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Bodies and Interests: Toleration and the Political Imagination in the Later Seventeenth Century

Derek Hirst

❧ CONSIDERABLE SCHOLARLY ATTENTION has been devoted to the shift from religious persecution to a measure of toleration in later seventeenth-century England—to the arguments and the extenuations, the sufferings and the compromises. Beyond the more obvious consequences for partisanship, however, little has been said of the meaning of that shift for the understanding of politics.¹ Such reticence is the more surprising since so much of religion was about politics, and vice versa; rethinking the ecclesiastical frame ought to have shifted understandings of politics. And, indeed, controversies over the place of the individual conscience during the period did occasion and shape reflection on how England was constituted and held together. Religious toleration proved central to the democratic vision of Levellers such as John Lilburne, Richard Overton, and William Walwyn, while antipathy to persecuting clerisy drove both the later career of Thomas Hobbes and the early history of Whiggism. Not only did religious fragmentation spark political reflection; there were also those during the Restoration who claimed that it shaped practices of association, too, since (they

1. See, in particular, Mark Goldie, “The Theory of Religious Intolerance in Restoration England,” in Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan I. Israel, and Nicholas Tyacke, eds., *From Persecution to Toleration: the Glorious Revolution and Religion in England* (Oxford, 1991), 331–68; John Coffey, *Persecution to Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (Harlow, U.K., 2000); Douglas R. Lacey, *Dissent and Parliamentary Politics in England* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1969); Frank Bate, *The Declaration of Indulgence, 1672* (London, 1908); Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1978–95), vol. 1; John Spurr, *England in the 1670s* (Oxford, 2000), 227–40; G. R. Cragg, *Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution, 1660–1688* (Cambridge, 1957); and the essays in Tim Harris, Paul Seaward, and Mark Goldie, eds., *The Politics of Religion in Restoration England* (Oxford, 1990). For some of the main currents in political thought, see esp. *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450–1700*, ed. J. H. Burns with Mark Goldie (Cambridge and New York, 1991); and Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories* (Cambridge, 1979), and *Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651* (Cambridge, 1993). In citations of seventeenth-century works below, the city of publication is London.

alleged) coffeehouses and conventicles, sociability and dissent, were synonymous.² And as the case of Hobbes suggests, there were forms of social cement more robust than mere sociability; these, too, could not be separated from religion: some both inside and outside Parliament in 1668 claimed that only standing armies ensured the cohesion of tolerationist states.³ Such speculations varied widely, but what they had in common was a departure from old ways of thinking about a body politic as possessing natural and normative unity.

If that were the general pattern the story would be a simple one, a story of a direct and causal relationship between religious dissidence and the articulation of new forms and images of political union. But there are episodes that indicate a less straightforward trajectory, and seem too to bear out those scholars who habitually couple “mere” with “rhetoric,” and who see figures of speech as simply instrumental. The younger Sir Henry Vane’s famous “cloudiness” may shroud many of his expository twists and turns, but not his recovery of a body politic amid the fractures and fissures of revolution. In *A Healing Question* (1656), his manifesto in the name of godly conscience and godly remnant and against single-person rule, Vane repeatedly acclaims “the good Party,” its representatives standing for “the whole Body, . . . flesh of their flesh, and bone of their bone,” its members’ actions, “proceeding from hearts sincerely affected to the cause, creat[ing] in them a right to be of an Incorporation and Society by themselves.”⁴ That organic claim, urged by one who was as solitary in his politics as he was in his religion, is perhaps no more disconcerting than John Dryden’s use and disuse of organic figures during the Exclusion Crisis. In *Religio Laici* (1682), his own profession of faith written at the end of that crisis, Dryden appears as cool and detached as he seems when in such plays as *The Indian Emperor* (1665) and *Tyrannick Love* (1669) he skewers religious coercion; and in these plays he had little to say of the body, except as a site of suffering. On the other hand, in the prefaces to several works written around 1680 he exploited all the body politic’s potential for the grotesque as he excoriated the diseased members and verminous carcasses of dissidents and prescribed amputation. Such performances cast an unsteady light on the fortunes of what had for so long been the dominant political discourse. For Vane and for Dryden at these moments, the body politic appears a rhetorical convenience to be deployed when as partisans they sought either to advance claims to inclusiveness and solidity or to vilify and exclude.

But the discourse of the body politic in the controversies over conscience offers more than a catalogue of opportunism and special pleading. Studying the way that the

2. Richard Tuck, “The Civil Religion of Thomas Hobbes,” and Mark Goldie, “Priestcraft and the Birth of Whiggism,” in Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Political Discourse in Early-Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1993), 120–38, 302–20; see also, from the same volume, Lawrence E. Klein, “Shaftesbury, Politeness, and the Politics of Religion,” 283–301.

3. *The Diary of John Milward*, ed. Caroline Robbins (Cambridge, 1938), 215, 216, 218–19, 326; *A Letter to a Member of this Present Parliament, for Liberty of Conscience* (1668), 9; Richard Perrinchief, *Indulgence not Justified, being A Continuation of the Discourse of Toleration* (1668), 49–51. In due course England came to exemplify such warnings—as it had in the 1650s—when the 1689 Toleration Act was swiftly followed by the expansion of the army.

4. Sir Henry Vane, *A Healing Question* (1656), 17, 8–9, and throughout.

organic metaphor actually worked in and across a particular controversy, rather than sampling impressionistically across the whole cultural field, allows us to see precisely what it offered and what—in comparison with its competitors—it failed to offer; recognizing these alternatives allows us to see what is too often ignored: that its users made choices. Those choices, idiosyncratic or uncomfortable as they may individually have been, together constituted patterns. The organic metaphor did lose something of its hold in the later seventeenth century, and it may be tempting to attribute that weakening to the increasing disenchantment of the world, characteristic of the early Enlightenment, of which so many scholars have written. However, in the field of conscience at least, the displacement of the Renaissance's organic visions by the passions and the interests of the early Enlightenment fits awkwardly into the legend of progress. The expansion of commerce certainly played a part in the story, but so did individual texts, as events as well as registers, and so, too, did politics and partisanship. It is the purpose of this essay to explore both the patterns and the idiosyncrasies in the discourse of the body politic, the better to understand the impact of religious division on the political imagination.



Despite the blow dealt in 1649, the body politic was blessed with a strong constitution that seemed restored to new vigor in 1660.⁵ Many, perhaps most, of those who had lived through the disorders of the 1640s and 1650s had been reinforced in their conviction that dissidence led only to disunity, and that disunity threatened the fabric of the social order—indeed, the life of society. Two ancient histories underlay the lesson taught by England's recent history. Not only had Aristotle been a zoologist as well as a political thinker, but Saint Paul had cast the community of believers as “the body of Christ.”⁶ The convergence was the more powerful since both these sources melded the organic and the patriarchal: in the early chapters of *The Politics* Aristotle slips repeatedly between arguments about animals and plants and assumptions about fathers,

5. Fittingly, much panegyric energy was expended on the fecund and pleasurable union of national body and returning king; see N. Jose, *Ideas of the Restoration in English Literature, 1660–1671* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), 41–42; Gerald MacLean, “Literature, Culture, and Society in Restoration England,” in MacLean, ed., *Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration: Literature, Drama, History* (Cambridge, 1995), 18–21. For a more wide-ranging discussion of Charles's body, see Paul Hammond, “The King's Two Bodies: Representations of Charles II,” in Jeremy Black and Jeremy Gregory, eds., *Culture, Politics, and Society in Britain, 1660–1800* (Manchester, 1991), 13–48; the organic figure continued to provide a happy motif for assessing royal bodies, their comings and goings, their doings and debauches, well into the modern period. Certain other usages possessed equal longevity. Their legally corporate status ensured that, whatever their internal fissures, boroughs long continued to be celebrated as bodies politic; more generally, in the localities the body politic provided a ready resource for those eager to gain sympathy for the hard-luck stories to which its inescapable vaunt of interdependency was so well suited; Paul Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic: Partisan Politics in England's Towns, 1650–1730* (Cambridge, 1998). For a virtuoso example of bodily special pleading, see the response of York corporation in 1660 to Sir Thomas Widdrington's offer to publish a civic history; Joan Thirsk and J. P. Cooper, eds., *Seventeenth-Century Economic Documents* (Oxford, 1972), 373–75.

6. 1 Corinthians 12, esp. verse 27.

while the New Testament's grafting of a story of body and blood, as well as spirit, onto one of patriarchy needs no exposition. That overlaying was given local and circumstantial point at the Reformation when, as John Coffey has reminded us, "the Christian community and the national population were to be coterminous," on the model of ancient Israel. The model took some time to lose its allure.⁷

Organic imagery resounded on the public occasions of Restoration England. In set-piece orations—from the throne to both Houses of Parliament at the opening and close of sessions, and to the king from the Speaker of the Commons as he presented legislation for royal approval—the politics of figures of speech were declared. Addressing both Houses in 1675, Lord Keeper Finch reflected on England's recent troubles and its present ills, which he blamed on those who denied to the body politic its singular identity: "Away with those ill-meant Distinctions between . . . the Natural and the Politic capacity."⁸ The body politic was united in the physical body of the king, whose call for obedience made all one. Although the king himself was more than usually indulgent, many of his servants were firm persecutors, their zeal resting not only on vengefulness but also on theological premises and on a cohesive and of course polemical vision of the nation. As Mark Goldie has put it, the parliamentary sustainers of the Church of England cast that church as "indefectibly the whole commonwealth at prayer," and their holy commonwealth was to be a body politic with teeth.⁹ Reacting against the royal policy of indulgence to tender consciences, the Speaker of the Commons in 1662 urged "the Forms of Common Prayer, which as Members of the public Body of Christ's Church were enjoined us," and immediately warned that "our late Wounds are yet but green, and possibly, before the Body Politic be well purged, may incline to break out again." The following year, more pointedly, he counseled repression: "true Religion is the Band of Society, the Sinews that hold fast the Joints of the Body Politic. If they be broken, the Body must be dismembered." During the same conservative backlash that began the new reign, Lord Chancellor Clarendon, another stalwart of the Church of England, located the cause of true religion in the body in terms that affirmed the vitality and vibrancy of the metaphoric structure. Confronting deviancy in the murmuring libels of dissident sects, he looked to sickness, sex, and gender for the cause, to "the English disease," to Achitophels who "ravish" the laws, to the effeminated conscience.¹⁰ Properly constituted, the body politic—at this point of course always male, always patriarchal¹¹—stood united beneath king and church. The

7. John Coffey, "Puritanism and Liberty Revisited: The Case for Toleration in the English Revolution," *Historical Journal* 41 (1998): 971–72. For a later example, see Stillingfleet's assertion that "upon the decay of the *Roman Empire*, [nations] resumed their just right of government to themselves, and upon owning Christianity, incorporated into one Christian Society, under the same Common Ties and Rules of Order and Government"; Stillingfleet, *The Mischief of Separation* (1680), 16.

