THOMAS STARKEY AND THE COMMONWEAL

Humanist politics and religion in the reign of Henry VIII

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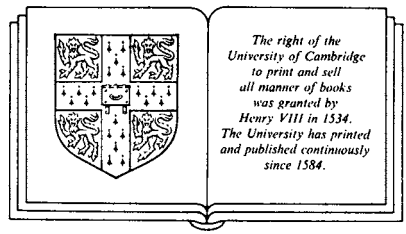

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INTRODUCTION

> Far be it from me to espouse the genius of a single man in its totality because of one or two well-formulated phrases ... He who wants to be safe in praising the entire man must see, examine, and estimate the entire man.
>
> Petrarch, *De ignorantia*

Although Petrarch meant his words to apply only to philosophers, they still well describe the ends of this first thorough intellectual and biographical study of Thomas Starkey. Petrarch's subjects were also well known, but this cannot be said of Starkey. He was born about the end of the fifteenth century into a reasonably well-off Cheshire family which paid for his education at Magdalen College, Oxford. In addition to an initiation into a rudimentary variety of humanism, Starkey there met the man who would have the most decisive impact on his life, Reginald Pole, grandson of the Duke of Clarence and protégé of Henry VIII. After gaining his MA in 1521, Starkey probably made his first trip to Italy, the determining event in his life. He would spend about a decade out of the next thirteen years acquiring an Italian education, mainly while moving in Pole's circle in Padua. His training there, first in natural science and then in civil law, prepared him to fulfil his ambition to enter royal service.

If it had not developed before, Starkey's aim to attract Henry's patronage matured in the last years of the 1520s, which he divided about equally between England and France. This is the time when he wrote his most famous work, the Dialogue between Pole and (Thomas) Lupset. Starkey did not choose these two as his interlocutors by coincidence. Both then stood high in royal favour, especially after their success helping to persuade the Parisian theologians to give a favourable opinion on Henry's divorce. But Pole refused to follow Starkey's plan to lure him into high office as leader of a reformed nobility. Starkey therefore separated from Pole in early 1532 and began the study of civil law in Avignon, his most overt step yet towards the king's service. After a short time in the south of France, he rejoined Pole in Padua where he took his degree in both laws before returning home in late 1534.

Very soon after his arrival in England, Starkey successfully caught the eye

of Henry's chief minister, Thomas Cromwell. Cromwell could not miss Starkey's value as a man recently returned from Italy, and the secretary recruited him in the first place to handle intelligence reports from friends in Venice and Padua. A little later Cromwell put Starkey to work corresponding with Pole in an effort to learn his true opinion of the divorce. Even though part of the reason for Starkey's departure from Pole in 1532 had probably been Pole's refusal to have anything further to do with Henry's attempts to rid himself of Catherine, neither Starkey nor Henry took Pole at his word. Starkey and Cromwell appear to have got along reasonably well; at least Starkey's correspondence with Cromwell contains many references to discussions between the two. One subject they talked about was doubtless religion, and at first this helped to draw the two together. Cromwell shortly gave Starkey the chance to fulfil his ultimate ambition of becoming a preacher, and in late 1535 Starkey finished a lengthy sermon entitled *An exhortation to the people instructynge theym to Unitie and Obedience*, his only work published during his lifetime.

In early 1536, then, the future looked promising. Pole was shortly to deliver his opinion, and Starkey's correspondents assured him it would be impressive. Starkey had just published a book, was enjoying a royal chaplaincy and his career seemed set fair for success. In mid-year, however, the bubble deflated. Disgrace did not burst it, because Starkey only temporarily fell out of favour. Compounded of concern over his preaching in the first place and his failure to induce Pole to give the proper opinion in the second, the cloud over Starkey lifted when he successfully defended his preaching and some of those in power – if not Cromwell – decided to give Pole yet another chance. In the midst of all this, Starkey made one last bid to attract Henry's attention in the cause of reform, and sent the king a letter detailing how to handle religious dissent, defending religious conservatives and moderates, and advising Henry what to do with the proceeds from the dissolution of the monasteries. The letter had no effect. At least it did not anger Henry, for in December 1536 Starkey added a rich benefice in London to his growing list of ecclesiastical preferments. Probably about the same time he began a tract against the Pilgrimage of Grace, but completed only a few lines. This may have been a sign of Starkey's ambivalence both about Henry's government and the rebels, now that neither the king nor Pole, whom the pope sent to aid the Pilgrims, would embrace reform.

