Algernon Sidney's Calvinist Republicanism

Michael P. Winship

Algernon Sidney was one of the "classical republicans," a handful of Englishmen writing from the 1650s to the 1680s who probed the science of government, ancient and modern, with a strongly anti-monarchical bias, in search of the preservation of liberty. His masterwork *Discourses Concerning Government* (written ca. 1681–83) is steeped in political history and theory, and it vigorously defends the God-given right of a people to overthrow tyrannical governments. *Discourses* was one of the most popular books on political theory in the eighteenth century, and it inspired luminaries of liberty as various as Charles de Secondat baron de Montesquieu, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson. No less inspiring for the devotees of liberty was that Sidney sacrificed his life to their cause. Charles II, whom Sidney had been trying to kill for two decades, had him beheaded for writing *Discourses* after a dubious trial in 1683.[1]

The religious beliefs of three other classical republicans, James Harrington, John Milton, and Henry Vane (in the group more as a martyr than a writer) have received extensive study, but the attention paid to Sidney's religion has been less thorough.[2]

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[1] For a recent survey of classical republicanism, see Jonathan Scott, *Commonwealth Principles: Republican Writing of the English Revolution* (Cambridge, 2004). For Sidney's eighteenth-century reputation, see Blair Worden, *Roundhead Reputations: The English Civil Wars and the Passions of Posterity* (London, 2001), chaps. 6–7; and Peter Karsten, *Patriot-Heroes in England and America* (Madison, WI, 1978), chap. 2.

[2] Harrington appears to have been a rationalist with little interest in distinguishing virtue from grace. It has been inferred that he was a Socinian. See Mark Goldie, "The Civil Religion of James Harrington," in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe,* ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge, 1987), 197–224; and J. G. A. Pocock and Gordon J. Sochet, "Interregnum and Restoration," in *The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500–1800*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock, Lois G. Schwoerer, and Gordon J. Sochet (Cambridge, 1996), 168–69. See also J. G. A. Pocock, "Historical Introduction," in *The Political Works of James Harrington*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge, 1977), 77–99; and Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and Its*

Journal of British Studies 49 (October 2010): 753–773
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https://doi.org/10.1086/654914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Most scholars have considered Sidney's religion to be inconsequential, smothered beneath what is assumed to be his proto-Enlightenment sensibility. J. G. A. Pocock has characterized Sidney as "tending to free thought" and has claimed that his religion had little to do with his republicanism. Thomas G. West claims that in *Discourses* Sidney employs divine revelation to "vindicate conclusions reached by reason." According to Lee Ward, Sidney has a "radically secularized political science of liberty" and "denies the tangible political relevance of the spiritual end for human life posited by religious authorities." Alan Houston states that, for Sidney, religion was personal, not public, which was why he believed in toleration and in "separating religion and politics."[3]

In contrast, two of the most acute recent studies of Sidney, by Blair Worden and Jonathan Scott, have emphasized the depth of Sidney's religiosity. They regard him as a Platonist and a Christian humanist. In a certain sense, they agree, Sidney could even be considered a Puritan. His affinity with Puritanism, they claim, lay not in Calvinist doctrine but in his sense of high moral seriousness. Sidney was no "Calvinist fundamentalist," but rather someone with an "individualistic creed of personal religion and toleration." Critical Puritan doctrines like predestination were not important to him. Humans, instead of being absolutely depraved through the Fall, had the ability through their own reason to know God.[4]

Enemies, 1660–1730 (Cambridge, 1992), 198–207. For the interpretation of Henry Vane accepted by historians of political thought, see Margaret Judson, *The Political Thought of Henry Vane the Younger* (Philadelphia, 1969), 19–20, where Vane is portrayed as an Arminian with universalist leanings. Recent work on Vane's theology, however, suggests that it is best described as heterodox, extremely finespun Calvinist covenantalism, and, in its own way, it is even harsher than orthodox Calvinism. On Vane's theology, see David Parnham, *Sir Henry Vane, Theologian: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Religious and Political Discourse* (Madison, WI, 1997), esp. chap. 7; and Michael P. Winship, *Making Heretics: Militant Puritanism and Free Grace in Massachusetts, 1636–1641* (Princeton, NJ, 2002), 87–88, 153, 245. For a good recent account of Milton's theology, see Benjamin Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom* (Berlin, 2006). For interpretations of "Paradise Lost," Book III, lines 183–202, a singular and obscure passage where Milton appears to be claiming that some of humanity are predestined to salvation while the rest have free will, see Maurice Kelley, '"The Theological Dogma of Paradise Lost, III, 173–202," *PMLA* 52 (1937): 75–79; Barbara K. Lewalski, "Milton and *De Doctrina Christiana*: Evidences of Authorship," in *Milton Studies*, ed. Albert C. Labriola (Pittsburgh, 1999), 220–21; Paul R. Sellin, "Further Responses," *Milton Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (May 1999): 38–51; Dennis Richard Danielson, *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge, 1982), 82–83; Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton's Peculiar Grace: Self-Representation and Authority* (Ithaca, NY, 2007), 187–88; John Rumrich, *Milton Unbound: Controversy and Reinterpretation* (Cambridge, 1996), 30–32; and Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom*, 80.

[3] J. G. A. Pocock, "England's Cato: The Virtues and Fortunes of Algernon Sidney," *Historical Journal* 37, no. 4 (December 1994): 926; Algernon Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government*, ed. Thomas G. West (Indianapolis, 1990), xxii; James Conniff, "Reason and History in Early Whig Thought: The Case of Algernon Sidney," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 43, no. 3 (July 1982): 404–5; Lee Ward, *The Politics of Liberty in England and Revolutionary America* (Cambridge, 2004), 205; Alan Craig Houston, *Algernon Sidney and the Republican Heritage in England and America* (Princeton, NJ, 1991), 125.

[4] Jonathan Scott, *Algernon Sidney and the English Republic, 1623–1677* (Cambridge, 1988), 27–29, and *Algernon Sidney and the Restoration Crisis, 1677–1683* (Cambridge, 1988), 55, 215; Blair Worden, *Roundhead Reputations: The English Civil Wars and the Passions of Posterity* (London, 2001), 143–46. Quotations are from Worden, *Roundhead Reputations*, 142 ("Calvinist fundamentalist"); and Scott, *English Republic*, 27 ("individualistic creed"). Worden and Scott recognize that elements of Sidney's religiosity are difficult to fit in this framework of Platonic rationalism. See, e.g., Scott, *Restoration Crisis*, 353; and Worden *Roundhead Reputations,* 144, 200.

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Whether depicted as a freethinker or a Platonist, Sidney in these portrayals remains within one generally agreed-upon set of parameters for the classical republicans. Calvinism was the dominant theology of the midcentury "Puritan revolution" in which all these authors were involved. However, as Blair Worden puts it, "a reaction against Calvinist orthodoxy" was "a unifying characteristic of seventeenth-century republicans." It was not a coincidence, various scholars have suggested, that the classical republicans were antitrinitarians, free-willers, believers in universal salvation, and implacable foes of "priestcraft" in all its manifestations. Calvinism and republicanism, they have suggested, were intrinsically incompatible, perhaps because of Calvinism's "morally pessimistic predestinarian theology," because it posited too great a gulf between grace and nature, or did not leave enough room for human choice and consent, or was inherently rigidly intolerant.[5]

However, if Sidney's "progressive" religious tendencies are not taken for granted, a close conjoined reading of his political treatises, *Discourses* and the recently discovered *Court Maxims*, shows that his affinity to Puritanism amounts to a great deal more than a shared seriousness of moral purpose. He was, and acknowledged himself to be, a Calvinist. His theological assertions, although extremely infrequent, mirror those of the orthodox Independent divines whose company he favored (the Independents' congregationalism was an offshoot of Presbyterianism). Sidney was willing to call himself a "Puritan," and his religion was grounded in the crowning creation of Puritanism: "experimental" Calvinism, the translation of the theology of predestination and absolute depravity into conversionist piety.[6]

Sidney's valorization of reason and appreciation of classical philosophers was kept within this strict religious framework in which the gap between human reason and unmerited grace remained the distance between damnation and salvation. His vaunted "tolerance," like much of the tolerance of the mid-seventeenth century, was not a foreshadowing of the liberal state, but one element, and an unstable one, of the theopolitical struggle of the "saints" against the devil and his minions. Reconstructing Sidney's Calvinism makes him a more typical figure of his times, draws attention to the Puritan antecedents of eighteenth-century Whiggery, and produces a vivid case study of the complex and unstable ways in which political theory and piety interacted across a period whose religiosity is being increasingly emphasized by historians. For Sidney, world history revolved around the saints' struggles; divinely sanctioned republicanism was the form of polity best suited to support them in those struggles; and the saints themselves were a republic's ideal citizens.

