



# **Enlightenment and Dissent**

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## Editorial

Our sad duty in this issue is to pay tribute to the memory of Richard I. Aaron who died on 29 March 1987. He was known to many in academic life as the author of *John Locke* (1937) in the 'Leaders of Philosophy' series, a work which established his reputation as a scholar. He held the Chair of Philosophy at Aberystwyth from 1932 until his retirement in 1969 and he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1955. His interests were many and diverse: he helped found the Welsh philosophy journal, *Efrydiau Athronyddol* and was its first editor, a role he filled for thirty years, and he played a notable part in the administration of University education. But his activities were not confined to the University: he played an active role in public bodies and was Chairman of the Council of Wales from 1959 to 1963. He was a warm admirer of the works of Richard Price and was an enthusiastic supporter of the *Price-Priestley Newsletter* and of this journal which is its successor. He was ready with sage and helpful advice whenever the editors turned to him for guidance. He will be missed by all, colleague and student alike.

This year we are pleased to be able to say that three well known contributors to the journal have accepted invitations to join the editorial board: they are John G. McEvoy, Mark Philp, and John Stephens. John McEvoy is a professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Cincinnati and has written extensively on the scientific work of Joseph Priestley, Mark Philp is a Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford and is the author of *Godwin's Political Justice* which is reviewed in this issue; and John Stephens is a director of Robin Waterfield Ltd. at Oxford and is a co-author of *Richard Price: a bibliography* which is scheduled to be published in 1988. We are immensely glad and proud to welcome them aboard.

We take some pleasure in the fact that for another year we have managed to keep to the same annual subscriptions for the journal. The future, however, casts a shadow and we warn our kind subscribers that next year we shall almost certainly have to make modest increases. What helps enormously to keep the rates relatively and reasonably low is an increase in the number of subscribers. These increases are most likely to be produced by discreet proselytizing by existing readers. Recruit a friend and help secure the future of *Enlightenment and Dissent*.

M. H. F.  
D. O. T.

*Richard Brinkley*

Although much work has been done over the last century on religion and theology in eighteenth-century England, a number of interesting figures still await proper recognition. One of these is Edmund Law, Master of Peterhouse and Bishop of Carlisle. He was one of the most important of those theologians who expounded the theory of 'progressivism' in the eighteenth century, an eager advocate of the extension of religious liberty, and diligent in urging the right use and widespread dissemination of knowledge, particularly that relating to the Christian faith and to holy scripture.<sup>1</sup>

Edmund Law was born in 1703. His father was curate and schoolmaster of Staveley-in-Cartmel, in what is now southern Cumbria, from 1693 until 1742. He was educated at Cartmel and at Kendal Free Grammar School and in 1720 he matriculated at St. John's College, Cambridge. He graduated in 1723 and was elected Fellow of Christ's College soon afterwards. From his early years he was a conscientious scholar and careful writer. In 1737 he was presented to the rectory of Greystoke in the diocese of Carlisle. He married soon afterwards; his wife bore him twelve children. He was appointed Archdeacon of Carlisle in 1743; he held this appointment, together with the rectory of Great Salkeld, until 1754. In the latter year he became—through the influence of Edmund Keene, Bishop of Chester—Master of Peterhouse, Cambridge; he retained this preferment until his death but resigned his Archdeaconry. The College flourished under his Mastership. Law was Vice-Chancellor of the University from 1755 until 1756 and played an active, if unobtrusive, part in the movement for the more liberal interpretation of religious texts later in the century.

In 1763 Law became Protobiothecarius or Chief Librarian of Cambridge University Library. This was a prestigious appointment which involved little mundane or detailed administration. Law had difficulty in making booksellers comply with the terms of the 1709 Copyright Act and in 1772, in his *Observations on literary property*, he was outspoken in his denunciation of the London booksellers for their conduct in this respect.