8. *Lords Journals* 13:39.

9. Goldie, "Priestcraft and the Birth of True Whiggism," 212. Mystification of the body politic was not a Cavalier preserve, for as Paul Halliday has pointed out, William Sheppard, Cromwell's favorite law reformer, allowed urban corporations a touch of divinity; Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic*, 29.

10. *Lords Journals* 11:470–71, 475, 578, 700.

11. The assumptions were affirmed even as they were challenged in one key regard by the Duchess of Newcastle, who in her utopia imagined eunuchs removed from the distractions and disturbances of wives and children, (ad)ministering the unitary body politic and the unitary church from whose

argument was driven home ad nauseam in the ballads and broadsheets that in 1660 celebrated the fall of the eponymous Rump, with its rogues' gallery of libidinous usurpers and she-sainted tub-preachers.¹²

Anglican clergy after the Restoration needed no prompting from the laity, and just as determinedly explored the connection of body, state, and church. In sermons, pamphlets, and treatises they browbeat their enemies and stirred their friends to vigilance with appeals, through metaphor, to the emotions and the imagination quite as much as to Scripture or reason.¹³ Richard Perrinchief, a loyal editor of the writings of the "martyred" Charles I, insisted that claimants to conscience warranted no privilege, no immunity to retribution; they were inescapably part of the body politic, indeed, of the body: "they stir up such humours of Wrath, and Malice, which like tough obstructions in the veins, and vessels of our bodies, hinder the current of blood and spirits: so do these hinder that supply of spiritual nourishment that one Member should afford unto another." Here the positive balanced the negative: reciprocal nourishment was the rule, for God "hath so dispersed the gifts of his Spirit . . . that the Members of his Body might have the same dependance, the same benefits as one member of a natural Body hath from another." But when the flow was obstructed and broke forth irregularly, the effluvia had to be purged. In 1684 Nathaniel Bisbie, while exhorting local magistrates in East Anglia to persecute, showed how visions of the body lent themselves to thoughts of extrusion as he insisted that the schismatics' challenge to authority "is usually the mother Evil of the Land; the Shore [sewer], the Chanel [gutter] into all which [*sic*] the nasty loathsome draughts of the Land empty themselves."¹⁴

Perhaps the fullest articulation of Anglicanism's organic themes came in a much-reprinted work of the 1680s, *A Resolution of Some Cases of Conscience with respect to Church-Communion*, by William Sherlock, dean of St. Paul's Cathedral.¹⁵

constituent churches women were excluded; Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, *Description of a New World* (1668), 16–18.

12. Alexander Brome, *The Rump, or, An Exact Collection of the Choycest Poems and Songs Relating to the Late Times* (1662); for anal applications, see Mark Jenner, "The Roasting of the Rump: Scatology and the Body Politic in Restoration England," *Past and Present*, no. 177 (2002), 84–120.

13. The theoretical arguments—theological, spiritual, historical—have been carefully analyzed in Goldie, "Theory of Religious Intolerance in Restoration England," 331–68.

14. Richard Perrinchief, *A Discourse of Toleration* (1668), 3, 9; Nathaniel Bisbie, *The Mischiefs of Anarchy in Two Sermons* (1684), 25. Equally graphic was Abraham Wright's characterization of the sects "but as the *Ascarides* bred out of our Bodies, but as Vermine on the Body Ecclesiastick"; Wright, *Anarchie Reviving, or, The Good Old Cause on the Anvile* (1668), 10.

15. William Sherlock, *A Resolution of Some Cases of Conscience with respect to Church-Communion* (1682/3), 4, 10, 12–13, 28: this went through a second edition in 1683 and was included as the leading item in *A Collection of Cases of Conscience*, published by a group of prominent London clergy in 1685. For examples of other sermons on the same theme, see Richard Wroe, *The Beauty of Unity* (1682), preached to the Guild Merchant at Preston; Joshua Richardson, *A Sermon Preach'd before the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London* (1682); and Thomas Smith, *A Sermon Concerning the Doctrine, Unity, and Profession of the Christian Faith* (1682), preached to the University of Oxford. A generation earlier John Pym's half-brother had drawn a very different conclusion from the text: "There is one Body, the Apostle says, and one spirit . . . One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God, and Father of all . . . Here's unity over and over, but this doth not necessarily draw uniformity after it"; Francis Rous, *The Ancient Bounds, or Liberty of Conscience Tenderly Stated* (1645), 61.

Despite the promise of casuistry in its title, Sherlock's tract offered a tightly woven case for the visible church, the Church of England. Linking worship and church organization with the body social and the body physical, Sherlock insisted, "There is but one Church, one Body, one Communion, one Household and Family." Replication of the primal number underscored what was for him the fundamental principle of religious life. The word "unity" runs as a refrain through his work; it led him to admit Roman Catholics, because centripetal, as members of a true church, and to reject Congregationalists, who, though Protestants, were centrifugal. Unity was the governing principle of social life, from the ground up: "in a Body Politick, when Men by any common Charter are United into one Society, they become one common Body . . . every one knows, who understands what it is to be a member of any Society, of a City, or any Inferior Corporation; which consists of Priviledge and Duty." The only associations Sherlock could admit were incorporated, and the conservative implications of that fact are apparent, for the chartered corporation was tightly regulated. Sherlock eagerly drew out the implications and made explicit what Lord Keeper Finch had gestured toward: "What natural Union is in natural Bodies, that Communion is in Bodies Politick, whether Civil or Religious Societies; a member must be vitally united to the Body, before it can perform any natural Action."¹⁶ The ambiguity of the "it" in that final clause—member or body?—can yield but one meaning: without unity there is no life, neither physical nor politic.¹⁷

Sherlock's outrage might tempt us to conclude that the trope of the body politic, premising as it did a fundamental unity, worked inexorably and implacably in the cause of hierarchical order. Such may have been the dreams of Restoration Anglicans. Nevertheless, these expectations were hardly justified by the experience of earlier decades, when the body politic had served quite diverse purposes. Parliament itself famously gave a lead in 1642 with its systematic exploitation of the maxim that the king had two bodies: the natural body, misguided and subject to correction, and the official body, comprehended in the "representative body" of the kingdom that Parliament ex-

16. Sherlock, *Resolution of Some Cases of Conscience*, 4, 10, 12–13, 28; for Sherlock's comparison of the status of Roman Catholicism and of Independency, see his *Letter to Anonymus*, 28. Thomas Hobbes expressed predictable reservations about what was to become the high Anglican position when he termed corporations "worms in the entrails" of the commonwealth; see Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic*, 28. An equally brisk challenge might be heard in the courtier Charles Cotton's poem *The Confinement* (1679), which brings together the two Ciceronian originary virtues of sociability and eloquence in tribute to the Greek poets:

Had they not been, no Cities had been known.
The deepest o'th' Foundations e're was laid,
Was dug by Poets in a rural shade.
They taught the World Civility: from thence,
Each future Corporation did commence.

17. If a dissenter is to be trusted as a source, Sherlock was not alone in such a position, for the dean of Worcester allegedly deemed parricide a less serious crime than withdrawal from the Anglican sacrament: "The one was the killing of a particular person, the other made a breach in the mystical body of Christ"; Robert Wallis, *Or Magna Charta; More News from Rome: Discoursed between a Poor Man and his Wife* (1666); the line quoted is part of the extended title.

pressed and defended. This claim, which allowed the two Houses to stay within the constitutionalist mainstream even while fighting the king, was to be as central to their case for war as was their equally organic claim to a natural right to self-preservation.¹⁸

The malleability of the trope was still more evident in religious affairs. Those who challenged hierarchy and uniformity could find shelter within the organic discourse. Some solutions were exotic enough, and Francis Rous, stepbrother to John Pym and future Speaker of Barebone's Parliament, developed early in the 1620s a sophisticated account of the organic origin of Christians' varying religious commitments in their varying "complexions," by which he meant temperaments in a Galenic scheme.¹⁹ And if conscience had a home in the physical organism, so it did in the social: in 1644 both John Goodwin and his foe in the struggle for liberty of conscience, Thomas Edwards, took it for granted that the socioeconomic lives of the industrious sort who filled the churches were bounded less by individual capacities than by corporate realities, by the halls and assemblies of the London livery companies. Sherlock was to draw unitary conclusions from the corporate environment, but Edwards's warning, "You cannot frame a good argument from Corporations and civill power, to bodies Ecclesiasticall, and spirituall power," suggests his recognition that his contemporaries might base a very different ecclesiology on the corporate realities of urban life.²⁰ A more common recourse was to spiritualize the premise of organic unity. Fresh from victory in the storming of Bristol in 1645, Oliver Cromwell urged the Speaker of the Commons against narrow platforms and creeds, insisting, "All that believe, have the real unity, which is most glorious; because inward, and spiritual, in the Body, and to the Head." In this at least he stood close to the antinomian army chaplain John Saltmarsh, for whom "Christ is an Head, but not an Head to every body . . . he is a pure, holy glorious Head in his Gospel-dispensation, and will have a body suitably pure."²¹

However attractive their readings, Cromwell and Saltmarsh were probably atypical among the saints in resting content with a merely spiritual *corpus mysticum*. Many who separated from the ungodly frame of a national church, particularly as millennialism increased, sought community as well as a pure communion and found their warrant in that "body of Christ" of which Saint Paul had spoken. In their compact on the *Mayflower*, the Pilgrims expressly constituted themselves as a body politic, and John Winthrop made similar claims aboard the *Arbella* at the end of the decade.²²

18. See E. E. Sirluck's introduction to the second volume of *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe, 8 vols. (New Haven, Conn., 1953–82); and Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories*.

