown, the idea of an essentially aristocratic church, conceived as an ecclesiological middle way, was inherited from the Catholic conciliarist tradition.⁷⁶

Puritans, by contrast, tended to argue about the relative roles of democratic and aristocratic elements within the church, and while it has been argued that the language of mixed government disappeared from puritan polemic after 1642, this is plainly untrue in the controversy over church government.⁷⁷ To see this controversy in motion, it is useful to follow one debate over ecclesiological moderation between Presbyterians and Independents during the Civil War. Around New Year’s Day 1644, with the Westminster Assembly poised to create a full Presbyterian settlement for the Church of England, five Independent ministers led by Thomas Goodwin submitted to parliament (and printed for a public audience) *An apologeticall narration, humbly submitted to the Honourable Houses of Parliament*.⁷⁸ After describing how they came to reject both Presbyterianism as quasi-popish tyranny and Brownism as tantamount to Anabaptism or religious anarchy, they confidently announced that they “believe the truth to lie and consist in a middle way betwixt that which is falsely charged on us, Brownism, and that which is the contention of these times, the authoritative presbyteriall government.”⁷⁹ This Independent *via media* was further explicated when two of the “Apologists,” Thomas Goodwin and Philip Nye, wrote a long foreword to a manifesto of Congregationalism by the New England minister John Cotton, *The keyes of the kingdom of heaven* (1644). Goodwin and Nye announced, “As for ourselves, we are yet neither afraid nor ashamed to make profession (in the midst of all the high waves on both sides dashing on us) that the substance of this brief extract from the author’s larger discourse is that very middle way (which in our *Apology* we did in the general intimate and intend) between that which is called Brownism and the Presbyteriall

⁷⁴ British Library Harleian MS 1769, fol. 87v. From a document entitled “Dr Moulyn his opinion to one of the knights of the parliam’ for Lancshiere concerninge Episcopacye 1640.”

⁷⁵ John Bramhall, *A replication to the Bishop of Chalcedon his Survey of the Vindication of the Church of England* (London, 1656), sig. Dd3v.

⁷⁶ Francis Oakley, *The Conciliarist Tradition: Constitutionalism in the Catholic Church, 1300–1870* (Oxford, 2003), 69–70, 239–40, and *passim*.

⁷⁷ Michael Mendle, *Dangerous Positions: Mixed Government, the Estates of the Realm, and the Making of the Answer to the XIX Propositions* (University, AL, 1985), chaps. 7 and 8. For puritan debates on these issues in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, see Mendle, *Dangerous Positions*, chap. 4; Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans?* chaps. 1 and 2; Stephen Brachlow, *The Communion of Saints: Radical Puritan and Separatist Ecclesiology, 1570–1625* (Oxford, 1988), chap. 5. See also the forthcoming works of Polly Ha and Michael Winship.

⁷⁸ On the politics of the *Apologeticall narration*, see John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution* (Woodbridge, 2006); Ann Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford, 2004).

⁷⁹ Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, Sidrach Simpson, Jeremiah Burroughes, and William Bridge, *An apologeticall narration, humbly submitted to the Honourable Houses of Parliament* (London, 1643), 24. This book was published either in the final week of December 1643 or the first week of January 1644.

government as it is practiced.”⁸⁰ They particularly stressed moderation in its Aristotelian or Polybian constitutional sense of balancing democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy in a mixed ecclesiastical polity. Presbyterianism, like popery and episcopacy, was a form of tyranny in the church, using unscriptural synods and assemblies to “swallow up not only the interests of the people, but even the votes of the Elders.” On the other side, Brownism pushed the authority of the people too far: “It was the unhappiness of those who first in these latter times revived this plea of the people’s right, to err on the other extreme . . . by laying the plea and claim on their behalf unto the whole power; and that the elders set over them did but exercise that power for them, which was properly theirs, and which Christ had (as they contended) radically and originally estated in the people only.” The Independent middle way, then, was to balance the power of the people and the elders in each congregation, and to disallow any claims of synods or national assemblies to tyrannical jurisdiction over them. Individual congregations might choose to associate with other congregations, but “each single congregation . . . is endowed with a Charter to be a body politic of Christ.”⁸¹