Further preferments soon came Law's way. In 1764 he was appointed Knightsbridge Professor of Moral Theology and Casuistical Divinity but it is unlikely that he gave any lectures. In 1763, Frederick Cornwallis,

Bishop of Lichfield and former pupil of Law, presented him to the Archdeaconry of Stafford and a prebend in Lichfield Cathedral. Law received a prebend in Lincoln Cathedral the following year and in 1767 a prebend in Durham Cathedral; he obtained the latter through the influence of the Duke of Newcastle who had earlier refused him the Deanery of Ely, which he would have liked. The circumstances of the preferment are interesting. Newcastle was out of office but persuaded William Trevor, Bishop of Durham, to offer the prebend to Law, who seemed, on account of his theological liberality, unlikely to obtain further advancement in the church. Newcastle acknowledged Trevor's generosity in the following letter;

Such a valuable preferment in the church ... at a time when I have not the opportunity of procuring them elsewhere, is not only the greatest mark of your goodness and affection to me, but must be the most agreeable favour conferred on a chancellor of the university who has at present no other way of rewarding men of merit than by the goodness of his friends.<sup>2</sup>

It is unlikely that Law devoted much time to these various preferments, since his Cambridge offices would occupy much of his time; in this respect he was no worse than many of his contemporaries.

In 1769 Law was offered the bishopric of Carlisle by the Duke of Grafton, who was at the time Prime Minister and Chancellor of Cambridge University. Law gave up all his preferments outside Cambridge except Greystoke although he was offered a dispensation to enable him to retain his prebend at Lincoln *in commendam* with his bishopric. He was, however, anxious to retain all his Cambridge offices partly because of the need to provide for his large family. Eventually, after the intervention of Cornwallis, Archbishop of Canterbury, he retained only the Mastership of Peterhouse, which he held with his bishopric until he died in 1787.

The bishopric of Carlisle was not a particularly important one. It was much smaller than it is now, comprising only the northern parts of the old counties of Cumberland and Westmoreland. Its income, approximately £3,000 a year, was comparatively small and it offered few advantages of polite or learned society. Law adopted the usual course of eighteenth century bishops of remote dioceses. He spent most of the year in Cambridge or in attendance at the House of Lords, where he appears to have made little mark, but visited his diocese, primarily to ordain and confirm, during the summer. In a small diocese like that of

Carlisle the day-to-day administration could be adequately carried on by the Archdeacon and the Chancellor who would between them attend to all ecclesiastical and legal business. Until 1869 bishops of the Church of England could not resign their sees, however infirm or incompetent they might be, and it is to Law's credit that he visited his diocese, where he died in August 1787, almost every year until his death.

It is likely that if the Duke of Grafton had not appointed him to Carlisle, Edmund Law would never have obtained a bishopric. Thomas Secker, Cornwallis's predecessor as Archbishop of Canterbury, was hostile to Law whom he considered unorthodox and Lord North, Prime Minister from 1770 to 1782, was unwilling to promote clergyman of liberal opinions.

A word may be mentioned here about Law's sons. Two became bishops. John Law held a number of Irish sees and from 1795 until 1810 he was Bishop of Elphin; he shared his father's anxiety that his flock should be properly instructed. George Henry Law was successively Bishop of Chester and Bath and Wells and founded, in 1816, the theological college at St. Bees. Edward Law, first baron Ellenborough, was Lord Chief Justice of England from 1802 until 1818. Thomas Law spent some years in the service of the East India Company and later went to the United States where he was associated with an early attempt to establish a national currency.

When one turns to Edmund Law's writings, one notices that he is editor as well as author. He was constantly concerned, and urged the duty on others, with the duty of people of learning and influence to extend knowledge and to assist free and impartial enquiry by all means at their disposal. His first publication was a translation of *De origine mali* by Edward King, Archbishop of Dublin and associate in matters ecclesiastical and Irish of Jonathan Swift; Law's translation, *An essay on the origin of evil*, with copious annotations, appeared in 1731 and had gone into five editions by 1781. In 1734 Law edited, with others, Robert Estienne's *Thesaurus linguae latinae*. In 1777 he published an edition of the works of John Locke. In considering Law's own writings here emphasis is placed on three works: *Considerations on the state of the world with regard to the theory of religion* (1745); *Considerations on the propriety of requiring subscription to articles of faith* (1774); *The necessity of catechising* (1785). The first is a statement of Law's theological position; the second shows him as a defender of religious liberty; the third shows his continued emphasis, maintained throughout his life, on the importance of well-founded instruction in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity.