[5] Scott, *Commonwealth Principles*, 43; Blair Worden, "Milton's Republicanism and the Tyranny of Heaven," in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge, 1990), 230; Goldie, "Civil Religion," 203; Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651* (Cambridge, 1993), 202–4.

[6] Houston, *Algernon Sidney*, 126 n. 116; Gilbert Burnet, *Bishop Burnet's History of His Own Times*, 2 vols. (London, 1724), 1:573. The Independents' Savoy Declaration was theologically almost identical to the Westminister Confession. Sidney's self-identification as a Calvinist is discussed later in the article. For experimental Calvinism, see R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford, 1979), 1–13.

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For almost three hundred years, the only significant source for Sidney's political ideas was his *Discourses*. That changed in the 1970s with Blair Worden's discovery of an earlier antimonarchical manuscript, "Court Maxims Discussed and Refelled" (published in 1996 as *Court Maxims*). Sidney wrote *Court Maxims* around 1664–65, while in exile in the Netherlands. He had served on the Council of State of the Rump Parliament in the early 1650s, joined again after the army recalled the Rump in 1659, and in 1660 was serving as ambassador to Sweden when Charles II was restored to the English throne. Sidney initially accepted the Restoration as legitimate since it had been initiated by Parliament. A string of events soured him on it: Charles II's broken promises about religious tolerance and the subsequent repression of religious dissent; the corruption of Charles' court; the eager acquiescence of Parliament to the diminishing of its own power; the kidnappings, assassinations, and executions of the regicides; and the judicial murder in 1662 of Sidney's friend Vane. In his disillusionment, Sidney joined the small number of religious dissenters and republicans actively plotting to overthrow the regime.[7]

Sidney wrote *Court Maxims* to inspire rebellion against Charles. Set as a dialogue in a garden between Eunomius, a "commonwealthsman," and Pilatethes, a "moral, honest, Courtier," *Court Maxims* is similar enough to *Discourses* that scholars draw upon them interchangeably to discuss Sidney's political ideas. But in one critical way *Court Maxims* is different from *Discourses*. Those Sidney calls the "saints" are the intended audience of *Court Maxims*, and the treatise possesses in abundance the heady religious language of midcentury radical Puritanism. Sidney's use of that language in *Court Maxims* has never been given close examination, which is unfortunate on its own terms, and this has meant that the scattered but critical traces of this language in *Discourses* have gone unnoticed.

The particular form of political activism Sidney advocates in *Court Maxims*, king killing, has its roots, according to Sidney, in religious conversion, and it is in his discussion of conversion that Sidney expresses his Calvinism most clearly. Sidney consistently frames conversion in terms of the activity of the Holy Spirit, an emphasis that was common among the midcentury Independent divines. The "spirit of God," he claims, leads the saints "unto the knowledge of all truths necessary to salvation," and that spirit "plant[s] faith in their hearts." At that point, the elect receive an "interior spiritual calling and anointing." Christ gives the "wings of love and faith" that allow the faithful to "rise unto that spiritual height as makes all worldly things appear dung and dross." The spirit "does perpetually bring forth fruits of hope and joy." Once saved, always saved, and Sidney's saints enjoy assurance of salvation; Christ sows a "spiritual seed," and "he will cause it to grow and prosper in the hearts of his elect." He repeatedly stresses that the saints follow the "impulse of the spirit of God." The people of God struggle only with the great gulf between their natural corruption and their divinely bestowed spirituality, continuing in "faith, prayer, and the exercise of the gifts God has given them,"

[7] "Court Maxims" was published as Algernon Sidney, *Court Maxims*, ed. Hans W. Blom, Eco Haitsma Mulier, and Ronald Janse (Cambridge, 1996). The editors modernize Sidney's spelling. Scott's *English Republic* and *Restoration Crisis* are the standard sources for Sidney's life.

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and "fearing nothing but sin and being found unworthy of the graces they have received" (God could chastise straying saints severely).[8]

Sidney has little to say about the ecclesiastical aspects of religion (which may not be terribly significant, given the purposes of his manuscript). He remarks that the Catholic Church is not a true church, but he does not emphasize that point.[9] He makes no allusions to the sacraments, and the only ministers he speaks of are the wicked bishops of the Church of England. Sidney launches no sweeping attacks on the power of the clergy in general, unlike his fellow republicans, James Harrington, Henry Neville, Henry Vane, and John Milton.[10] That silence might mean nothing, or it might reflect the fact that Sidney's theological conservativism gave him less reason than the others to resent the clergy as a class. Sidney, however, does make one revealing positive comment on church government. He repeats an important Independent modification of Presbyterianism, one that inhibited the two groups' attempts at reunification, when he claims that the power of discipline rests in the entire congregation and not, as Presbyterians claimed, in the church officers alone.[11]

Sidney's Calvinism might have been antiformalist, but *Court Maxims* suggests that it was not private. Rather, it had a rich sociability, a sociability perhaps oriented not so much to minister-focused church worship but to lay conventicles. In those conventicles, the godly laity preached to each other, expounded scripture, and prayed together, and these are all practices that Sidney repeatedly praises. "Joining in prayer and holy exercises," he claims, "does not only make [the godly] know one another, but increases their love to each other and faith in Christ, their head."[12]

Sidney's saints need this cohesion, for they are the front-line troops in a political battle that has been raging since the fall of man. On one side are the "powers of earth and hell united," the "tyrants and priests." On the other side are the "prophets, apostles, and all the saints from the beginning of the world." These two sides have an "irreconcilable enmity." "A good man hates that that is evil," Sidney snarls, "an evil man . . . hates all that is good. And he that hates his brother . . . desires to destroy him." This tooth and nail struggle will "never end till the powers

[8] Geoffrey F. Nutall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Chicago, 1992); Sidney, *Court Maxims*, 91, 92, 93, 98, 106, 107. An argument could be made that Sidney's theological comments are too few and too terse to definitively categorize them. But, at a minimum, in both *Court Maxims* and *Discourses*, they are consistently straightforward to read as Calvinist and very difficult to read as anything else, a difficulty that the tiniest amount of tweaking could have remedied. If Sidney was not a Calvinist, he was going out of his way to conceal that fact, a concealment that he fortified by accepting the label of Calvinist.

[9] Sidney, *Court Maxims*, 93.

[10] Goldie, "Civil Religion"; Henry Vane, *The Retired Mans Meditations* (London, 1655), 368–69, and *Two Treatises* (n.p., 1662), 55; John Milton, "De Doctrina Christiana," ed. Maurice Kelley, trans. John Carey, vol. 6 of *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, gen. ed. D. M. Wolfe, 8 vols. (New Haven, CT, 1953–82), 571–73, 595–97, and *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church* (1659), ed. Robert W. Ayers, vol. 7 of Milton, *Complete Prose Works*, 273–321.

[11] Sidney, *Court Maxims*, 108; Richard Baxter, *Reliquae Baxterianae* (London, 1696), pt. 3, 62. Burnet's comment that Sidney "was against all publick worship, and every thing that looked like a Church" is not likely to mean anything more than that Sidney was opposed to an established church. See Burnet, *History*, 1:538.

[12] Sidney, *Court Maxims*, 193; cf. 87, 91, 187.

