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Introduction

Henry St John, later Viscount Bolingbroke, was born in 1678, the year of the Popish Plot, and died in 1751, nine years before the accession of George III and the subsequent revival of Tory fortunes reshaped the British political landscape. However, Bolingbroke's career as an active politician spanned only the period from the last year of William III's reign, when he first entered Parliament in 1701, to the first of George I, when he was impeached by the overwhelmingly Whig Parliament elected in the aftermath of the Hanoverian succession and the Jacobite rising of 1715. St John's fortunes rose and fell with those of the post-Revolutionary Tory party. His political acumen, charisma and industry had recommended him to Tory leaders, who rapidly promoted him up the ranks of their administration until he held the crowning office of his career, as Secretary of State for the Northern Department during the closing years of the War of the Spanish Succession.

St John was elevated to the Lords as Viscount Bolingbroke in 1712, and in the following year he took credit for negotiating the Treaty of Utrecht which ended the war. Bolingbroke looked set to make a bid for the leadership of his party, until the Whigs won the general elections of 1715 by a landslide, 'after which a new and more melancholy scene for the party, as well as for me, opened itself', as he put it in *A Letter to Sir William Wyndham* (1716). The Tories went into the wilderness of proscription and opposition until 1760, and Bolingbroke fled to his first extended period of exile in France (1714–25). While there he became Secretary of State to the Old Pretender in 1715–16. For many of his associates in the Tory

party and the opposition to Walpole, this flirtation with Jacobitism put him beyond the political pale in English politics, despite his association with the Hanoverian heir, Frederick, Prince of Wales, in the late 1730s, and though he protested that he was innocent of the 'treason that claret inspires' (p. 269). Thereafter, he confined his political enterprises to building coalitions and dispensing counsel to the various groups ranged against Sir Robert Walpole. His greatest political writings – the *Dissertation upon Parties*, the letter 'On the Spirit of Patriotism', and *The Idea of a Patriot King* – all sprang from these contexts, and deployed the languages of Whiggism and Toryism, classical republicanism and Stoicism, in defence of the mixed constitution and the common good, in accordance with the order of nature as revealed by reason.

Bolingbroke was a member of the first generation that came to maturity under the Revolution Settlement of 1688. 'Under this constitution the greatest part of the men alive were born', he noted in 1733 (p. 78). This was the constitution under which David Hume, thirty years his junior, and for a time his adversary, grew up; it became the envy of continental contemporaries, such as Voltaire and Montesquieu, both of whom drew upon Bolingbroke as a constitutional authority. The Glorious Revolution had affirmed the Protestantism of the English state, restored the supposedly ancient constitutional balance between monarchy and Parliament, and set the terms for political debate in Britain for the next century. Yet the cost of securing Protestantism was military invasion by the Dutch stadtholder, William of Orange, and entry into the opening stages of a second hundred years war between Britain and France that ended at Waterloo. As Bolingbroke acknowledged in the *Dissertation*, annual parliaments were the offspring of the fiscal necessity of continental warfare. The uneasy political truce negotiated in 1688 soon began to fracture into party strife, as the Whigs benefited from William's patronage, while Tory fortunes only revived with the accession of Queen Anne in 1702. Bolingbroke was the chronicler of these ambivalent consequences, which made and unmade his own political career.

The Glorious Revolution, according to Bolingbroke, had scrambled the traditional markers of party politics. The classic labels of Whig and Tory first appeared in the context of the Exclusion Crisis of 1679–81. The pre-Revolutionary Whigs were

those politicians who favoured the exclusion of Charles II's Catholic brother, James, Duke of York, from the succession to the throne; the Tories, those who resisted such tampering with the succession. The national and international dimensions of the Exclusion debate identified Whigs and Tories with distinct positions on the relative powers of Parliament and monarchy, on the Church of England and its toleration of Dissent, and on the menace of international Catholicism. The Exclusionist Whigs demanded the power for Parliament to alter the succession, and hence placed statute above prerogative. They supported toleration for Dissent, yet were fearful of the supposed relationship between popery and arbitrary government, and hence resisted toleration for Catholicism, and proposed vigorous measures against the threatening power of Louis XIV's France. The anti-Exclusionist Tories resisted Parliamentary supremacy in the name of royal power, upheld the exclusivity and sacramental validity of the Church of England, were less wary of international Catholicism, and believed that the danger of altering the succession would be greater than the consequences of a known Catholic taking the English throne. The inept authoritarianism and expedient political and religious somersaults executed by the Duke of York during his reign as James II (1685–88) alienated both Whigs and Tories. Accordingly, the majority of both parties joined forces in 1688 to resist his innovations in Church and state, and ultimately to legitimize the accession of the Dutch invader, William of Orange, to the English throne.

The Glorious Revolution in England was a genuine compromise between Whigs and Tories, achieved under pressure of political necessity, and by means of ideological legerdemain in the Convention Parliament of 1688. No party could be held to have won over the other in 1688, and it seemed for a time that the divisions opened up by the Exclusion Crisis had finally been closed. However, during the course of William's reign, the Whigs emerged as the victors, and they became the natural party of government for most of the eighty years after 1688. Ideological and religious divisions persisted into the first Age of Party, the age of Bolingbroke's political maturity, and the scene for his own early political career.