*Considerations on the state of the world with regard to the theory of religion* is Law's most important work. It went through six editions in his lifetime and was translated into German. Later editions included copious notes. Reference here is to the first edition of 1745. From the latter years of the seventeenth century there had been a succession of challenges to revealed religion by English writers. Many opponents of orthodox Christianity asserted that belief in a divine providence or in Christianity as a true revelation was incompatible with the unequal distribution of spiritual and temporal gifts and knowledge which the doctrines of the Church seemed to imply, and which were obvious to even the most casual observer. Christianity did not fulfil the basic requisite of a religion necessary to salvation in that it had not always and in every place been known to man, as in this anonymous tract which appeared in 1695:

That Rule which is necessary to our future Happiness, ought to be generally made known to all men.

But no Rule of Revealed Religion was, or ever could be made known to all men.

Therefore no Revealed Religion is necessary to future Happiness, The Major is thus prov'd:

Our Future Happiness depends upon our obeying, or endeavouring to fulfil the known Will of God.

But that Rule which is not generally known, cannot be generally obey'd.

Therefore that Rule which is not generally known, cannot be the Rule of our Happiness.

Now the Minor of the first Syllogism is matter of fact, and uncontrovertible, that no Religion supernatural has been conveyed to all the World.<sup>3</sup>

In the face of such attacks Christian apologists defended Christianity by showing how the Christian religion and those who professed it had progressed, on the analogy of individual growth, by gradual stages from crude beliefs and imperfect knowledge to a greater purity and perfection. Thomas Burnet's *Sacred theory of the earth* (1687) and Richard Bentley's Boyle lectures, *The folly and unreasonableness of atheism* (1692) incorporate this idea. In addition, there were several treatises devoted to the idea of progress in religion. In 1699 John Edwards, minister of St. Sepulchre's, Cambridge, published *A complete history ... of all the dispensations and methods of religion ... as represented in the Old and New Testaments*. Edwards shows that God's revelation of Himself to man was communicated in regular stages and

that the progress of God's revelation was revealed in contemporary progress in human knowledge, with particularly noticeable improvements in human knowledge in recent years. The revelation itself remained unchanged but the manner of its communication changed with the growth of religious knowledge among mankind. As to the coming of Christ, to which freethinkers raised the objection that it could have occurred earlier, Edwards asserted that it occurred when the world was ready to receive it.

In 1743 William Worthington, incumbent of Llan-y-Blodwel in Shropshire, published *An essay on the scheme and conduct, procedure and extent of man's redemption* in which he showed Christianity as progressing towards a state of greater perfection in knowledge and in practice. Worthington's treatise was one of the w. provoked by Matthew Tindal's *Christianity as old as the creati n* (1704). Tindal's central thesis is the complete lack of authority of any religious beliefs which cannot be shown to have been held everywhere, in all age, by all men:

Of the many attacks on revealed religion whi\yi had appeared in England since the middle of the seventeenth century, few were more effective in concentrating on their authors the warmed attention of the church; and the explanation is chiefly to be fothid in the vigor and clarity with which Tindal set forth the essential presuppositions of the deistic creed and applied them as a solvent of all that was distinctive in historical Christianity. The point on which he was most explicit and uncompromising was the point which had been central in deism from the start: the complete lack of authority of any religious beliefs which cannot be shown to have been held everywhere, in all ages, and by all men. With monotonous iteration, in passage after passage, he drove this doctrine home. "Will any affirm, that the nature of God is not eternally the same? Or that the nature of Man is chang'd? Or that the relations God & Man stand in to one another, are not always the same...? Or that God, at any time, "cou'd have any motive to give Laws to mankind, but for their own good"? Or that he is not, "at all times, equally good"? If the answer is, as Tindal expected, "No," then it follows that any rules of life which it is essential to man's happiness to recognize and obey must be rules that never vary under any conditions, that cannot be altered or added to, that are not communicated to man "grudgingly, little by little; here a bit,& there a bit," but are plain and self-evident to the reason of all human beings in all ages, constituting a complete and adequate religion in the beginning and a complete and adequate religion—the same religion—now:

