Prologue

> First she tasted the porridge of the great, huge bear, and that was too hot for her; and she said a bad word about that. And then she tasted the porridge of the middle bear, and that was too cold for her; and she said a bad word about that too. And then she went to the porridge of the little, small, wee bear, and tasted that; and that was neither too hot nor too cold, but just right; and she liked it so well she ate it all up: but the naughty old woman said a bad word about the little porridge pot, because it did not hold enough for her.
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> Robert Southey, 'The Three Bears'[1]

There was no Goldilocks in the earliest written versions of the tale, only an 'impudent, bad old woman'. In the 1837 version by Robert Southey, the old woman's invasion of the three bears' domestic tranquility was narrated as a cautionary tale of moderation versus excess. The 'good natured and hospitable' bears were the very image of civilised moderation. Each bear had only what he (significantly, they were all male) needed: 'Each a chair to sit in; a little chair for the little, small, wee bear, and a middle-sized chair for the middle bear, and a great chair for the great, huge bear.' In proper control of their bodily appetites, they 'walked out into the wood while the porridge was cooling, that they might not burn their mouths by beginning to eat it too soon'. In keeping with their modest condition, they ate their porridge with wooden spoons. The old woman, by contrast, was an avatar of excess, a greedy and foulmouthed beggar rather than the innocent child of later interpretations. When she located the porridge that was 'neither too hot nor too cold, but just right', instead of appreciating its moderation she gobbled it up and cursed it because the pot 'did not hold enough for her'. When she located the chair that was 'neither too hard nor too soft, but just right', she sat down until 'the bottom of the chair came out, and down came hers, plump upon the ground. And the naughty old woman said a wicked word about that too.' And it was lucky the bears used wooden spoons, for 'if they had

[1] Robert Southey, *The Doctor, &c.* (London, 7 vols., 1834–47), IV, pp. 318–26.

been silver ones, the naughty old woman would have put them in her pocket'. At the end of the tale, then, the old woman reaped the fruits of her immoderation, a process described as the purgation of 'ugly, dirty' matter by 'good, tidy bears': having lazily fallen asleep, she was forced by the return of the bears to hurl herself out of a second-floor window, 'and whether she broke her neck in the fall, or ran into the wood and was lost there, or found her way out of the wood and was taken up by the constable and sent to the house of correction for a vagrant as she was, I can not tell'.

We know little about the origins of 'The Three Bears', but we do know that it had been circulating in England long before it was written down in the 1830s. It seems likely, though it is not certain, that, like many other folktales collected in the nineteenth century, it had roots deep in the early modern era.[2] Certainly its emphasis on moderation fed upon an older preoccupation with virtuous mediocrity that has long been noticed by scholars, and helped inaugurate modern stereotypes of Englishness, but has received little serious historical scrutiny. If we might thus tentatively take 'The Three Bears' as a projection of early modern England's cultural imagination, it is worth noticing several things about the ideal of moderation it embodies. First, moderation here is a relative rather than an absolute conception of virtue: 'just right' is defined in contrast to encroaching extremity, represented not just by hot and cold porridge but by the excesses of the bad old woman. Second, its defence of moderation is an aggressive and even violent exercise: the story plainly attacks certain forms of social behaviour even as it defends others, and the bad old woman ends the tale at best rotting in prison and at worst lying dead on the forest floor. Third, while the violence of the denouement might seem to belie the bears' ethical superiority, their expulsion of the old woman is in fact described as an example of moderation rather than an exception to it. Fourth, the identity of the antagonist is no coincidence: the poor, vagrant crone embodies centuries of stereotypes of immoderation in need of restraint, while moderation is normatively associated with male, middle-sort householders – the three bears themselves. The story thus depends upon a profound tension within

[2] Evidence for the story's antiquity is threefold: first, two wholly independent versions in distant parts of England were produced in the 1830s; second, both versions at least claim that the story was an oral folktale, although this claim is more robust in Eleanor Mure's version than in Robert Southey's; third, the story bears considerable family resemblance to the folktale 'Scrapefoot', which much more clearly has early modern origins. See Iona Opie and Peter Opie, *The Classic Fairy Tales* (Oxford, 1974); Alan Elms, '"The Three Bears": Four Interpretations', *The Journal of American Folklore* 90, no. 357 (July–September 1977), pp. 257–73. The 1831 ms version has been printed in facsimile as Eleanor Mure, *The Story of the Three Bears* (Toronto, 1967).

the ideal of moderation it depicts: moderation was simultaneously a state of equipoise and an act of control, both self-restraint and the restraint of others to produce a golden mean.