After 1688, the two parties remained divided over the legacy of the Glorious Revolution and the Church of England's attitude towards Protestant Dissent. Post-Revolutionary Whigs increasingly

appealed to the notion of a contract between the crown and the people (or, rather, their representatives as assembled in Parliament), which James II had violated, and to which future monarchs would be held accountable. Tories argued that, since James had abdicated his throne, there had been neither a contract to be broken nor any future right of resistance implied by the Revolution. Instead, subjects should be passively obedient to their monarchs, and could have no justification for resistance. This left Tories open to the charge that they were half-hearted in their support for the Protestant succession, a suspicion that their intolerance of Dissent also raised. The Whigs remained the party of Dissent, the Tories the supporters of Anglicanism at all costs. For High Church Tories, the national church could only be the Church of England or nothing; for Low Church Whigs, it had to be the Church of England with toleration for almost all Protestants. The Whigs' greatest victory was the Toleration Act of 1689, which to Tories smacked of support for heresy and irreligion that put the 'Church in Danger', as their rallying-cry had it. As Bolingbroke noted, the idea of a Whig became inseparably associated with '[t]he power and majesty of the people, an original contract, the authority and independency of Parliament, liberty, resistance, exclusion, abdication, deposition'; that of a Tory with '[d]ivine hereditary, indefeasible right, lineal succession, passive-obedience, prerogative, non-resistance, slavery, nay and sometimes popery too' (p. 5).

The consequences of the post-Revolutionary wars against France sharpened the ideological divisions between the two parties. The Whig war party benefited most obviously from William's patronage, as they were most committed to the anti-Catholicism and anti-Bourbonism of their new monarch, and to the military and fiscal measures needed to finance European warfare. The Tories however baulked at the expense of the continental commitment, and proposed instead a 'blue-water' policy to sap French commercial might by attacking shipping, draining trade-revenues and dispersing their defences by assailing French coastlines and colonies rather than seeking pitched battles on the European continent. The Whigs rode high politically on the benefits of their aggressively interventionist policies, achieving victory in eleven of the twelve general elections held between 1689 and 1715. Nevertheless, it was the Tories – Bolingbroke pre-eminent among them – who gained temporarily

from the reaction to the costs of war, as they swept to power in 1713 at the end of the War of the Spanish Succession.

The institutional consequences of making Britain into a fiscal–military state cut across and complicated these party divisions. The financial demands of international warfare accelerated the transformation of England from an overwhelmingly agricultural economy, with a low tax-base, a comparatively unintrusive and informal bureaucracy, and an isolationist stance towards the outside world, into the United Kingdom of Great Britain, home to Europe's greatest financial institutions and most productive system of public credit, an expanding fiscal capacity, a growing and professional bureaucracy, and the financial resources to prosecute continental war, commercial expansion and imperial growth. Whig leadership and investment lay behind the greatest fiscal and institutional innovations after the Revolution, such as the Bank of England and the National Debt, and the benefits of investment in these institutions flowed most of all to Whigs and the so-called 'monied interest'. This alliance between policy and profit, created by royal favour and cemented by the spoils of office, led to the association of a specific 'Court' programme, encompassing high taxation, governmental expansion, financial innovation and international aggression, with the Whigs. The supporters of the competing 'Country' programme protested that half of the tax burden fell on the 'landed interest', feared the growth of the executive, benefited less from the suspicious new institutions, and were sceptical of the benefits to be had from costly continental commitments. Since the bulk of the Whigs were beneficiaries and backers of the Court programme, and the majority of Tories opposed the actions of the Whigs, 'Court' Whigs became counterposed to 'Country' Tories, and the so-called Old Whigs who were committed to the neo-republican constitutional Whiggism of the 1690s joined forces with the Tories in an uneasy oppositional alliance.

The ascendancy of the Whig Robert Walpole to the post of principal, or prime, minister in 1722 sharpened the appeal of a Country interest arrayed against the increasingly powerful Court Whigs. Bolingbroke emerged as the pre-eminent spokesman for this interest, as well as the most talented and mercurial of Walpole's opponents. The chief instrument of his campaign against Walpole was *The Craftsman* (later retitled *The Country Journal*), the journal he

founded with the dissident Whig William Pulteney in December 1726 and which carried both the *Remarks on the History of England* (1730–31) and the *Dissertation upon Parties* (1733–34) in the form of weekly editorials. The aim of these publications was to construct a platform for the disparate constituencies which made up the opposition to Walpole, and to convince them that they were bound together not solely by their common enemy but rather by a shared set of political principles.

Bolingbroke's Country platform combined Old Whig and Tory elements in order to put Walpole's regime on the defensive against the charge that it had betrayed the heritage of Whiggism and that its policies endangered the liberty guaranteed by the Revolution Settlement. Bolingbroke reminded Walpole and his ministry of 'the civil faith of the old Whigs' (p. 8), that body of political principles which stretched back through the early years of the eighteenth century, via the works of the Whig apologists for the Revolution and the supporters of Exclusion to the republicanism of the Interregnum. These principles enshrined a classical republican vision of liberty as freedom under the protection of law and of virtue as devotion to the welfare of the community. According to the writers in this tradition, the greatest threats to liberty and virtue were a standing army in time of peace (which could overturn the laws, and deprive citizens of their property by force) and the corruption of the nation's politicians and people by means of bribery, placeholding and a more general lack of moral activity. Bolingbroke's oppositional campaign returned time and again to the charges that the armed forces under Walpole were a threat to 'public liberty', and that the minister's shrewd management of Parliament amounted to packing it with placemen and thereby disabling its function as the assembly of the nation.