I hope you will pardon me, if I presume to think, that God, at all times, is so good & impartial, that his will, on which the happiness of Mankind at all times depends, is at all times equally knowable; & consequently, must be founded on what is always alike discernable, the nature and Reason of Things. Can a Religion, design'd for every one, not be within the reach of every one? Or can that, which above all things it concerns ALL Men'.<sup>4</sup>

In response to this challenge Christian writers appealed to an idea which was gaining ground in the early eighteenth century; the theory that variety and inequality were inevitable in any universe which had been created by a wise and good Supreme Being. If nature—created by God—is beautiful because of its diversity, why should the religion revealed by Him not be likewise? Butler's *Analogy* is the most important of the replies to Tindal and his associates which makes this point but there were many others who contributed to the debate, and it is clear from Law's notes in his *Considerations*, that he was familiar with many of them. Law's *Considerations*, based on discourses preached before the University of Cambridge, falls into three parts:

1. Want of universality in natural and revealed religion no just objection against either.
2. The Scheme of Providence, with regard to the *Time* and *Manner* of the several Dispensations of Revealed religion.
3. The Progress of Natural Religion and Science, or, the continual Improvement of the World in general.

In the Preface to the *Considerations* Law states his standpoint and intention:

The following Discourses are part of a much larger Design tending to show that Arts and Sciences, Natural and Revealed Religion, have upon the whole always been progressive ... as also that they have been suited to each other, as well as to the Circumstances of Mankind, during each Period of this their Progression...<sup>5</sup>

He begins the first part of his treatise by emphasizing the diversity among mankind and the unequal distribution of gifts among men. He ridicules the idea of a fixed universal law of nature:

To speak therefore of one fixt, immutable and universal Law of Nature is framing an imaginary Scheme without the least foundation

in the nature of things, directly contrary to the present order of the whole Creation: 'Tis making the same rule suit Beings in all circumstances, which is as full absurd as to prescribe the same food and physic to all Constitutions.<sup>6</sup>

If gifts of nature are unequally distributed, why should people object if God's revelation of Himself is not shown to all people, and in one way? There is no reason why God should not communicate the revelation of Himself by the same means as those obtaining in the natural and moral worlds.

The revelation of God was originally made to a few people who gradually spread it throughout the world. All men cannot be perfect; it follows that religion cannot be equally communicated to all men at once. Christianity must therefore be spread abroad in a gradual and partial way. However widely it is proclaimed, its reception and continuation are dependent on the varying circumstances of mankind.

The second part of *Considerations*, 'The Scheme of Providence...', is, perhaps, the most important part of the whole treatise. In the first part Law presents, albeit with great force and clarity, arguments which have already been stated at length. In the second part he considers why Christ came on earth when He did; this element of the Christian religion had received little emphasis in earlier Christian apologetics, but had provided one of the recurring objections to Christianity among its recent detractors.

Throughout the history of mankind, knowledge and skill have been gradually increasing. Mankind has been instructed by God since the Fall and the Knowledge of God has been passed on from one generation to another through a succession of good people. In time God showed Himself to a chosen people, who were continually receiving instruction and assistance according to their circumstances. In the course of time the chosen people, the Jews, spread knowledge of God far and wide: this was accomplished in various ways; by the dispersion of the Jews after the fall of Jerusalem in 588 B.C. and by the writings of the prophets. This was part of the preparation for the coming of Christ. It was not right that Christ should come until all other means of saving mankind had been tried, and until all people could understand and receive the blessings He came to bring.

The relatively late time of Christ's coming, to which the Deists and freethinkers objected, was not only appropriate to the state of the world

which Christ came to save but of benefit to later ages in that it was not so far removed from them as to be remote from them. Christ came 'in the fulness of time'. Both Jews and Gentiles were in need of reformation in respect of morals and religion. Jewish and Gentile civilizations were past their prime and ready to be followed by something more perfect. The spread of civilization and commerce had greatly increased the means whereby the Gospel could be spread abroad. people had advanced in knowledge and would be able to consider, rather than to observe or be amazed at, the miracles which Christ would perform. Law even cites the fact that the Jews were subject to Rome as an important reason why Christ should have come to the earth when He did; if the Jews had been independent they would have put Him to death much earlier, and He would have had much less time in which to spread His message.