'The Three Bears' therefore suggests in broad strokes the thesis of this book: in early modern England, the ubiquitous moral principle of moderation was a profoundly coercive tool of social, religious and political power. Beginning in the reign of Henry VIII, a cluster of Aristotelian ethical ideals centred on 'moderation', the 'golden mean' and the 'middle way' became a standard moral language by which power in state, Church and society was justified.[3] Of course, the preceding period also had its share of speculation on moderation. The middle ages were nothing if not Aristotelian, and besides numerous attempts to reconcile Peripatetic ethics with Christianity, concepts of 'balance' or 'equilibrium' brought moderation to the core of medieval science and economics.[4] Yet rarely in the middle ages did these ideas shape public discourse the way they did in Tudor-Stuart England. There were several important reasons for this new emphasis – besides the exponential growth of public discourse itself – on ideals of moderation available since antiquity. First was the Reformation principle that restraint in the world, rather than monkish abnegation of the world, was the epitome of virtue; in English culture, moderation was often coded Protestant. Second was the Renaissance principle of the *vita activa*, stressing that classical wisdom was not merely a private pursuit but an instrument of public policy; in Tudor England, moderation became the business of government. Third was the peculiar institutional configuration of the English Reformation, which subsumed crucial questions of ecclesiastical moderation within the politics of the English state. In light of these developments, from the second quarter of the sixteenth century onwards the ideal of moderation became central to the authorisation of public action in England. It retained this pre-eminent position until the later seventeenth century, but even long afterwards moderation continued to hold a privileged place in the nation's discourse.

This book argues that the early modern preoccupation with moderation shaped the development of English history in profound but deeply

[3] The most sophisticated discussion of this phenomenon is Joshua Scodel, *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature* (Princeton, 2002).

[4] Joel Kaye, 'The (Re)Balance of Nature, *c.*1250–1350', in Barbara Hanawalt and Lisa Kiser (eds.), *Engaging with Nature: Essays on the Natural World in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Notre Dame, 2008); see also Joel Kaye, *Economy and Nature in the Fourteenth Century: Money, Market Exchange, and the Emergence of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge, 1998). There were also more popular works on moderation like *The ABC of Aristotle*, a startlingly popular didactic poem for children that survives in no fewer than fourteen manuscripts: Martha Rust, 'The ABC of Aristotle', in Daniel Kline (ed.), *Medieval Literature for Children* (New York, 2003).

counterintuitive ways. For the idea of the 'middle way' defined ethical spectrums, delineating not only moral centres but also immoral peripheries: arguments for moderation routinely incorporated attacks upon immoderate, excessive, immoral others. Moreover, according to prevailing views of the human condition, moderation was extremely difficult to achieve, beyond the capacity of most if not all subjects; its maintenance thus required aggressive new interventions by authority in the social world. Most importantly, moderation meant government, with no firm boundary between the ethical governance of the self and the political governance of others; it referred simultaneously to the internal restraint of wayward passions by reason and the external restraint of wayward subjects by authority. Thus, assertions of moderation in early modern England – from the *via media* of Anglicanism, to the rise of the middle sort, to the idea of liberty – were in significant measure arguments for government, authorising the forcible restraint of dangerous excesses in Church, state and society. This book thus analyses how moderation was claimed in early modern England, arguing that such claims were the instruments by which politics was conducted, power was sought and domination was justified.