This Independent vision of the *via media* provoked a series of bitter Presbyterian rebukes offering their own versions of the middle way. To take just two examples: first, Alexander Forbes wrote *An anatomy of independency, or A briefe commentary and moderate discourse upon the Apologeticall narration* (1644). Forbes’s “moderate discourse” was a vicious invective, calling for imprisonment of the “Apologetists” because their ecclesiology was in reality “the same with that of the Brownists, to wit, popular government (whatever middle way they tell us of).”⁸² To the extent that Independency was a middle way, Forbes argued cleverly that it was “*medium abnegationis* in respect of Presbyterial, and *medium participationis* in respect of Brownistical government”—in other words, it rejected Presbyterianism while incorporating Brownism, making it really Brownism in disguise rather than a middle way at all.⁸³ Independency was anarchy in the church rather than a form of government: the Independents were schismatic because they had separated “without seeking or obtaining leave of the state,” their alleged liberty was no more than slavery “to their corrupt appetites and pleasures,” and their claim to have “voluntary” church government rather than no church government was a sham because government was precisely an external bridle that sinful human beings required to tame their fallen wills.⁸⁴ Forbes’s alternative moderation, then, was a middle way between the absence of governance and excessive governance “as episcopal men absurdly understand it”: a national church “even as we rightly understand it to be meant of all the particular congregations making one entire body, which is represented in a national synod.”⁸⁵

A second reply was Daniel Cawdrey’s *Vindiciae clavium* (1646), intended to prove “the middle way (so called) of Independents to be the extreme or by-way

⁸⁰ John Cotton, “To the Reader,” in *The keys of the kingdom of heaven, and power thereof, according to the VVord of God* (London, 1644), sig. A4r.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, sigs. A2r–A4r.

⁸² Alexander Forbes, *An anatomy of independency, or A briefe commentary and moderate discourse upon the Apologeticall narration of Mr Thomas Goodwin and Mr Philip Nye, &c.* (London, 1644), 18.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 4, 5, 6, and 49.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

of the Brownists.”⁸⁶ Cawdrey accepted the Aristotelian argument for a middle way between the “double extreme” of Episcopal tyranny on one side and Brownist popularity on the other, but he argued that the Independents had missed it: Independent government was “democratical” just like the Brownist “extreme” and, hence, tended inevitably to anarchy.⁸⁷ The problem was that the Independents saw the power of the keys lying originally in the whole congregation, who merely delegated that power to elders; this was to give the people not a balancing power against the elders but an effective veto over them. As Cawdrey put it, “Do you mean (as you should if you speak congruously) that the Church receives all power first, then distributes it among the officers respectively? Then (say I) your middle way falls out to be the extreme of the Brownists, who make the people the first subject of all power.”⁸⁸ At several points this argument took an explicitly gendered turn: if authority in the church lay jointly in the congregation, then this included women, which was “an extreme beyond the Brownists, even downright Anabaptistical.”⁸⁹ The Presbyterian middle way, on the contrary, used the elders to balance the powers of clergy and people: just as in the civil English state “the balancing of the privileges of the people and the authority of the magistrate supreme lies in the authority of parliament,” so in the church “the balancing of the brethren’s privileges and the ministers’ authority seems to lie in the ruling elders who are the representatives of the people.” If one were to “take away this ballast or poise of the government” it would become “either absolutely monarchical, and so easily tyrannical, or else democratical, and so liable to anarchy and confusion; as experience shows us, in the papal and episcopal tyranny, and the separatists’ anarchy, the two extremes before observed.”⁹⁰

All of this suggests that the multifaceted struggle over ecclesiology in the Church of England was in a significant sense a battle over the shape of moderation, an exercise in competitive topology intended to establish and defend the middle ground. This was not merely because the moderate center represented virtue and the extremes vice, as Peter Lake and others have correctly argued, but because the moderate center between tyranny and anarchy—properly controlled, reasonable, and balanced—was ipso facto authorized to moderate the “corrupt appetites and pleasures” of extremists. Again, moderation was governance, and governance was moderation.