The gradual diffusion of the knowledge of God before Christ's coming and the rightness of the time at which Christ came are paralleled by the subsequent progress of the Christian religion. The Christian religion was not revealed to all men at once but progressively, beginning with the gradual revelation of the basic Christian truths to the first disciples. It was gradually diffused throughout the Roman Empire, even in its decline when barbarian invasions brought 'Northern peoples' to a knowledge of Christianity. Later it extended to other parts of the world; Law confidently asserts that where it now exists in a corrupt form—he was thinking particularly of 'Popery' and Islam—it will be purified in due time.

Law concludes the second part of the *Considerations* with some observations upon man's knowledge of God and of the Scriptures. As men advance in the knowledge of God's works—and Law has no doubt that this is happening—they will understand His word more clearly. It was no accident that the Reformation coincided with the spread of printing, which greatly assisted the spread of the Gospel, now purified from Popish errors. Law is, however, not complacent. There is still a need for increased understanding of the Scriptures and Christians must resist the temptation of 'confining' the Gospel to a particular church or nation. The individual should not judge others and he should not expect God to give equal gifts and knowledge to all. Christians of the present age should learn from previous ages and should pass on their knowledge of God to those who do not already have it.

In the third part of the *Considerations*, 'The progress of natural religion', Law attacks the practice, evidently as common in his day as in

ours, of lamenting the badness of the present age as compared with what has gone before. Complaint in itself may be useful, in that it exposes and checks vices. But when people say, in addition, that things are getting worse, they give occasion for discontent and should be challenged.

The natural advantages of life—earth, times, seasons—have not diminished; Law cites Genesis, viii. 22:

While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold, and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

to make his point. The 'acquired' advantages of life, the continual progress in arts and sciences, have undoubtedly contributed to the improvement of life in general. Progress in secular knowledge goes together with progress in religious knowledge. An increase in the knowledge of nature is also an increase in the knowledge of God. Knowledge of God is not confined to Christians. In the second part of the *Considerations* Law had shown that the teachings of the Greek philosophers had helped to enlarge men's perception of moral and spiritual things and to help to prepare them for the coming of Christ. In the final part of his treatise Law shows how the spread of writing aided the spread of religious knowledge and cites Zoroaster and Confucius as well as Scripture as contributing to the increasing knowledge of God as it became more widely known throughout the world.

Law exposes the absurdity of the idea that the present age is worse than previous ages by reminding his readers of the history of Christianity. Early Christianity was imperfect and error increased during the Middle Ages. The error was corrected at the Reformation and improvement in religion has continued ever since. Law insists that improvement and progress are not confined to this world but continue in the next, and cites *Spectator* No. 111 to support his argument:

There is not, in my opinion, a more pleasing and triumphant Consideration in religion than this of the perpetual Progress which the Soul makes towards the Perfection of its Nature, without ever arriving at a Period in it.<sup>7</sup>

Law then returns to the question of the present age, this time in respect of its moral situation. Previous ages have probably been just as bad as the present age but only their greater vices are now remembered. The vices of the present age seem worse because we are more directly aware of them. The present age is better than its predecessors in some



respects; there is a much more general exercise of Christian benevolence, greater generosity in controversy and greater toleration in religious matters.

Having shown that the present age is not, after all, worse than former times Law indicates the consequences of thinking that it is. Such a view of the present age 'casts a cloud on all the works of God' and makes men doubtful or spiritually dead. It discourages study and endeavour and can provide a covering for sedition or malice. The past may be invoked, but it must be as a guide as to our future conduct.

Law concludes the *Considerations* with some remarks on 'enquiry' in relation to religion and improvement. Progress and improvement should always be aided by enquiry. Law is totally opposed to the idea of the inerrancy of Scripture, which should in his view, be subjected to the same scrutiny as other writings:

Authority ... may have contributed to cast a cloud over the whole, which makes us, as it were, afraid to look into them and examine them with the same freedom that we do and we find must do every other book which we desire to understand: I mean the notion of an absolute, immediate inspiration of each part and period even where the writers themselves by the very manner of expressing themselves most effectually disclaim it.<sup>8</sup>