Even though his fall proved temporary, Starkey had lost Cromwell's confidence and his career came to a standstill in 1537, save for his participation in a debate with the bishops over various theological questions. As a result, and as often happened when secular ambitions met frustration, Starkey's religious bent became increasingly pronounced. He turned to the Old Testament for inspiration and by October he had finished a set of notes on it which

manifested his growing discontent with the course of policy in England. Only obliquely hidden under many remarks on prophets and the kings who refused to hear them was the figure of his old master Pole. Starkey kept in touch with Pole, and at least once provided him with crucial intelligence of moves against him. Starkey was drifting into opposition.

In the beginning of 1538, Starkey's hopes probably revived somewhat when he was first asked to preach before the king at York Place and then added to a commission charged to investigate an incident of witchcraft in London. About the middle of the year, Starkey undertook his most ambitious piece of writing, a detailed refutation of Albert Pighe's massive *Hierarchiae ecclesiasticae assertio*, part of which attacked Henry. Starkey did not live to bring the work past the stage of notes and a sketch of his counter-argument, but it still clearly embodies his typical moderation. That was a commodity in increasingly short supply. Starkey's death in August cheated the headsman. Shortly after he died in Somerset, where he seems almost to have fled, Starkey narrowly escaped indictment for treason as a member of the so-called Exeter conspiracy.

Starkey's is not a life of outstanding accomplishment, but it does define a series of contexts which can help to make sense of his ideas.[1] Starkey has always been regarded as important above all for them, particularly those which fall within the realm of the history of political thought. This book endorses that assessment, even as it strips Starkey of much of his traditional significance. My argument is often negative, and designed to clear away fifty or more years of unhelpful analysis. I shall argue that Starkey was not a follower of Marsilio of Padua, nor a Lutheran (or any kind of Protestant), nor a proto-Roundhead, nor even an enthusiastic partisan and intellectual companion of Cromwell. Instead, I shall present Starkey as the most Italianate Englishman of his generation and among the most eager importers of Italian concepts in the sixteenth century. The manner in which he combined various European traditions – Paduan, Venetian, Florentine, Parisian – with English ideas constitues his greatest significance. This claim could be phrased in such a way as to label Starkey a harbinger or anticipation of his Elizabethan successors, but that would be to read history backwards. He skilfully, if not always clearly, wielded Italian categories of political analysis, both secular and ecclesiastical, together with Italian religious beliefs to make sense of English 'reality'. He was especially good at stretching the parlous English vernacular to cover the much more sophisticated coinage of Italian political

[1] Dominick LaCapra warns historians against the dangers of placing ideas in context, and especially against the problems in a 'life and works' approach in his 'Rethinking intellectual history and reading texts', 55ff. and 60–1. Starkey's social ideas, which A. B. Ferguson studied in *The articulate citizen*, will receive less attention than his political and religious thought in this book.

discourse. Study of his language then can contribute to understanding how ideas move from one culture to another.

As ideas, so the manner in which they were presented, and Starkey further deserves attention as the first writer of a humanist political dialogue in English. This he has almost never had. On the score of both his play with language and his skill in weaving it into a larger literary representation, Starkey fits Richard Lanham's portrait of the 'playful' rhetorician. Therefore a study of him can contribute to the new 'literary' history Lanham seeks, a history 'essentially literary ... animated by dramatic motive, play instead of purpose' or, more tamely put, to the sort of 'fully serious history [which] will combine both conceptions of event: purposive and playful'.[2] This biography thus essays to bridge the gap Barbara Shapiro decries between narrowly focused intellectual history and literary studies.[3] Lanham calls the relationship between play and purpose, philosophy and rhetoric 'symbiotic', and this is certainly true of Starkey's career.[4] Beneath a spate of highly aureate diction lay a political purpose, and a perfectly serious motive under markedly rhetorical intentions. The resulting ambiguity in Starkey's thought will require careful study. This problem again is partly a function of Starkey's Italian experience. The study of the Dialogue offered here is the first attempt to put any such Henrician work into its Italian context.