Another religious battle concerned a different framework for moderation: the idea of *adiaphora* or “things indifferent.” Mainstream Protestant theology held that things neither required nor forbidden by Scripture were indifferent and, hence, might be done or not done depending upon the circumstances. These *adiaphora* were often known as “middle things,” intrinsically moderate within God’s moral order. But crucially, that did not mean that “doing or not doing” was without

⁸⁶ Daniel Cawdrey, *Vindiciae clavium, or A vindication of the keyes of the kingdome of heaven into the hands of the right owners* (London, 1645).

⁸⁷ Ibid., “Epistle to the reader,” sigs. **1v–A3r.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 50 and 67.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 10. See also 5–7, 72–73.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 28.

religious significance; on the contrary, souls could hang in the balance. Indifference merely meant that an action was not always good or evil but rather became good or evil depending upon its worldly context rather than its eternal valuation. The debate thus concerned under what circumstances indifferent actions should be done and, more significantly, who was authorized to decide; in other words, it was a debate over governance. Conformists tended to argue that in *adiaphora* the moderate course of action was to obey the magistrate regardless of one's own beliefs, because in indifferent matters the Pauline injunction to act "decently and in order" rendered conscientious zeal excessive rather than moderate. Puritans tended to argue that moderation meant limiting the use of *adiaphora* to conditions that produced edification, so moderation became a code for the conscientious omission of ceremonies in conditions where they might give offense. Hence the struggle for moderation became a crucial battlefield in English religion, structured precisely around the question of when moderation meant the internal bridle of conscience and when moderation required the external bridle of the magistrate.⁹¹

The locus classicus of the conformist equation between obedience and moderation was Thomas Starkey's *An Exhortation to the people, instructyng them to Unitie and Obedience* (1536).⁹² Starkey claimed repeatedly that the solution to the factional and ideological struggles of the Reformation was an Aristotelian golden mean, about which he waxed lyrical:

By a certain mean, the harmony of this whole world is contained in this natural order and beauty. By a mean, all civil order and policy is maintained in cities and towns with good civility. By a mean, man's mind with all kinds of virtue is garnished, is brought to his natural perfection and light. And by a mean, all true religion, without impiety or superstition, is established and set forth to God's honor and glory in all Christian nations and countries. Yea, and so by a mean, we shall, most Christian people, chiefly avoid this dangerous division grown in among us, by the reason whereof some are judged to be of the new fashion and some of the old.⁹³

Here Starkey's moderation subtly blurred the lines between the internal/moral and the external/legal; the mean between extremes may be the essence of universal harmony, but in the fallen world it depends upon the enforcement of "civil order and policy."

In particular, the Scylla and Charybdis between which the Church of England sailed were "superstition" on one side and "contempt of religion" on the other. "Superstition" meant attributing spiritual necessity to *adiaphora* like pilgrimages or images in churches. "Contempt of religion" meant rejection of all ceremonies,

⁹¹ See Ethan Shagan, "The Battle for Indifference in Elizabethan England," in *Moderate Voices in the European Reformation*, ed. Alec Ryrie and Luc Racaut (Aldershot, 2005), 122–44; Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans?* For a discussion of *adiaphora* that essentially takes the conformist position as genuine moderation, see Bernard Verkamp, *The Indifferent Mean: Adiaphorism in the English Reformation to 1554* (Athens, OH, 1977).