The *Considerations* influenced a number of later writers. David Hartley in his *Observations on man* (1740) defends, on the basis of progress, revealed religion against the attack of the Deists. Edward Young, in his *Conjectures on original composition* (1759), applies the idea of progress to literature and urges writers to avoid imitation and boldly strike out on their own. Joseph Priestley, at Warrington, was expounding to his students a doctrine of Providence similar to, and derived from, that stated by Edmund Law:

It seemed to be the uniform intention of divine providence, to lead mankind to happiness in a progressive, which is the surest, though the slowest method. Evil always leads to good, and imperfect to perfect

9

Edmund Law played an active, but not prominent, part in the attempt in the mid-eighteenth century, to reduce the rigour of religious tests. There was a considerable body of opinion within the Church of England that subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles, then binding on all

Anglican clergymen, should no longer be obligatory. The publication in 1766 of *The confessional* by Francis Blackburne, Archdeacon of Cleveland and friend of Edmund Law, brought the question of subscription to the attention of a wider audience. Blackburne maintained that the Scriptures were the sole foundation of the faith of a Christian and that subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles was unnecessary and could be replaced by a declaration that Scripture contains a revelation of the mind and will of God. A group of people formed the Feathers Tavern Association, named after the tavern in the Strand where they held their meetings, to protest against subscription. A petition was presented to Parliament in 1772. It had over 200 signatures, including a large number from Law's own college of Peterhouse. The petitioners affirmed their loyalty to the Church of England but asked for relief from subscription to articles and confessions of faith. Law was sympathetic to the petitioners but felt with others, including Richard Watson, that the matter of subscription should have been considered within the Church of England before being submitted to Parliament. The petition was rejected by 217 votes to 71. Although the Feathers Tavern Petition failed in its immediate object, it led on to other reform movements, one for the abolition of religious tests at the Universities, the other for relief of Dissenters from subscribing to the Thirty-nine Articles. Edmund Law was deeply interested in all these attempts at reform. He disliked the arbitrary imposition of articles of belief without reference to the private judgement of the individual who was required to subscribe to such formularies. He wished that members of the Universities should pursue their studies without being limited by theologians' formularies; he had a much more tolerant and kindly attitude to Dissenters than most of his colleagues on the episcopal bench. He was retiring and judicious and tended to keep in the background. He published his own contribution to the debate in 1774, *Considerations on the propriety of religious subscriptions to articles of faith*. He published the work anonymously to lessen the risk of controversy, and to avoid becoming the 'focus' of a party within the church. Although Law throughout his life challenged the claims of Deists on the one hand and 'Popery' on the other, he still wished to see, in spite of liturgical and legal obstacles, a church in which people professing the Christian faith could join together without being limited by rigid statements of faith or doctrine.

In his pamphlet of 1774 Law attempts to 'set the whole question [of subscription] in its proper light'. He declares that he is expressing opinions which he has held for some time. His objection to subscription is twofold. Articles of faith are superfluous in that they are an

unnecessary addition to Scripture which is the only true basis of the Christian religion. They are also an improper infringement upon the private judgement of individual Christians. Christianity was originally plain and practical:

The Christian religion as originally constituted, as very plain and practical; level to all capacities, and calculated for the common good of mankind, in every station and condition, both here and hereafter.'

It has now become overloaded with alterations and innovations.

Every man's religion is purely personal to himself. Every man must answer for himself; in that case should he not be allowed to judge for himself? Why should the individual not make use of his reason in matters of religion? Every man is entitled to exercise private judgement in all things that concern his eternal welfare, and to use the abilities which God has given him to work out his own salvation.

In his challenge to subscription Law asserts once more his 'progressive' views of religion. Declarations of faith, which incorporate fixed and unchanging statements of doctrine, are at variance with the religious condition of any individual which is liable to change according to his circumstances and his increase in religious knowledge.

The first obligation upon Christians is to believe in the word of God in Holy Scripture, and not to subscribe to any doctrines superimposed thereon. The Christian should give his primary obedience to God; the submission to an earthly authority implied by subscription to articles of faith detracts from this obedience.