Part I

Moderate foundations

Introduction

This book began as an attempt to answer a deceptively simple question: why was it that whenever the Tudor-Stuart regime most loudly trumpeted its moderation, that regime was at its most vicious? The question had first occurred to me in the context of Henry VIII's remarkable, simultaneous execution of three Catholics and three Protestants in July 1540 as a (literally) flamboyant statement of the Church of England's moderation. But over years of teaching English history, I found that the question seemed to recur in a wide variety of contexts: the claim to punish religious dissidents for their conduct but not to make windows into men's souls; the use of writs of the peace to enforce order and punish offenders without resorting to the courts; claims for the moderation of the English empire compared to the excesses of New Spain; laws promoting religious toleration that established new penalties for blasphemy. The common thread running through these examples was that they were all cases where power was authorised and even amplified by its limitation. My deceptively simple question, I realised, led deep into the ideological heart of early modern England.

My first answer to this question was that moderation was an intrinsically relational and comparative ethical framework, so that every claim to the moderate centre involved the construction and vilification of extremists on the margins. I still stand by this initial answer, and while I am hardly the first scholar to notice it, the intrinsically aggressive character of moderation is far too rarely emphasised. As a historian, however, I soon became unsatisfied with such an ahistorical, structural thesis. If moderation were 'always already' aggressive, then there seemed little point in isolating one specific example of it or studying its ideological resonances in a particular time and place. I was uninterested in practising philosophy without a licence; I wanted to understand what made moderation so peculiarly important to early modern England.

My second answer, then, was much more historically specific. In a Protestant religious context, where original sin cast such a long shadow upon human morality, ethical moderation was seen as virtually impossible

to achieve, so moderation was constantly externalised: human beings naturally tended to sinful excesses, hence the *via media* required the coercive power of ministers and magistrates. Moreover, the Renaissance ideal of the *vita activa*, in which Tudor lawmakers adopted an activist impulse to improve the commonwealth, provided a context in which the ancient ethical ideal of moderation was made central to public policy and modes of governance for the first time. In this sense, I came to see the peculiarly aggressive moderation of the Tudor-Stuart regime as the bastard child of Renaissance and Reformation, a glaring example of Margo Todd's dictum that 'internal contradictions are to be expected from an intellectual milieu which in England combined humanist optimism with the Calvinist doctrine of human depravity'.[1] Again, I still stand by this answer: the presumed moral incapacity of its subjects allowed the English government to justify acts of breathtaking repression as instances of moderation. But I soon realised that this could not be the whole answer because, while it explained how moderation became an exercise of power, it failed to explain how power was authorised by its moderation.

My third and final insight, then, was that the state's prerogative to moderate its subjects reflected deeper habits of thought, first noticed by historians of gender and empire as well as historians of political philosophy, in which the ethical government of the self was understood as a microcosm or synecdoche of the political government of subjects.[2] Within a Renaissance mentality that presumed interconnections and dependencies between human beings and their environments, *moderation meant government* with no clear boundary between inward and outward. Hence, if moderation were the active force by which excesses were controlled and reduced to a mean, then the 'moderation of gentlemen' could mean simultaneously control of their passions and control of their servants, while the 'moderation of the Church of England' could mean simultaneously a middle way between Catholicism and Anabaptism and the requirement of obedience and conformity it enforced upon its subjects. If internal and external moderation were so profoundly linked, in other words, then power could be authorised and amplified by its limitation: the moderation of the government legitimated its use of coercive force, but that use of coercive force was itself an example of the government's moderation. In this model, moderation subsumed two concepts that today

[1] Margo Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 18.
[2] See e.g. Susan James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford, 1997); Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco, 1980); Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651* (Cambridge, 1993); James Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (Cambridge, 1993), ch. 6.

are incompatible but in early modern England had not yet been differentiated: the state of equipoise and the act of restraint that produced it. This was the rule of moderation.