⁹² See Daniel Eppley, *Defending Royal Supremacy and Discerning God's Will in Tudor England* (Aldershot, 2007), chap. 2; Thomas Mayer, *Thomas Starkey and the Commonweal: Humanist Politics and Religion in the Reign of Henry VIII* (Cambridge, 1989), and "Starkey and Melancthon on *Adiaphora*: A Critique of W. Gordon Zeeveld," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 39–50.

⁹³ Thomas Starkey, *An Exhortation to the people, instructyng them to Unitie and Obedience* (London, 1536), sig. Y4r.

laws, and traditions not explicitly required by scripture, and Starkey denounced those who, under pretense of “the liberty of a Christian,” denounced all ceremonies as merely “snares and stays unto weak minds.”⁹⁴ The result of this reasoning was that Starkey dismissed the entire Protestant Reformation as an unnecessary quarrel that had gotten out of hand because of people’s unwillingness to accept the golden mean between superstition and irreligion. In Germany, he wrote, “all their controversy and sedition”—a reference certainly to Lutheranism and possibly to the Peasants’ War—“rose of things in no point necessary to man’s salvation.”⁹⁵ Catholic Germans wrongly “took as God’s law” certain things that were merely “convenient to a certain policy” and “of long time received.” Protestant Germans failed to accept ceremonies and traditions as “things convenient to maintain unity” and hence “by their foolish correction of the abuses in the Church” they created unnecessary divisions.⁹⁶ Transported into an English context, Starkey thus condemned both Catholics who attacked their opponents as heretics, since those of the “new faction” could be “true and obedient persons both to God and their prince,” and Protestants who attacked their opponents as antichristian, since their errors were not “of such moment and weight . . . wherefore we ought to condemn all antiquity and all our forefathers for the ignorance thereof.”⁹⁷

Yet Starkey was no ecumenist, and his argument was not that things indifferent should be left to individual discretion but, rather, that duty in *adiaphora* was owed to the magistrate. Hence in indifferent matters there could be no private conscience; any supposed pangs of conscience on these issues were the result of either superstition or irreligion. The moral standing of *adiaphora* was “left to worldly policy, whereof they take their full authority, by the which . . . they are sometimes good and sometimes ill.” The state, in other words, had authority to make an indifferent thing good or evil by fiat.⁹⁸ Hence “if any private person” were “moved by any scruple of conscience” on any indifferent matter, “if he may neither be brought to knowledge by good instruction, nor yet to just obedience with due admonition, he is not worthy to live in that common policy.” Starkey thus suggested that anyone “whose conscience is troubled with any scrupulosity conceived by anything decreed by common authority” had only one lawful remedy: “to give obedience to such things as be decreed by common authority” so that “all such division as hangeth over our heads, which might bring in confusion into this our country and policy, we shall right well avoid and eschew, living together in due obedience and perfect unity.”⁹⁹ In the name of moderation, then, Starkey effectively denounced any individual conscience in outward religious practice, whether Protestant or Catholic, as extremism.

If we fast-forward two generations, we again see how claims to moderation built upon *adiaphora* functioned as attacks upon “superfluous scrupulosity.”¹⁰⁰ Book 5 of Richard Hooker’s *Of the lawes of ecclesiasticall politie* (1597) was built around the principle of moderation in *adiaphora*, for example, his long discussion of the

⁹⁴ Ibid., sig. F3v.

⁹⁵ Ibid., sig. A4r. A more specific reference to the German Peasants’ War is on sig. H4v.

⁹⁶ Ibid., sig. A4r–v.

⁹⁷ Ibid., sigs. H2r and E1r.

⁹⁸ Ibid., sig. B2v.

⁹⁹ Ibid., sigs. B4v–C3r.