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of sin and death be destroyed and swallowed up in that victory, which the son of Man shall have over all his enemies on earth and in hell."[13]

The political struggles in England in the 1660s continue this ancient battle. King Charles and the bishops reinforce their respective tyrannies over church and state. They corrupt the laws, impoverish the people, enfeeble the nobility, and cripple trade. The cathedrals and parish churches are filled with "apish postures, frivolous discourses, and ridiculous bawlings." The worship in those churches is nothing but an idol, as is the Book of Common Prayer, and as is the Church of England itself, with its "civil head [the king] set upon a spiritual body." The bishops are "teachers of lies, workers of iniquity, persecutors of saints, and apes of Rome," while the good people of the land, who all oppose the king and bishops, are "flocking into those contemned corners where they hope to hear the word of God from the mouths of his servants." But for flocking to hear the word of God, the good people of England can expect "prison, banishing, and killing" from the bishops, who display a "cruel thirst after the blood of innocents." King Charles comes from a family drenched in blood, to which he has contributed his share. The saints endure this violence from church and state willingly; the godly resign themselves "into God's hands as willing sacrifices." They know that their martyrdom is a divine affirmation of their cause: "The blood of martyrs has been experienced as the seed of the church."[14]

Nonetheless, the godly pray that "God will not only blast [the bishops'] designs, but the tottering monarchy itself." "Many signs," persuade Sidney "to hope that salvation is near at hand." Salvation will invariably be accompanied by violence. "There will be, can be," Sidney warns, "no true peace till by the blood of the wicked murderers a propitiation be made for the blood of the righteous that has been shed by them." "The blood of the saints . . . cries aloud against you," Eunomius tells his honest, moral courtier, "and God will not long delay his appointed vengeance."[15]

The saints' role in God's vengeance against tyrants is not confined to praying and suffering, as careful study of the Bible shows. The devil first set up tyranny among the "wicked [heathen] nations devoted to his service." God's chosen nation of Israel was originally an exception to this tyranny, since "God did appoint that government which was best for them." The government God gave Israel was a mixed government of democracy and aristocracy, with "nothing of monarchy" in it. Occasionally, God would raise a judge, a monarch-like figure, which resulted "in some sort of all the three kinds of government [monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic]." This monarchical element, however, was "only occasional, when necessity required." The permanent aristocratic and democratic government was "constant nourishment," while the threefold, monarchical government was "medicine."[16] God also bestowed a law code on Israel. Like the Fifth Monarchists and generations of Puritan theorists before them, Sidney praises that government's

[13] Ibid., 106, 188, 189–90. I thank Jonathan Scott for providing me with the version of this passage in the original manuscript—"son of Man," not "son of Mary," as the published version has it.

[14] Ibid., 53, 91, 92, 94, 99, 103, 106, 187, 198.

[15] Ibid., 109, 191, 198.

[16] Ibid., 42.

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divinely bestowed law code as "the best and most perfect in its institution, as to the true ends for which all laws ought to be made."[17]

Armed with this polity and this set of laws, ancient Israel was initially "invincible." But the same kind of tyranny and idolatry, Sidney explains, that is destroying England had caused Israel's ultimate political decline. Sidney draws on a strain of rabbinical commentary recently disseminated by Milton and Harrington to account for Israel's adoption of monarchy. "A universal defection of the nation to idolatry," Sidney claims, "drew them at length to that mad and wicked desire of setting up a king, like unto the Gentiles." God sent them kings "as judgements to chastise their folly, being of the same nature as plagues and fiery serpents sent to destroy them."[18]

But what God sets up, he can destroy, and Sidney lovingly catalogs the ancient Jews' righteous regicides. That conclusion brings Sidney back to the present. Since God authorized the saints to kill wicked tyrants in the Old Testament, "the like may be done by other saints, and will be done." Those saintly regicides "performed on [God's] command by men inspired by him are to be perpetual examples unto us," Sidney proclaims in this treatise intended for his fellow saints. "The blood of an idolatrous tyrant was then a grateful sacrifice to God, it will therefore be so forever." Conversely, the failure to kill idolatrous tyrants is a sin compared in Scripture to witchcraft. Although Sidney does not quite put it this way, the willingness to kill kings is implicitly a sign of genuine conversion and thus of salvation. Sidney prays that "all who love [God] will ever be ready instruments in his hand to execute his wrath upon his and their enemies."[19] In stressing the duty of the saints to kill tyrants, Sidney was undoubtedly expressing a sentiment current among the religious enemies of Charles II, but it is hardly a classical republican perspective. Milton, the other classical republican to have defended regicide, cast his argument in terms of the rights of the people, not the duties of the saints, and in general, Milton much prefers the term "citizen" to "saint."[20]

[17] Ibid., 127. Blair Worden ("The Commonwealth Kidney of Algernon Sidney," *Journal of British Studies* 24, no. 1 [January 1985]: 25) claims that Sidney here is referring to the "Hebrew polity," but the subject of the sentence is the "law of God given to Israel." With the correct subject, the sentence is not a pious bromide, but a self-identification with a long-standing goal of Puritan reformers. Elsewhere, in *Court Maxims*, 62, Sidney, as was conventional, distinguishes between the judicial laws that were specific to the Jews and those that are perpetual. B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (London, 1972), 162–71.

[18] Sidney, *Court Maxims*, 43, 129; Eric Nelson, "'Talmudical Commonwealthsmen' and the Rise of Republican Exclusivism," *Historical Journal* 50, no. 4 (December 2007): 809–35.

[19] Sidney, *Court Maxims*, 56–57, 60–61, 150.

[20] Sidney's remarks can be contrasted, on the one hand, with the Fifth Monarchist and Fifth-Monarchist-accommodating pamphlets in the Venner and Tong plots of 1661 and 1663 emphasizing the duty of the saints to overthrow tyrants in preparation for Christ's millennial kingdom and, on the other hand, with the more conventional insistence of Anonymous, *Mene Tekel, or the Downfal of Tyranny* (London, 1663), on the lawfulness by both scripture and natural law of the "people" to do the same. See Anonymous, *A Door of Hope* (London, 1661); Evan Price, *Eye-salve for England* (London, 1667), 4–6; 178–79; Anonymous, *Mene Tekel*; and Richard L. Greaves, *Deliver Us from Evil: The Radical Underground in Britain*, 1660–1663 (New York, 1986), 50, 178–79, 223. Formal arguments for the regicide emphasized that it was lawful both by scripture and natural law to kill tyrannical kings, not that it was a Christian duty, although the difference between this line of reasoning and Sidney's was one of emphasis, not hard and fast distinction, as the standard invocation of the zeal of the Old Testament figure Phineas suggests. The distinction is further blurred by the

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For readers still seeking an "Age of Reason" Sidney, it might at first glance appear a relief to turn from his blood-drenched religious certainties about monarchy to his firm arguments against "the power of the civil magistrate in spiritual things." He is, or appears to be, firmly for the separation of church and state. Alan Houston, working out of the common understanding of Sidney as a proto-Enlightenment figure, has claimed that Sidney's "espousal of toleration" in *Court Maxims* demonstrates that for Sidney "religious faith was an intensely personal matter." "By separating religion and politics," Houston argues, Sidney believed it would be possible to "preserve the integrity of both."[21]

A reader fresh from encountering Sidney encouraging the saints to kill kings, however, might suspect that separating religion and politics was not one of his major concerns. Closer examination of the totality of Sidney's arguments for religious liberty is valuable not because it foreshadows a more progressive age with firmer boundaries between public secular politics and private religion, but because, on the contrary, it brings out just how deeply immersed Sidney was in the theopolitical battles of the mid-seventeenth century.

Sidney's courtier Philalethes vigorously argues for religious repression. The state, he claims, should set up "one rule" for worship, backed by "a coercive power to keep hotheaded fanatics in awe." In response, Sidney's mouthpiece Eunomius makes four arguments. Two of Eunomius's arguments have to do with the illegitimacy of force in religious matters: belief cannot be coerced, and coerced worship is not acceptable to God. Another argument is based on skepticism: a "prudent good man" cannot be so certain he is right about religious truths that he would force others to agree with him. All of these are standard midcentury arguments for liberty of conscience; identical or very similar ones appear in Milton's treatise on the topic. The fourth is also an old argument, but not a conventional one in this context: men who are not spiritual, Eunomius warns, paraphrasing 1 Cor. 2:14, are not to be judges of spiritual things.[22] It is this intrinsically partisan insistence on the superiority of the saints over the unregenerate that lies at the heart of Sidney's appeal for liberty of conscience.

