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Harmony and Discord between Sovereignty and the Body Politic in Edward Forset's Comparative Discourse

In the year 1606 Edward Forset published his quite curious book, under the title, *A Comparative Discourse of the Bodies Natural and Politique*. His book is an example of the glorification of the idea of sovereignty, and thus requires more attention in the shadow of the works of Hobbes and Bodin. Forset is mostly preoccupied with the analogy between bodies natural and politic. In European political theory, starting with the 12th century, with John of Salisbury and his famous treatise *Policraticus*, one can notice the emergence of a political metaphor consisting in drawing an analogy between the medieval state and the human body. Furthermore the medieval and early modern mind was dominated by the idea that man was a microcosm which faithfully mirrored, on a lesser scale, the universal macrocosm. That was the basis for the analogy between the human body and the state and it was openly acknowledged by political and literary authors, such as Forset or the more famous James IV and I, king of England and Scotland. My aim with this paper is to explore the ideological background of Forset's work, which could serve as a solution for the different and also ambiguous historical approaches, that concerned this work. In my reading the numerous inconsistencies of the discourse can only be processed if we approach the text as an ideological performance and not as an example of social and political conflict.

Key words: Edward Forset, Sovereignty, English Political Thought, Body Politic, Cosmic Harmony, King's Two Bodies, Cultural History



Edward Forset (1553–1630) was a man welcomed at the court of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603) and then King James I (1603–1625). The year after the Gunpowder Plot, in 1606 he published his book entitled '*A Comparative Discourse of the Bodies Natural and Politique. Wherein out of principles of Nature, is set forth the true forme of Commonweale, with the dutie of Subjects, and the right*

of the Sovereigne: together with many good points of Politicall learning, mentioned in a Briefe after the Preface.¹

In this work, he uses metaphors and similes to compare the body politic to the human body in various ways, seeing the sovereign as the 'soule, the head, and the heart' to whom obedience is due from the subjects for natural reasons. There are not many studies available on this book, and it is often ignored in the histories of early modern English literature and political thought.

John William Allen thought Forset was confused about the theory he desired to describe. In his analysis the general claim was that few supporters of the monarchist case felt the need to clarify a philosophy. He stigmatized the corresponding arguments used to defend royal power as nonsense. Given this attitude he was led to misinterpret the rationale and so the authority of the political ideas of, for instance Edward Forset.² However William Howard Greenleaf claims that Forset espoused a 'complete and coherent theory',³ and he certainly demonstrates the presence of serious analogical argument, which Allen had slighted. Nevertheless Johann Peter Sommerville considers Forset's work valueless, based on his argument that these examples that Forset uses were regarded only as illustrations and not proofs for political theory.⁴ In contrast with this proving Kevin Sharpe considered the 'Discourse' one of the best illustrations of the concept of *Commonweale* in Renaissance England.⁵ James Daly also put a great emphasis on Forset's ideas in his remarkable work about the relationship between cosmic harmony and English politics in the century.⁶ Considering that this tract evoked such polemic interpretation one must ask the question what is behind these readings and also not ignore a deeper look into this divisive work. My aim with this paper is to highlight Forset's concepts, particularly upon sovereignty and examine how that theory accommodates into the structure of the *Commonweale*. Overall my study will only serve as a starting point, how – in my opinion – Forset's pamphlet could be

¹ Edward FORSET: *A Comparative Discourse of the Bodies Natural and Politique*. London. 1606. (hereafter: FORSET 1606).

² John William ALLEN: *English Political Thought. 1603–1660*. I. 1603–1644. London. 1938. (hereafter: ALLEN 1938) p. 76–84.

³ William Howard GREENLEAF: *Order, Empiricism and Politics. Two Traditions of English Political Thought 1500–1700*. London – New York – Toronto. 1964. (hereafter: GREENLEAF 1964) p. 56–57, 68–79.