To these Whiggish principles Bolingbroke added distinctive planks from earlier Tory platforms, in particular a commitment to maintaining the mixed and balanced constitution. This had its roots in the moderate Toryism of the opening decade of the eighteenth century, which upheld mixed government, the common good, and the moral leadership of the monarchy in response to the Court Whigs' exaltation of the power of Parliament and doctrines of popular sovereignty. For example, in 1701, Sir Humphrey Mackworth's *A Vindication of the Rights of the Commons of England* argued that

only internal political divisions could ruin England, that all three parts of the constitution – King, Lords and Commons – must balance one another to safeguard the common good, and that the best guarantee of the national welfare would be a reciprocal relationship between crown and people, for 'no king was ever great and glorious in England, but he, that . . . became the prince of the people'. The twenty-three-year-old Bolingbroke praised Mackworth's work as 'a just draught of our admirable constitution'. The closeness of Mackworth's constitutional vision to that espoused by an Old Whig theorist such as John Toland in *The Art of Governing by Partys* (1701) made it doubly attractive for Bolingbroke's purposes. It could be used to affirm that post-Revolutionary Whigs and Tories had been united in principle, and to argue that their common platform could again provide the impetus for the co-operative enterprise of defending British liberties in the face of Walpolean 'corruption'.

The defeat of Walpole's excise scheme in 1733 and the necessity of general elections in 1734 provided the occasion for the *Dissertation upon Parties*, the greatest monument to Bolingbroke's oppositional activities. Walpole's plan to extend the excise to wine and tobacco encountered a storm of protest from those who feared the imposition of a general excise, and offered the opposition its best opportunity yet to mobilize opinion both inside and outside Parliament. The bill proposed to increase the powers of excise officers, and could therefore be presented as offering a threat to liberty and property, and hence to the very principles of the post-Revolutionary political order. The opposition rallied in Parliament and left Walpole with such slim majorities for his unpopular measure that he was forced to withdraw the bill in June 1733. The onus was now on the opposition to exploit their victory at the elections scheduled for the coming year.

Bolingbroke himself had stayed on the sidelines through most of the Excise Crisis, yet he seized the opportunity offered by Walpole's defeat to produce the decade's most sophisticated statement of Country ideology, in the *Dissertation upon Parties*. Bolingbroke's aim in this series of essays was to keep the opposition together in the face of the impending elections, as well as to undermine the legitimacy of Walpole's shaken government. George II's steadfast support of his chief minister had restored Walpole's standing, and the ministry quickly regained its control over Parliament. This recovery

made it all the more necessary for the opposition to maintain a united front, and for its writers to expose the vulnerability of Walpole's ideological position.

Bolingbroke's main strategy in the *Dissertation* was to show that the party divisions of Whig and Tory had been made redundant by the Glorious Revolution. He argued that the only true distinctions were now between Church and Dissent and, most importantly, between Court and Country. All political parties are necessarily ideological coalitions: Bolingbroke exploited this structural fact in the hope of leaving Walpole and his closest supporters isolated from the majority of those who assented to the principles derived from the Revolution. Accordingly, he rewrote the history of seventeenth-century Britain to show Walpole's apostasy from the Old Whig principles which had been forged in the century-long battle against monarchical absolutism.

Bolingbroke's earlier series of essays in *The Craftsman*, the *Remarks on the History of England* (1730–31), had cast British history from the earliest times to the calling of the Long Parliament in 1640 as a perpetual battle between 'prerogative and privilege', the 'spirit of faction' and the 'spirit of liberty'. The first ten letters of the *Dissertation* (published in *The Craftsman* between October 1733 and January 1734) projected this narrative into the later seventeenth century by tracing the 'epidemical taint' (p. 14) of absolutism from the accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne in 1603, through to the climactic reign of James II. Bolingbroke had promised that the *Dissertation* would trace the origin of parties both civil and ecclesiastical. He therefore argued that the only true divisions in the years after 1660 were those between Churchmen and Dissenters, since the factions of 'roundhead and cavalier' had expired before the Restoration, while Whig and Tory would not arise until the latter years of Charles II's reign. The battle over the exclusion of the Duke of York from the succession allowed the court to use its power to foment faction. The court alone was therefore culpable for having shattered the civil consensus on the common good which had been maintained by the Country party of the 1670s. Bolingbroke hoped to show that the party divisions of 1679–88 had been contingent, temporary, and created only by misguided passions and 'the wily intrigues of the court' (p. 37). The spirit of liberty and the national interest should therefore prevail over manipulation

by the court and private interest in the name of the natural and historic 'Country party . . . authorized by the voice of the country' (p. 37).