Philalethes, the honest courtier, after listening to Eunomius lay out these arguments, asks him to explain his reasoning. That request provokes Eunomius into the longest speech by far in the entire tract. What is notable about this speech is that it spends no time looking forward to an age of private religious pluralism under a neutral state. Rather, it plunges into a world of public, violent religious absolutism. Eunomius collapses his arguments against coercion based on the judgment of nonspiritual men into a single political charge: the "kings of the earth" under their master Satan, in their warfare against the "Lord and his anointed," are illegitimately attempting to coerce the saints into false worship. Satan previously warred against

necessity, given the army's role and the dubiousness of the court that tried Charles, of invoking not only the right of the "people" to kill tyrants, but the right specifically of the "best" people. For a discussion, see Martin Dzelzainis, "Anti-monarchism in English Republicanism," in *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, ed. Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 2002), 1:27–41. On Milton's avoidance of the term "saint," see Worden, "Milton's Republicanism," 230.

[21] Sidney, *Court Maxims*, 95; Houston, *Algernon Sidney*, 125.

[22] Sidney, *Court Maxims*, 95, 98. John Milton, *A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes* (London, 1659), in *Collected Works*, 7:246–48, 258–59.

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Christians through heathen emperors, "but now finds none more able to destroy the people of God than they that pretend to preserve them." Satan benefits from religious coercion because it is a given that so-called "Christian" princes will persecute real Christians. Princes themselves benefit from religious coercion because "the power of princes could not be fully established unless they had a power over consciences"—as ever, tyranny and idolatry work hand in hand. Almost by definition, monarchs are unsuited to set religious standards. "Nothing can be imagined more directly opposite to right order," according to Eunomius, "than that princes that for the most part are utterly ignorant of spiritual things should impose rules in them to be followed by those to whom God has given the true light of his spirit to see their own way." Sidney's religious liberty is not a private refuge, but public relief from the wicked priests and tyrants who persecute the godly and attempt to drive them to "uniformity in superstition, flat atheism and belief of lies."[23]

The saints, Sidney claims, can find that public relief through aggressive public action. When princes attempt to force the people of God into false worship, the saints "by violence are brought to the hard necessity of sinning against God [by worshiping him falsely] or suffering their families to be ruined and persons perpetually imprisoned, banished, or murdered." Sidney argues that there is another response to religious coercion besides false worship or passive suffering. The godly can "by force seek to repel such violence." In doing so, they will act as the instruments of God's vengeance for the blood of the martyred saints. Sidney's discourse on religious liberty ends with his expression of confidence that God will blast the designs of the bishops and destroy the monarchy with them. "This we expect in faith, knowing that the redeemer of Israel lives."[24]

Sidney's threats of religious violence and warnings of God's public judgments hardly suggest that he conceived of religion as a refuge from politics. At first glance, his skeptical or probabilistic argument about religious truth might seem a better venue for discovering incipient modernity. However, Eunomius, in his extended rant against Satan and his princely tools, only recommends skepticism once, and he recommends it only to the wicked bishops. If the bishops persecute by virtue of their infallibility, he argues, they must ground that infallibility on some authority. They cannot claim the authority of the pope, since they are Protestants, ostensibly at least, and they certainly cannot claim infallibility on the basis of "spiritually infused gifts," for "this is that they tax for madness in the fanatics who have the spirit of God."[25] Since the wicked bishops have no basis for claiming infallibility, they need to be skeptical about their erroneous beliefs.

The "fanatics" such as Sidney, on the other hand, have no need of skepticism because they have the spirit of God guiding them, and it is precisely because they have this spirit that they know the pointlessness of state religious coercion. They do not "hope yet to be believed until the same spirit that dictated the word plants it in the heart of the listener." Sidney's faith in divine persuasion with no state muscle behind it, however, does not mean that he envisions religious pluralism as a permanent condition or religion itself as nonpolitical and private. The Restoration, according to Sidney, was made possible through "division amongst the

[23] Sidney, *Court Maxims*, 95, 96, 98, 109.
[24] Ibid., 102, 109.
[25] Ibid., 107.

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honest party." Yet those divisions, he claims, are disappearing as the "fanatics," through their conventicles, deepen their love for each other and faith in Christ. In other words, the wicked and idolatrous are lined up on one side in England and the honest, or pious, on the other. The honest party is in a state of religious pluralism, but that pluralism is melting away as their religious gatherings lead them into more perfect faith. Sidney probably accepted that his Quaker friends, such as William Penn and Benjamin Furley, for example, had the spirit of Christ in them, even if their free-will theology and their valuing of the Holy Spirit's revelations above scripture were erroneous. In his portrayal of religious toleration as a temporary state of affairs until the ultimate triumph of the saints, Sidney resembles many other midcentury religious radicals.[26]

In Sidney's vision, as the honest party grew into complete conformity to the will of Christ, it would overthrow the king and the bishops. How his advocacy of religious noncoercion would have translated into government practice is not at all certain. Sidney is emphatic that it is wrong for a government to interfere with the "outward performance of spiritual duties" and with the mutual imparting of spiritual "helps and comforts." A government that would do such things would be the "perpetual and irreconcilable enemy of all that nation, except the corrupt rabble." But he says nothing one way or the other about a government hindering the false devotions of the corrupt rabble. *Court Maxims*, unlike some treatises on liberty of conscience, makes no direct claims concerning the liberty to pursue false worship. Vane, for example, wrote a tract defending the religious liberty of idolaters, while in *Discourses*, Sidney puts idolatry, rapine, and murder at equal levels of offense against God. An analogy would be with Milton, who, in spite of the vehemence of his appeals for liberty of conscience, wanted "idolatry" kept illegal. Sidney's comments suggest that he too would have forbidden idolatry in his ideal commonwealth, a ban that would have made problematic the public use of the Book of Common Prayer, let alone the public practice of Roman Catholicism.[27] In any case, idolaters living among saints who took seriously Old Testament injunctions about killing idolatrous rulers would not be likely to aspire to civic offices. Although the status of the idolators might be shaky in Sidney's ideal commonwealth, the status of the saints is not. Sidney praises lawmakers who have "valiantly protected the people of God." The closest Sidney comes to expressing a positive religious legislative agenda is in *Discourses*, where he warns, in standard conservative Puritan fashion, that reserving the sabbath exclusively for the "service and worship"

[26] Ibid., 107, 193; David Zaret, "Religion and the Rise of Liberal-Democratic Ideology in 17th-Century England," *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 2 (April 1989): 169–70; J. C. Davis, "Religion and the Struggle for Freedom in the English Revolution," *Historical Journal* 35, no. 3 (September 1992): 507–30; Theodore Dwight Bozeman, "John Clarke and the Complications of Liberty," *Church History* 75, no. 1 (March 2006): 69–93. Sidney regarded Quakers as among "God's people," which is more than most Calvinists would have conceded to them. See R. W. Blencowe, ed., *Sydney Papers* (London, 1825), 258–60. Sidney's attitude to the Bible and the work of the Holy Spirit shows no sign of Quaker influence. On the differences between radical Puritans and Quakers, see Nutall, *Holy Spirit*. Henry Vane was friends with Quakers while regarding them as dangerously theologically inadequate. See Vane, *Retired Man's Meditations*, 184, 211.

[27] Sidney, *Court Maxims*, 149, and *Discourses*, 439; Henry Vane, *Zeal Examined* (London, 1653), sig. A2r-v. For Vane's authorship, see Carolyn Polizzotto, "The Campaign against 'The Humble Proposals' of 1652," *Journal of Eccleciastical History* 38, no. 4 (October 1987): 569–81. Milton, *Treatise*, 258–59.