⁴ Johann Peter SOMMERVILLE: *Politics and Ideology in England, 1603–1640*. London – New York. 2014. p. 48–49.

⁵ Kevin SHARPE: *Remapping Early Modern England. The Culture of Seventeenth-Century Politics*. Cambridge. 2000. (hereafter: SHARPE 2000) p. 38–123.

⁶ James DALY: Cosmic Harmony and Political Thinking in Early Stuart England. *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 69 (1979:7), p. 1–41 (hereafter: DALY 1979).

understood, which may bring up new questions for further research on this work.

Forset incorporated into his '*Discourse*' the ideas of the humours and the affections, religious, legal and medical ideas, while calling it a work of political science. However his work was also a philosophical tract for the times, while he mentions contemporary events and issues like the Gunpowder plot⁷ and James I's inclination towards favourites and he, on the whole, supports James I's assertions on the divine right of kings.⁸

About the possible influence of this book, Raffaella Santi generally points out to the evidence that Forset's work was to be found in many private libraries in the early seventeenth century and influenced certain philosophic writers such as Hobbes.⁹ He was the inventor of the science of politics or civil science, but he drew also on previous sources, adapting them to his own system of ideas.¹⁰

I just would like to point out one specific Forsetian phrase, which has an allusion to the engraved title-page of the '*Leviathan*'. Anyone who is familiar with the giant, crowned figure could recognize the similarity between the actual image and the written text by Forset. Every aspect of this description appears in the frontispiece of the *Leviathan*. While this does not prove that Hobbes's inspiration came from the Forset's portrayal, we can certainly note that it is wrong to think that the '*Discourse*' had no discernable influence.

*"The Commonweale [...] seemeth to have beene both sweetly and soundly conceived by that thrice renowned Philosopher Trismegistus, when he imagined an huge and mightie Gyant, whose head was above the firmament, his necke, shoulders, and upper parts in the heavens, his armes and hands reaching to East and West, his belly in the whole spaciousnesse under the Moone, his legges and feet within the earth."*¹¹

As Forset draws his analogies from the natural world, his main goal is to demonstrate the true and consistent connection between the rationality of the natural and the political order: to present the body politic as a

⁷ FORSET 1606, p. 51-52.

⁸ Kevin SHARPE: *Reading Authority and Representing Rule in Early Modern England*. New York – London. 2013. (hereafter: SHARPE 2013) p. 128

⁹ Raffaella SANTI: Edward Forset: Why is the 'Body Politique' called a 'Commonweale'? In: *The 'Commonwealth' as Political Space in Late Renaissance England*. Ed. RAFFAELLA SANTI – Garret Samuel ZEITLIN – Luc BOROT – Myriam-Isabelle DUCROCQ. Milan. 2014. (hereafter: SANTI 2014) p. 33-38.

¹⁰ Santi points out that even the title of *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic* (1640) echoes the title of Forset's work, and also mentions some of the similarities between the two texts. See the reference in Thomas HOBBS: *Elementi di Legge Naturale et politica*. Ed. Arrigo PACCI. Florence. 1968. p. 160.

¹¹ FORSET 1606. p. i-ii.

harmonious commonwealth. These analogies are powerful arguments, since they allow the reader to visualize the truth through mental images, using similitudes and metaphors, but they are also intended as rational and logical arguments. The process of this analogy called '*correspondence*',¹² and it's fundamentally based on Christian-inspired metaphysics.¹³ In early modern England this kind of an argument was associated with the enhanced cult of royal authority and the idea of absolute sovereignty, also providing a philosophical basis for the doctrine of the divine right of kings.¹⁴

Forset knew that the analogies could never be exact; they were general indications rather than precise conclusions. He uses these '*pleasing illustrations*' to demonstrate the theoretical truth.¹⁵ Referring to the natural world, as a source for these analogies, the subtitle of the book displays the proposed demonstrative power of the work: '*Wherein out of the principles of Nature is set forth the true forme of a Commonweale.*'