The ideology of the Country party, as elaborated by Bolingbroke, was recognizably Whig in its conception of the Glorious Revolution. James II had violated the nation's fundamental laws, and had therefore forfeited the throne. There had been no dissolution of government, but the Revolution had restored the ancient constitution and, with it, the 'spirit of liberty, transmitted down from our Saxon ancestors' (p. 82) that had withstood the assaults of faction and prerogative government down the ages. All monarchs since William III had ruled under the 'original contracts' (p. 83) that were the pillars of the Revolution Settlement, the Declaration of Rights (1689) and the Act of Settlement (1701). These guaranteed that the 'rights and privileges of the people' (p. 84) limited the monarchy, and that among those privileges was a limited right of resistance. All were now agreed in their subscription to these original contracts. Extreme exigency alone could justify resistance like that in 1688, Bolingbroke argued, as he took up the argument from necessity originally employed by post-Revolutionary Tories, and later taken up by the anxious Whig managers of the Sacheverell trial in 1710, Walpole among them. There was therefore no foreseeable possibility of justifiable resistance. Nor was it likely that malcontents would attempt to overthrow the government or, at the most extreme, the constitution itself (an admission intended to marginalize the Jacobites, and perhaps to distance Bolingbroke himself from his own earlier associations with the Pretender). The only threat came from those who were attached to the government yet enemies to the constitution, by which Bolingbroke meant Walpole's placemen in Parliament and others who profited from the Whig oligarchy at the cost of abandoning true Whig principles.

Bolingbroke had argued that Whig and Tory had been replaced by Court and Country parties, and that the only true enemies to the principles of the Revolution were Walpole and his supporters. All that remained for him, in his first series of letters, was to provide a criterion for judging political behaviour in the new era of Country consensus. To this end, he proposed a major conceptual distinction between 'government' and 'constitution'. He defined government as the instrumental activity of administration, an evaluatively neutral

activity that could be used to describe the conduct of any 'chief magistrate, and inferior magistrates under his direction and influence' (p. 88). Attachment to the principles of the constitution, however, provided the means to judge whether a government was good or bad, and hence whether it fostered the spirit of liberty or the practice of tyranny. 'By constitution', he argued in a classic definition, 'we mean . . . that assemblage of laws, institutions and customs, derived from certain fixed principles of reason, directed to certain fixed objects of public good, that compose the general system, according to which the community hath agreed to be governed' (p. 88). Any government that acted against the common good, or that went against the original contracts which formed the basis of the constitution, could be accused of being 'unconstitutional', a term coined by Bolingbroke himself (p. 124).

In order to convict Walpole's government of unconstitutionality, Bolingbroke turned to two further shibboleths of the Old Whig tradition, standing armies and the corruption of Parliament. Now Walpole was keeping the army on foot, on the pretext of potential Jacobite invasion. Bolingbroke's argument at this point was rather undeveloped, though he was compelled to make it because of the association between tyranny and standing armies which had most recently been affirmed in the 1690s by Old Whig authors such as John Trenchard, John Toland and Andrew Fletcher. His argument that Walpole was corrupting Parliament was more persuasive. If the monarch could sufficiently pack both Houses of Parliament, either through his direct influence or through his chief minister, the balance of powers in the mixed constitution would be destroyed, and with it liberty itself. 'Parliaments are the true guardians of liberty', Bolingbroke asserted, '[b]ut then no slavery can be so effectually brought and fixed upon us as parliamentary slavery' (p. 94). The crucial support of the crown in keeping Walpole in power after the Excise Crisis lent conviction to this argument, and it was on the ground of Parliamentary 'corruption' that the opposition mobilized its attack during the election campaign of 1734.

The diagnosis of corruption provided the link between the *Dissertation*'s first ten letters, 'Letter XI' of the *Dissertation* (first issued as a separate broadside in the spring of 1734), and the work's concluding suite of letters (published in November and December 1734), though Bolingbroke's target shifted from the crown to the

people. The opposition, led by Bolingbroke and his Tory ally Sir William Wyndham, had put pressure on Walpole by introducing a bill to repeal the Septennial Act in March 1734. This Act had been introduced in the wake of the 1715 Jacobite rising as a security measure on the grounds that elections held at least every three years (as had been the case since 1694) led to political instability. The bill of repeal provided the occasion for *The Craftsman Extraordinary . . . In Which the Right of the People to Frequent Elections of their Representatives is Fully Considered*, which Bolingbroke later incorporated as 'Letter XI' of the *Dissertation*. In this pamphlet, Bolingbroke again traced the history of royal management of Parliament from Richard II to James II to show how the 'essentials of British liberty', 'freedom of elections, and the frequency, integrity and independency of parliaments' (p. 101), had been repeatedly threatened, until restored by the Revolution Settlement and forced by the needs of war. To safeguard that liberty, Bolingbroke argued for triennial, even annual, parliaments to prevent the entrenchment of oligarchical government, and hence the unbalancing of the constitution. Later in the century, Rousseau famously remarked that the English were free only once every seven years, while Paine held that the existence of the Septennial Act proved that 'there is no constitution in England'. A distinctive feature of later eighteenth-century British radicalism would be the demand for annual parliaments. The central place of this argument in the *Dissertation* partly explains Bolingbroke's reputation among radicals as '[t]he ablest defender of our liberties and the noblest asserter of the excellence of our constitution as it was established at the Revolution', as the *London Courant* called him in 1780.