19. Rous argued that the other main cause of religious difference—custom—also originated in the body; Rous, *The Disease of the Time* (1622), 426–29 (custom), 445–66 (complexion). I am grateful to Sears McGee for pointing me to this source, and for discussions on the theme.

20. Goodwin, *Theomachia*, 31; Thomas Edwards, *Antapologia* (1644), 121, 123.

21. Thomas Carlyle, *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, 2 vols. (New York, 1863), 2:249. Saltmarsh made clear at the close of his work that "Tis by a divine Law that the Church of Christ should be one, but the unity of it doth not consist in the union (or collection) of many that are of the same flock or body, but in the unanimous consent agreement [*sic*] in faith and doctrine"; Saltmarsh, *Smoke in the Temple* (1647), 70, 75.

22. Henry S. Commager, *Documents of American History* (New York, 1934), 15–16; *The Winthrop Papers*, 5 vols. (Boston, 1929–47), 2:231–33, 282–95.

Proponents of the "New England way" continued to nourish the claims of a covenanted body politic, and their leading London supporters, the Independents Thomas Goodwin and Philip Nye, endorsed that posture in their introduction to John Cotton's *The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven* (1644), when they greeted "each single Congregation . . . indowed with a Charter to be a body-politique to Christ."²³

Physical, indeed transoceanic, separation from a national church surely intensified the self-consciousness of those who turned the body politic to purposes new. It was Roger Williams who most fully exploited the physical immediacy of organic discourse, and in the cause of liberty rather than constraint. Urging on Parliament and people the case for toleration in 1644, Williams brutally deconstructed one of the most powerful applications of the body politic, Richard Hooker's fiction of immortal fatherhood, its ancient commitments binding descendants into a common order through mutual incorporation of the generations: "Most Noble Senatours, Your Fathers (whose seats you fill) are mouldred, and mouldring their braines, their tongues, &c. to ashes in the pit of rottenesse."²⁴ Although Williams denied the "bloody tenet" that underlay aspirations to ecclesiastical unity, he worked within the metaphoric frame systematically, and his graphic dilations in both versions of his masterpiece, *The Bloudy Tenent*, on the rape of a "chaste wife" in an "adulterous and polluted bed," as he imagined the "spirituall whoredome and defilement" of the coerced conscience, still possess the power to shock.²⁵ Those who questioned the dominating identification of nation and church could thus find sustenance in the nurturing figure of the body politic. When, in the waning days of the republic, John Milton contemplated the prospect of renewed persecution, he bluntly charged with fornication those who sought to make one body out of the political and the spiritual, God having separated them in His new dispensation.²⁶ Indeed, some in the sects even appreciated the coercive face of the figure when they themselves confronted fragmentation or challenge, especially from women,

23. Richard Mather, *An Apologie of the Churches in New-England for Church-Covenant* (1643), at 22; John Cotton, *The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven* (1644), n.p., "To the Reader"; the assumption of the two Londoners, Nye and Goodwin, that a charter was integral to a body politic suggests that they shared something with that other Londoner, William Sherlock. John Canne, whose millennialist Independency was soon to become clear, revealingly entitled as *Syons Prerogatyve Royal* (1641) his assertion that "every particular congregation" was an "independent body," neatly overlaying the political image of the book's title on a spiritual claim, and folding both within the body politic of Christ.

24. Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent, of Persecution* (1644) in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, ed. R. A. Guild et al., 7 vols. (New York, 1963), 3:7. For Hooker's argument, see book 1, chapter 10, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, in *The Works of Richard Hooker*, ed. W. Speed Hill, 7 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., and Tempe, Ariz., 1977–98), 1:103.

25. *The Bloudy Tenent, of Persecution*, 63–64, also 60; and *The Bloody Tenent yet more bloody* (1652), in *Complete Writings of Williams*, 4:326–28. Compare Henry Robinson's similarly excited *John the Baptist, forerunner of Christ Jesus, or, A necessity for liberty of Conscience* (1644), 106, notably its concluding address to persecutors who "intrude into Gods throne, & in the room of his sacred Ordinances thrustest in daily more and more adulterd off-spring of Antichristian traditions, or the uncleanse conceptions of thy more poluted phancie, by imprisoning, fining, banishing, dismembring, and death; as though these, even according to thine owne carnall principles, were not farre lesse capable of prevailing upon the spirit, then those spirituall which God prescribes to worke upon the body."

26. John Milton, *A Treatise of Civil Power*, in *Complete Prose Works* 7:260.

within their own churches: the Fifth Monarchist Baptist Peter Chamberlen warned against the defilement of the “small body” of his church, while John Bunyan spoke of the need to protect the “body politic” of Christ’s body, the church.²⁷ When, therefore, the Presbyterian Thomas Edwards in *Gangraena* (1646) excoriated sectarian abuse, he was not merely alerting anxious conservatives to a nightmare of dissolution but challenging opponents who believed no less than he in the cohabitation of body and spirit.²⁸

Recognition of the continuing appeal of the language of the body even to radicals of the spirit leaves us better able to understand the circumstance of dissent after the Restoration. The dilemma of Presbyterians, committed in principle to a national church they could not conform to in practice, is well known. The London Presbyterian John Humfrey conceded in 1672 that the king, “in Ecclesiasticals as well as Civils . . . National head,” had the power to compel attendance at parish churches, and made clearer his sense of membership in a national and organic whole when he protested that to bring in popery “were but the committing of a rape or ravishment upon the publick Conscience.” More poignantly, Humfrey’s London colleague John Howe lamented in 1680 for his fellows, “cut off from the whole Body of the Christian community”—which he took to be a national community—“only because they scruple some things . . . We are of that *One Body* which they themselves profess to be of, and desire to be under the conduct and Government of that one Spirit.”²⁹ The perplexity of conscientious dissenters may be clear enough, but only attention to their language and its freight can suggest the depth of that perplexity.



A richer measure of the predicament so many found themselves in when confronted with the spiritual claims of a body politic is provided by John Owen, the most important English dissenter who urged freedom of conscience after the Restoration.³⁰ Writing in 1657 as vice chancellor of Oxford University, with Oliver Cromwell in power and a considerable measure of toleration in place, Owen engaged fully and directly with the figure of the body. These might have been circumstances to quieten misgivings about the place of the godly individual conscience within the nation; nevertheless, Owen

27. Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England, 1500–1720* (London and New York, 1993), 143; and Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992), 45–46.

28. See Ann Hughes, “*Gangraena*” and the *Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford, 2004), for a full exploration of the ground Edwards shared with his foes.

29. John Humfrey, *The Authority of Magistrate (sic) about Religion Discussed* (1672), 21, 23; John Howe, *A Letter written out of the Countrey* (1680), 9–10. John Spurr has noted that as late as 1689 Presbyterians could be found who sought to become “one body with the Church of England”; John Spurr, “Religion in Restoration England,” in Lionel K. J. Glassey, ed., *The Reigns of Charles II and James II and VII* (New York, 1997), 120.

30. In the height of millennial excitement Owen had published *Of Toleration* (published with his *A Sermon preached to the Honourable House of Commons in Parliament Assembled: on Jan. 31 [1649]*) and urged exactly that, a broad toleration rather than the more usual freedom for godly consciences, in the evident belief that the approaching enlightenment would rectify the errors of papists and others.

made clear his intent to talk merely of the body ecclesiastical, not national. On the one side, in all its perversions, stood Rome: "The pope is the head of their church; several nations of Europe are members of it. Have we not seen that head taking his flesh in his teeth, tearing his body and his limbs to pieces?" On the other side, in full bodily health, stood the local voluntary congregations of Owen's fellow-believers, where there are "some rulers, some ruled; some eyes, some hands in this body; some parts visibly comely, some uncomely, upon the account of that variety of gifts and graces which are distributed to them."³¹ Owen could willingly entertain collectivities, and he could imagine different forms of church and their members as physical manifestations of the body spiritual, but critic both of constraint and of the nation's failings as he was, he could not allow the nation even in its Cromwellian form as body.³²

Nor could Owen follow his ally Cromwell into a more purely spiritual discourse of the body. Unlike Cromwell, Owen was committed to a vision of a tangible church, even though he feared the application to it of the language of the body, with all its capacity to draw Christians into false assumptions of collectivity. In hundreds of pages of print, therefore, Owen worried over distinctions and qualifications, and the meaning and application of the corporeal. The collective body was, he contended, purely and simply the mystical body of Christ, the community of believers united in Christ, their only head, through faith and love. To imagine any visible community now as a body, on the model of Israel, "were to overthrow a remarkable difference between the economy of the Old Testament and the New." Talk by the apostle Paul of the body in relation to the primitive churches "is plainly metaphorical." Owen himself was probably more comfortable with the distancing of similitudes than with the immediacy of metaphor, as when he noted that the ungodly who joined Christian churches "are like the hair, nails, and ill humours in a human body." But metaphor inhabited his scriptural sources, and he grew exercised as he tried to defend against pretenders to corporeality. "An organical political body is a thing of another nature. A politic body or commonwealth . . . also is said to be organical on a metaphorical account,—because the officers and members that are in it and over it hold proportion to the more noble parts of the body. Kings are said to be heads."³³ But, he tried to make clear, this relation had its origins in the voluntary choice of laws, not biology; and, indeed, in 1657 he found only association and consent natural: "a confederation and consultation to carry on any design wherein the concernment of individuals doth lie."³⁴ After the Restoration he was not allowed to rest content in such similitudes and voluntarism. Taunted by Simon Patrick, future bishop of Ely, in the great controversy that began in 1668, he backed

31. *The Works of John Owen*, 16 vols. (Edinburgh, 1850–53; reprint ed., Norwich, U.K., 1967), 13:114, 180.