In early modern Europe it was widely thought that, just in a way God was sovereign in the universe or macrocosms, a similar sovereignty existed in the microcosms of both the human body and the body politic – which is the human society. This argument by correspondence meant that the body politic and the physical human body lent themselves to analogies, as between the head and the monarch, bodily health and social welfare, the circulation of blood and finance, or the rule of the rational soul and the political sovereignty.¹⁶ As the social order was thought to be structured by God, the theory maintained that monarchy was the best form of government: the king ruled his people and maintained laws and customs, just as the head ruled the human body through reason.¹⁷

By imitating God's action of creation, man could create the commonwealth as a form of political action. In Platonic terms,¹⁸ this action is seen as the process of bringing order and harmony into the disorder.¹⁹

¹² GREENLEAF 1964. p. 6.

¹³ GREENLEAF 1964. p. 8.

¹⁴ GREENLEAF 1964. p. 9.

¹⁵ FORSET 1606 p. 1.

¹⁶ Eustace Mandeville Wetenhall TILLYARD: *The Elizabethan World Picture*. London. 1943. (hereafter: TILLYARD 1943) p. 74.

¹⁷ FORSET 1606. p. 89–103; GREENLEAF 1964. p. 21–22; Stephen BROGAN: *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England: Politics, Medicine, and Sin*. Woodbridge – Suffolk. 2015. (hereafter: BROGAN 2015) p. 105.

¹⁸ For the connection between commonwealth and early modern Platonism see: Raffaella SANTI: 'Commonweale': Platonism and Political Thought in Renaissance England. *Agathos* 7 (2016), p. 157–169.

¹⁹ SANTI 2014. p. 42.

The consequence is this: '*Homo mensura rerum omnium*'.²⁰ This is also true for political action, through which men can give life to a well ordered commonwealth because the body politic is having the same features, measures, and proportions of the natural body.²¹ Forset refers to the *Vitruvian man* in order to demonstrate to the reader that nature has designed the human body so that its members are duly proportioned to the frame as a whole.²²

Furthermore, the commonwealth was also represented generally as a condition of harmony.²³ This feature of course reflected the idyllic proportions harmony of the celestial bodies, which idea modelled the perfection of God's creation for as God authored and maintained the coexistence of the world, so it was the role of the monarch to sustain the structure of the State.²⁴

While explaining these analogies Forset does not break up his text with chapters. However, we can divide the text into two distinct, but eventually coherent sections. The first concerns the metaphysical entity, which the king as *Sovereign* embodies, and while pursuing this analogy Forset brings up his essential ideas and characteristics of sovereignty. In the next section he discusses the different conflicts of the commonwealth, including a lengthy diagnose of such causes and offering a sort of policy to keep the body politic healthy. Henceforth, I will explain Forset's idea on sovereignty followed by a clarification how the political and social disorder of the state could be interpreted.

Rehearsing directly the '*Theory of the King's Two Bodies*', Forset described the sovereign as both human and mystical.²⁵ According to the theory the king was figured as having two bodies: the '*natural body*' subject to imperfection, disease and death, and a '*mystical body*' free of natural defects, which represented the body politic.²⁶ In his law reports, the Elizabethan jurist Edmund Plowden reported that "*the king has in him two bodies viz. a*

²⁰ "That in the very composure of man, there is manifestly discovered a summary abstract of absolute perfection, by which as by an excellent Idea, or an exact rule, we may examine and exemplifie all other things". FORSET 1606. p. 1.

²¹ TILLYARD 1943. p. 98.

²² FORSET 1606. p. 1–2.

²³ The word *Commonweale* / *Commonwealth* contains the idea of '*bonum commune*', the '*good of the people*', seen as the result of a policy carried out by a good government, that follows justice and, in general, what reason dictates. *Commonweale* also indicates the political community as a whole or the body politic.