The result was that discussions of moderation and the middle way in early modern England often bore powerful connotations of coercion and control that have been lost over subsequent centuries, leaving behind only cosy connotations of equanimity and reasonableness. This does not mean that moderation was always externalised to an equal degree or in the same way; a vast range of nuances was available for contemporaries to describe the capacity of different actors for internal self-control, while options for external moderation ranged from polite admonition to public execution. I would not want to flatten these differences or argue that early modern English people were incapable of genuine accommodation; in early modern England, as in most times and places, most people just wanted to get along.[3] But nonetheless, moderation meant government, and the routine alliance of internal and external moderation, the stark absence of any ethics that was not at heart about the maintenance of public order, meant that it took rare effort to suppress the more aggressive side of moderation altogether. Historians who have analysed early modern discussions of moderation, however, have for the most part missed their coercive qualities, seeing in them only their modern meanings; given the pervasiveness of moderation and the middle way in early modern English historiography, the consequences of this omission are significant.

The most noteworthy context in which early modern English subjects and their modern historians have discussed moderation is the English Reformation, especially the development of an eccentric new institution called the Church of England. A central argument of this book, then, is that the English Reformation was understood as moderate, and its Church was defended as a *via media*, not so much because it was limited, compromised or reasonable, but because it was so very governmental. It was moderate not only in its restraint but insofar as it restrained, not only because it was reasonable but because it moulded reasonable subjects. Internal and external moderation produced one another; moderation was simultaneously peace and coercion, a state of equipoise and an act of control. In other words, in order to understand the *via media* of the developing Anglican Church, we need to understand that the Reformation

[3] Jeffrey Knapp has suggested, for instance, that accommodation was particularly suitable to theatre people because of their professional investment in fellowship predicated on simulation, while Linda Pollock has suggested that women played a vital role in facilitating accommodation in elite society: Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theater in Renaissance England* (Chicago, 2002); Linda Pollock, 'Honor, Gender, and Reconciliation in Elite Culture, 1570–1700', *JBS* 46 (January 2007), pp. 3–29.

in England, arguably more than anywhere else, was always at heart about governance, and governance was moderation.

But while part of this book is about religion, much of it also concerns broader ideologies of governance in state and society. As such, the violent moderation of the English Reformation is both foundational to, and is the most baroque example of, the more general thesis of this book: that the quintessentially English quality of moderation, as it developed in the early modern period, was at heart an ideology of control. The various iterations of aggressive moderation analysed in this book were central to the emergence of a peculiarly English modernity in which the precocious development of the state was linked to its restraint, a Leviathan not of absolutism but of moderation. In the broadest sense, then, this book is a contribution to understanding one of the central puzzles of English history: how England came to represent reason, civility and moderation to a world it slowly conquered.

At the risk of appearing jejune and undergraduate, let us begin with dictionaries as rough indicators of the relationship between moderation and government. Within the new genre of English language dictionaries that appeared in the early seventeenth century, some offered definitions of moderation that would not seem out of place today. Robert Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabetical* (1604), for instance, defined moderation as 'keeping due order and proportion'.[4] But because this definition described moderation as an action rather than a condition, we must be careful to note its ambiguity: did it mean keeping yourself in due order and proportion, or keeping others? This ambiguity was made more explicit a decade later in John Bullokar's *An English Expositor* (1616), which defined the verb 'moderate' and the adjective 'moderate' in the same entry: 'Measurable, temperate, also to govern or temper with discretion'.[5] Soon afterwards, Henry Cockeram's *The English Dictionarie: or, an Interpreter of Hard English Words* (1623) was yet more blunt, defining the verb 'moderate' simply as 'to govern', and hence defining a 'moderator' as 'a discreet governor'.[6] Moreover, while Cockeram's 1623 edition defined the noun 'moderation' as 'temperance, good discretion' without explicit connotations of governance, in the 1670 edition this was changed to 'temperance, discretion, government'.[7] This change may have been in response

[4] Robert Cawdrey, *A Table Alphabetical* (London, 1604).
[5] J. B. [John Bullokar], *An English Expositor* (London, 1616).
[6] Henry Cockeram, *The English Dictionarie: or, an Interpreter of Hard English Words* (London, 1623).
[7] Henry Cockeram, *The English Dictionary: or, an Expositor of Hard English Words* (London, 1670).