Advocates of subscription argue that it helps to maintain the security of the ecclesiastical establishment. Law answers that a more general statement of compliance is sufficient:

Nor does any further security seem requisite in ecclesiastical establishments than that of public acquiescence under their decisions ... [it does not] seem reasonable that any further test be imposed upon a minister in any church, than his promise of compliance with the liturgy, rites and offices of the church in which he is to minister. This one would think sufficient for any valuable purpose ...<sup>11</sup>

Finally Law makes a threefold attack upon subscription. First, a church founded upon scriptural principles does not need to be upheld by

religious tests. Secondly, insistence on authority disgraces a church and reduces the influence of its ministers. Law asserts again the importance of free enquiry. Insistence on authority obstructs free investigation of the Scriptures and impedes progress in religious knowledge. Third, the imposition of religious tests is improper in that, in the Universities as well as in the Church, tests are administered and subscribed to without serious consideration. Earlier in his pamphlet Law had suggested that the people who suffered from the imposition of tests were the conscientious ministers who were not prepared to assent to articles of faith with which they did not fully agree.

Law's pamphlet drew a reply from Thomas Randolph, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford, in which the relaxation of the laws relating to subscription was attacked as tending to bring about the weakening, and eventual fall, of the Church of England. William Paley, who had been greatly influenced by Law while at Cambridge, answered Randolph in *A defence of the considerations on the propriety of requiring a subscription to articles of faith*. In this pamphlet, which appeared anonymously, Paley showed the unreasonableness of requiring men to subscribe unequivocally to articles of faith drawn up by a few men some centuries earlier. The Church does not exist in order to enforce obedience to doctrines or observances in which all may not agree and which may give rise to controversy. It exists to serve God in peace, to encourage the study of the Scriptures, and to promote free enquiry, and thereby a greater understanding of its basic doctrines, about the Christian faith.

In 1783 Law published a short tract, *The necessity of catechizing*. It is a much slighter work than either of the two previously considered but is nonetheless of considerable importance. It shows that Law never lost sight of the need for Christians, and especially the young, to be properly instructed in the Scriptures and in the basic tenets of the faith. He begins by saying that religious strife is now abated but that zeal for religion has abated likewise.

Christianity, for the individual, begins with confirmation; baptism by which one is received into the Church, is to some extent an act of others on one's behalf. Confirmands should be properly instructed so that they know to what they are committing themselves. The confirmation should be properly conducted since the ceremony is bound to leave an impression on the youthful mind; a confirmation properly performed will lead those confirmed to greater understanding and deeper faith. Law, drawing on his experience of the diocese of Carlisle, states that

post-baptismal instruction, especially on the part of godparents, is generally neglected. Confirmation is under-estimated and misunderstood, but this can be remedied by adequate catechizing. Many clergymen throughout the Church of England instruct their flock in the catechism during Lent, as they are instructed to do in the Book of Common Prayer, but Law considers that this is insufficient and should be part of a more thorough and systematic programme of instruction in the Christian faith. Catechizing is no light task and should not be delegated by the parish clergyman to the parish schoolmaster or anybody else, since it is part of the exercise of his pastoral function.

Law admits that there are hindrances to catechizing. Children are often sent out to work at an early age and have little opportunity for instruction. 'People of condition' are reluctant to have their children mixing with the common people; adults are reluctant to be 'examined' in the company of others. Once catechizing is established as an integral part of church life in which all should join these objections will lose their force.

On the other hand the benefits of catechizing, when conducted properly, are manifold. It will help develop powers of reasoning in the young and will remove 'bashfulness' and shyness. Through it young people will be properly instructed, and infidelity and error will be combated. Above all, it will give people an idea of religion as the basis of a rule of life.

Law's pamphlet was widely circulated and later reprinted. It was not, however, until the mid-nineteenth century that systematic instruction in the faith, for adults as well as children, became widespread in the Church of England.

This essay does not pretend to give a 'whole view' of Edmund Law, which would require much more extended treatment than is given here. William Paley's appraisal of Law, with its emphasis on his eagerness for free enquiry and for goodwill among all Christians, will serve as a fitting conclusion;

The life of Dr Law was a life of incessant reading and thought, almost entirely directed to metaphysical and religious inquiries ... No man formed his own conclusions with more freedom, or treated those of others with greater candour and equity. He never quarrelled with any person for differing from him, or considered that difference as a sufficient reason for questioning any man's sincerity, or judging

meanly of his understanding. He was zealously attached to religious liberty, because he thought that it leads to truth; yet from his heart he loved peace. But he did not perceive any repugnance in these two things. There was nothing in his elevation to his bishoprick, which he spoke of with more pleasure, than its being a proof that decent freedom of inquiry was not discouraged.