²⁴ DALY 1979. p. 13; SHARPE 2000. p. 52.

²⁵ Ernst Hartwig KANTOROWICZ: *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton. 1997. (hereafter: KANTOROWICZ 1997) p. 7–23.

²⁶ 'Body politic' and 'mystical body' seem to be used without great discrimination. KANTOROWICZ 1997. p. 15.

body natural and a body politic. 'The body natural is 'subject to passions [...] as other men are' whereas his politic body is 'utterly void of [...] natural defects and imbecilities'.²⁷ In the body politic the king is the head, the focus of reason and intellect, and his subjects are the 'members' and the mystical body of the king is "not subject to passions as the other is".²⁸

On the concept of sovereignty Forset said that it was indivisible for "as the Soule, so the power of principallitie in government [...] in all points, and all parts is all one".²⁹ This was a reflection of the principle of unity which meant, further, that power should be in the hands of one man. Monarchy was the best, and only form of government compatible with the nature of sovereignty. Although Nature had assigned more than a single part to carry out many of the body's function, yet "for the supremacie of governing ouer all, she hath but one head; [...] regall dignitie."³⁰

Second, he suggested that sovereignty was permanent and did not cease upon the death of the ruler who wielded it. In his 'personal respects' the sovereign exhibited frailties, but his sovereignty was invincible.³¹ As a person death made an end to his "single and indiuiduall"³² life, but sovereignty never failed for any moment as long as the succession continued.³³ This supreme power was also unlimited and self-sustaining for, like the soul, it was at no time abridged or enfeebled. Next, in every state the ruling authority was "selfe competent and complete"³⁴ as far as the ordering of affairs in its territory concerned. Consequently, the king was the sole source of authority in a society, just as the soul was the cause of whatsoever the body was beyond a mere lifeless mass.³⁵

Forset continued that the sovereign's authority was indefeasible and could not properly be called in question or resisted by any subordinate officer. All power of command in the commonwealth derived from the "supreme principallitie"³⁶ and all the authority of the subordinate magistracy was dependent on it and was secondary to the sovereign.³⁷

Forset was anxiously concerned about the absolute necessity for a sovereign, but could not avoid the need to think of the soul as expressing principles of association throughout the body politic, as the analogy was

²⁷ Edmund PLOWDEN: *Commentaries or Reports*. London. 1816. quoted by KANTOROWICZ 1997. p. 7.

²⁸ PLOWDEN: *Commentaries* quoted by KANTOROWICZ 1997. p. 13.

²⁹ FORSET 1606. p. 25.

³⁰ FORSET 1606. p. 57.

³¹ FORSET 1606. p. 25.

³² FORSET 1606. p. 33.

³³ FORSET 1606. p. 33.

³⁴ FORSET 1606. p. 9-10, 13, 33.

³⁵ FORSET 1606. p. 9-10.

³⁶ FORSET 1606. p. 8-9, 74.

³⁷ FORSET 1606. p. 7-8, 74.

likely to point the mind towards the structural principles of power.³⁸ Forset declares that just as God breathes into the natural body a reasonable soul, so does God appoints rulers in the body politic. He infers that it is a mistake to suppose that people has any part in the establishment or creation of the Sovereign. He does not deny that in a quite superficial sense, popular choice or election may establish a form of government or monarch, but he declares that in all such cases God takes special measures.³⁹

Clearly there is an exaltation of the office of the royal figure in his concept, but not without some limitations. As Kevin Sharpe points out, early modern Englishmen were more used to thinking in terms of duties than rights.⁴⁰ These duties were above all the burdens of the subjects, from whom obedience to the law was requested, but the power of the king was never thought of as unlimited and arbitrary.⁴¹ He had his own obligations and duties; in the first place, he had to give account to God.