32. Thus, in his follow-up, *Review of the True Nature of Schism* (1657), he insisted, "I deny utterly, that ever we had indeed, whatever men thought, a *nationall church*; for I grant no such thing, as a *nationall church* in the present sense contended about"; *Works of Owen*, 13:272.

33. The crucial text for the argument of this paragraph is Owen's *Of Schism* (1657), reprinted *ibid.*, 13:89–206. The references are to 124–31, 151–52, 176.

34. *Ibid.*, 13:177.

away from his exposed position and made the remarkable concession that “the principle of rule and subjection is natural to us, concreated with us, and indispensably necessary to human society, in all the distinctions it is capable of, and the relations whence those distinctions arise.” Nevertheless, Owen did continue to struggle, and when he confronted the favorite scriptural proof-text of his foes, casting kings as nursing fathers, he balanced his not-so-veiled sally against Charles Stuart as *pater patriae*—“yet we do not desire such nurses as beget the children they nurse”—with expostulations of pious hope and clumsy finger-wagging about “the rules of metaphor.”³⁵



By this point in the century Owen the controversialist was no longer limited to uncomfortable parsing of figures of speech. A new language had become available and was eagerly adopted by those who sought less contested space in which to situate the conscience. Steven Pincus has shown the rapidity with which the notion of a national “interest,” popularized in England with the 1640 publication in translation of the Duc de Rohan’s *Interest of Princes*, had by the 1650s passed into sophisticated calculations of political economy.³⁶ The significance of the shift in vocabulary was not limited to such a calculus. By identifying and urging the ruler’s “interest,” Rohan sought to accommodate the internal divisions, religious and otherwise, that had weakened France and its neighbors. His English readers swiftly applied his prescription to the building of a Protestant “interest” that would divert passions from the domestic broils of the early 1640s to an assault on Catholic foes in Ireland and then on the Continent.³⁷

35. *Truth and Innocence Vindicated* (1669), in *Works of Owen*, 13:373–74, 401–2. Owen here qualified multiply. The “principle of rule and subjection” might be natural, but “arbitrary fictions of ends of government, and what is necessary thereunto, influenced by present interest, and arising from circumstances, confined to one place, time, or nation, are not to be imposed on the nature of government itself, which hath nothing belonging unto it but what inseparably accompanieth mankind as sociable”; and “begetting” was the imposition of false religion. It is, nevertheless, tempting to wonder whether he had read the grotesque scenes of self-engenderment in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Marvell’s *Last Instructions to a Painter* (1667). Francis Rous in 1645 had insisted that while “The Christian Magistrate ought to be a Nursing Father to the Church, to nourish the truth and godliness[.] The begetting Father he is not, that is Christ”; Rous, *Ancient Bounds*, 10.

36. Steven Pincus, “From Holy Cause to Economic Interest: The Study of Population and the Invention of the State,” in Alan Houston and Steven Pincus, eds., *A Nation Transformed: England after the Restoration* (Cambridge, 2001), 272–87; also Steven A. Pincus, “Neither Machiavellian Moment nor Possessive Individualism: Commercial Society and the Defenders of the English Commonwealth,” *American Historical Review* 103 (1998): 705–36.

37. The translation of Henri Duc de Rohan’s treatise was by H. Hunt; there was a second edition in 1641. For examples of its application, see Calybutte Downing, *A Discourse of the False Grounds the Bavarian Party Have Layd . . . With a Discourse of the Interest of England in that Cause* (1641); and Sir William Constantine, *The Interest of England. How it Consists in Unity of the Protestant Religion* (1642). The papers of the emigré reformer William Hartlib through the ensuing two decades are full of proposals for a Protestant peace that seems by the 1650s to have been widely understood in terms of economic expansion. As J. A. W. Gunn noted a generation ago, Rohan’s language was repeatedly invoked by those seeking to understand and to reshape English political alignments in the great moments of division, in 1641–42, in 1647–49 and in 1659–60; see Gunn, *Politics and the Public Interest in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1969), esp. 36–49.

These years may have been prelude to the birth of political economy in England, but more obvious at the time was Rohan's contribution to Protestant polemics, and not only those of a strategic kind. In one of a linked pair of fast sermons to Parliament in 1646, the Presbyterian Simon Ford fiercely located the Protestant "interest" in the defense of the "prophets," the ordained clergy, against sectarian abusers—even as his colleague for the occasion, the Independent Thomas Goodwin, urged a contrasting vision of that interest, liberty of conscience for the saints.³⁸ Goodwin's allies in the sects and in the New Model Army, too, where many saw in the informality of "interest" a way to legitimize the army's obtrusive voice, quickly found that they had available a new and expansive way to think about the ties that bound them to others.³⁹ The Leveller Richard Overton's mixed metaphor of 1645 vividly catches what proved to be a transitional moment in the passage from natural to contingent association: "All the different members being wrapt up in the skin of one constitution, need no stronger obligation, to uphold the whole then their owne Interest."⁴⁰

While interest, no less than the body politic, had multiple applications, there can be no doubt of the speed with which dissidents recognized that gains were to be had in thinking beyond the organic. Reference to the body politic was heard not at all in the debates at Whitehall in late 1648 on the magistrate's power over conscience, though "interest" was repeatedly invoked.⁴¹ But perhaps the most striking demonstration of the value for religious dissidents of understanding society in terms of interest is provided by an unlikely figure, the future Anglican bishop and arch-ceremonialist, Jeremy Taylor, who had the misfortune to run close to heresy on the doctrine of original sin. In his *Treatise of the Liberty of Prophesying*, which appeared in several editions after its 1647 publication, Taylor denounced persecution as part of the erosion of that "public interest . . . of Innocency and public Society," which had characterized the history of Christianity since its earliest centuries.⁴² A decade later, in his sermon at the opening of the Protector's second parliament, Owen caught the changing wind as he coupled anxious parsing of the meaning of the organic in the spiritual sphere with argument of a very different kind. Opposing those who would unite nation and

38. Thomas Goodwin, *The Great Interest of States and Kingdomes* (1646); the paired fast sermon by Simon Ford was not printed, but in the second—and printed—installment of that pronouncement, Ford delivered a splenetic defense of the ordained clergy against some of the very people for whom Goodwin spoke; Simon Ford, *The Great Interest of States and Kingdomes . . . The Second Part* (1646).

39. For recognition, if not explanation, of the appeal of "interest" to the New Model Army, see Mark Kishlansky, "Ideology and Politics in the Parliamentary Armies, 1645–1649," in John Morrill, ed., *Reactions to the English Civil War, 1642–1649* (London, 1982), 163–83; and Jonathan Scott, "The Rapture of Motion: James Harrington's Republicanism," in Phillipson and Skinner, eds., *Political Discourse*, 144.

40. Richard Overton, *The Araignment of Mr. Persecution* (1645), 29.

41. C. H. Firth, ed., *Clarke Papers*, 4 vols. (London, 1891–1901), 2:71–132.

42. Jeremy Taylor, *Theologia Eklektike* (1647), esp. 19; the pagination is identical in the 1652 edition, *A Treatise of the Liberty of Prophesying*. After the Restoration, Quakers looked back hopefully on such claims from one "now a Bishop in Ireland"; Edward Burrough, *The Case of Free Liberty of Conscience in the Exercise of Faith and Religion* (1661), 14; John Sturgeson, *A Plea for Toleration of Opinions and Perswasions in Matters of Religion* (1661), 12–13.

church, he poised the Protestant interest against a persecuting body politic, “the proper interest of the people of God . . . the common interest,” against those who would insist the saints “are not of the body.”⁴³

Not only was interest in the 1640s and beyond taking shape as a convenient bridge between natural and contingent ties and associations; it was also enabling those who urged the Protestant cause to articulate material considerations.⁴⁴ The credit for this striking accommodation should go not just to the famous projecting circle around the émigré William Hartlib, who dreamed of Protestant union and the millennial renewal of a shattered Europe, but also to the economic theorist and religious reformer Henry Robinson. In 1641 Robinson touted the Dutch mercantile example and three years later followed with a tolerationist argument for the Dutch practice of opening doors to the persecuted and the capital and skills they would bring. The claim quickly spread in radical circles. By the time of the Whitehall debates in 1648—that is, long before the beginnings of brutal if instructive competition with the Dutch under the Rump—Hugh Peter, even while declaring that “[t]he interest of England is Religion,” was coupling Dutch economic success with toleration.⁴⁵ Overton’s irenic friend William Walwyn provides a still more suggestive case, both of chronological development and of the drift toward the material. His pleas for the oppressed conscience in 1643–44 had been rife with organic imagery; by the middle of the decade not only was he attuned to pleas of interest but he had also doubtless read enough of the Dutch recipe for success to ask bluntly, “Who can live where he hath not the freedome of his minde, and exercise of his conscience? . . . why he takes his estate, and trade, and family, and removes.”⁴⁶ As a practical rather than an argumentative proposition, Walwyn’s coupling of religious with economic voluntarism probably offered little consolation to religious dissidents in the later years of a civil war, when there was little trade and less security of movement to be had; nonetheless, domestic peace helped to change the economic climate. As Pincus has shown, the capture of commerce and shipping from

43. John Owen, *God’s Work in Founding Zion* (1656), esp. 15, 23, 29–30, 35.

44. This no doubt enhanced the appeal of the term to the army, with its powerful material grievances, in the later 1640s; see n. 39, above.