But Starkey also played some role in English politics, if again not quite the one he has usually been given. He shaped his career and his thinking around a double loyalty, to Pole (and his fellow nobles) and to prince, but Starkey would support neither unless they answered his call to reform. The tension between these two allegiances helps to account for much of the peculiarity of Starkey's thought. Starkey's plans look odd, even 'radical', because he put his humanist education to the conservative end of restoring Pole and his fellow reformed aristocrats to dominance. Pole thus emerges as the central force in Starkey's life. His importance to Starkey has not gone unnoticed, but the implications of the link between them have not been properly appreciated. Pole, like Starkey, has borne the label 'liberal' and been seen as yet another of those pushing Starkey into modernity. In fact, Pole was perhaps the Englishman best placed to put Starkey in contact with the traditions of the high nobility, and he certainly behaved on several well-known occasions a good deal like his maternal grandfather. It must be emphasized that Pole was in an unusual position: a scion of the high nobility, thrown down from that eminence by Henry VII, only to be rescued and well educated by Henry VIII in precisely the humanist fashion Starkey was. This is not to suggest 'influence', but it seems most likely that if Starkey debated his ideas with anyone, that

[2] R. A. Lanham, *The motives of eloquence: literary rhetoric in the renaissance*, 20.
[3] Review of L. Martines, *Society and history in English renaissance verse*, 1191.
[4] Lanham, *Motives*, 34.

person was Pole, not Richard Morison.[5] Alas, next to nothing is known of Pole's ideas before he wrote *De unitate*, his savage attack on King Henry. The usual argument that Starkey faithfully reproduced Pole's thinking in the Dialogue could be stood on its head to make of Pole an ambitious man, eager to pursue the active life. That, of course, was no longer his view by 1536. A long, drawn-out process stretched between Dialogue and *De unitate*, but very little of it can be sufficiently documented to allow us to say much about Pole's impact on Starkey.

Nevertheless, it seems that Starkey saw himself as the spokesman for a party of the high nobility, centred around Pole. Its membership can be roughly reconstructed from the names of those who either certainly or probably favoured Pole during his legation of 1537, to judge from the very likely deliberately bungled efforts to settle the threat Pole posed.[6] The members of the Carewe–Exeter faction head the list, especially the Marquis of Exeter himself and Pole's brothers, Henry Lord Montagu and Sir Geoffrey Pole, not to mention his mother, the Countess of Salisbury. Sir John Wallop, then one of the English ambassadors in Paris, expressed open support for Pole, and Stephen Gardiner and Francis Bryan, on a special mission to Francis's court, behaved in such a way as to raise strong suspicions that they also favoured Pole. Further, at least four leading members of the king's council should probably be counted as real or potential sympathizers. One of Henry's most senior advisers, William Lord Sandys, was a notorious opponent of Cromwell and had contemplated open opposition a year or two earlier.[7] Sir William Paulet certainly helped one of Pole's clients who had fled England for religious reasons. His neighbour in Hampshire and fellow councillor Sir William Fitzwilliam did his best to cover up the first signs of Sir Geoffrey Pole's misdeeds in 1538. And Sir John Russell had earlier openly supported Pole and was certainly much less than enthusiastic about Anne. The council's principal secretary, Thomas Wriothesley, who also had an estate in Hampshire should be added to the list, too. Several bishops and members of the council ought not to be excluded, especially Richard Sampson and Cuthbert Tunstall, even though the latter was by 1536 being kept away from council meetings.[8] Three other great lords belong in the same region of the political landscape: Delawarr, Abergavenny, and perhaps Baron Hastings, son of the Earl of Huntingdon. One of Paulet's near neighbours in

[5] D. S. Berkowitz suggested in his introduction to *Humanist scholarship and public order*, 43, that Morison and Starkey must have talked over their work in Padua. In my view, Morison loses his traditionally important place in Starkey's life, because he was not close to Starkey in Padua, he and Starkey used a common language to different ends, and we have next to no evidence for the period when they may have acted together in 1536.