I am still referring to Kevin Sharpe's definition of power, which we most obviously think of as residing in individuals – or institutions – as the sway wielded by a superior over an inferior, and as related to the exercise of the will. None of these associations gets to the heart of early seventeenth-century attitudes.⁴² Early modern perceptions of power are beset by ambivalences and hard to pin down.⁴³ For example the power of the king, as we know, was described as analogous to that of God. Yet, as James Daly pointed out, the position of God himself in the cosmic theory was ambiguous, since He was both the author of the chain of correspondences and also part of that chain. Not surprisingly then, the analogy of divine right kingship could support both relatively unrestrained action and action circumscribed by the need to act according to the principles – or laws – that maintained the harmony in the cosmic view.⁴⁴

³⁸ DALY 1979. p. 17.

³⁹ FORSET 1606. p. 7.

⁴⁰ SHARPE 2000. p. 54. See for example the passage from King James I to his son: “*Being borne to a king, ye are rather borne to onus [labour], then honos [honour].*” KING JAMES I: Basilikon Doron. In: *King James VI and I Political Writings*. Ed. Johann Peter SOMMERVILLE. Cambridge. 2006. (hereafter: *King James VI*) p. 1–61, here: p. 2.

⁴¹ “*In medieval and early modern England ‘Sovereignty’ was identified not with the King alone or the people alone, but with the ‘King in Parliament.’ Continental jurisprudence though might easily attain to a concept of the ‘State’ in the abstract, or identify the Prince with that State, in England it never arrived at conceiving of the Prince as a sole corporation from which the body politic as represented by Parliament could never be ruled out.*” KANTOROWICZ 1997. p. 20. see: FORSET 1606. p. 33.

⁴² Richard TUCK: Power and Authority in Seventeenth-Century England. *The Historical Journal* 17 (1974), p. 43–61, here: p. 85.

⁴³ SHARPE 2000. p. 54.

⁴⁴ DALY 1979. p. 10.

Most contemporaries, however, saw God as acting usually through the divine laws according to expectations discernible by reason, deploying only exceptionally His power of miracle which operated outside of natural law. That power was explicitly compared to the king's prerogative.⁴⁵ *"The analogy of the king with God then limited as well as validated royal power, moreover the king's inferiority to God and his derivation of power from God made the due exercise of that power an obligation."*⁴⁶

The second section deals with members of the Body, and comparing to the first section, the body politic as a collectivity is suddenly granted the power to serve the same purpose as the king; both the king and the members as a collectivity are recognized as forces of order within the body politic.⁴⁷ Even so, Forset claims that the sources for social and political disorder that sometimes emerge in the state *"are originally arising and coused from the bodie' eventually causing 'the diaseses of the head"*.⁴⁸ Albert Rolls sees this as a problem, because the collective aspect of the body politic forces the writer to grant power to the people to influence the king.⁴⁹ However he initially misses the author's point in this question, as Forset continues: the subject and the sovereign are not only analogous to the body and the soul, but also, they existed in the same balance.⁵⁰ What secured to balance or harmony, was moderation, the avoidance of any extremes.⁵¹

James I specifically proclaimed his axiom the following: *"I am for the medium in everything."*⁵² The idea of cosmic harmony of balance and moderation far from a validation of unrestrained authority was a normative ideology of self-restraint for rulers.⁵³

At this point Forset uses analogies to describe the relationship between the king and other sites of authority, which also draw on the analogy that King James I and others used to define the king's affiliation to God, which meant that the Jacobean authorities functioned as James lieutenants with no power to question the idealistic embodied of the king. The king was the

⁴⁵ Francis OAKLEY: Jacobean Political Theology: The Absolute and Ordinary Powers of the King. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 29 (1968), p. 323–346 (hereafter: OAKLEY 1968) here: p. 341; FORSET 1606 p. 20–21.

⁴⁶ SHARPE 2000. p. 53; OAKLEY 1968. p. 323–46, here: p. 337–40.