45. Henry Robinson, *Liberty of Conscience* (1644), 6, and *Englands Safety in Trades Increase* (1641); *Clarke Papers*, 2:89–90. By 1652 Robinson could put the case for commerce and conscience much more confidently. The Dutch, he contended, “finde the advancing Trade to be the onely true State Interest and Pollicy, protected from all Forraign injuries, and enjoy a full liberty of conscience, and by the wise management of their Overseers, have such accommodations and advantages of Trading provided for them to their hand, as that they . . . generally live so comfortably and contentedly, as no Nation does the like”; Robinson, *Certain Proposals in order to the peoples freedome and accommodation in some particulars* (1652), 10. See, too, the Commonwealthsman John Streater’s association of economy and liberty: “Care to increase Manufacturie ought to be had, for that enricheth and civilizeth the people,” in Streater, *A Glympse of that Jewel, Judicial, Just, Preserving Libertie* (1653), 15.

46. *The Writings of William Walwyn*, ed. Jack R. McMichael and Barbara Taft (Athens, Ga., 1989), 80, 83, 85, 100, 120, 140, 200. Although sympathetic to Walwyn’s main goal, John Goodwin was less sanguine: “Many times the situation and conveniency of a mans present dwelling for trade, employment, &c. is such, that he cannot remove, but at the perill of his estate, and ruining himself and his whole family”; Goodwin, *Theomachia* (1644), 25.

the Dutch in the First Dutch War had by the time of the Rumpers' return to power in 1659 massively changed the rhetoric.⁴⁷

In negotiating this watershed, Owen once again proves illuminating. Unlike the more intransigent Rumpers whom Pincus studied, Owen found reassurance rather than vindication in the economic arena. Preaching to the second Protector's Parliament in 1659 and far from confident of the future, Owen advanced the remarkable and, as we shall see, far-sighted argument that God's people would be saved by their jobs, that "they are woven by their Relations and imployments into the bowels of the nations." The claim was part of a novel and pointed application of the generalities of a Protestant interest: whether England was "fruitful, flourishing and prosperous" would depend on its treatment of the saints.⁴⁸

Owen had obvious reason to worry about the security of the tender conscience, and not least because the celebratory application of the new discourse of interest to England's Protestant history had become hopelessly compromised by the missteps of the 1650s. At the Restoration, arguments for a political balancing of interest groups were aired systematically, as J. A. W. Gunn noted some time ago; but these offered Protestant dissenters comfort only as long the latter seemed strong enough to require balancing.⁴⁹ Although the young Dryden might offer panegyric salute to "our Nation with united Int'rest blest," an England of balanced interests was not the old England that some Cavaliers were eager to reclaim. Addressing the king at the adjournment in 1661, the Speaker of the Commons sought to exclude the new vocabulary from the old as he reflected poignantly on a body politic for which the loyal Commons worked "in Pain," unlike "the discontented Commonwealth's Men with all their complicated Interests." Charles himself seems to have thought that the old could incorporate the new as he congratulated himself at the opening of the Cavalier Parliament on his "Indulgence and Condescensions . . . towards all Interests"; his words, however, made clear that interests were to be contained within an organic order by a patriarch-king whose "indulgence" might yet be qualified by the limit of his "condescensions." Thus, the Anglican William Assheton commented sourly in 1670, "They propose, that the Parties

47. Most of the evidence Pincus cites of Rumper vauntings comes not from the first phase of the republic but from 1659; see especially "Holy Cause to Economic Interest," 285–86. In a similar vein, Jonathan Scott associates interest theorizing at its height with that key 1659 Rumper, Algernon Sidney, in Restoration exile; the appeal of arguments of interest was in fact broader than Scott seems to imagine and predated Sidney's adversity; Scott, *Algernon Sidney and the English Republic, 1623–1677* (Cambridge, 1988), esp. 207–21.

48. John Owen, *The Glory and Interest of Nations Professing the Gospel* (1659), 13. We may therefore doubt Blair Worden's view that Owen would have been "horrified" in the 1650s by the Restoration dissenters' claim that the advancement of England's trade depended on toleration; Worden, "The Question of Secularization," in Houston and Pincus, eds., *England after the Restoration*, 37.

49. Gunn devoted a substantial chapter (pp. 153–204) of his *Politics and the Public Interest*, acutely entitled "Conscience and Interest after the Restoration," to these controversies, but in that chapter he concerned himself with political arguments and claims to a national interest; he confined his discussion of economic interest to a separate chapter (pp. 205–65), and did not attempt to relate it to conscience. Furthermore, apprehensiveness looms large throughout; the disintegration and uncertainties of the 1640s and 1650s, along with a discussion of Thomas Hobbes, take up the first third of the book (pp. 1–108).

comprehended in their establishment shall be of importance in the Publicke Interest, and of Principles congruouse to such stated Order in the Church, as the stability of the Commonwealth requires: and yet never informe us what these important Interests, and congruouse Principles are.”⁵⁰ There could be little security for dissenters in a frame of balanced interests; and we might wonder whether the case for freedom of conscience could have gathered such force in the Restoration, once the political quiescence, indeed incapacity, of dissent had been exposed by the end of the 1660s. But in its material dimension, interest was open to an altogether more optimistic reading.

Fortunately for those who sought to ward off persecution as they were driven into the wilderness at the Restoration, visions of a commercial society had a wide appeal. The Rumpers of 1659 sang of trade and empire as they tried to justify their rule; so, too, did the newly triumphant royalists at the Restoration, and they were confident that they best understood the song’s meaning.⁵¹ One of the more successful pieces of royalist propaganda to emerge from the crisis of 1641–42, Sir John Denham’s poem *Cooper’s Hill*, had sought to distract attention from ecclesiastical and political breakdown by trumpeting the gains to be had from trade, and in particular from a trading empire centered on the Thames.⁵² And royalists remained among the most eloquent advocates of commerce and empire as the nation’s destiny. Newly released from imprisonment for his manifold political offenses, Thomas Violet in 1651 heralded England’s role as “Mistress and Empress of the Sea, . . . the Magazin for the world, for all wealth and Trade.”⁵³ Royalists could indeed have advanced a plausible claim to having first seen the commercial and political potential of empire. It was the turncoat poet Edmund Waller who in 1655 conjured good feeling through not just the balance but also the gratification, material as well as political, of all interests in his *Panegyric to the Lord Protector, of the present greatness and joynt interest of His Highness and nation*.⁵⁴ And it was the royalist James Howell who in 1657 published the revealingly titled *Londinopolis; An Historicall Discourse or Perlustration of the City of London, The Imperial Chamber, and Chief Emporium of Great Britain*. Who but a royalist could make empire and the market go hand-in-hand?⁵⁵

50. John Dryden, *Astrea Redux* (1660), line 296; *Lords Journals*, 11:333, 357; William Assheton *Toleration Disapprov’d and Condemn’d* (1670), 9. Perrinchief, the Anglican divine, took a similarly bleak view of interest when, in 1668, he bracketed it with “Humour, and Corruptions” as the source of error; Perrinchief, *Indulgence not Justified*, 35.

51. Thus, one royalist complained that the republic’s failure to enforce and protect trading, or corporate, privileges had left “the body of our trades . . . anatomized, dissected . . . discovered to foreigners”; *Awake O England: or the People’s Invitation to King Charles* (1660), in Thirsk and Cooper, eds., *Seventeenth-Century Economic Documents*, 67.

52. Sir John Denham’s *Cooper’s Hill* was published in 1642 and republished in 1643, 1650, 1655; and in Latin in 1676.

53. Thomas Violet, *The Advancement of Merchandize* (1651), sig. av.

54. The title of another edition of the poem—*A Panegyrick to my Lord Protector by a Gentleman that Loves Peace, Union and prosperity of the English Nation*—was no less revealing in its salute to national profit.

55. Dryden, too, imagined London, situated in its “*British Ocean*,” the nation’s “*Emporium*” of world trade; *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), lines 1205–6.

Predictions of a glorious commercial future abounded in the early years of the Restoration—abounded even though England had gone only a little way toward a trading revolution. *Astraea Redux*, Dryden's celebration of the Restoration, may be better than its rivals in the panegyric throng but it voiced themes familiar enough elsewhere. Dryden closed with a long apostrophe to an ever-expanding future of English commercial empire; equally suggestively, he hinged his forecast of a "united Int'rest" on the wearying of factions into domestic peace through plenty and on the conquest of trade from the Dutch.⁵⁶ Charles himself, appearing before Parliament in September 1660 to ratify the passage of the Act of Oblivion, swelled the refrain, linking increasing happiness, empire, and "the infinite Importance [of] the Improvement of Trade." Over the next two years Clarendon filled out the king's vague reference to the "Improvement of the Peace and Happiness of the Kingdom" with more pointed talk of advancing "the Peace, Plenty, and Prosperity of the Nation," the "Prosperity and Greatness" of the people: "Let profitable Arts and Industry find so great Encouragement, that all thriving Inventions may be brought from all Parts of the World to enrich this Kingdom, and that the Inventors may grow rich in this Kingdom."⁵⁷ Whatever was of the body politic in these scenes was scarcely traditional: when in 1662 Clarendon lashed out at the effeminated consciences of gloomy Puritan libelers, he imagined a world otherwise driven by restless appetite, in which all courted the same mistresses: trade, commerce, empire.⁵⁸ The following year one of the king's Privy Chamber gentlemen, Samuel Fortrey, wove together what was fast becoming an official mythology of commercial patriotism—from which of course the crown would benefit fiscally—in a work evocatively entitled *England's Interest and Improvement*.⁵⁹ From the very start of the reign, therefore, opinion at court was powerfully drawn to the talk of a national interest centering on trade and expansion that was to generate most famously Dryden's first major work, *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), as well as that hymn to progress, Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal Society* of the same year. Indeed, by the next decade, commercial triumphalism had become a matter of concern to moralists beyond the John Milton of *Paradise Lost*. As the Norfolk Anglican parson Robert Conold reflected in 1675, "The Wealth of the Indies is now more designed, than the Glories of an Eternal Kingdom; Trade is become the sole, or the grand Interest of England, and there are few concerned for the Affairs of Reli-

56. Lines 292–323. J. G. A. Pocock has argued that it was only with the development at the end of the century of the national debt and long-term national credit that it became possible to visualize a secular national future, but that possibility seems to have been well within reach at the Restoration; Pocock, "Modes of Political and Historical Time in Early Eighteenth-Century England," in R. C. Rossbottom, ed., *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Madison, Wis., 1976), 96–97.