¹⁰⁰ *WRH*, 2:262 (V, 60.7).

ceremonial *bête noire* of puritans, the use of the sign of the cross in baptism. On this issue, the Catholic excess was that “in zeal to the sufferings of Christ they admire too much and over-superstitiously adore the visible sign of his cross.” Yet in response, puritans sought to “cure one contrary by another” and replace an excess with a deficiency: “They think there is not any other way besides universal extirpation to reform superstitious abuses.” For Hooker, this created disorder in the church, for “vices have not only virtues but other vices also opposite unto them.” The way to “remedy the superstitious abuse of things profitable in the Church is not still to abolish utterly the use thereof because not using at all is most opposite to ill usage, but rather if it may be to bring them back to a right perfect and religious usage, which albeit less contrary to the present sore is notwithstanding the better and by many degrees the sound way of recovery.”¹⁰¹

Hooker’s argument that *adiaphora* might lawfully be used or not used was thus emphatically not a call for individuals to choose but, rather, was a call for the lawful use of the ceremony, “scoured from the rust of evil which by some accident hath grown upon it,” as ordained by lawful authorities.¹⁰² For Hooker, uniformity was a virtue in itself, and since there was no uniformity in omission, “it is and must be the Church’s care that all may in outward conformity be one.” For this purpose the “laudable polity” had “established diverse laws” against ceremonial nonconformity, “the moderate severity whereof is a mean both to stay the rest and to reclaim such as heretofore have been led awry.”¹⁰³ Or, as he put it in a later passage, laws requiring ceremonial uniformity were a form of “discipline and moderate severity, which is used either in otherwise correcting or silencing them that trouble and disturb the Church with doctrines which tend unto innovation, it being better that the Church should want altogether the benefit of such men’s labors than endure the mischief of their inconformity to good laws.”¹⁰⁴

In constructing this vision of “moderate severity” Hooker was in part developing the ideas of his colleague John Bridges, who wrote that God had left indifferent ceremonies to our liberty but “hath not in the mean season permitted unto us a varying and unbridled license: but he hath encompassed round about (that I may so term them) lattices (or cross bars) either else hath he indeed so moderated the liberty which he gave, that at length we may by his word esteem what is right.”¹⁰⁵ The point was not only that the authority to determine indifferent ceremonies was by definition moderation—a moderating of licentiousness through public order—but that such authority had to be binding and enforceable or else it was no moderation at all: “What authority at all call ye that . . . when every man may do as he please and is not so much as bounden to hold them or to account of them as they be judged, determined, and disposed, but may dispose of them at his own pleasure without any restraint?”¹⁰⁶

If we turn now to puritan arguments for moderation in *adiaphora*, we find commonplace claims that obedience to conscience rather than obedience to the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 2:301–20 (V, 65).

¹⁰² Ibid., 2:318–19 (V, 65.19).

¹⁰³ Ibid., 2:352 (V, 68.7).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 2:489 (V, 81.11).

¹⁰⁵ Bridges, *A defence*, 671. For Christian liberty applying to churches rather than individuals, see the pithy discussion on 320.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 117.

magistrate could constitute moderation, as long as it did not give offense or create disorder. William Perkins, for instance, sought a middle way between sectarians and conformists: both those who “would have nothing but *mercy, mercy* . . . and consequently to pull down authority, and so in the end to open a door to all confusion, disorder, and to all licentiousness,” and those who would have “nothing in their mouths but *the law, the law*, and *justice, justice*.”¹⁰⁷ The essence of this version of moderation was that the godly could practice nonconformity without disorder precisely because they could moderate themselves: their use of ceremonies was virtuously limited without the external force of the law because of their own election, a position whose antinomian potential mainstream puritans did their best to suppress. As the puritan Thomas Taylor put it, “Such men as have not received grace to moderate themselves, and their affections in their pleasures, are not yet regenerate.”¹⁰⁸ But crucially, this puritan argument for internal or self-moderation simultaneously authorized puritans to moderate those ungodly subjects whose natural licentiousness and proclivity to sin was not properly tempered by regeneration. Moderation, then, was the core of the habitual puritan argument that while ceremonial nonconformity was legitimate for the godly, moral purity and doctrinal orthodoxy must be preserved with fire and sword. As such, moderation was a powerful puritan argument in the seventeenth century against religious toleration; for puritans as much as conformists, moderation meant governance.