⁴⁷ Albert ROLLS: *Renaissance Incorporations. Negotiating the Theory of the King's Two Bodies*. New York. 2015. (hereafter: ROLLS 2015) p. 70.

⁴⁸ FORSET 1606. p. 28.

⁴⁹ FORSET 1606. p. 28–38.

⁵⁰ FORSET 1606. p. 49–51.

⁵¹ SHARPE 2000. p. 52.

⁵² KING JAMES I: A Speech to both the Houses of parliament, delivered in the Great-Chamber at White-Hall, the last day of March 1607. In: *King James VI* p. 159–178, here: p. 161.

⁵³ SHARPE 2000. p. 53.

head, of course, while his counsellors the mental faculties, the limbs inferior officials.⁵⁴

The head-sovereign was inextricably combined in a cooperative hierarchy; his dignity was greater than that of other parts, but all were needed.⁵⁵ James I accepted the houses of parliament as the three estates which made up the body of which he was head, and it was also normal for this sort of terminology to occur in statements by ministers in parliament.⁵⁶ The unity and mutual need of sovereigns and subjects was well summed up in parliament conceived as both an institution and political image. Concluding, that is, *'in king-in-parliament, acting as one.'*⁵⁷

The analogical head-king monarch of cosmic harmony includes his counsellors, who perfect him by supplying his human defects and making up for his normal human failings. Thus, the perfect king is assisted by experienced advisers, informed by the people's elected representatives.⁵⁸ This is not quite the same distinction as that between 'the king's two bodies,' politic and personal, though it has affinities with it. *"The politic-personal distinction was a necessary legal one, while the harmonist treatment combined both parts at a different level and for different purposes. The political role nearly absorbs, transmogrifies the person into a perfect analogical figure. To some extent, this perfected head was almost implicit in the head – body figure, since it simply could not function at all without mutual support from aspects of the body."*⁵⁹ In the last analysis, the head cannot even be conceived to exist apart from the body's cooperation. There can be no head without the body.⁶⁰

I must mention a critical viewpoint on this matter described by Francis Oakley. He suggests that James I and a couple of theorists of that time should not be associated with the Great Chain of Being. Instead they called upon the distinction between the absolute and ordinary prerogative powers of the monarch, aligning him with the rival vision that was grounded in will, promise, and covenant.⁶¹ This vision affirmed the reliably self-binding

⁵⁴ DALY 1979. p. 17.

⁵⁵ DALY 1979. p. 19; FORSET 1606 p. 13–14.

⁵⁶ Few years before Forset's publication, in a speech to parliament, James had described himself as the *"head wherein the great body is united"* and the people as members. KING JAMES I: A Speech, as it was delivered in the upper house of the parliament to the lords spiritual and temporal, and to the knights, citizens and burgesses there assembled, on Monday the xix. Day of March 1603. In: *King James VI* p. 132–146, here: p. 135.

⁵⁷ DALY 1979. p. 18.

⁵⁸ DALY 1979. p. 18.

⁵⁹ DALY 1979. p. 18; See: FORSET 1606. p. 16–17.

⁶⁰ DALY 1979. p. 18. Cf: KING JAMES I: The Trew Law of Free Monarchies. In: *King James VI*. p. 62–84, here: p. 78.

⁶¹ Explaining the connections between the monarch's ordinary and absolute powers and the 'theory of king's two bodies' see: Corinne Comstock WESTON – Janelle Renfrow GREENBERG:

nature of that sovereign's will and emphasized the degree to which confidence could safely be reposed in its stability.⁶² Though I must note that the absolute prerogative power refers to the autonomous power of the king to govern, and it is never against established legal order nor does it undermine it. *'It is a power assigned to the king by fundamental law to determine according to the reason of state'*.⁶³