57. *Lords Journals* 11:175, 248–49, 474.

58. *Ibid.*, 11:700, and the text above, p. 404.

59. The Anglican Samuel Butler satirized that intersection of the fiscal and the commercial with his mischievous proposal that fines for exercising the liberated conscience, "a Mysterious, yet profitable talent," be farmed out "for advantage and improvement"; Butler, *A Proposall Humbly Offered for the Farming of Liberty of Conscience* (1662), 6. The political arithmetician William Petty similarly, though more soberly, proposed a tax on those seeking indulgence in conscience; Petty, *A Treatise of Taxes and Contributions* (1662), 51–52.

gion: I doubt the Merchants and Ships at Sea, have more Prayers and good Wishes, than all the Governours and Guides of the Church.”⁶⁰

Conold had other grounds besides mere materialism for worry. The language of interest and the growth of commerce intersected with the history of the churches in Restoration England, just as they had in the republic. Even the most intransigent were caught up in the tide of trade. In 1671 the Anglican polemical pugilist Samuel Parker warned that “the Settlement of Publick Peace in the Nation, is a more comfortable thing then the Improvement of Trade,” but, sensing which way the wind was blowing, he hinted at a corporatist fall-back position when he asked whether princes may not “at the same time project the Improvement of Trade, and the Establishment of Uniformity, and enact Laws to suppress Schisms, whilst they Establish Priviledges to encourage Manufactures.” Equally revealing was the way the two houses of Parliament were in 1675 instructed from the throne on the power of persecution to obliterate internal religious division, a division held forth as the only obstacle to an otherwise inexorable commercial expansion.⁶¹ But the intolerant found themselves boxed in not just by the apparent promise of prosperity but also by the ambiguities in that fashionable term “interest,” which seemed to carry with them a prescription for accommodating the dissident. Although by the end of the 1660s “interest” had acquired a strong meaning conflating nation and economic strength, it still denoted the sectional and particular, even the private;⁶² and of all particular interests in the 1660s the dissenting was the most obvious.⁶³ “Interest” might therefore connote the national good or it might mean a dissenting subgroup of the nation’s churchgoing population; and it proved only too easy to fold the particular into the general, the more so since by common consent dissenters were clustered in trading towns.⁶⁴ The continuing economic rivalry with the tolerant Dutch in the 1660s drew many into making the conflation: an early example in the circle around the king is Fortrey’s *Englands Interest*, which reflects at length on

60. Robert Conold, *A Sermon Preached before the Maior of the City of Norwich* (1675), 15. For Milton, see David Armitage, “John Milton: Poet against Empire,” in David Armitage, Armand Himy, and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Milton and Republicanism* (Cambridge, 1995), 206–25.

61. Samuel Parker, *A Defence and Continuation of the Ecclesiastical Policie* (1671), 43, 45; *Lords Journals* 12:654.

62. As Kishlansky noted, the New Model Army during its political mobilization in 1647–48 distinguished assiduously between public and private interest, and a generation later the Quaker William Penn was alert to the distinction: “The Word INTEREST has a good and bad Acceptation; when it is taken in an ill Sense, it signifies a Pursuit of Advantage without Regard to Truth or Justice; . . . The good Signification of the Word . . . is a Legal Endeavour to keep Rights, or augment honest Profits, whether it be in a private Person or a Society”; Kishlansky, “Ideology and Politics,” 164–82; see Penn, *One Project for the Good of England: That is, Our Civil Union is our Civil Safety* (1679; in *Political Writings*, ed. Murphy), 120–21. And in the eighteenth century, the “moneyed Interest” became of course a Country by-word for electoral and national corruption; I am grateful to Gordon Wood for emphasizing this to me.

63. See Gunn, *Politics and the Public Interest*, 153–204.

64. The importance of toleration to those in the towns on whose “hands & industriousnes” the nation’s commerce depended was apparent to some even at the start of Charles’s reign; see, for example, the work by the Quaker Edward Burrough, *The Case of Free Liberty of Conscience in the Exercise of Faith and Religion* (1661), 11–12.

the economic advantages a tolerant England would possess in a competitive Europe, as Robinson had done nearly twenty years earlier.⁶⁵

The reach of “interest” into the material thus underlay what was to become a quintessential Restoration argument, sociological as well as soteriological, over toleration. The new commercial environment provided an opening for those Protestants who dissented from the Church of England and sought a form of toleration. As important as the opportunist claim that persecution of dissenters was scarcely the way to compete with the tolerant Dutch is the conceptual framework that housed such special pleading.⁶⁶ A 1667 work by the Presbyterian John Corbet proclaimed in its extended title that true religion was “*the Stability and Advancement of this Kingdom*.” In the very throes of Restoration, Corbet had appealed to the Protestant interest of the nation, conceived in non-economic terms familiar since the early 1640s, as a way to bring together the diverse groups; by 1667 he recognized what was to be gained by combining that platform with the new emphasis on trade and expansion—even progress. Not only did he now confidently develop Owen’s startling claim of 1659 that by their economic activities, “by Relations and Commerce [dissenters] are so woven into the Nations Interest, that it is not easie to sever them, without unravelling the whole”; under the chapter heading “The Reformed Religion is the permanent Interest of this Kingdom” he also argued that “by the Support and Defence of this [Protestant] Cause, the Nation hath encreased in Honour, and Wealth, and Power.”⁶⁷ Such bold affiliation of religion to trade and national glory spanned the spectrum of respectability and taste. The most famous text in the campaign is Slingsby Bethel’s *The Present Interest of England Stated* (1671), which deserves to be remembered if only for its denunciation of persecution as “the new Philosophy of Poverty”; no less powerful was William Penn’s *Great Case of Liberty of Conscience* (1670), which promised to bid “farewel [to] Englands Interest” with the failure of trade that would come with persecution.⁶⁸ By 1675 Penn had, in his *England’s Present Interest Discover’d*, developed this theme into a paean to property, trade, and the free conscience.⁶⁹ A more pointed attempt to implicate toleration in the newfound values of the court came from the ex-Cromwellian Sir Charles Wolseley,

65. Fortrey, *Englands Interest and Improvement*, 14–17; see also the moderate Anglican Sir Peter Pett’s *Discourse Concerning Liberty of Conscience* (1661), 35–36.

66. As early as 1661 one Quaker stressed the deadening effect of persecution on “Trading, Husbandry, and Merchandize in these Kingdomes”; Edward Burrough, *The Case of Free Liberty of Conscience* (1661), 11–12.

67. John Corbet, *A Discourse of the Religion of England, Asserting That Reformed Christianity settled in its Due Latitude, is the Stability and Advancement of this Kingdom* (1667), 19; Corbet, *The Interest of England in the Matter of Religion* (1661).

68. A *Second Letter to a Member of this Present Parliament against Comprehension* (1668) was more explicit: unless toleration were implemented, “the Dutch and New England will draw from us the trading and industrious part of our Nation, with their stocks” (p. 10).

69. Slingsby Bethell, *The Present Interest of England Stated* (1671), 7, also 13–21, 25–27. Penn was one of the many who—like Corbet—awakened gradually to the advantages of arguments of interest; thus, his major work of 1670 had been only occasionally and loosely concerned with interest; Penn, *The Great Case of Liberty of Conscience*, 24, 29–30.

who in 1668 located “a true National Interest” in the freeing of “noble and generous minds” to go about their “Callings and Trades.”⁷⁰

It is Owen again who best suggests the argumentative opportunities offered by the new rhetoric of interest. The persecutory measures of 1665–70—the Conventicle Act, the Five-Mile Act, the Second Conventicle Act—and the zeal for persecution displayed by Anglican polemicists such as Simon Patrick and Samuel Parker drove him into a flurry of activity.⁷¹ Much of Owen’s argument was predictable enough in its insistence on the peaceableness of the godly conscience and the shared subscription to basic Protestant truths, and in its lament for the persecution of peaceful and useful traders. But those arguments were woven into a fabric that he clearly hoped would stretch to cover the men who had drafted the measures under which he suffered. Through one 1667 tract runs a refrain on “the interest of the kingdom,” “the true civil interest of this nation,” “this nation’s interest,” “the interest of England.” When we search for the meaning of such an interest, we find harmony and mutual respect, but we also find in the tract’s closing words the argument he had advanced in 1659: toleration was the prerequisite for “tranquillity, trade, wealth, and peace.”⁷² Like so many others, Owen was determined to exploit the common estimate that in trade the nation’s “principal strength doth lie” and that in the dissenters lay the principal part of trade.⁷³

The vision Owen sought to shape went beyond the economic. He looked to a civil society whose industriousness, whose productivity, whose whole sphere of activity was far different from the order of the body politic.⁷⁴ In the attempt to avert the sanctions of the Second Conventicle Act, Owen in 1670 offered to the House of Lords a series of debating points. One of these mapped out the social program that toleration would enact: “Unless these things,—namely, industrious endeavours in the way of trade and usefulness, common mutual trust, with acquiescency in the government,—be countenanced and preserved, it is impossible that the welfare and prosperity of the kingdom shall be continued.”⁷⁵ That phrase, “industrious endeavours,” comes close to summing up the way that many dissenters sought to define and justify themselves and thus avert persecution. But it is in *Truth and Innocence Vindicated* (1669), his greatest contribution to the Restoration polemics over toleration, that Owen reached furthest

70. Sir Charles Wolseley, *Liberty of Conscience the Magistrate’s Interest* (1668), 7–8. In like vein, an excited Quaker pamphlet of 1667 had situated its apocalyptic defense of the consciences of “the Trading People of the Nation” within a striking appeal to those “Heroick Gentlemen” who kept their eyes on the nation’s destiny; *Omnia Comesta a Belo. Or, An Answer out of the West to a Question out of the North* (1667), sig. A2v, 10, 12, 16.