The elections of 1734 returned Walpole and the Whigs to power, albeit with a reduced majority. Though Bolingbroke spent the spring of 1734 in Somerset, 'rising early and writing much', he did not resume publication of the *Dissertation* until the winter of that year, after the election had been settled. The attempt at coalition-building had collapsed, the move to repeal the Septennial Act had failed, and Bolingbroke was now a marginal figure in the counsels of the opposition. These circumstances may account for the more leisurely and abstract character of the *Dissertation*'s concluding 'Letters', which returned to the examination of the mixed constitution, the dangers it faced, and the means to protect it. They may also

account for the greater emphasis Bolingbroke placed on the complicity of the people in their own downfall, as if in reproach to the electorate for their failure to displace the minister. In 'Letter VII', he had argued that Charles II had not been able to subvert the constitution, because only Parliament, and not the people, were corrupted. Now the danger lay in the people lapsing into voluntary servitude, by their failure to hold their representatives to account and thereby to safeguard the constitution. 'We may give ourselves a tyrant in our folly, if we please' (p. 112), he warned, but only if the people became accomplices in their own enslavement.

In 'Letters XII–XIX' of the *Dissertation*, Bolingbroke turned to history to show the vulnerability of the mixed constitution, and the necessity of vigilance to protect it. Only a government in which the three parts – monarchical, aristocratic and democratic – checked one another's powers, and remained in balance with one another, could protect true liberty, that is, 'liberty stated and ascertained by law' (p. 112). The Romans had a monarchical dictator and an aristocratic senate, but lacked a third estate. Their fate was the collapse of the Republic and imperial tyranny. The aristocracy of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Castile had failed to mediate between crown and people, and had thereby allowed a powerful monarch aided by a corrupt minister to establish absolutism. Finally, the French people 'had no real share in the supreme power of government, either collectively or representatively' (p. 143), so that a powerful monarchy was able to intimidate the nation's assemblies. These examples pointed up the excellence of Britain's constitution: it had not yet collapsed into the tyranny suffered by its fellow Gothic constitutions in France and Spain, and its spirit of liberty had survived even the Norman Conquest. Only if the crown were rich, Parliament corrupt and the people demoralized would ruin come to Britain. In the end, 'nothing can destroy the constitution of Britain, but the people of Britain' (p. 167). Bolingbroke argued that the crown had grown rich from the proceeds of the civil list and the financial settlement agreed after the Revolution. Parliament was packed with placemen and office-holders. The task now was to sustain the incorruptibility of the people themselves. If that were lost, the balance of the constitution would be upset, and 'then will the fate of Rome be renewed, in some sort, in Britain' (p. 167).

The *Dissertation* did not end on this chillingly Machiavellian note. Instead, Bolingbroke returned to his crucial distinction between the constitutional and the anti-constitutional parties within British politics. Neither Tories, nor Whigs, nor Dissenters could be expected to protect the constitution alone; instead, the 'constitutionists' must join together in order to resist the forces that would corrupt the constitution: the power of the crown, the profits of speculation, and the connivance of ministers. He also called Walpole to account with a classic republican threat. Walpole's schemes of corruption were ultimately self-defeating, rendering his family's 'riches and honours precarious and insecure, and . . . entailing servitude upon his own race' (p. 188). This was because freedom demanded sacrifice by every citizen for its protection; only if all remained virtuous could the liberty and security of any individual be ensured. Bolingbroke's conception of the subordination of private interest to the common good and his parallel definition of liberty as freedom under law reveal his debt to the classical republican tradition more clearly than either his use of the language of virtue and corruption or his dire warnings of imminent national decline.

The electorate had failed Bolingbroke as much as his allies in the opposition had and he returned to France in 1735, where he adopted the pose of the retired politician-philosopher associated with Cicero and Seneca and, more recently in British political life, with Francis Bacon and the Earl of Clarendon. His first major political work composed in France, the letter 'On the Spirit of Patriotism' (1736), expressed disillusionment with the older generation of opposition politicians in neo-Stoic tones and no longer directed advice to the people but rather counsel to the aristocracy. Bolingbroke addressed his letter to Henry Hyde, Viscount Cornbury, Clarendon's great-grandson, a member of a group of young, largely aristocratic MPs who had been elected to Parliament in 1734. These 'Boy Patriots' were untainted by association with an opposition which had conspicuously failed to cohere in 1733–34, and they could not be accused of the compromises which had dogged Bolingbroke's own career. They promised new hope for the opposition, and Bolingbroke offered counsel designed to call them to their responsibilities and to show that their most important duties were those to the nation itself.

Bolingbroke followed Cicero in arguing that the highest duty was service to one's country, and that the responsibility to serve was calibrated according to one's position in the commonwealth. The greatest responsibility fell on the members of that aristocracy of talent present in every society 'who are born to instruct, to guide, and to preserve' (p. 193). These were the men who were above passion and ambition, and who were born to lead once humans had congregated naturally and submitted to government under the law. Bolingbroke's appeal to natural law in this letter is notable, since he had so signally avoided it in the *Dissertation upon Parties*. In the *Dissertation*, he had mainly relied instead upon history to validate his arguments and, where history was lacking (as in the case of the origins of the British constitution) on immemoriality; in response, Ministerialist writers had monopolized natural jurisprudential argument in their justifications of hierarchy as a counterblast to Bolingbroke's constitutionalism. However, in the letter, he offered an account of the world as a 'moral system' (p. 197), framed by the Creator, whose order was accessible to human reason, and to which all humans should contribute according to their capabilities. Yet this again was consonant with the Stoic conception of duty as conformity to nature. Since men were naturally sociable, and sociability entailed government, service to one's country was therefore 'no chimerical, but a real duty' (p. 201). The satisfactions to be derived from the exercise of one's duty were again calibrated according to the importance of that duty, and the achievement of this highest responsibility would therefore generate the highest of intellectual pleasures.