Furthermore, I must stress that governing – exercising power – in early modern England was seen not as an individual act of will but as the expressions of a cosmic and communal order by a monarch whose public body and will were inseparable from that order and community.⁶⁴ I agree with the concept which suggests that the idealized commonwealth was bound by this theory. The state existed to make virtuous life possible. It was basically a moral community and because it was moral there could be – theoretically – no confrontation between the good of the individual and the good of the whole. The good of each person derived from and depended on the good of the community.⁶⁵ Forset went so far as to say that the business of each subject was to labour to increase the happiness of the sovereign, just as each bodily member to assist in the perfection of the soul.⁶⁶

The dominant political note of cosmic harmony was not the supremacy of the sovereign; it was the hierarchical chain, a chain of government as much as a chain of being, in which the absolutely necessary cooperation presupposed the respect of higher powers for the legitimate roles of the lower, which were themselves just as necessary.⁶⁷ As Forset stated:

*"It is not therefore called a Commonwealth, that all the wealth should bee common; but because the whole wealth, wit, power, and goodness whatsoever, of every particular person, must be conferred and reduced to the common good. [...] All the members ioine their assisting aid, and effect their whole force according to their diuers function, as well for the upholding of the whole and eueire part in soundnesse, as also against a commonemie."*⁶⁸

Subjects and Sovereigns: The Grand Controversy Over Legal Sovereignty in Stuart England. Cambridge. 2003. p. 8–34.

⁶² Francis OAKLEY: The Absolute and Ordained Power of God and King in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Philosophy, Science, Politics, and Law. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59 (1998), p. 669–690, here: p. 686; Francis OAKLEY: *The Watershed of Modern Politics: Law, Virtue, Kingship, and Contest (1300–1650)*. New Haven – London. 2015. p. 168.

⁶³ Martin LOUGHLIN: *Foundations of Public Law*. Oxford. 2010. p. 380. See: FORSET 1606. p. 20.

⁶⁴ SHARPE 2000. p. 48.

⁶⁵ SHARPE 2000. p. 50.

⁶⁶ FORSET 1606. p. 95–96.

⁶⁷ DALY 1979. p. 29.

⁶⁸ FORSET 1606. p. 48.

Later in his work Forset offered an explanation about maintaining the health of the body politic and studies the difficulties faced by a king who embodies a commonwealth which is suffering from diseases, similar to those found in the natural body. Upon the account of dealing with problems and struggles of a commonwealth, we can read that the king is diseased because of the Body as collectivity has infected him. Still the ideality of Forset's king depends on the ideality of the members of the political body. James I assertion that the king can negatively affect the body politic⁶⁹ has been inverted, and Forset goes on to warn his reader that "*the foule daughter of darknesse and chaos is to be exiled out of the body politique each part is to know and administer his owne proper worke*".⁷⁰ If corruption rises from below to infect the king, the king's ideal status can only be maintained if the members conform.

This meant that physical or psychological disorder within individuals was thought directly to influence the state, and so a direct parallel was drawn between the conditions of the body politic and that of the king's subjects. Disease and '*passions*' had to be cured and controlled by medicine and reason if the individual and collective order was to be maintained.⁷¹ In the natural body of man, health depended on a harmonious and balanced constitution. As the physician of the state, it was the duty of the king to preserve a balanced '*constitution*' in the body politic.⁷²

The idea of the ruler as a physician appears in the Italian '*reason of state*' literature.⁷³ The state or body politic is described as being subject to illness so that the ruler has to be able to interpret pathological symptoms, just like a good physician. Forset re-uses the king-physician similitude, and compares the illness of the State or body politic to those of the natural body. Also, the laws are presented as the medicines that are able to preserve the body politic, or heal it when it is ill.⁷⁴

The body politic was no mere metaphor in this context. Just as the imagined order of the body is thought to explain the disposition of duties in society, different political systems become involved in the dispute about

⁶⁹ "*Your fault shall be aggravated according to the height of your dignity, any sin that ye commit not being a single sin procuring but the fall of one; but being an exemplary sin, and therefore draweth with it the whole multitude to be guilty of the same*". KING JAMES I: Basilikon Doron. In: *King James VI*. p. 1–61, here: p. 12–13.

