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Response to Jim Collins' review of Guy Rowlands, *The Dynastic State and the Army under Louis XIV: Royal Service and Private Interest, 1661-1701*.

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I would first like to thank Professor Collins warmly for his gracious words about my scholarship. But I am particularly pleased that he has taken the opportunity to engage with the broader arguments I pose which, I believe, have profound implications for the way we study and write about the period between 1661 and 1789.

Professor Collins and I have a very similar approach to the question of “absolutism.” We share the view that it is neither helpful nor accurate to see “absolutism” as reconstituted and modernised feudalism. But we need to recognise that “absolutism” should be defined as more than just the right to make “positive law.” It was an attempt to monopolise all the marks of sovereignty as defined by contemporary thinkers and lawyers (e.g. coining, conducting foreign policy, authorising the use of military force etc., as well as making laws). If David Parker is right that “absolutism” was never made but was always in the making, Louis XIV would still count as the French (and European?) prince who came closest to achieving that monopoly on sovereignty within his territories in the *ancien régime*.

Professor Collins and I also seem to agree that Louis XIV's regime was based upon a degree of compromise and cooperation with elite interests rather than being reliant on arbitrary *diktat* and authoritarian force. Nevertheless we appear to share the notion that between 1656 and 1675 this king did indeed lay down a new political dispensation with a far more authoritarian character, encouraging the development of a political system and culture that demanded obedience to the sovereign prince and an acceptance that all *bienfaits* flowed from the prince. Once subjects embraced this new world then the crown would take as much account of their interests as it could afford to, commensurate with the king's own interests. And the king's ministers, François Michel Le Tellier, marquis de Louvois, in particular, were determined to construct frameworks which better enabled the elites to serve the crown and disciplined them more effectively. Much of Louis XIV's success can be attributed to the way he manipulated the private interests of his subjects to enhance the dynastic interests of the Bourbon state. This is how one can square the apparent circle of the personal rule being both authoritarian and cooperative.

Beneath the sound and fury of historiographical debate about “absolutism” lie the interests of contemporaries, and this brings me to the issue of dynasticism. It is on this matter that Professor Collins and I would appear to diverge and I hope he will forgive me for meeting his criticisms head on. First, I think Professor Collins needs to consider more closely what dynasticism might actually mean, for, although it existed in the late Middle Ages, it nevertheless attained its fullest *articulated* and *practiced* sense in the mid-seventeenth century, reflected in the raising of birth above personal qualities as a defining feature of nobility and in the mania for producing family histories at this time.<sup>[1]</sup> Certainly up to 1701, and in my view beyond (see below), France remained a “dynastic state” from top to bottom in its basic organisational principles, reflecting the prevailing ethos of society. Moreover, this dynasticism was, by the personal rule of Louis XIV, *patrimonial* and *patrilinear*, based upon primogeniture (and increasingly entail). It had moved away from the far looser idea of a family corporation that Professor Collins and I would agree had been the hallmark of the sixteenth-century state and society. In this respect the turning point, whether we are talking about royal or noble

dynasticism, appears to have come somewhere in the period 1580-1610,<sup>[2]</sup> although tensions persisted, thus explaining at least some of the problems the crown faced with the *princes du sang* up to 1660. By 1661, however, the wider interests of a family were now deemed to be embodied by the head of the senior branch of the family (even if it was sometimes unclear which branch of a noble house was more senior!). Certainly Louis XIV believed this, and significantly his brother Philippe I, duc d'Orléans, was prepared to swallow this principle with minimal complaint. Louis did, though, have an Achilles heel on this issue: his illegitimate children, especially his sons, for whom he was ultimately prepared to contravene his own strict principle of upholding, above all else, Bourbon patrilinear dynasticism.

Second, and related to the above, I do not see the stark shift to a more impersonal state and realm by 1700, and I would challenge Professor Collins' explanation of the principle of maintaining the integrity of the kingdom. Since Louis XI and the disputes with the Habsburgs surrounding the resumption of Burgundy after 1477, it was not so much the elites as the French kings who had been determined to avoid full alienations of royal domain; this is why the Peace of the Ladies in 1529 was so painful for the crown and appears as a grievance even under Louis XIV. And in any case it should be pointed out that in the early sixteenth century territories offered by way of dowry negotiations, as with Claude de France and the future Charles V, were offered as fiefs and not as full alienations (or so the French crown intended even if the Habsburgs did not understand it this way). By the 1590s this royal determination to maintain the integrity of the realm had gone a stage further: the crown no longer even wanted to grant major apanages, with devolution of real authority, to the king's brothers because this had proved so dangerous to the monarch in the hands of Hercule-François, duc d'Anjou. It is therefore not surprising there were no offers even of fiefdoms as part of dowry negotiations with Spain, Savoy, or any other power in the seventeenth century. As Herbert Rowen makes clear, these practical considerations were reinforced by increasingly sophisticated (and self-serving) theories of patrimonial dynasticism that emerged in the late sixteenth century and which stressed the peculiar *immobilier* nature of royal dynastic property and the state. Some of the elites (particularly robe jurists and royal advisers) may have shared the crown's opposition to hiving off parts of France, but prior to the 1660s the crown remained far from convinced that these views were strongly felt by many provincial nobles and even some of the *grands*.

