

## **The war of ideas in the English Revolution**

**Course Code:**

**Module Title:** The war of ideas in the English Revolution

**Weighting: 10 ECTS**

**Co-Ordinator:** Dr Robert Armstrong

**Teaching Staff:** Dr Robert Armstrong

**Course Overview and Aims:** This course will examine the conflict of ideas which swept England in the middle decades of the seventeenth century, challenging long-held notions of order and stability in both church and state. The nation endured a sequence of devastating civil wars, resulting not only in massive loss of life, including that of the king, Charles I. Yet the battle of ideas was if anything more far-reaching, as events moved towards the overthrow of monarchy and the establishment, for the only time in English history, of a republican political order. Conflicting sides in the civil wars began by contesting ownership of shared commitments – to monarchy, the rule of law, and a Protestant church of England. The debate was soon joined on much more profound questions, as to the origins and nature of political power, even the extent to which ‘the people’ might be participants in political structures. In matters religious, too, arguments over the nature and future direction of the one, national, Church, were soon turned around to debate the validity of maintaining the identity of nation and church, and the hitherto widely scorned notion of toleration. The opinions which can be heard from these years are not only those of established elites, for the upsurge in print publication allows for a greater access to a wider range of voices, female as well as male, unlearned and lowly as well as powerful.

The course is aimed at developing a understanding of the important political and religious debates undertaken in this time and place through a study of key texts in their contexts; cultivating skills in the critical study of documents; deepening understanding of perennial issues in political thought and the nature of civil society through the detailed study of a particularly focused series of debates in early modern England; encouraging self-directed

study towards the production of an extended essay on a topic of the student's own choice, and related to one or more of the seminar sessions.

**Working Methods:** The format of the course will be that of a sequence of seminars, convened to examine and discuss contemporary texts – from political pamphlets and sermons to poems, speeches and more elaborate theoretical works. Classes will focus both on the issues raised within, and between, the texts themselves, and on the need to consider texts in context, both of events and of the circulation of ideas.

Class members will have the opportunity to read widely in seventeenth-century works and in the modern, secondary literature which opens up and locates the works in question. Detailed reading lists will be provided.

There will be room for consideration of topics to be chosen and submitted as the subjects of extended essays, and of how to go about producing the assigned work.

**Syllabus:** The course will run for nine weeks, covering the following topics:

- What was the English Revolution?
- The ancient constitution: traditions of political thought
- Alternative Reformations: traditions of religious thought
- From obedience to resistance
- From Reformation to toleration
- From resistance to revolution
- Radical alternatives: Levellers, Quakers and others
- Reactions to revolution: literary responses
- Leviathan: Hobbes and beyond

**Assessment:** By extended essay of 3,500 words

**Learning Outcomes:**

**Introductory Reading:**

Mark Kishlansky, *A monarchy transformed: Britain 1603-1714* (1996)

Ann Hughes, *The causes of the English civil war* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1998)

David Wootton ed., *Divine right and democracy: an anthology of political writing in Stuart England* (1986; reprinted 2003)

Austin Woolrych, *Britain in revolution, 1625-1660* (2002)