Bolingbroke returned to the themes of duty and patriotism in his most famous, and later most reviled, political work, *The Idea of a Patriot King* (1738). He had left France for England in the summer of 1738, to sort out his financial affairs, and to stay with his friend Alexander Pope. By this stage, the Patriot opposition to Walpole was rallying around Frederick, Prince of Wales, and was becoming identified with his alternative court at Leicester House. *The Idea of a Patriot King* seems to have arisen from a request by Frederick's Secretary, George Lyttelton, that Pope provide much-needed counsel for the Prince at a time when his popularity was on the rise. Frederick needed to live down a chequered, rakish past, and to prepare himself to be a worthy successor to his father. Bolingbroke,

rather than Pope, responded with a mirror for the Prince that completed the intellectual trajectory he had followed in the *Dissertation* and 'On the Spirit of Patriotism'. In the *Dissertation*, he had stated that '[a] popular king of Great Britain will be always not only easy and secure, but in effect absolute. He will be, what the British constitution alone can make any prince, the absolute monarch of a free people' (p. 162). *The Idea of a Patriot King* gave substance to this statement, on the basis of the natural-law principles of the letter 'On the Spirit of Patriotism'.

Bolingbroke had addressed the British people and their representatives in the *Dissertation upon Parties*. In 'On the Spirit of Patriotism', he had turned to the aristocracy. Finally, he directed *The Idea of a Patriot King* to the remaining power in the mixed constitution, the monarchy. Now the duties to be treated were the highest ones, 'the duties of a king to his country' (p. 217). Bolingbroke again derived duties from the principles of divine order and human nature. Though he now argued that government had arisen from human depravity as much as from natural sociability, this inconsistency did not affect his main contention that the aim of government was the happiness of society in accordance with the precepts of the law of nature. To this deistical utilitarianism, Bolingbroke added the republican contention that good government was necessary 'to support legal liberty, and legal liberty to preserve good government' (p. 244). The best constitution to guarantee happiness and liberty would be a monarchy limited by an aristocratic and a democratic element. Should that happiness and liberty be under threat, the best means to restore it would be the accession of such a limited monarch, devoted to the common welfare, protective of the rights of property and liberty, and therefore, in Bolingbroke's terms, truly a 'Patriot King'.

Bolingbroke repudiated extreme party positions on the nature of the monarchy, as he had earlier done in the *Dissertation*. He disavowed the High Tory belief in divine-right kingship, by claiming that any government that promoted the happiness of the people was in accordance with God's laws, and could therefore be called divine, whether it was a monarchy or not. He also rejected the most radical form of Whig contractualism, which would lead to the destruction of the constitution by placing too stringent limitations on the monarchy. However, his failure to define exactly what limitations would

be so damaging, and his insistence that the prince ruled solely for the good of his people, made *The Idea of a Patriot King* palatable to Whig oppositionists, just as his insistence upon hereditary right and the necessity of monarchy rendered it acceptable to Tories. Bolingbroke once again provided an ideology for a disparate coalition, this time centred on a prince rather than on a party programme.

The Patriot King would be the enemy of corruption, the father of his people, a moral exemplar and the head of a flourishing commercial empire. He would therefore purge his court of self-interested and ambitious advisers and rely upon the wise counsel of virtuous men. He would exhibit the essential decorum intrinsic to virtue and maintain the unaffected propriety of a gentleman. He would rule above party, favouring one when temporary necessity demanded, yet not permanently enlisting himself with any, for only then could he truly act for the common good. Finally, he would encourage the nation's commerce, foster overseas colonies and avoid continental commitments. He would therefore follow the precepts of the mirror-for-princes tradition, which recommended the avoidance of flattery and the pursuit of good counsel; he would adopt the Country programme of national unity and non-party government promoted by Bolingbroke and his allies throughout the 1730s; he would model himself after the moral advice of Cicero's *De Officiis* (twice paraphrased in the text itself); and he would follow the blue-water foreign and colonial policies espoused by the Tories since the Glorious Revolution.

Bolingbroke chose his sources pointedly in the circumstances of 1738. The tradition of advice to a prince remained alive and well in a culture where the education of the heir to the throne was a major political prize, especially when Frederick's own son George (later George III, for whom his father wrote his own brief advice in 1749) had been born in the summer before Bolingbroke composed *The Idea of a Patriot King*. The Patriot King would be enlisted among the supporters of Cicero (for his stand against corruption, his prosecution of Catiline, and his championing of national unity) against those on the minister's side in the 1730s who accused him of trimming and hypocrisy. More immediately for Bolingbroke's political purposes, the Patriot King's non-partisan leadership (as embodied in Frederick) could offer hope to a Patriot cause which was newly

confident of Walpole's weakness in Parliament, especially as commercial grievances against Spain inspired widespread opposition to his policy of peace within and without doors. This last context gave point to the work's closing panegyric of the Patriot King as a latter-day Nerva, combining the traditionally incompatible ideals of *imperium* and *libertas*, or as a new Augustus, at the head of a prosperous and free people, commanding a vast though uncorrupting empire well suited to the maritime capabilities of an island nation. Within a year of Bolingbroke's writing *The Idea of a Patriot King*, Britain had entered the War of Jenkins's Ear, fought to protect the nation's maritime and commercial interests.