We find some of the most explicit expressions of this framework in the revolutionary decades, when Presbyterians found themselves between Royalists and Independents in a three-way struggle for control of the Church of England. One representative example is *Moderation iustified* (1645), based upon a sermon to the House of Commons by the Presbyterian Thomas Thorowgood. Thorowgood assured his auditors that his text, “Let your moderation be known to all men, the Lord is at hand” (Phil. 4:5), did not refer to “moderation in the sense of politicians and the world, but as it is a Christian grace, and not inconsistent with holy zeal.”¹⁰⁹ It referred particularly to “mediocrity in external things,” in other words *adiaphora*, and Thorowgood stressed that the litmus test of this moderation was not obedience to the state but behaving such that “no man’s eye or conscience is offended.”¹¹⁰ He thus argued that popish ceremonies, however indifferent, could never moderately be practiced because of the offence they gave; papist moderation was really “murderation.”¹¹¹ On the other side of the religious divide, moderation did not mean that “all men’s conceit must be borne with in religion, and everyone suffered in what he supposeth to be the truth,” for toleration was incompatible with peace and unity, which were the essence of moderation.¹¹² Thorowgood drew

¹⁰⁷ William Perkins, *Hepietikeia, or A treatise of Christian equitie and moderation* (London, 1604), sig. A8r–v.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Taylor, *A commentarie vpon the Epistle of S. Paul written to Titus* (Cambridge, 1612), 615.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Thorowgood, *Moderation iustified, and the Lords being at hand emproved* (London, 1645), sig. A2v, 1. For another very explicit example of Presbyterian moderation through persecution, see George Gillespie, *VVholesome severity reconciled with Christian liberty. Or, the true resolution of a present controversie concerning liberty of conscience. Here you have the question stated, the middle way betwixt popish tyrannie and schismatizing liberty approved* (London, 1645).

¹¹⁰ Thorowgood, *Moderation iustified*, 3.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9 and 21.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 11.

his line in the sand: “It is one thing to show moderation to pious, peaceable, and tender consciences; it is another thing to proclaim beforehand toleration to impious, fiery, and unpeaceable opinions. I say no more, but *sic vigilet moderatio, ut non dormiat disciplina*, let moderation be so much awake, that discipline fall not asleep.”¹¹³ One goal of Thorowgood’s moderation, then, was to convince parliament to reconstruct a persecuting national church with proper discipline. But Thorowgood also had another agenda: to convince parliament to enforce a reformation of manners. Thorowgood’s principal complaint was that the nation showed “no moderation or abatement of mirth” despite the continuing Civil War, and if the nation could not moderate itself it fell to the government to moderate it.¹¹⁴ In particular, because his sermon was preached on December 25, he condemned the ceremonial excesses of “Christmas Day (as it is yet named).”¹¹⁵ He admitted that some of his critics would think the abolition of Christmas “extreme excess” rather than moderation, but he turned the tables on them by denouncing the celebration of Christmas as true extremism—“the extreme forgetfulness of Christ in those days of Christ, the extreme excess of carnal and sensual delights.”¹¹⁶ The second goal of Thorowgood’s moderation, then, was the eradication of Christmas, to moderate the passions of the people.

