

**Mark Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain: Politics and Language in the Shadow of the French Revolution 1789-1815*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. 309. £65. ISBN 9781107027282.**

This volume is a compilation of Mark Philp's essays written over the past twenty years on the English political debates that arose in response to the French Revolution. There are a few new additions, Chapters 5, 10 and 11, but the remaining eight essays in the volume have been published elsewhere and will be familiar to scholars in the field. Nevertheless, these were and remain seminal works that make an important contribution to historiography and this compilation in one volume is welcome.

In the Introduction Philp identifies himself with a broad selection of other well-known scholars in the field (including Dickinson, Colley, Eastwood, Smith, Claeys, O'Gorman, McCalman, Mee, Barrell and many more) who have contributed to an intellectual culture of discussion and debate that has influenced his own work (2–4). He pulls the essays together with the statement that 'collectively, they attempt to understand what was going on' at the time (1), and later: 'to understand better how people negotiated [the] shifting sands' of ideology and commitment at a time of great change (10). The essays overall provide a broad coverage that, as well as those on more mainstream topics, include chapters on Paine's scientific experiments; Paine and Jefferson and the influence of the American Revolution on Britain and France; and Nelson and popular song, that illustrate the extent of Philp's research in the area. Appropriately, 'The fragmented ideology of reform', Chapter 1, kicks off the volume, and many roads then lead from there. I will not here discuss the previously published chapters but focus on the new ones.

Chapter 5, 'Failing the republic' considers the fate of Classical republican virtue in the eighteenth century. The classical virtue envisaged an individual's duty to their *patrie* as going beyond rules and laws and sacrificing all in a higher form of morality. This 'scale morality' underlies such republican thinking. But Philp makes the point that British political thought in the eighteenth century disrupted and displaced this classical republican inheritance and the instrumental factors here were 'the acknowledgement of self-interest; the recognition of legitimate opposition; the depoliticisation of virtue; and the revaluation of the nature of punishment in law' (137). Such shifts were due to the increasing fragmentation of the republican tradition as it vied with a range of newer incompatible developments within politics and society. This is an interesting and thought-provoking chapter but perhaps it warrants further exploration within a broader context than that of this volume.

Chapter 10 considers how far the conceptual components of a doctrine of collective self-determination can be identified in the later eighteenth century. Philp identifies this as a period of change in both the internal character of states and external inter-state relations. A shift towards recognition of the sovereignty of the people and the concept of representation were central to this change and a number of contemporary thinkers, particularly in France, adopted such ideas and came close, in part, to formulating an idea of collective self-determination. Yet ultimately, Philp concludes that the idea as then conceived is too unstable, deeply flawed and incoherent to form a history of the concept. Chapter 11 continues on a similar theme to consider the tendency of scholars of political thought or intellectual history to view the 'march of ideas in ways that ascribe an order and coherence to people's thinking and acting' that does not reflect how they actually 'experienced the world' (288). He argues that there needs to be a greater focus on contextualising such conceptual change more broadly and to consider the 'relationships between words and ideas, practices and commitment' in Britain in the 1790s (288). He also makes the point that scholars have been rather too ready to assume that radicals believed their hopes and aspirations for reform were about to be

realised. In fact they were celebrating merely that the world was open to remodelling, to being 'rethought' as he puts it (289). There were many different ways in which those involved in the debates envisaged the challenge to the status quo. This is not in itself new but Philp explores the idea with interesting examples and a fresh look at the discussions within the London Corresponding Society.

Overall, this volume pursues and extends Philp's major theme – that popular politics in Britain during the French Revolution was more diverse, fragmented, inconsistent and innovative than perhaps historians have hitherto identified. This is a valuable thesis that may, by now, be a familiar one, but to which Philp brings new insights that invite a fresh reading of the volume as a whole.

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