

Civilization

Second year

Good morning,

This is lecture number 9 and our third lecture since the suspension of lectures. I hope all of you are doing well and are making the best use of your time.

We will interrupt our analysis of the structure of Western thought in the early modern age and make a move to England and the formation of modern British monarchy. Just like Spain – which we discussed briefly in our last lecture – modern Britain was formed in the sixteenth century, the Renaissance. This is also called the Elizabethan age and the Age of Shakespeare. Henry VIII is usually credited with unifying England as a kingdom after a civil war known as the War of the Roses. He also separated the English church from the RCR (Roman Catholic Church) and created the Anglican Church which is the official Church of England. Although this is usually ascribed to his desire to divorce his first Catholic wife, Catherine of Aragon, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic king and queen of Spain, in order to have a male heir to his throne, history is more complicated and events abound to testify to the fact that his goal was much more important. His real goal was to gain total and undivided power over England and his subjects. He did not want the See (i.e. the Pope in Rome) to have control over England and contest his authority. Therefore, his real goal was to set England apart from Europe and from the RCR. This policy which started in the sixteenth century still has its echoes today which is clear in Brexit, Britain's separation from the European Union.

His daughter Queen Elizabeth I is regarded as the one who turned England from a small country to one of the main European powers. She started a policy of tolerance

in order to ease the religious struggles between the Catholics and the Protestants in England. She consolidated British independence by refusing to marry Philip II, Emperor of Spain. When he tried to join England to the Spanish Empire by force, the War of the Armada started. He tried to put England under siege but British pirates formed a fleet and fought The Great Armada, the Spanish fleet which was regarded as the greatest naval force at the time and defeated it. This established England as an independent European power.

England achieved national unity earlier than any other major European state. Its island geography freed it from the border disputes that plagued emerging states in Continental Europe. By an accident of fate, its administrative structure also developed in such a way as to encourage centralization. In 1066, William, duke of Normandy and vassal to the French king, had invaded and conquered England, acquiring at a stroke the entire kingdom. In contrast, the French kings took centuries to make the territory of France their domain. As conquerors, the Norman kings pursued policies of intermarriage with their powerful subjects, such as earls and barons, and of consultation with the church and the nobility. By the middle of the thirteenth century, these consultations, or *parlays*, came to be called *parliaments*. Increasingly, there emerged the practice of inviting to these parliaments representatives from the counties—knights and burgesses. Gradually, these lesser-than-noble but landed and prominent representatives came to regard Parliament as a means of redressing their grievances. In turn, the later medieval kings saw Parliament as a means of exercising control and raising taxes. By 1297, the Lords (the upper house) and the Commons (the lower house) had obtained the king's agreement that no direct taxes could be levied without their consent. By the fourteenth century, Parliament had become a permanent institution of government.

Its power was entirely subservient to the crown, but its right to question royal decisions had been established.

The British Parliament:

The medieval English Parliament possessed two characteristics that distinguished it from its many Continental counterparts, such as the various French Estates. The English Parliament was national, not provincial; more important, its representatives were elected across caste lines, with voting rights dependent on property, not on noble birth or status. These representatives voted as individuals rather than collectively as clergy, nobles, or commoners, that is, as Estates. In the Middle Ages, Parliament and the monarchy were interdependent; they were seen not as rivals but as complementary forms of centralized government. That very interdependence, however, would ultimately lead to conflict. The constitution, too, emerged during the Middle Ages in England. It comprised unwritten and written precedents, laws, and royal acts that came to embody the basic principles of government. In contrast to the French model, England developed into a *constitutional* monarchy. The most famous document, Magna Carta (1215), guaranteed certain aristocratic privileges and was read at the opening meeting of almost every Parliament the king called. The theoretical foundation for the constitution— which was never a written document— grew out of legal practices and customs described under the generic term *common law*. Whereas feudal law applied only to a local region, common law extended throughout the realm and served as a unifying force.

What the Tudors did for England:

This emphasis on Parliament and the constitution should not obscure the fact that England in the fifteenth century could be a lawless place where local nobility made war on their neighbors largely unchecked by central government. One such war, the War of the Roses (1455–1485), pitted two noble families against each other in a struggle for domination. Out of it, the Tudors emerged triumphant, in the person of Henry VII (1485–1509), who spent much of his reign consolidating and extending his authority. He revitalized and remade the institutions of central government. Henry VII's goal was to check the unruly nobility. Toward this end, he brought commoners into the government. These commoners, unlike the great magnates, could be channeled into royal service because they craved what the king offered: financial rewards and elevated social status. Although they did not fully displace the aristocracy, commoners were brought into Henry VII's inner circle, into the Privy Council, into the courts, and eventually into all the highest offices of the government. The strength and efficiency of Tudor government were shown during the Reformation, when Henry VIII (1509–1547) made himself head of the English church. He was able to take this giant step (known as the Henrican Revolution) toward increasing royal power because his father had restored order and stability. The Protestant Reformation in England was a revolution in royal, as well as ecclesiastical, government. It attacked and defeated a main obstacle to monarchical authority: the power of the papacy. At the same time, the Reformation greatly enhanced the power of Parliament. Henry VIII used Parliament to make the Reformation because he knew that he needed the support of the lords, the country gentry, and the merchants. No change in religious practice could be instituted by the monarchy alone. Parliament's participation in the Reformation gave it a greater role and sense of importance than it had ever possessed in the past. Nonetheless, the final

outcome of this administrative revolution enhanced monarchical power. By the end of his reign, Henry VIII easily possessed as much power as his French rival, Francis I. Indeed, until the early seventeenth century, the history of monarchical power in England, with its absolutist tendencies, was remarkably similar to the Continental pattern.

At Henry's death, the Tudor bureaucracy and centralized government were strained to the utmost, yet they survived. The government weathered the reign of Henry's sickly son, Edward VI (1547– 1553), and the extreme Protestantism of some of his advisers, and it survived the brief and deeply troubled reign of Henry's first daughter, Mary (1553–1558), who brutally tried to return England to Catholicism. At Mary's death, England stood dangerously close to the religious instability and sectarian tension that would undermine the French kings during the final decades of the sixteenth century.

As for Queen Elizabeth's influence over Britain, this will be discussed in our next lecture. After that, we will discuss the formation of the European mind again.