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of God is a law that men cannot change. By contrast, Milton and Vane, in their very different ways, deny that the "Jewish" sabbath is still binding. Given Sidney's advocacy of saintly king killing, his condemnation of idolatry, his commendation of magistrates who protect the people of God, and his defense of sabbatarianism, it is clearly a conceptual leap unwarranted by the evidence to assume, as many of Sidney's recent explicators do, that Sidney had "an essentially secular attitude toward politics." Just as Sidney was a theological conservative, he remained in aspiration a godly magistrate, searching for the most useful way to position civic government to defend godliness at a time when the saints themselves were badly divided.[28]

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If Sidney did not support a broadly secular attitude to politics, there is yet much in *Court Maxims* that could be read as "essentially secular." The treatise moves back and forth in a jarring way between a world of saintly concerns, the world of no-king-but-King-Jesus republicanism, and the world of republican political science: morally neutral European power politics, classical antiquity, and universal political principles. That apparent incongruity, combined with the extreme scarcity of hot Protestantism in *Discourses*, is striking. It has led more than one historian to conclude that Sidney was faking his religion in *Court Maxims*. He was reshaping his humanist, even free-thinking, beliefs to his intended audience of English nonconformists. Sidney's "propaganda plays skillfully on nonconformist vocabulary," Blair Worden has suggested, and he "seems in his prose to be trimming his theological sails to the dissenting wind."[29]

Sincerity is not something that can be conclusively demonstrated one way or the other, and Worden asserts, rather than demonstrates, his claim. There is no reason to assume that Sidney saw any inconsistency between his interest in Plato and other classical philosophers and his Calvinism. Moreover, if Sidney had been attempting to trim his sails to the myriad fierce cross-winds blowing through dissent, he made a hash of what would have been a fearsomely difficult job to begin with. Saying next to nothing about the ministry, the sacraments, and the institutional church while going on about the impulses of the spirit were not tactics for picking up the support of conservative Independents and Presbyterians. Sidney would have lost any Presbyterians still listening after those faux pas with his denunciation of the Solemn League and Covenant as an "idol" and by his advocacy of religious liberty. Emphasizing Calvinist soteriology and the primacy of the scrip-

[28] Sidney, *Court Maxims*, 146, and *Discourses*, 435; Milton, "De Doctrina," 704–15; George Sikes, *The Life and Death of Sir Henry Vane* (London, 1662), 48–49. The cessation of "legal" Sabbath "works" was a vital part of Vane's intricate theology. See Vane, *Retired Mans Meditations*, 80, 100; and Houston, *Algernon Sidney*, 128. Scott, *Commonwealth Principles*, 184–90, notes how Sidney's emphasis on the importance of "discipline" for a country, an emphasis he shared with Milton, resonates with the Puritan ideal of the godly magistrate.

[29] For extended discussions of the "secular" analysis in *Court Maxims*, see Scott, *English Republic*, chaps. 12 and 13; Houston, *Algernon Sidney*, pt. 2; and Worden, "Commonwealth Kidney," 25–26. Worden reverses his appraisal in *Roundhead Reputations*, 145. Also see Houston, *Algernon Sidney*, 130 n. 132; and Steve Pincus, "The English Debate over Universal Monarchy," in *A Union for Empire: Political Thought and the British Union of 1707*, ed. John Robertson (Cambridge, 1995), 55 n. 80.

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tures was not a way to pick up Quakers. For good measure, antitrinitarians appear in *Court Maxims* only as persecutors of true Christians.[30]

If Sidney was trimming his theological sails in any particular direction, it was toward radical Independent Calvinists. Such an appeal might give some credence to Alan Houston's supposition that Sidney was laying on the piety for the benefit of his fellow republican, devoutly pious exile Edmund Ludlow. But the problem with that supposition is that Sidney exhibits religious idiosyncrasies in *Court Maxims* that leave him virtually a party of one. Sidney can threaten God's vengeance on his enemies as impressively as any preacher, and he no less eagerly warns the enemies of the godly of the consequences of Jesus's return at the end of time. But he also appears to have a very unconventional lack of interest in both the chronology of Christian apocalypticism and its major players. There is no millennial speculation in *Court Maxims* or reading of the signs of the Book of Revelation. The great war of the true church against the false church is largely absent. Sidney makes it clear that Rome is a false church, but he spends next to no time on the topic. His references to the true church are similarly perfunctory. Antichrist makes only a few appearances, and these appearances are pitched at an extremely low level of rhetorical intensity.[31] It is striking that Sidney ignores a century of standard Puritan rhetoric and nowhere accuses the English bishops themselves of being anti-Christian or under the spirit of Antichrist, in spite of all the abuse he dumps on them. It is not that Sidney denies the apocalyptic struggle between the true church and the false church led by Antichrist. He accepts it, and there is nothing heterodox in his infrequent formulations, but clearly his interests lie elsewhere. Were Sidney simply setting out to paint a veneer of persuasive piety over the political arguments in *Court Maxims*, there would have been no reason for him to minimize drastically the intensity and scope of the tract's apocalypticism. The subject would have been near and dear to the hearts of Ludlow and most of the rest of Sidney's audience of prospective saintly king killers.

Rather than being ignored in *Court Maxims*, however, apocalyptic intensity is displaced. Instead of invoking Antichrist when attacking the bishops and their ceremonies, Sidney chooses another sort of imagery. He compares the bishops to the wicked devotees of Roman gods and their ceremonies to lurid pagan rites. The bishops' malice against the godly, he says elsewhere in *Court Maxims*, shows them to be "heathen." Evidently aware that with this comment he is being somewhat unusual in his terminology, Sidney goes on to explain that it makes no difference whether persecutors of true Christians are called "Christians or Mohammedans, Turks or heathen." They are all instruments in the devil's purpose to "destroy the people of God."[32] Just what this paganizing rhetorical maneuver has to say about how Sidney integrated his Calvinism with his love of classical culture becomes clear when *Discourses* is read with the *Court Maxims* in mind.

[30] Sidney, *Court Maxims*, 5, 190.

[31] Houston, *Algernon Sidney*, 130 n. 132. See Blair Worden, "Introduction," in Edmund Ludlow, *A Voyce from the Watch Tower: Part Five, 1660–1662* (London, 1978).

Sidney, *Court Maxims*, 46, 93, 99, 106, 178. What Worden, *Roundhead Reputations*, 144, 200, calls Sidney's "millenarian streak" and his "apocalyptic theology" are passages simply repeating the familiar warning that God punishes the wicked and avenges his saints. They have nothing whatsoever specific to do with the end of time, let alone the projected thousand year reign of the saints.

[32] Sidney, *Court Maxims*, 105, 109.

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At first glance, *Discourses* might seem an unlikely vehicle for elaborating the piety of *Court Maxims*. It has no discussion of the infallible knowledge of the saints and nothing about how the spirit's anointing of converts gives them the privilege and obligation to kill kings. Sidney makes no denunciations of the bishops as workers of inequity thirsting after the blood of the innocent. In the *Court Maxims*, the scripture-inspired confidence of an enthusiast, steered by the impulse of the spirit, appears to trump reason, while in *Discourses*, reason appears consistently to have the upper hand over divine revelation.

Why the difference in tone? One possible explanation is the changing times. Sidney left England in 1659, and he had still not returned when he wrote the *Court Maxims* six years later. The sudden restoration of the king and the crushing of the saints had been unexpected, and it would have still been relatively easy to imagine the pendulum swinging just as suddenly in the opposite direction. To Sidney, it might have seemed plausible that the honest party was on the verge of praying its differences away; that the best Protestants were all, at heart, Calvinist saints; and that the best way to unite them was to explain how the Spirit led converts from the new birth to king killing. *Discourses* was written in a rather different context, after the grueling Exclusion Crisis, in which Sidney had been actively involved. The crisis took place in a society increasingly suspicious of anything resembling religious "enthusiasm" or dogmatic Calvinism, while Anglicans frequently argued that the two were identical and added up to rebellion.[33] The leadership of Sidney's emergent Whig coalition ranged from moderate non-Calvinist Anglicans to Quakers to libertines. It might have dawned on Sidney that at least for the time being overt saints were going to have to be only parts of a much bigger, religiously tolerant political movement. The movement from *Court Maxims* to *Discourses*, by this reading, is the movement from godly republicanism to Whiggery. Blair Worden has made a somewhat related suggestion to account for the difference in tone between the *Court Maxims* and *Discourses*. *Discourses*, Worden argues, like the memoirs of the Calvinist "apocalyptic" republican Edmund Ludlow, might have been silently edited and rewritten before being published in the mid-1690s, to "whiggify" it by removing all taint of a now-archaic religious intensity.[34]

Another explanation for the difference of emphasis is that Sidney wrote *Discourses* with a different immediate purpose than that of *Court Maxims*. In *Discourses* Sidney is dealing not with the trials and duties of the elect. He is engaging in a point-by-point refutation of Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha*, written around 1630 but not published until 1680. *Patriarcha* attempts to extinguish what Filmer calls the "vast engine of *Popular Sedition*" by denying the existence of a God-given natural liberty

[33] For a general discussion, see Blair Worden, "The Question of Secularization," in *A Nation Transformed: England after the Restoration*, ed. Alan Houston and Steve Pincus (Cambridge, 2001), 20–40. For the most skillful (Patrick) and the most notorious (Parker) handling of a common set of Anglican anti-Calvinist themes, see Simon Patrick, *A Friendly Debate betwixt Two Neighbours, the One a Conformist, the Other a Non-conformist* (London, 1668); and Samuel Parker, *Of Ecclesiastical Politie* (London, 1670).