[6] For most of this, see my 'A diet for Henry VIII: the failure of Reginald Pole's 1537 legation', 323–27.

[7] For Sandys, see chapt. seven, n. 87, below.

[8] For Tunstall, see further chapt. 7, below.

Hampshire, Sir Antony Windsor, should also be included for the same reason as Paulet. Sir Antony served as receiver-general to Lord Lisle, who would be brought down in 1540 partly on charges of having met secretly with Pole.

Much of this party never achieved 'reality', but if we are to restore contingency to the study of Tudor history, we might profitably think in terms of options, of what might have been.[9] J.-P. Moreau has recently suggested that the Pilgrimage could have enjoyed much greater success if it had availed itself of Pole's leadership, especially because he could have provided it with a programme.[10] Doubtless this is right, and Pole's ideas came close to what many of the Pilgrims believed in an inarticulate way, but then Starkey's platform did, too. As J. A. Guy demonstrates, many of the Pilgrims' leaders supported conciliar government and were given to using the language of the commonwealth.[11] They may have been thinking more traditionally than Starkey in both cases, but Starkey's positive programme offered them much more than Pole's essentially negative and defensive one, no less than the chance to take the theoretical and moral high ground against Cromwell in the name of reform. Thus by thinking in counter-factuals, it appears that Starkey's programme, together with his patron and near-claimant to the throne Pole, and the force assembled by the Pilgrims in 1536 and 1537, could have added up to a successful rebellion against Henry VIII. It did indeed misfire because Starkey had not yet moved all the way to covert opposition (although the potential was there from the beginning of his thinking life), Pole was tardy, and the Pilgrims a little too trusting, but all the elements were present. It may even be that Starkey shows us the end of an evolution like Thomas More began but did not live to complete, from the reforming impulses and career-seeking of *Utopia* (no matter how ironically masked) to passive resistance to a king who had disappointed More's hopes.

Starkey also acquires new significance in the history of the Reformation, which important new materials dating from the last two formerly almost entirely dark years of his life support. Here we are on firmer ground. Starkey represented the thinking of a middle party, anti-papal but not Protestant, and not much concerned about doctrinal niceties. Once again, contingency must enter in if we are not to view the Reformation as a foregone conclusion. Starkey's views well illustrate recent efforts to stress the religious heterogeneity of pre-Reformation Christianity both in England and in the rest of Europe. Unlike many of his religious allies at home, Starkey's inspiration was

[9] This study thus joins the emphasis of many of the essays in D. Starkey and C. Coleman, eds., *Revolution reassessed*, especially those by J. A. Guy and J. D. Alsop. Cf. also D. Starkey's conclusion, 201.

[10] J.-P. Moreau, *Rome ou l'Angleterre?*, 248.

[11] J. A. Guy, 'The king's council and political participation', in J. A. Guy and A. Fox, *Reassessing the Henrician age*, 121–2.

once again Italian, stemming from the group known as Italian Evangelicals or *spirituali*, one of whose leaders was Pole. It may even be that some members of this party regarded Starkey as an emissary to England. Another of its leaders, Pole's close friend Gianmatteo Giberti, had earlier made vigorous efforts to recruit Tunstall, friend of More and Pole, to join him in Rome to reform the church, and it appears that someone (perhaps the third member of the central leadership of the *spirituali*, Gasparo Contarini) made vigorous attempts to keep lines of communication open to England even after the apparent fiasco of Pole's intemperate attack on Henry. However this may be, Starkey manifested the typically irenic attitude of the *spirituali*, and used their nondogmatic Pauline language skilfully.