⁷⁰ FORSET 1606. p. 51.

⁷¹ BROGAN 2015. p. 105.

⁷² SHARPE 2000. p. 52.

⁷³ Peter BURKE: Tacitism, scepticism, and reason of state. In: *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450–1700*. Ed. James HENDERSON BURNS – Mark GOLDIE. Cambridge. 2008. p. 477–498, here: p. 482.

⁷⁴ Katherine Bootle ATTIE: Re-Membering the Body Politic: Hobbes and the Construction of Civic Immortality *English Literary History* 75 (2008), p. 497–530, here: p. 507.

the role that different parts of the body play in health. Forset holds out for the sovereignty of the heart, because nothing apparently feeds it, a phenomenon that demonstrates its independence, as well as the dependence of the rest of the body upon it.⁷⁵

Finally we see that the key to solve the overlaps and confusion about the nature of sovereignty and the collectivity we have to remember that Forset was indeed a harmonist thinker. Forset gives the sovereign only a supervisory power over a bodily constitution which is beyond his power to change; he is the most important of the functioning parts of the body. To isolate however Forset's sovereign, is to do a great violence to his thinking and to cosmic harmony itself.⁷⁶ Isolation of one part was that the system existed to avoid: nothing was more inimical to the correspondence of body natural and body politic.⁷⁷ The head-sovereign was inextricably combined in a cooperative hierarchy: his dignity was greater than that of other parts, but all members were needed. In the harmonist cosmology, first and last were indissolubly tied. Both sovereignty and subjection were dictated by nature, and both were modified and limited by it.⁷⁸

Forset's purpose was simply to define the function of the king, but he also gave a preliminary definition of the king as the essence or form endowing the state with order. The king, according to this definition is distinct, but also necessary to the cohesion of the collective body.⁷⁹

In the *'Discourse'*, he was not interested in a formal political theory; he was trying to explore the problem of the necessary unity of ruler and community by a series of analogies.⁸⁰ Many works of the period could be identified as case studies of rebellions, arguing about the basic causes of political instability and developing strategies by which rulers might restore order. These works usually left aside questions conceiving the ultimate nature of authority; they rather examined the discontent in the society and the miscalculations of a ruler that might lead to disorder.⁸¹

Ideas of harmony are the essential context for any understanding of the attitudes to power in early modern England and in particular they help to make sense of what seem irreconcilable contradiction to us. They suggest how disagreements and even disruptions could for long be accommodated

⁷⁵ Kevin SHARPE – Steven N. ZWICKER: *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England*. Cambridge. 2003. p. 224.

⁷⁶ DALY 1979. p. 19; FORSET 1606. p. 13–14.

⁷⁷ DALY 1979. p. 21.

⁷⁸ DALY 1979. p. 28.

⁷⁹ ROLLS 2015. p. 70.

⁸⁰ DALY 1979. p. 16.

⁸¹ Robert Malcolm SMUTS: *Court Culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition in Early Stuart England*. Philadelphia. 1999. p. 260.

to ideas of unity and wholeness: by treating political upheavals not (as we naturally do) as rival contests for power, but rather as temporary imbalances in the body politic.⁸²

His vision was of a people harmoniously and with all its powers co-operating for the common good,⁸³ by virtue of a sovereignty which is embodied in the community itself.⁸⁴ In his work he equated the soul and reason with sovereignty and the body with affections and obedience. Just as there was in each man a soul and body, and the soul was the image of God, so was the king in the State: '*the political soul in his full royalty*.'⁸⁵



⁸² SHARPE 2000. p. 52.

⁸³ FORSET 1606. p. 9.

⁸⁴ ALLEN 1938. p. 76.

⁸⁵ FORSET 1606. p. 6, 14–17.