[34] Worden, *Roundhead Reputations*, 13, 101, 131–32; Scott, *English Republic*, 169, and *Commonwealth Principles*, 351.

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of a people to choose and depose their rulers.[35] Sidney, in response, defends that liberty, and he calls his defense the "cause of all mankind."[36] To put it crudely, *Court Maxims* is about why God's laws require that the saints should kill kings, while the *Discourses* is about why those laws require that everyone else should join in. An analogous example of the relationship of purpose and contents would be Sidney's undated essay "On Love." The essay has been called "the most straightforwardly Platonic" of all his writings. Yet it includes a stiff statement invoking natural depravity and Calvin's arbitrary God that has been overlooked because of its singularity.[37]

The differences between the *Court Maxims* and the *Discourses* might be due to authorial sensitivity to changing times, to editorial intervention in publishing *Discourses*, to differing intentions, or to some combination thereof. But whatever explanation is preferred, they all support a similar conclusion. Since there is no obvious polemical incentive for the expression of Calvinism in *Discourses*, any evidence of it there can be taken as a reflection of Sidney's personal conviction. The evidence, in fact, is there, very terse but emphatic.

Sidney's polemical purposes in *Discourses* are not wrapped up with the realm of God's grace, the realm of Calvinism, but with the realm of his laws of nature, a realm that encompasses all humanity. Sidney is being entirely conventional when he claims that "the universal law of God and nature is always the same" and that its rights are "inherited by every one of us, and ours, that is, by all mankind." Natural law does not provide for salvation, but it provides a template for people to enjoy, as the great Independent divine John Owen put it, the "Benefits of humane Conversation and Administration of Justice."[38]

But how? After all, as Sidney explains, invoking the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity, since Adam's fall, "the nature of man hath been fruitful only in vice and wickedness." However, although the Fall left humanity incapable of the goodness required for salvation, it did leave people with enough virtue to obey God's natural laws sufficiently to live together. Moral virtues, Owen acknowledged, are "good . . . in themselves, useful to Mankind, and seldome in the Providence of God go without their reward in this World." It is in keeping with this universal human capacity for virtue that Sidney approvingly cites Saint Augustine's praise of the Romans' moral virtues. Virtuous pagans, Owen allowed, could enjoy calmness of mind in this world and lesser torments in the next. When God "intends to exalt a people," Sidney says, "he fills both them and their leaders with the virtues suitable

[35] Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha, or, The Natural Power of Kings* (London, 1680), 4.

[36] Sidney, *Discourses*, 78.

[37] Ibid., 78. "The best of Men are troubled with Frailties and Vices, the worst have nothing else; for which no other Reason perhaps can be given, than that it so seemed good to the Divine Wisdom, unless you will take this for one, that we have within ourselves a Power of doing or being ill, but . . . our Recovery from that Condition of Illness, which is natural to us, is, by the Power of God upon our Hearts, who gives his Graces unto such Men, at such Times, and in such Proportion as he pleaseth." See Anonymous, *A Collection of Scarce and Valuable Tracts*, 4 vols. (London, 1748), 2:404. Scott, *English Republic*, 118–19: Scott suggests that Sidney wrote "On Love" before the Restoration.

[38] Sidney, *Discourses*, 57; John Owen, *A peace-offering in an Apology and Humble Plea for Indulgence and Liberty of Conscience* (London, 1667), 16; Francis J. Bremer, *Congregational Communion: Clerical Friendship in the Anglo-American Puritan Community, 1610–1692* (Boston, 1994), 227.

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to the accomplishment of his end; and takes away all wisdom and virtue from those he resolves to destroy."[39]

Sidney's overriding focus on natural law and moral virtue is one key element in *Discourses*' subsequent popularity. That focus allows Sidney to illustrate his points indifferently from the reasoning of pagan philosophers and from what he always insists is the "better authority" of the scriptures, as well as to range over a wide number of polities. A consequence of this attention to virtue, rather than to grace, is that it allows *Discourses* to be read as an almost, but not quite entirely, de facto deistic treatise. That almost complete lack of specifically Christian focus was to facilitate its absorption into eighteenth-century Whiggery.[40]

Unlike some of his most fervent subsequent admirers, however, Sidney did not regard moral virtue and human reasoning as grounds in themselves for salvation, as a handful of scattered but crucial comments in the *Discourses* make clear. After praising the universal rights bestowed on all mankind by the law of nature, Sidney insists that the universal law of God is not to be confused with "God's peculiar promises, which were not according to the law of nature, but the election of grace." It is not out of the question that Sidney had in mind with this passage the increasing tendency among Anglican divines to identify virtue with grace. Owen and other Nonconformists had gotten into heated, abusive debates with Anglicans on the topic in the 1670s.[41] As this pointed comment about grace shows, although Sidney has no reason to bring up his Calvinism in *Discourses*, and almost never does, he makes no effort to hide it. Calvin was a "glorious servant of God," he claims in response to one of Filmer's attacks on Calvin. Sidney himself, when insisting that the observation of the Sabbath is a perpetual divine law, is willing to take the "reproach" of being called a Puritan and a Calvinist.[42]

The most extended Calvinist passage in *Discourses* comes after Sidney denies Filmer's claim that humanity has a natural propensity to monarchy. Even if humanity did have that propensity, Sidney continues, it would demonstrate nothing. Men have always been wicked liars, none do good, and evil thoughts proceed out of their hearts continually, Sidney claims, stringing together Genesis 6:5, Psalms 116:11 and 14:3, and Matthew 15:19 without acknowledgment. He then loosely channels Romans 6 to demonstrate that grace alone can deliver people from this corruption. There is a chasm between the natural man and the spiritual man filled

[39] Sidney, *Discourses*, 11, 134, 145, 163; John Owen, *Truth and Innocence Vindicated* (London, 1669), 189, and *A Display of Arminianisme* (London, 1643), 120; William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine* (Cambridge, 1600), 11, 17–19; John T. McNeill, "Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers," *Journal of Religion* 26, no. 3 (July 1946): 168–82.

[40] Sidney, *Discourses*, 71; Worden, *Roundhead Reputations*, 146.

[41] Sidney, *Discourses* 57; Dewey D. Wallace Jr., *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525–1695* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1982), chap. 5.

[42] Sidney, *Discourses*, 124, 437. "Puritan" in this period was used, as it always had been, as a usually pejorative synonym for nonconformity and for the "godly." It sometimes had a retrospective meaning. For examples, see Roger Morrice, *The Reign of James II, 1685–1687*, ed. Tim Harris, vol. 1 of *The Entring Book of Roger Morrice, 1677–1691*, gen. ed. Mark Goldie, 6 vols. (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2008), 1:141, 164; Richard Baxter, *Church-history of the Government of Bishops and their Councils* (London, 1680), sig. a2 [i]r-a2, and *A Paraphrase on the New Testament* (London, 1685), sig. A3 r; Thomas Tomkins, *The Inconveniencies of Toleration* (London, 1667), 2; John Corbet, *A Discourse of the Religion of England* (London, 1667), 2; and John Bunyan, *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (London, 1680), 291.

