

Book Reviews

CHARLES WEBSTER (ed.), *The intellectual revolution of the seventeenth century*, (*Past and Present* Series), London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974, pp. x, 445, £5.95.

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Everyone who is familiar with the jealousy with which librarians guard their copies of *Past and Present* will welcome this addition to the *Past and Present* series, which contains twenty-nine reprinted articles by nineteen authors. *Past and Present* has developed an enviable reputation as a journal of controversial interpretation and lively debate, and after twenty years it is as vigorous as ever. It has contributed toward broadening the context in which their subject is now treated by historians of ideas. One way in which it has done this, illustrated in the present volume, is through continued exploration of the possible relationships between the achievement of the early scientific community in seventeenth-century England and various forms of religious persuasion. The thesis, here promoted by Christopher Hill, that meaningful connexions *can* be made between scientific development and technological innovation and the “puritan” spectrum of belief, may not yet have proved itself as the new orthodoxy, but it has certainly continued to raise new questions about the social milieu of science. It is indeed useful to have argument and counter-argument conveniently to hand.

By its title this book claims, however, to be more than one in a series of reprints. Do the articles—over the preparation and selection of which the present editor of course had no control—justify, as a collection, the title given them by Dr. Webster, “The intellectual revolution of the seventeenth century”? The articles range from C. B. Macpherson’s interpretation of Harrington’s writings as “bourgeois realist”, through Christopher Hill on “William Harvey and the idea of monarchy” to Bernard Capp on English millenarianism. Are there closer connexions between these than might at first appear? The article by S. F. Mason outlines the problems of the historical explanation of the intellectual revolution: by the late seventeenth century the medieval *leitmotif* of hierarchy had been overthrown in theology, politics, and in natural philosophy from cosmology to physiology. The articles gathered in this book do for the most part explore the possible relationships of these revolutions: the intellectual revolution subsumes the revolutions in English politics, in theology and in science. Indeed, in theorizing, all these areas could be “anatomized”. Charles Webster in his Introduction provides a valuable critical synthesis of the contributions within the wider context of historical study, a synthesis which it would be difficult to better. Subsequent contributions to the debates are also noted. The Introduction also stresses the importance of millenarianism and of the “tendency to express intellectual aspirations in terms of utopian programmes”, whose scientific and technological content, Webster believes, should not be ignored.

It is of great value to have these contributions gathered together in a single volume. It may only be regretted that the acrimony with which some of the debates were originally conducted should be perpetuated and continued.