Bolingbroke's visions of virtuous princely rule, non-partisan government and a flourishing empire of the seas in *The Idea of a Patriot King* bequeathed enduring legacies to later eighteenth-century British political thought. The work provided a necessary point of reference for all subsequent mirrors for princes after its official publication in 1749, a standard against which radicals held future kings (only one of whom, William IV, seems to have read it), as well as a slur to be cast on the monarchy of George III by Sir Robert Walpole's son, Horace, who accused the young King's tutors of having raised him on prerogative principles derived from Bolingbroke. The work may have had its most enduring influence in the early American republic, where it was read by John Adams and Thomas Jefferson as a blueprint for a presidency above party. This was despite the fact that the benign blue-water patriarchalism promised by Bolingbroke had been subverted by the territorial militarism of the later eighteenth-century British Empire, which the American rebels had attacked with Bolingbrokean accusations of ministerial corruption in the decade before 1776.

Bolingbroke has been largely remembered as the grandfather of English conservatism, though this has done grave historical and intellectual violence to his thought. Such appropriation can be explained by the fact that his political career in office was indeed spent as a Tory; by his promotion of the ideal of patriotism which, since the last round of the British wars against France in the late eighteenth century, has been associated with the xenophobia of the right; and by his appeal for Benjamin Disraeli, who took Bolingbroke as his own model in forming the Young England movement in the 1840s. Yet Bolingbroke's place in the history of political

thought was secured by his definition of constitutional government in the *Dissertation upon Parties*, by his revival of a neo-Stoic conception of patriotism in the letter 'On the Spirit of Patriotism' and by his vision of a non-partisan executive in *The Idea of a Patriot King*. All of these ideas still deserve attention from citizens of those nationalistic, commercial, representative republics we call democracies, whether their constitution is presidential or monarchical, congressional or parliamentary, in form.

Principal events in Bolingbroke's life

1678 *September*: born, probably at Lydiard Tregoze, Wiltshire.
October: mother buried at Lydiard Tregoze; Henry St John baptized at Battersea.

1685 *February*: accession of James II.

1688 *December*: flight of James II; accession of William and Mary.

(?) Educated at Sheriffhales Dissenting Academy, Shiffnal, Shropshire (?).

1697 'To Mr. Dryden' published in Dryden's translation of *The Works of Virgil*.

1698 Begins two-year grand tour: visits France, Switzerland and Italy.

1701 *February*: elected MP for Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire.
May: marries Frances Winchcombe.

1702 *March*: death of William III; accession of Anne.
August: receives honorary degree from Christ Church, Oxford.

1704 *April*: appointed Secretary at War in Godolphin–Marlborough administration.

1708 *February*: resigns from administration.
April: fails to secure re-election as MP for Wootton Bassett; retires to wife's estate at Bucklebury, Berkshire.

1710 *February–March*: trial of Dr Sacheverell.
June: appointed Secretary of State for the Northern Department in Harley administration.
August: *A Letter to the Examiner* (Swift's new journal).

September: Tory landslide at general election; elected MP for Berkshire.
November: first meeting with Swift.

1711 *November*: Swift publishes *The Conduct of the Allies*.

1712 *July*: elevated to the Lords as Viscount Bolingbroke and Baron St John.

1713 *April*: Treaty of Utrecht ends War of the Spanish Succession.

1714 *June*: promotes Schism Bill in the Lords.
July: Harley (Oxford) dismissed by Queen Anne.
August: death of Anne; accession of George I; Bolingbroke dismissed from Secretaryship.

1715 *February*: Whig landslide at general election.
March: flees to France.
June: impeached by Parliament.
July: accepts earldom from the Pretender and becomes his Secretary of State.
September: death of Louis XIV.

1716 *March*: dismissed as Pretender's Secretary.
April: Collapse of Jacobite rising in Scotland; Septennial Act passed by Parliament.
Writes *Reflections upon Exile* and *A Letter to Sir William Windham* (first published 1752–53).

1718 *October*: death of Frances Winchcombe.

1719 Marries Marie-Claire de Marcilly, Marquise de Villette.

1720 Collapse of the South Sea Company.
December: leases Château de la Source, near Orléans, where he lives until 1725. During this period, writes *The Substance of Some Letters to M. de Pouilly, A Letter Occasioned by One of Archbishop Tillotson's Sermons* and *Reflections Concerning Innate Moral Principles* (first published 1752–54).

1722 Walpole becomes principal minister.

1723 *May*: pardoned under the Great Seal, but not released from 1715 Act of Attainder.
June–August: back in England.
Foundation of the Club de l'Entresol in Paris.

1724 *August*: drafts 'Plan for a General History of Europe' in letter to Pope.