It was this, along with his training in the civil law, which probably accounts for Starkey's appeal to Cromwell and for his brief moment of prominence. This has never been missed, but I shall suggest that from the outset Starkey and Cromwell were speaking superficially similar languages, while using them to quite different ends. Cromwell's intention to employ Starkey as a master intelligence-gatherer while Starkey wished only to preach illustrates this neatly. Neither Cromwell nor Starkey noticed their divergence at first, but gradually they drifted apart until finally Cromwell authorized Starkey's indictment for treason a few months after his death. Even though the indictment was not proceeded with, part of the cause for it was Starkey's continued support and covert assistance to Pole. It is probable that his religious and political principles continued to coalesce in his erstwhile patron. And it must be emphasized that prior to Cromwell's swoop on the Exeter conspiracy in 1538, this course of action was not dangerous. The middle party, even with the 'renegade' Pole as its standard-bearer and even after the Pilgrimage, retained life.

So much for Starkey's intellectual and political significance, the latter proving the harder to assess. The problem here lies more in the yardstick than in the object measured. The external standard of political or religious 'reality' is no longer adequate and it can certainly no longer be the exclusive means of judging importance, either for a political figure or for an intellectual one.[12] If Starkey never seems to have followed Pole in the typically Renaissance activity of self-fashioning or creating a new *persona* through literary means, he certainly engaged in the humanist practice of creating 'reality' through language.[13] This he did most clearly in his Dialogue, in both the 'objective'

[12] A. Lockyer, 'Traditions as context in the history of political thought', 203n; Robert Hariman argues that Machiavelli was making a rhetorical claim when he offered a more 'realistic' analysis of politics than his predecessors had, and that historians have been deceived by his device. 'Composing modernity in *The prince*'.

[13] S. J. Greenblatt, *Renaissance self-fashioning*, and T. F. Mayer, 'A mission worse than death: Reginald Pole and the Parisian theologians'.

sense of putting forward a manifesto of reform designed to influence events, and in the 'subjective' one of using words to bring a particular vision of things into existence, whatever its 'practical' impact.

Starkey's Dialogue has been accounted a classic of English political thought since the last century, even if it was left unpublished before that and probably had only a very limited circulation (if any) during Starkey's lifetime. This book hinges on it, in particular its constitutional ideas. Here, as in most of his works, Starkey adhered to an oligarchical model of secular government which drew ultimately on Aristotle. For most of his life, Starkey hoped to see sweeping institutional changes in England designed to restore the high nobility to leadership of the commonwealth. This is the basic argument of the Dialogue. Starkey blamed the ills in the body politic – his central metaphor – on the 'frencey' in its head, by which he meant first the prince and second the nobility. All his long catalogue of ills, from depopulation, through high prices, to the slow process of the law, could be cured if the nobles were trained in civic virtue. Once properly educated, the leading members of the nobility would regain their rightful place in two councils which Starkey proposed as a means to bridle the power of the prince. As is clear from the long debate between Pole and Lupset over the relative merits of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* at the beginning of the work, Starkey meant Pole to head this reordered government. But it would not be sufficient to restore the secular order alone; papal tyranny was as serious a problem as royal and Starkey once more proposed a conciliar solution. The pope should do nothing without the advice of the cardinals, who derived their authority from the general council.

Starkey argued further that this was both the natural system and accorded with natural law. Nature, however, played a much greater role in Starkey's theory than natural law. From the beginning of society, biology and native endowment counted for more than human action, even though social order was in part consensual. Humans had been brought to accept communal life by leaders of great prudence, which must have come to them naturally since Starkey offered no explanation of how they might otherwise have acquired their preeminence. The problem in Henrician England was that those natural leaders had become corrupted. But while Starkey argued that the choice of prince was in the hands of his subjects, he never swerved from his belief that they in turn were permanently of two sorts with no choice about their station. Some were nobles born to rule (at least once retrained) and the rest were destined to serve them. Some remained naturally superior to their fellows. And naturally they also needed more property to allow them to exercise rulership.

As Starkey finally assured his readers, these arrangements had been approved by Christ. For most of the Dialogue, Starkey displayed little more interest in religion. Near its end, however, he had 'Pole' and 'Lupset' turn to a

discussion of salvation, allegedly drawing on Paul. In fact, Starkey embraced an idea of salvation through grace and one's own effort, but the latter was much deemphasized. This seems to have been the entering wedge for Starkey's gradual evolution into a believer in salvation through faith alone. From the conclusion of the Dialogue foreward, in any case, religious concerns bulked increasingly large in Starkey's mind.