The Presbyterian Josiah Hunter made further arguments against toleration in his *Loves companion, or A short treatise of the nature, necessity, and advantages of moderation* (1656). Hunter made indifference the centerpiece of his moderation: “I say, a moderate man is not lukewarm in those things wherein God’s glory is concerned; otherwise, if the things be indifferent, he is also indifferent, and where the thing is neither good nor evil, he is neither hot nor cold. But in matters of weight and importance, there is none more zealous than he.”¹¹⁷ The real test for moderation, then, was not offending weaker brethren: “Moderation . . . is a grace whereby we are enabled in all quarrels, causes, and conditions so to carry ourselves as not to offend God or give any unjust offense to men.”¹¹⁸ As such, it was never moderate to tolerate popery, Anabaptism, Judaism, or Arminianism; these opinions were by nature “immoderate unsettledness,” and (here quoting Thomas Fuller) moderation “is not an halting between two opinions when the thorough believing of one of them is necessary unto salvation.” As he put it later, “where there is a toleration, I cannot see how the scum can be purged out,” and he explicitly endorsed capital punishment for heretics at a historical moment when such executions had long since ceased.¹¹⁹ Yet interestingly, Hunter also stressed that even among the godly, most people, by virtue of their status as subjects rather than magistrates, were properly recipients rather than authors of moderation. He hence argued for a middle way in *adiaphora* between “cowardice” and “turbulency” in which moderation meant the restraint of unofficial voices in church and state: “Contrary to this moderation is turbulency in actions, and that is, briefly, when men, 1. Will be stepping beyond the bounds of their lawful callings, invading the

¹¹³ Ibid., 15.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., sig. A2v and 18.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 17–19, 25.

¹¹⁷ Hunter, *Loves companion*, 8.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 12.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 10–13.

magistracy or ministry, and attempting to reform abuses and corruptions in Church and State when they have no lawful call to it. . . . 2ly, as he is turbulent who goes beyond his calling, so he that carries himself turbulently in his calling, opposing government whether in Church or State settled by authority, sowing divisions. . . . The moderate man meddles little with civil government.”¹²⁰



The violence of the *via media* is ubiquitous in early modern English texts. The essence of moderation was restraint; hence in emblem books the visual signifier of moderation was the bridle, the instrument of civilized power upon unruly and uncivilized nature.¹²¹ Yet in a Protestant religious context, where original sin cast such a long shadow upon human morality, this restraint was constantly externalized: human beings naturally tended to sinful excesses, whether coded popish or Anabaptist; hence the *via media* required the coercive power of ministers and magistrates. It was in this vein that Thomas Thorowgood argued, “Moderation is a gracious and an acceptable virtue. . . . it offers a kind of violence upon men’s affections before they be aware.”¹²² Other texts offered other metaphors for this violence. A 1640 puritan ballad called *The lofty bishop, the lazy Brownist, and the loyall author* offered a *via media* between the bishops and the radicals: “The Brownists’ noses want a ring / (to draw them with a rope) / The Prelates’ wings do cutting need / (lest they fly to the pope).”¹²³ William Laud offered more grotesque imagery for moderation when he preached in 1626 how the psalm *Laetatus sum*, a psalm “for the peace of the Church,” was formerly sung by the Jews on the “day of the circumcision”: “Peace can neither be had nor held long unless there be a circumcision and a paring off round about of heated and unruly affections in the handling of differences. And there must be a circumcision and a paring off of foolish and unlearned questions . . . such as are fitter to engender strife than godliness.”¹²⁴

The result was a logic of the middle way in which interventions of authority (whether lawful or self-proclaimed) in religion, no matter how coercive, constituted moderation of the “unruly affections” of subjects. Thus the discourse of moderation offered something to Protestants that the discourse of binary oppositions strained with difficulty to provide: the ability not just to start the Reformation but to stop it. Every description of the religious *via media* in effect projected the Reformation itself onto an axis from deficiency to excess. Different axes proposed different criteria for moderation, but in each case the spectrum was structured to define one’s own position not just as reformed but as virtuously limited in its Reformation. The logic of moderation offered, in other words, mechanisms for

¹²⁰ Ibid., 22–28.

¹²¹ George Wither, *A collection of emblemes, ancient and moderne* (London, 1635), 169; Henry Peacham, *Minerua Britanna, or A garden of heroical deuises furnished, and adorned with emblemes* (London, 1612), 93; see also Thorowgood, *Moderation iustified*, 5, for a discussion of the bridle as the “hieroglyphic” of moderation.

¹²² Thorowgood, *Moderation iustified*, 7.