1725 Returns to England; settles at Dawley, near Uxbridge.

May: attainder reversed, but not allowed to return to the Lords.

1726 *October*: Swift publishes *Gulliver's Travels*.
December: first issue of *The Craftsman* published (5th).

1727 *January*: *The First Vision of Camilick* appears in *The Craftsman*.
March: *The Occasional Writer, I–III*, appear in *The Craftsman*.
June: death of George I; accession of George II.

1728 *January*: Gay, *The Beggar's Opera* first performed.
May: Pope publishes *The Dunciad*.

1729 *August–October*: tours Netherlands and north-west France.
October: Montesquieu begins visit to England (October 1729–summer 1731)

1730 *The Case of Dunkirk Faithfully Stated and Impartially Considered*.
September: begins publishing *Remarks on the History of England* in *The Craftsman* under the pseudonym 'Humphrey Oldcastle'.

1731 *May*: publishes concluding letter of *Remarks on the History of England* in *The Craftsman*.
A Final Answer to the Remarks on the Craftsman's Vindication.

1733 *January–June*: the Excise Crisis.
February–May: Pope publishes *An Essay on Man*, Epistles I–III (addressed to 'my St John').
The Freeholder's Political Catechism.
October: begins publishing the *Dissertation upon Parties* serially in *The Craftsman*.

1734 *The Craftsman Extraordinary . . . In Which the Right of the People to Frequent Elections of their Representatives is Fully Considered*.
December: concludes publication of the *Dissertation upon Parties* in *The Craftsman*.

1735 Lyttelton publishes *Persian Letters*; James Thomson publishes *The Seasons*.
February: *The Dissertation upon Parties* appears in book form, dedicated ironically to Walpole.
May: leaves England for France.

June: settles at Chanteloup, in Touraine.
November: begins writing *Letters on the Study and Use of History*, dedicated to Henry Hyde, Lord Cornbury.

1736 Moves to Argeville, near Fontainebleau.
Writes *A Letter on the Spirit of Patriotism*, addressed to Lord Cornbury, and (?) *Of the True Use of Retirement and Study*, dedicated to Lord Bathurst.

1738 *March*: Pope, *Epistle to Bolingbroke*.
June: birth of George, son of Frederick, Prince of Wales.
July: returns to England; stays with Pope until April 1739.
Pope prints private edition of *Letters on the Study and Use of History*.
November/December (?): writes *The Idea of a Patriot King*.

1739 *April*: returns to France.
Writes *Of the State of Parties at the Accession of King George the First*.

1740 *June*: death of Sir William Wyndham.

1741 (?) Pope prints edition of The *Idea of a Patriot King*.

1742 *February*: Walpole resigns, and is elevated to the Lords as Earl of Orford.
April: father dies.
Late April/early May–June: in England.

1743 *April–May* and *October*: in England.

1744 *May*: death of Pope.
Returns to England for good, and settles at Battersea.
October: Pope's pirated edition of *The Idea of a Patriot King* mostly destroyed.

1745 *March*: death of Walpole.
October: death of Swift.
Duke of Cumberland crushes Jacobite rebellion.

1746 Publishes [Pope,] *Verses on the Late D—ss of M—. By Mr P—*.

1748 *A Collection of Political Tracts by the Author of the Dissertation on Parties*.
Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle ends War of the Austrian Succession.

1749 *January–April*: *London Magazine* begins unauthorized reprint of sections from *The Idea of a Patriot King*.
May: *Letters, On the Spirit of Patriotism: On the Idea of a*

Patriot King: And On the State of Parties, At the Accession of King George the First.
July: *A Familiar Epistle to the Most Impudent Man Living.*
Writes last political tract, *Some Reflections on the Present State of the Nation.*

1750 *March*: wife dies: buried in St Mary's Church, Battersea.

1751 *March*: death of Frederick, Prince of Wales.
December: dies; buried at Battersea.

1752 *March*: *Letters on the Study and Use of History, Of the True Use of Retirement and Study and Reflections upon Exile.*
Reflections Concerning Innate Moral Principles.

1753 *A Letter to Sir William Wyndham, Some Reflections on the Present State of the Nation and the Letter to Mr Pope.*

1754 *March*: *The Works of the Late Right Honourable Henry St John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke* published in five volumes by David Mallet.

Further reading

Biography

H. T. Dickinson, *Bolingbroke* (London, 1970) replaced all earlier accounts, though Walter Sichel, *Bolingbroke and His Times* (2 vols., London, 1901–2) contains material which is still useful. Sheila Biddle, *Bolingbroke and Harley* (London, 1975) and Brean Hammond, *Pope and Bolingbroke: A Study of Friendship and Influence* (Columbia, Missouri, 1984) have since treated two of Bolingbroke's most important relationships in greater detail, Hammond the more revealingly.

Political background

Four major recent syntheses of British history in the 'long' eighteenth century provide a variety of contexts for Bolingbroke's life, works and politics: John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State 1688–1783* (London, 1989); J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1688–1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice During the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge, 1985); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven, 1992); and Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People? England 1727–1783* (Oxford, 1989). None of these entirely replaces two older synoptic studies of relevance to the study of Bolingbroke and his thought: Betty Kemp, *King and Commons 1660–1832* (London, 1959) and J. H. Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability in England 1675–1725* (London, 1967).