Starkey made his case in most of his work through two means which often overlapped. Sometimes he used dialectical or 'demonstrative' arguments, and sometimes rhetorical or persuasive. The whole of the Dialogue is a heavily rhetorical work, replete with all the trappings of humanist literature. It is this and especially the humanist bent for eclecticism which largely accounts for the difficulty in interpreting the Dialogue. Starkey's humanist predilection for word play and historical precedents further complicates matters. The former means that most of his central terms can be translated into one another and the latter that he both drew on more or less 'accurate' versions of English history and also seems to have invented what he could not find. As Starkey learned from humanist rhetoricians like Rudfolf Agricola, what mattered was persuasion, not strict accuracy, verisimilitude not point-to-point realism. Lastly, the structure of the Dialogue can help to clarify Starkey's procedure. Starkey divided his work into three sections. It began with a description of the ideal commonwealth, proceeded to the general causes of its decay, and Starkey finally worked his way down to specifics, with the end in view of proposing remedies once the causes of problems had been isolated. This systematic procedure is usually well sign-posted, but the twistings and turnings of the dialogue between Pole and Lupset do not always stick to the straight line from one section to the next.

A word about the method of this book, especially lest this synopsis of Starkey's major ideas give a false impression that I shall be concerned to track 'influences' on Starkey's mind. G. R. Elton once warned that paucity of evidence renders biography among the worst approaches to the Henrician period in most cases, but enough material about Starkey survives to mean that Elton's stricture does not apply well to him.[14] Current emphasis on placing ideas in their proper context demands more attention to the lives of those who think them and reinforces the recommendation of a *Sitz-im-Leben* approach for the study of lesser humanists.[15] My *modus operandi* derives both directly and through various mediators from R. G. Collingwood's idealist model of history.[16] In particular, if Quentin Skinner's proposal to locate an idea in a context of speech acts and conventions is loosened up a

[14] G. R. Elton, *England 1200–1640*, 243–4.

[15] J. D. Tracy, 'Humanism and the reformation', in S. E. Ozment, ed., *Reformation Europe: a guide to research*, 42. Richard Tuck proposed a similar modification in the direction of biography to Quentin Skinner's influential emphasis on context, but on a broader scale. *Natural rights theories*, 4.

[16] R. G. Collingwood, *The idea of history*, part V, especially section 4.

little and translated into Conal Condren's notion of 'usage', and J. G. A. Pocock's concept of tradition (lately somewhat modified in the direction of 'language') is converted into a matter of a continuing discourse, as Andrew Lockyer suggests, then both will serve to locate Starkey in his linguistic context.[17] Unlike the hoary category of influence, usage is not an evaluative term and serves merely as shorthand 'that one writer has found another germane to his own enterprises'.[18] The vital point is that emphasis throughout must fall on redressing the balance between individual and tradition, as Condren insists, on how Starkey used the materials available to him, not the materials.[19] This is once more a matter of restoring contingency to Starkey's life. Hence the great stress I place on Starkey's contacts with friends, in which as much potential significance inheres as in his reading of books. The object is never establishing influence, for as both Skinner and Condren have shown this concept is nearly devoid of explanatory power.[20] Occasionally, it is clear that Starkey closely imitated a particular model, for example, Donato Giannotti's dialogue on Venice, and this is worth knowing. That sort of demonstration is not my usual concern. Instead, in order to define the limits on what Starkey could have thought, the resources on which he drew or could have drawn must be established. Thus this book endorses the focus on intention and language together with context and tradition which Donald Kelley recommends for the study of intellectual history.[21] Unlike Kelley and Skinner, I would argue that Starkey's motives should also be taken into account.[22] Motive is undoubtedly more difficult to deal with, in part because any number of motives may coalesce in a single intention. The former is also, of