Moving forward to the War of the Spanish Succession, I would also take issue with Professor Collins' interpretation of the desperate peace negotiations. Despite the propaganda deployed in June 1709 to rally his subjects once he had rebuffed Allied demands, Louis XIV was prepared in 1709 and again in 1710 to give up outlying parts of his kingdom, and in this he was reversing French policy since 1529. It was not concern for national sentiment and French territorial integrity that prevented him agreeing to peace on the Allies' terms; it was the very demand that Professor Collins mentions, that Louis should use his own troops to force Philip V off the Spanish throne that brought the collapse of negotiations. This is what Louis meant when he said the Allies' terms dishonoured "the name French"—it would have been dishonourable for him to betray a *fils de France* to such an extent, and he was hoping that his subjects would accept that the interests of the kingdom were embodied in upholding the honour of the Bourbon dynasty. In 1709-10 it was important that Louis try to bring public opinion along with him, not least because it would affect his ability to raise credit in its multifarious forms, but this should not detract from the fact that in royal policy dynasticism trumped territorial integrity and the "national" interest: ultimately he was prepared to sacrifice French territory if it meant his dynasty could retain control of at least a part of the Spanish Monarchy.

None of this means that I disagree with Professor Collins that the dynastic ethos came under greater pressure at the end of the seventeenth century. Indeed, I consciously say: "Only with the eruption of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1701 did France have to confront a new reality—that most of the rest of Europe had ceased to privilege dynasticism above international equilibrium."<sup>[3]</sup> It may well also be the case that the dynastic interests of the ruling house were coming into increasing conflict in the

eighteenth century with the dynastic interests of French subjects, starting with the massive material strain placed on the kingdom by Louis XIV's final two wars. But we should be very wary of assuming that the dynasticism of the Bourbon monarchs altered in response to this. It is arguable that to survive the eighteenth century as an absolute monarchy the French crown needed to change its approach. But, as Tim Blanning has recently shown, it failed to do so.[4] In this respect the French monarchy was very different from some other princely states. And, rather than invoking Gerhard Oestreich, an historian of Imperial German territories, to support the idea of a changing French state, I would argue instead that the German experience of "absolutism" he and others have portrayed provided an emerging contrast, at least in emphasis, with France. After all, ideas developing in the mid-seventeenth century associated with Cameralism, the public good and the service owed by princes to their subjects take decades, nearly a century, before they become the inspiration in *some* (and only some) quarters of French governing circles. Arguably the French monarchy remained trapped almost to the very end within its own conception of itself as a patrimonial dynastic state and did not become, or at least was not perceived by the French and foreigners to have become, an "Enlightened Absolutism". Hence the Revolution....

I should end by saying that I chose my words very carefully when making generalisations in the book and I take pains to stress that I do not believe dynasticism can explain everything—merely that it is the necessary prism through which one must view government in this period.[5] More controversially perhaps, I stand by the argument that there was no *coherent* development or programme during the period 1661–1701 other than the preservation and strengthening of the Bourbon leading patrilinear dynasty. There was certainly no coherent programme of anachronistic state-building in terms of size of state machinery and numbers of personnel at the king's disposal. Bourbon ruling interests involved such principal matters as the expansion of territory, the strengthening of Bourbon prestige/*gloire* abroad and international influence, the establishment of order, the maintenance of religious discipline, the development of the state's authority and the furthering of the king's writ. Nevertheless, none of these impulses were pursued absolutely nor with complete consistency, sometimes owing to severe misjudgment but more often because the king had to restrain himself on these various matters if he was to pursue the coherent programme he had set himself: presiding over the long-term preservation and strengthening of the Bourbon dynasty and of its control of the French crown.

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## NOTES

[1] See Rowlands, *The Dynastic State*, pp. 9-17, on dynasticism.

[2] The best articulation of these ideas can be found in the much underrated book by Herbert Rowen: *The King's State. Proprietary Dynasticism in Early Modern France* (New Brunswick NJ, 1980).

[3] Rowlands, *The Dynastic State*, p.11.

[4] T.C.W. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe, 1660-1789* (Oxford, 2002).

[5] Rowlands, *The Dynastic State*, p. 336.

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