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only by God. The spiritual man's "proceedings can only be referred to God, and that only so far as he is guided by the spirit." The "natural man," by contrast, "is in a perpetual enmity against God without any possibility of being reconciled to him, unless by the destruction of the old man, and the regenerating or renewing him through the spirit of grace." Having established the utter corruption of all that is natural, which would include Filmer's alleged natural propensity to monarchy, Sidney guides this theological excursus on Calvinist conversion to a polemical destination: "There being no footsteps of this [conversion] in our author's book, he [Filmer] and his master Heylin [the anti-Calvinist Laudian] may have differed from the Apostle, referring that propensity of nature to God, which he declares to be total enmity against him." Bad political theory is understandable, in other words, from unconverted natural men like Filmer, who have never known what it is to be guided by the spirit. The passage appears contextually excessive. However, it might be significant that the Puritan conception of conversion was under heated attack in this period and that John Owen placed this attack in the unceasing struggle of the wicked against the good that began with Cain and Abel.[43]

Sidney, in *Discourses*, continues to organize his broader "political science" in starkly dichotomized, religious terms. Although the gap between the realm of nature and the realm of grace, according to Sidney, is eternally wide, those realms share an important commonality. They are both battlegrounds in the unceasing struggle between good and evil. As he does in *Court Maxims*, Sidney warns in *Discourses* of "a universal principle of hatred to all that is good, exerting itself as far as it could, to the ruin of mankind." "Good" includes not just the gospel but also virtue under God's natural law. In this wide-ranging war between good and evil, civic government is a critical battleground. Princes are pulled almost by gravity away from good and toward evil because they easily become slaves to their own lusts. They will seek the overthrow of all that stands in their way, either out of fear or because of their hatred to all that is unlike them. This war between good and evil does not always directly involve the saints, for its agents can just as well be virtuous and nonvirtuous pagans. Tyrants and all but the most severely restrained monarchs are always on the side of the devil, while the virtuous are always on the side of God, whether or not they are also among the saved.[44]

It is entirely predictable, according to Sidney, that the civic struggle between good and evil will spill into the religious war between the elect and the damned. Wicked princes and tyrants will not only overthrow justice, "the rule of civil and moral actions," but, given the opportunity, they will also attempt to overthrow the Gospel, "which is the light of the spiritual man."[45] The opponents of God will flock to those princes in order to persecute true Christians more effectively.

This location of the wars of the saints within the broad struggle between good and evil forms the critical link between Sidney's Calvinism and the wide-ranging scope of his political interests. It explains how, in the *Court Maxims*, he can bypass in good conscience conventional Puritan apocalyptic concerns and compare the bishops to the devotees of heathen deities. In his attention to civic government

[43] Sidney, *Discourses*, 123; John Owen, *Pneumatologia, or, A Discourse concerning the Holy Spirit* (London, 1674), 287.

[44] Sidney, *Discourses*, 266–67; cf. 71.

[45] Ibid., 266–67.

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and classical culture, he remains no less focused on the cosmic struggle between good and evil, and ultimately on the fate of God's people, than he would have been if he had focused more conventionally on the apocalyptic struggle between the true and false churches.

In *Discourses*, Sidney unites the struggles of the saints with his civic struggles in a single, striking passage. He quotes Tacitus on the determination of Nero to destroy "virtue itself" by killing two of his virtuous enemies. Sidney imagines the objection that these were "particular cases," not demonstrations of Nero's overriding intentions. In response, Sidney escalates effortlessly from Nero's murder of virtuous pagans into the "slaughter of the prophets and apostles, the crucifixion of Christ, and all the villainies that have ever been committed." Sidney then invokes the universal principle of evil attempting to ruin mankind. It is only the "overruling power of God" setting bounds to this "rage" that has prevented mankind's ruin. However, the reason God has set those bounds, Sidney claims, leaping back into the emphases of conventional Puritanism, is not to prevent the destruction of all humanity (most of humanity is eternally ruined anyway), but because he "resolved to preserve himself a people."[46] The destruction of tyranny is the cause of all mankind, no less in classical antiquity than in Christian Europe, in other words, but history is ultimately about the cause of saints like Sidney.

Just as the saints are the ultimate focus of history in *Discourses*, so are they the crowning point of militant republicanism. Sidney celebrates the saints' republicanism, one of the predominant themes of *Court Maxims*, in one solitary, dense sentence in *Discourses*: "It hath been ever hereupon observed," says Sidney, "that they who most precisely adhere to the laws of God, are least solicitous concerning the commands of men, unless they are well grounded; and those who most delight in the glorious liberty of the sons of God, do not only subject themselves to him, but are most regular observers of the just ordinances of man, made by the consent of such as are concerned according to the will of God."[47] The subject of this complex sentence is those who enjoy the "glorious liberty of the sons of God," the predestined saints, in other words (the phrasing is taken from Romans 8, a paean to the privileges enjoyed by the born again). As befits a Puritan precisianist, Sidney claims that true converts "precisely adhere to the laws of God." It is this finely honed adherence to the laws of God that make the saints the best republicans, according to Sidney. Just as they rigorously obey God's laws, so will they faithfully adhere to the laws of man. However, those man-made laws must adhere to the laws of God, by being just and by being made with the consent of the people. Otherwise, Sidney warns tyrants, no one is less "solicitous concerning the commands of man" than the saints.

That packed sentence neatly sums up Sidney's Calvinist republicanism. He wanted a polity governed by just laws made with the consent of the people. In principle such a polity could be monarchical; in practice, monarchies continually dissolved into corruption and tyranny. This polity would be a safe haven for the saints, since its magistrates would protect them, while the saints would be its best citizens, since they were sure to possess the quality republics most needed: virtue. It is not impossible that Sidney's ideal republic would have followed the model

[46] Ibid., 267.
[47] Ibid., 9.

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suggested by Sidney's close political colleague and fellow Calvinist, albeit an extremely heterodox one, Henry Vane, whom Sidney looked on as his "master" in "virtue, wisdom, and godliness." Vane would have restricted the franchise to saints and to men who had shown themselves to be the saints' civic equivalents by providing exemplary service to the commonwealth.[48]

Sidney's Calvinist republicanism, like English midcentury republicanism in general, was a product of the intransigence of Charles I. However, there were ample Puritan precedents for it. Elizabethan Presbyterians argued that their "republican" churches, with shared power, the consent of the people, and rejection of rule by one man, were ideal barriers to anti-Christian tyranny, while their opponents accused them of wanting to overthrow the monarchy. As with Sidney's Calvinist republicanism, this earlier Puritan ecclesiastical republicanism has been overlooked by scholars exploring republican discourse and practices operating under the cloak of Tudor and early Stuart monarchy. Yet the concerns of these earlier radical Puritans easily spilled into the civic sphere, with the deliberately republican, self-pronounced free state of Massachusetts being the most extreme outcome. Calvinist piety in general tended to foster activist citizenship.[49]

One earlier radical Puritan antecedent of Sidney's Calvinist republicanism was indirectly responsible for the creation of *Discourses*. Historians have recently explored how classical republican and Calvinist ideals freely intermingled during the Forced Loan controversy of the late 1620s, when it was Puritans, and not infrequently, Presbyterians and proto-Independents, who were at the forefront of resistance to Charles I.[50] The most aggressive theorist of this resistance, the Presbyterian Thomas Scott of Canterbury, is studied today for his fierce manuscript

[48] Sidney, *Court Maxims*, 186. Henry Vane, *A Healing Question* (London, 1656), 19, and *Needful Corrective* (London, 1660), 7–8. On Vane's Calvinism, see n. 2 above. Sidney shows no trace of Vane's theological idiosyncrasies. The belief in a godly franchise was widespread among the sectarian fringe of Puritanism in the 1650s. See Douglas R. Lacey, *Dissent and Parliamentary Politics in England, 1661–1689: A Study in the Perpetuation and Tempering of Parliamentarianism* (Rutgers, NJ, 1969), 4. Milton's writings breathe an intimate relationship between piety, virtue, and republicanism, without any intimation, however, of anything resembling Vane's proposal. He rejected restricting the franchise on the basis of theology. Harrington rejected Vane's linking of the franchise with Calvinist virtue as oligarchical. Blair Worden, "Republicanism and the Restoration, 1660–1683," in *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649–1776*, ed. David Wooton (Stanford, CA, 1994), 165; John Milton, *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660) in Milton, *Complete Prose Works*, 7:368, 380; Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* (Oxford, 2003), 279; Harrington, *Political Works*, 731–32, 736–37, 796–99.