¹²³ *The lofty bishop, the lazy Brownist, and the loyall author* (London, 1640).

¹²⁴ William Scott and James Bliss, eds., *The Works of the Most Reverend Father in God, William Laud*, 7 vols. (Oxford, 1847–60), 1:72–73.

policing orthodoxy in the messy aftermath of the Reformation that the simplistic division of the world into good and evil failed to provide.

The implications of this model are significant, for it disrupts the cozy equation of moderation with peace that lies close to the heart of early modern historiography. It is ubiquitous in discussions of the development of religious pluralism, for example, that moderation and persecution were antithetical frameworks. As we have seen, Stuart Clark argued, “Religious life does not have to be a war of opposites; it eventually tolerated latitude and pluralism.” In a similar vein, Mark Greengrass argued, in reference to the execution of Mary Stuart, that “the voice of the Old Testament was heard all too often in the sixteenth century alongside the voice of moderation.”¹²⁵ John Coffey argued that “although most Christian humanists did not break with the Augustinian assumption that religious coercion was legitimate . . . Erasmus provided the inspiration for both Catholic and Protestant moderates.”¹²⁶ Mark Knights suggested that “the call for moderation had been drowned out by the din of persecution in the early 1680s, but by 1687 the prevailing rhetoric was tolerationist.”¹²⁷ The examples are nearly endless. But the evidence presented here suggests that “pluralism” had its own, very different early modern form, based not upon a plurality of morally equivalent positions but upon a plurality of points on a spectrum from excess to deficiency. Within this pluralism, the search for moderation could be every bit as destructive as the dualist division of the world into good and evil.

Moreover, a broad movement in European historiography in recent years has focused on identifying and privileging ecumenical voices in the Reformation associated with golden means and middle ways.¹²⁸ Within this historiography, scholars wishing to downplay the violence of the European tradition locate historical actors who proclaim the moderate center, and this claim to normative moderation is then given a sort of redemptive status as an antidote to the religious fury of the age. The evidence presented here suggests, on the contrary, that there is an enormous undercurrent of aggression in the English past that remains uncharted because the ideological system authorizing it was not challenged in the Enlightenment like so many other early modern ideologies but rather continues to structure modern ideals of virtue.

Now, let me stress that I am not suggesting that the discourse of moderation caused any sort of violence; cultures throughout history have been capable of prodigious atrocities without reliance upon Aristotle. Rather, I want to argue that all cultures need intellectual frameworks through which to justify themselves, and while many forms of self-justification have come under withering scholarly scrutiny

¹²⁵ Mark Greengrass, “Moderate Voices, Mixed Messages,” in Ryrice and Racaut, *Moderate Voices*, 203.

¹²⁶ John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (Harlow, 2000), 210.

¹²⁷ Mark Knights, “‘Meer religion’ and the ‘Church-State’ of Restoration England: The Impact and Ideology of James II’s Declarations of Indulgence,” in Houston and Pincus, *A Nation Transformed*, 41–70, at 57.

¹²⁸ See, e.g., Zdeněk David, *Finding the Middle Way: The Utraquists’ Liberal Challenge to Rome and Luther* (Baltimore, 2003); Jan Papy, “Lipsius and Marcus Welsler: The Antiquarian’s Life as *Via Media*,” *Bulletin de l’Institut Historique Belge de Rome* 68 (1998): 173–90; Stéphane Gal, “Malaise et Utopie Parlementaires au Temps de la Ligue: Les ‘Moyenneurs’ du Parlement de Dauphine,” *Revue Historique* 303, no. 2 (2001): 403–31; Ryrice and Racaut, *Moderate Voices*.

in recent decades—like arguments for patriarchy, or arguments for natural hierarchy, or indeed arguments for a world divided into polarities of good and evil—claims to moderation have not received the same attention. If moderation was a discourse of power, however, then the very point where scholars have previously imagined early modern violence to end is where our search for that violence must instead begin.