[17] Both Skinner and Pocock, together with their critics, have created an imposing literature on method. Perhaps Skinner's most important thoughts are contained in 'Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas'; 'On performing and explaining linguistic actions'; '"Social meaning" and the explanation of social action'; and his reply to a critical symposium in 'Some problems in the analysis of political thought and action'. Pocock's chief contributions are 'The history of political thought: a methodological enquiry'; 'Time, institutions and action: an essay on traditions and their understanding'; most of the pieces in *Politics, language and time: essays on political thought and history*; his self-review, '*The Machiavellian moment* revisited: a study in history and ideology'; and 'Introduction: the state of the art', in *Virtue, commerce and history*. The second last piece cited provides a reasonably comprehensive bibliography of Pocock's critics, of whom C. Vasoli, '*The Machiavellian moment*: a grand ideological synthesis' and J. H. Geerken, 'Pocock and Machiavelli: structuralist explanation and history' should be singled out. Amongst Skinner's most important critics are C. D. Tarlton, 'History, meaning and revisionism in the study of political thought'; B. Parekh and R. N. Berki, 'The history of political ideas: a critique of Q. Skinner's methodology'; and LaCapra, 'Rethinking intellectual history', 55ff. C. Condren, *The status and appraisal of classic texts*, 139. Lockyer, 'Traditions', *passim*.

[18] Condren, *The status and appraisal of classic texts*, 139.

[19] *Ibid.*, 136.

[20] Skinner presents a radical attack in 'The limits of historical explanation', while Condren argues more moderately in *Classic texts*, chapter 5.

[21] D. R. Kelley, 'Horizons of intellectual history', 162.

[22] Skinner, '"Social meaning"', 144–7.

course, more deeply seated. Nevertheless, I have concentrated both on establishing what Starkey's texts said in his own words – his intentions in Skinner's terms – and also what reason (in Collingwood's sense) led him to put those intentions into prose. Whenever a conflict arises between interpretations based on intention and text or motive and life, I give somewhat greater weight to the latter in common with more traditional historians.

The first three chapters of this book concern Starkey's exposure to various traditions (or perhaps 'coherent sub-traditions' in George Logan's phrase) and languages during the early years of his education.[23] These included several fairly primitive forms of 'civic humanism' in England, together with the fully developed Venetian oligarchical variety, the Florentine–Venetian hybrid, and echoes of the once more robustly republican Paduan sort. Then, too, Starkey almost certainly knew several schools of conciliarist thought, including the Gallican type and its close analogue descending from Francesco Zabarella. During this time he also began his training in rhetoric, encompassing the again fairly unrefined English imitators of Cicero and the more polished littérateurs of Padua, and in dialectic. Here he probably learned both the new humanist mode of argument, typified by Agricola's transformation of dialectic into rhetoric, as well as the scientific method of the 'school of Padua' which blended a more rhetorical style with the logic of its scholastic predecessors. Finally, although religion would become more important later in Starkey's life, the Pauline Christianity of John Colet and the equally Pauline circle around Contarini helped to prepare an option for Starkey. Training in Padua and Paris gave Starkey an arsenal of concepts and a complete language which allowed him to describe English conditions in a much more sophisticated fashion than usual in the early sixteenth century, and to prescribe civic humanist remedies for the problems his analysis revealed.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the Dialogue itself. In the first of these I turn to Starkey's political vocabulary in order to pin down the language he used to construct his argument for a revived aristocracy. Chapter 5 documents that case within an ideological context both of traditional aristocratic political thought and of some of its forms contemporary with Starkey.[24] Beginning with chapter 6, the basic tension in Starkey as in all humanists between the active and contemplative lives manifests itself as I trace his attempts to prepare himself for government service at the same time as he developed an Italian Evangelical religious faith and decided on a career as a preacher. The last two chapters cover Starkey's brief moment near centre stage and the denouement of his career when he immersed himself in religion.

[23] G. M. Logan, 'Substance and form in renaissance humanism', 2, 30–1.

[24] This is the approach Skinner followed in 'History and ideology in the English revolution' and 'The ideological context of Hobbes's political thought'.