[49] Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London, 1988), 53–64; Michael P. Winship, "Godly Republicanism and the Origins of the Massachusetts Polity," *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (July 2006): 427–62, and "Freeborn (Puritan) Englishmen and Slavish Subjection: Popish Tyranny and Puritan Constitutionalism, c. 1570–1606," *English Historical Review* 124, no. 3 (October 2009): 1050–74; Johann P. Sommerville, *Royalists and Patriots: Politics and Ideology in England, 1603–1640* (London, 1999), 79. Calvin's jaundiced view of monarchs and preference for republics is discussed in Harro Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge, 1982), chap. 7. Richard Cust and Peter Lake, "Sir Richard Grosvenor and the Rhetoric of Magistracy," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 54 (May 1981): 40–53.

[50] Cesare Cuttica, "Thomas Scott of Canterbury (1566–1635): Patriot, Civic Radical, Puritan," *History of European Ideas* 34, no. 4 (December 2008): 475–89; Markku Peltonen, *Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought, 1570–1640* (Cambridge, 1995), chap. 5; Richard Cust, *The Forced Loan and English Politics, 1626–1628* (Oxford, 1987), 170–72.

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attacks on Charles I and particularly on the duke of Buckingham. Alongside his religious convictions, Scott expounded what one historian has called "vehement quasi-republican constitutionalism," in the form of classical ideals of citizenship, along with forthright expressions of the duty to resist tyrannical monarchs and of skepticism about monarchy and hereditary political authority in general. Scott was also Robert Filmer's cousin, and, as David Underdown has suggested, his arguments were very likely a major reason why Filmer decided to write the treatise that belatedly provoked Sidney's *Discourses*.[51]

What was unique about Sidney is not that he was Calvinist and republican, nor that he drew upon classical ideas. Many of his fellow republicans in the Rump Parliament would have shared that description.[52] What distinguished him from this group was the sheer extent of his passion for classical culture and for theoretical political science. Sidney, according to Gilbert Burnet, had studied "the history of government in all its branches beyond any man I ever knew."[53] Among the group of mid- and late-century authors who shared these passions, Sidney might have been the most religiously conservative. His outlier position is not surprising. The "classical republicans" were immersed in a human science whose traditions provided ample building materials for bridging the gulf between grace and nature, a gulf which, according to Calvinism, was impassable.

Yet that outlier position helps explain why Sidney became such an enduring figure. Sidney engaged in a variety of maneuvers to classicize his Calvinism and Calvinize his classicism. The most striking of these maneuvers was his rhetorical subordination of Christian apocalypticism to what Sidney presented as an equivalently furious struggle of good against evil. That struggle embraced pagans as much as Christians and thus validated Sidney's interests in classical culture and history. At the same time, a consequence of this struggle was that political theory itself, even when ostensibly dealing with natural law alone, became a critical battleground in the greatest battle between good and evil, the battle between the saints and Satan. Sidney meant exactly what he wrote in *Discourses* when he repeatedly claimed that Filmer's political arguments obviously marked him as a false Christian and a servant of the devil.[54] Turning Filmer into a damned heretic was the theopolitical equivalent of the contemporaneous Cain-versus-Abel theological

[51] Cesare Cuttica, "Thomas Scott," 488, and "'Adam . . . The Father of All Flesh': An Intellectual History of Sir Robert Filmer and His Works in Seventeenth-Century European Political Thought" (PhD diss., European University Institute, 2007); David Underdown, *A Freeborn People: Politics and the Nation in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York, 1996), 44. Studies of Scott's political thought give scant attention to the specifics of Scott's Puritanism. In the tract calling for Parliament to execute Buckingham, Scott claims that the "Puritans," among whom he counted himself, "teach a paritie betweene Bishopps and other Inferiour persons." In a 1632 response to a treatise by James I, Scott writes that the "Puritans" desire "no other politie and paritie then the best reformed Churches practice." See Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidenhead, Knachtbull MS U.951/ Z10, 7; Z17/3, fol. 275v.

[52] Sean Kelsey, *Inventing a Republic: The Political Culture of the English Commonwealth, 1649–1653* (Stanford, CA, 1997), 200–227.

[53] Burnet, *History*, 1:538.

[54] Sidney, *Discourses*, 7, 8, 56. By contrast, the other major Whig responder to Filmer, James Tyrrell, makes it clear that he is attacking Filmer's ideas, not his person. Tyrrell calls Filmer "ingenious," "great and worthy," and one "whose good Name upon all accounts I designe not to diminish." See James Tyrrell, *Patriarcha non Monarcha* (London, 1681), sig A2 [ii]v., and *Bibliotheca Politica* (London, 1692), sig. A2 [ii]r.

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debates in which Owen and other Independents were embroiled. *Discourses*' depiction of a ferocious, because fundamentally religious, battle of liberty and virtue against tyranny and corruption helped ensure that the book would become a rousing inspiration to later generations of devotees of liberty, even as its already nearly invisible Calvinist theological and affective scaffolding vanished from sight.

■ ■ ■

Just as *Discourses* clarifies the relationship in Sidney's mind between Calvinism and classical antiquity, it also clarifies the relationship for Sidney between idolatry and tyranny. When the ancient Israelites defied the law of God and turned to idolatry, they sought kings as their rulers. They did so, Sidney explained far more clearly in the *Discourses* than in *Court Maxims*, because all but the most severely restricted monarchies violated the law of God themselves. Therefore, the law-breaking, idol-worshiping Israelites were confident that a law-breaking king would "uphold them in their disobedience."[55] The Israelites' desire for idols put the will of man in place of the will of God, and since the desire for monarchs stems from the desire for idols, the Israelites' monarchy itself was an "idol," a "production of their own fancy, conceived in wickedness, and brought forth in iniquity."[56] Monarchy was an idol, Sidney repeated in *Discourses*; the anti-Christian Catholic Church was idolatrous, the Church of England and its ceremonies were idolatrous, and all of them were tools in the devil's plot to destroy the people of God.[57]

"I fall as a Sacrifice unto Idols," Sidney announced to the English public in a widely dispersed paper he handed to the sheriff of London in lieu of a speech at his execution on December 7, 1683. Eighteenth-century Whigs lost sight of the deeper struggle in which Sidney was engaged and simply portrayed him as a martyr of the people's right to defend their God-given natural rights against tyrannical governments. Sidney, however, in composing his last paper, saw himself dying more like the regicides or like the Marian martyrs of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. Like those earlier martyrs, Sidney blessed God for allowing him to "be singled out" to die as a witness to his truth. He prayed that God would preserve England from idolatry and that he would bless his people and save them. No less than the earlier martyrs, Sidney made it clear in his "Last Paper" that he himself was among God's people; his execution was part of a "plot to destroy the best Protestants in England."[58] Those best Protestants, as Sidney conceived of them, had been rescued

[55] *Discourses*, 289; cf. 125, 231, 335, 338.

[56] Ibid., 338, 27.

[57] Sidney, *Discourses*, 78. Sidney's loathing for Roman Catholicism, "where the name of God is no otherwise known than to be blasphemed," is clearly religious and not simply based on its "tyrannous" government. See ibid., 315.

[58] Algernon Sidney, *The Very Copy of a Paper Delivered to the Sheriffs upon the Scaffold on Tower-Hill, on Friday Decemb. 7, 1683 by Algernon Sidney, Esq., Before his Execution There* (London, 1683), 3. Scott, *Restoration Crisis*, 341–47. Sidney struck much the same tone at the closing of an "Apology" he wrote immediately before his death. See Algernon Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government. By Algernon Sidney, Esq; to which are Added, Memoirs of his Life, and an Apology for Himself,* 3rd ed. (London, 1751), lii; *The Speeches and Prayers of Major General Harison, Octob. 13. Mr. John Carew, Octob. 15. Mr. Justice Cooke, Mr. Hugh Peters, Octob. 16. Mr. Tho. Scott, Mr. Gregory Clement, Col. Adrian Scroop, Col. John Jones, Octob. 17. Col. Daniel Axtell, & Col. Fran. Hacker, Oct. 19 the Times of Their Death* (London, 1660); and *The Speeches and Prayers of John Barkstead, John Okey, and Miles Corbet* (London, 1662).

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by God from eternal destruction; they followed the impulse of his spirit after their spiritual anointing; and they took the killing of kings as part of their religious duties. Sidney died not as one of the first Whigs, but as one of the last of the Calvinist republicans, for whom their own glorious liberties as the predestined sons of God and their struggle against kings were inseparable.

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