71. Simon Patrick, *A Friendly Debate* (1669); Samuel Parker, *A Discourse of Ecclesiastical Politie* (1669).

72. Owen, *Indulgence and Toleration Considered: In a Letter unto a Person of Honour* (1667), in *Works of Owen*, 13:519–40, esp. 530–33, 540.

73. Owen, *A Peace-Offering* (1667), *ibid.*, 13:543–74 at 571.

74. And, indeed, far different from the ship of state imagined as antithesis to the body politic by Michael Walzer, *Revolution of the Saints* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 171–83.

75. Owen, “The State of the Kingdom with Respect to the Present Bill against Conventicles” (1670), in *Works of Owen*, 13:583–86 at 585.

to address the values underlying fashionable discourse. In Sprat's *History of the Royal Society* of 1667, in Abraham Cowley's prefatory materials both to that work and to John Evelyn's *Sylva*, and perhaps as well in Dryden's salute to London in his *Annus Mirabilis* of 1667, we find a shared cultural project that twinned noble heroism with utility, trade, and economic and imperial expansion.⁷⁶ The preface to Owen's work closed with an extended bow to trade and national honor, while the concluding peroration made quite clear how he hoped to package the intervening pages of casuistry and polemic.

I in no way doubt but that all generous, noble, and heroic spirits, such as are not concerned in the empaled peculiar interest and advantage of some, and do scorn the pedantic humours of mean and emulous souls, . . . will be willing to give up to God the glory of his sovereignty over the consciences of men, and despise the thought of giving them disquietment for such things as they can no way remedy, and which hinder them not from being servants of God, good subjects to the king, and useful in their respective lots and conditions.⁷⁷

Here he pulled out all the stops as he implicated heroic endeavor, the program of Restoration court culture, in his attack on the petty obscurantism and the envy of the persecutors. Skewering their narrowness brilliantly in those words, "empaled," "mean," and "peculiar," he sought to catch up elite browsers at the bookstalls and hurry them past the potentially awkward "consciencs of men" toward the promise of utility he offered at the close. It is a short step from here to what is so often taken as a founding text of the great transformation, John Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*. Although his epistemology and his argument were more sophisticated, Locke occupied some of the same imaginative and polemical space as Owen. From the opening dismissal of clerical intolerance as "marks of men's striving for power and empire over one another," to the smacks at the close of the letter proper at "arrogant, ungovernable . . . ecclesiastical men . . . intermeddling with state affairs" and falsely imagining patriarchy, Locke's language is that of the reign of Charles II.⁷⁸ His account of the progress of truth, when "strong arguments and good reason are joined with the softness of civility and good usage," sounds as though it was taken from those cultural arbiters of the 1660s, Cowley, Sprat, and Dryden. Most revealing of all are the analogues he gave for the church. In the 1680s that ardent Churchman, Dean Sherlock, insistently identified chartered cor-

76. The cooptation of economic endeavor into an aesthetic and indeed political program is perhaps nowhere clearer than in the way "the gentleman's heroick exercise" is folded into the extended title of Joseph Blagrave's *The Epitome of the Whole Art of Husbandry* (1669). See as well the effort Bethell expends to provide a historical explanation—the acceptability of commercial employment for younger sons—of why the English elite, unlike the French, looked to trade; *Present Interest of England Stated*, 2–5.

77. Owen, *Truth and Innocence Vindicated* (1669), in *Works of Owen*, 13:345–506, at 367–69, 506.

78. John Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (London, 1991), 14, 53. Locke's "Farewell" (p. 53) is followed with an awkward afterthought of several pages "concerning heresy and schism."

porations as the only associations within the state: inside the body politic there were only other bodies, whether ecclesiastical or civil. In like vein Roger Williams, contesting John Cotton's insistence on the need for unity within city and church in New England, could in the 1640s only imagine formal organizations, "a colledge of Physitians, or a society of Merchants, Turkish, East-Indies, &c"—though unlike Sherlock, he insisted that these, and still more the church, could "voluntarily combine, and voluntarily also dissolve . . . without any breach of civil and publike peace."⁷⁹ Locke, by contrast, able to revel in what was by then an environment of greater social voluntarism, could confidently liken a church, "a free and voluntary society," to other societies, "how free soever, or upon whatsoever slight occasion instituted, (whether of philosophers for learning, of merchants for commerce, or of men of leisure for mutual conversation and discourse)." The strength of his plea derived from the new range of possibilities that English culture presented. In the scientists' and merchants' associations, the polite coffeehouses and (in what Locke termed) "clubs for claret," as well as in the theater, in the exchange, in the law courts, and in the market, there appeared the new social and cultural world of the later seventeenth century.⁸⁰



From the middle of the seventeenth century a conviction of the vital importance of trade took hold and spread to the very center of power. In so doing, it facilitated a new measure of national life—indeed, a new sense of England and its destiny. Interest theory was the measure, and while this theory may have been first systematized by republicans (often enough themselves anti-imperialists), it was in a cruder version espoused most ringingly by proponents of empire, as for example in the vision articulated so deftly by Dryden in the 1660s, of an expanding and united nation pursuing commerce and empire with heroic valor.⁸¹ The repeated gestures of Charles II and his leading servants toward the new order suggest its imaginative power. That dream of a commercial nation was one that dissidents knew how to exploit to ease their path to acceptance. The astuteness with which Owen challenged metaphor and urged interest in pursuit of toleration shows his recognition that the expansionist vision signaled a major and welcome departure from the imagined wholeness of the body politic. Meanwhile, stalwarts of church and crown, conscious themselves of the enticements of trade and empire, sharpened the body politic's teeth.

Such a narrative of partisan alignment oversimplifies, particularly in neglecting the spreading ideals and practices of civility and sociability. Even within the Anglican establishment, there were those who were ready to look beyond the ligatures of the body politic, the more so since in sociability they could see a way to distance

79. Roger Williams, *The bloody Tenent yet more bloody*, in *Complete Writings of Williams*, 4:70.

80. *Ibid.*, 20, 48, 49. For this new world, see Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580–1800* (Oxford, 2000).

81. For republican doubts about empire, see Pincus, "Neither Machiavellian Moment nor Possessive Individualism," esp. 729–32.

themselves from dissenter rigidity and enthusiasm.⁸² Preaching to the Lord Mayor of London in what we might think the repressive year of 1685, Gregory Hascard, a royal chaplain, urged the case for a Christian sociability, for tender-heartedness as not merely “the best imitation of God and Christ” but also “the ease of Humane nature, the glew of Societies and Conversation.” And ten years earlier the future bishop Robert South, preaching before what might appear a budding Tory audience at Oxford University, had managed the neat trick of diffusing the body politic into a universal body polite: “If you consider the Universe as one Body, you shall find Society and Conversation to supply the office of the Blood and Spirits.”⁸³ For these men, circulation was about conversation and association, not about blood feeding members, feeding bone. Although there were Tories in the crisis years around 1680 who suspected sociability itself as a partisan device—seeing in the coffeehouse the seeds of rebellion—some who might have seemed their natural allies clearly found it inherently attractive and the fixities of the body politic correspondingly less necessary and less compelling.⁸⁴ As a result, Hascard and South were close to sharing imaginative ground with Locke.

In the very cross-currents of partisanship lies a greater obstacle to assumptions that partisan and discursive alignments might coincide. The courtiers and republicans who in 1659–60 vied to bear the flag of commerce did not hold the field alone, for they were soon joined by Peter Walsh, the most systematic Anglo-Irish Catholic exponent of liberty of conscience. Averring at the opening of his major 1673 polemic that he had read “most” of the press output on the subject of toleration, Walsh substantiated the point by his evident familiarity with the issues and authors of the moment. Assuring Protestant readers that even though they would not meet Romanists in church, they would find them in the marketplace to be honest and reliable, “sociable and amicable . . . ready to perform all Offices of good neighbourhood and civility,” Walsh insisted that the liberty he urged was only such “as preserves the Nation in Trade, Peace and Commerce.” Urging values prominent in Owen’s armory, Walsh proclaimed that he and his fellows would submit willingly to “those excellent Laws, that tend to sober, just, and *industrious* living in a due Christian regulation.” Since persecution must, he contended, result in emigration and economic loss, “indulging Dissenters” was “not only, most Christian and *rational*, but prudent also.” Walsh shared much with Owen and his fellows: experience of exclusion and suffering and an insistence that persecution could not constrain inner convictions. But acceptance of the rest of the Protestant dissenting case was another matter. Although Walsh, probably sensitive to the plight of Anglo-Irish townsmen as well as to a polite audience in England, urged civility and industriousness, he housed prudential argument in an altogether organic frame. Persecutors—who were for him the companions in Ireland of those who found them-

82. Klein, “Rise of ‘Politeness,’” 153–66. For the range of Anglican opinion and argument, see John Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646–1689* (New Haven, Conn., 1991).

83. Gregory Hascard, *A Sermon Preached before the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor Sir James Smith* (1685), 2; Robert South, *A Sermon [to Oxford University] Oct. 17, 1675*, in *Twelve Sermons*, 2 vols. (1697), 1:495.

84. Steve Pincus, “‘Coffee Politicians Does Create’: Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture,” *Journal of Modern History* 67 (1995): 822–32.

selves among the persecuted in England—showed only their own “hypochondriachal Zeal” by talking earnestly of “purging out the peccant humour” even as they cast “the body politick . . . into a *Calenture* or burning fever.” Appealing, in a way that Hooker would surely have understood but abhorred, to tropes of inheritance and descent as the organic warrant for English Catholicism, Walsh found in the body politic the true limits to toleration. Roman Catholics, who owed their own sufferings to misrepresentations drawn from “the Sepulchres and Common-shores of *Schismatics*,” knew that it was the dissenters, “of hotter tempers, more Cholerick Constitutions, and feverish complexions,” who must not be tolerated: they were incorrigible in their “dayly *neighing* after *novelties*, . . . their Brest . . . full of turbulent and seditious Spirits,” their lungs forever “spreading their opinions to others, till they see the Children of their brains prove meer abortions.” Given the historical claims of St. Peter’s church, we may not be surprised to find a Roman Catholic polemicist urging an organic unity against Protestant dissidents, even as many Anglican polemicists used similar arguments against him. But it is the central element in the Protestant dissenters’ case for the utility of toleration that underscores the way partisan contest was shaping social thought. Living in Ireland under the heel of an English Protestant “interest,” Walsh had good reason for clinging to the body politic, however eccentric the ensuing argument, for he could not stomach the alternative. “Interest” was, he insisted, the persecutors’ plea as they set their face against “our private and *civill* good.”⁸⁵

As so often, then, Ireland’s troubles broke the mold. Indeed, the Roman Catholic’s plea for liberty of conscience, awkwardly and yet strategically crossing from one of the prevailing discourses to another, was matched by an English army Baptist’s equally inelegant straddle. In his advocacy of the rigorous transplantation of the Catholic Irish, Richard Lawrence provided ample warrant for Walsh’s charge that persecutors hypocritically goaded and abused the body politic. On one side Lawrence discovered the familiar, beleaguered, and altogether worthy “English interest”; ranged against it, metaphorically as well as militarily, Lawrence saw “the whole Body of the Irish,” “a body of People [in which] there must be several members each one acting in his place in order to the good of the other, or else the whole could not subsist.”⁸⁶ Just as Walsh, though receptive to fashionable arguments of utility, appealed to the body politic to eviscerate his enemies, so Lawrence deployed the same inclusive figure to tar all the Irish Catholics with blood guilt for the 1641 massacre. The shallowness of Lawrence’s commitment to his organic scheme can be inferred from the language of interest that resonates through the title and text of his book, and perhaps as well from his remarkable characterization of Pauline usages in 1 Corinthians as “Simile” rather than metaphor.⁸⁷

As the nearly simultaneous exercise in body language by Sir Henry Vane shows, partisanship and circumstance prompted discourse-adoption decisions on both sides of the Irish Sea. But however notorious the works of Lawrence and Vane,

85. Peter Walsh, *The Advocate of Conscience Liberty* (1673), 8, 22, 30, 31–32, 37, 38, 81–82; emphases in the original.

86. Richard Lawrence, *The Interest of England in the Irish Transplantation, Stated* (1655), esp. 22–23.

87. *Ibid.*, 22.

perhaps nowhere were the discursive consequences of partisanship more consequential than in the courtiers' adoption of the crucial tropes and arguments of utility. Although the trade expansion of Charles II's reign was to give those claims a genuine appeal, Clarendon, the young Dryden, and Charles himself had been alert to arguments of commercial empire in 1660, at the very moment of Restoration, before the economic climate had improved after the 1659 recession but while the need to steal the Rumpers' triumphalist clothes was only too clear. Dryden offers something of a case study in partisan rhetorics. As we have seen, he had in several plays of the 1660s put himself forward as fashionable critic of confessional rigor, only to seize on the coercive potential of the body politic as the political crisis of Charles II's reign intensified and dissenters advanced factional goals under the banner of trade as well as toleration. At that point, he swung against the language of interest and economy he had earlier found so beguiling, and in *Absalom and Achitophel* gave new force to the Cavalier intransigents' charges of the early Restoration. The dissenters' pleas of public interest were a rebellious charade designed to mask private greed and the manipulation of the market:

The next for Interest sought t'embroil the State,
To sell their Duty at a dearer rate;
And make their Jewish Markets of the Throne,
Pretending publick Good, to serve their own.
(Lines 501–4)⁸⁸

When he came in *The Hind and the Panther* of 1687 to make his own case for near-universal toleration under a Roman Catholic king, Dryden showed, on the one hand, his contempt for Protestant appropriation of the language of expansion and empire and, on the other, his recognition of that language's importance by reimagining it within the body politic, fiercely sexualizing it, compounding trade now with the brothel.⁸⁹

There could be few more poignant instances of the way religious dissidence could drive interrogation of the polity than the contorted meditation on gullibility and predation in Dryden's *Hind and the Panther*. The Levellers and the elderly Hobbes were thus scarcely alone in exploring new reaches of the political as they sought to make space for the heterodox conscience. Locke's ability to conceptualize what looks like the fully formed Habermasian public sphere in service of religious toleration should be remarked; so, too, should the explorations of interest carried out by the army leaders and their allies in the debates at Whitehall in 1647–48 and the more systematic consolidation of that territory by Owen and Penn twenty years and more later. Conversely, pas-

88. I am grateful to Steve Zwicker for this reference and for pointing out to me that Dryden was no less a client of the Duke of Ormonde than was Walsh. The vindictive prefaces are those to *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), *The Medall* (1682), and *Religio Laici* (1682).

89. John Dryden, *The Hind and the Panther*, II, lines 556–75; these lines took much further the critique of dissenters that he had begun to develop in Charles II's later years.

sions born of religious discontents drove Anglicans such as Sherlock and Perrinchief into equally passionate descants upon the body politic.

If there is political irony in the luxuriant metaphors that Perrinchief and other Anglican persecutors shared with the Roman Catholic Walsh, there is a rhetorical irony, too. Lord Chancellor Clarendon in 1662 located the dissenting threat in “deluded Fancies and Imaginations”; Hobbes also, like his disciple Parker, Owen’s great foe at the end of the 1660s, traced enthusiasm and all its dangers to the imagination.⁹⁰ By this point it was of course the persecutors who insistently fixed politics in a richly imagined frame, to which Owen and other dissenters responded with a discourse of interest that is in conventional terms distinctly *un*-imaginative, or at least unmetaphorical. Yet for all their eschewal of metaphor, Owen and Corbet showed by the determination with which they beat the drum of interest their recognition that the identity of a community lay in the imagination—that a nation conceived in terms that were potentially non-unitary offered a more hospitable place for dissidence than did the body politic.

There is a further lesson to be learned from the argumentative exploits of Owen and his friends. We have grown accustomed, under the tutelage of Benedict Anderson, to reckoning the modern nation a collectivity whose construction owed little to police work. Invented traditions, and all the forms of public memory and celebration through which sentiment is inculcated and manipulated, have properly entered the catalogue of nation- and state-building.⁹¹ In contrast, students of the early modern period have been slow to follow Anderson’s lead. Perhaps because the imagination seems more properly the concern of literary studies than of history or political science departments, *imagining* as a political and social action with real consequences has received little attention. But politics surely had an imaginative dimension, one from which historians should not be deflected by deference to literary scholars’ preoccupation with “imaginative” texts.⁹² Exploration of the language used in controversies over conscience in seventeenth-century England suggests how determinedly partisans deployed the imagination to bound or define the moral community and to set or loosen constraints on political action. The dissenting conscience formed the site at which we can best observe not just the work done by language but also the gathering challenge to the dominant organic frame of social and political order. Roger Williams’s fierce engagement with the body politic as he pursued toleration—his brutal rejoinder to Hookerian assertions of the binding role of ancestors, his startlingly sexualized defense of a feminized conscience—discloses the imaginative charge of that body.

90. *Lords Journals* 11:476; Samuel Parker, *Discourse of Ecclesiastical Politie* (1670), and *Continuation of the Ecclesiastical Politie* (1671) throughout, esp. p. 339 of the latter. Hobbes in book 1 of *Leviathan* located the mispromptings of religion firmly in the imagination. Sounding very like Parker, Thomas Smith, in *A Sermon Concerning the Doctrine, Unity, and Profession of the Christian Faith* (1682), attributed the growth of schism to “every mans particular Reason, though never so much bypassed and perverted by the prepossessions of fancy, and by the heat and influence of his Passions” (p. 22).

91. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1991).

92. Most famously, New Historicist critics have seen the imaginative text as the space left free for subversive acts outside the hegemonic structure of politics, but the traffic between politics and the imagination is more complex than such a formulation allows.

Although Williams, Milton, and others were well able to exploit the figure polemically, the figurative violence into which it drew them as they sought to break free of coercion may have rallied the like-minded but is unlikely to have persuaded bystanders, let alone the persecutors.⁹³ We may accordingly admire the capacity of Rohan's new language of interest to provide not merely a vocabulary that more easily comprehended difference but one that, in representing difference as a source of energy and expansion, might persuade.

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ABSTRACT

Religious fragmentation threatened the notion of a unitary body politic, and conservative Anglicans in the Restoration exploited the organic figure to excoriate dissenters. While scriptural patterns drew the godly too to that trope, its ecclesiastical implications often left them parsing uncomfortably as they urged concessions. In this article Derek Hirst argues that they were largely rescued from such parsing by the new discourse of "interest." When the promise of trade was taking the court by storm, Independents and Presbyterians had much to gain in re-imagining the polity more pluralistically in terms of interest; Locke too was part of this process. But though the general drift is clear, partisan circumstance could occasion surprising cross-currents, in England and Ireland alike. Keywords: body politic, religious toleration, John Owen, discourse of "interest," John Locke

93. Still less congenial must have been the Levelling talk of the "birthrights" of "a free-born people" that closed one Quaker's appeal to the king for toleration; William Smith, *Liberty of Conscience and Pleaded* (1663), 8. I am grateful to Mike Braddick and John Spurr for discussion of this and associated themes.