He was a man of great softness of manners, and of the mildest and most tranquil disposition. His voice was never raised above its ordinary pitch .... He had an utter dislike of large and mixed companies. Next to his books, his chief satisfaction was in the serious conversation of a literary companion, or in the company of a few friends. In this sort of society he would open his mind with great unreservedness, and with a peculiar turn and sprightliness of expression. His person was low, but well formed; his complexion fair and delicate. Except occasional interruptions by the gout, he had for the greatest part of his life enjoyed good health; and, when not confined by that distemper, was full of motion and activity. About nine years before his death, he was greatly enfeebled by a severe attack of the gout in his stomach; and a short time after that, lost the use of his legs. Notwithstanding his fondness for exercise, he resigned himself to this change, not only without complaint, but without any sensible diminution of his cheerfulness and good humour. His fault (for we are not writing a panegyric) was the general fault of retired and studious characters, too great a degree of inaction and facility in his public station. The modesty, or rather bashfulness, of his nature, together with an extreme unwillingness to give pain, rendered him sometimes less firm and efficient in the administration of authority than was requisite. But it is the condition of human mortality. There is an opposition between some virtues which seldom permits them to subsist together in perfection.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The following are among the more important sources of information about Edmund Law: C.J. Abbey, *The English Church and its bishops* (London, 1887), II, 245-251; R.S. Crane, 'Anglican apologetics and the idea of Progress, 1699-1745: Edmund Law', *Modern Philology*, XXXI (1933-1934), 349-382; J. Gascoigne, 'Anglican latitudinarianism and political radicalism in the late eighteenth century', *History*, LXXI No. 2 (Feb. 1986), 22-38; *Gent. Mag.*, XXXVII (1787), pt. 2, 744-45; T.G. Law, 'Edmund Law', *N. B.*, IX, 656-57; W. Paley, 'A brief memoir of Edmund Law...' in W. Meadley, *Memoirs of ...*

William Paley, 2nd edn. (Edinburgh, 1810), 355-366; R.F. Scott, ['Edmund Law'] in *Admissions to the College of St. John the Evangelist in the University of Cambridge part III, 1765-1767* (Cambridge, 1903), 331-333.

<sup>2</sup> The Duke of Newcastle to William Trevor, 25 Aug. 1767. B.L. Add MSS. 32984, p. 285.

<sup>3</sup> A.W., 'To Charles Blount Esq. Of natural religion as opposed to divine revelation' in *The miscellaneous works of Charles Blount* (London, 1695), 198.

<sup>4</sup> R.S. Crane, 'Anglican apologetics and the idea of progress, 1699-1745' quoting M. Tindal, *Christianity as old as the creation in Modern Philology*, 31 (1933-1934), 350.

<sup>5</sup> E. Law, *Considerations on the state of the world with regard to the theory of religion* (Cambridge, 1745), [henceforth cited as *Considerations*].

<sup>6</sup> *Considerations*, p. 7.

*Spectator*, No. 111, 7 July 1711.

<sup>8</sup> *Considerations*, 251.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Priestley, *An essay on the first principles of government* (London, 1768), 139. <sup>10</sup> E. Law, *Considerations on the propriety of requiring subscription to articles of faith* (Cambridge, 1774), [henceforth cited as *Subscription*], 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Subscription*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> W. Paley, *Memoir of Edmund Law, D.D.* in W. Meadley, *Memoirs of... William Paley*, 2nd edn. (Edinburgh, 1810), 363-66.

## DOCTRINE, DISSENT AND THE DECLINE OF PALEY'S REPUTATION, 1805-1825

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'At Cambridge, as you know, Paley is one of our heroes.' So wrote the anonymous Q.V. in G. W. Meadley's *Memoirs of William Paley, D.D.*<sup>1</sup> That was around 1809 and there were obvious grounds at the time for lionizing Paley. For example, Paley's *Principles of moral and political philosophy* (1785) was a textbook at the university and had been such since 1787.<sup>2</sup> As well, his *Horae Paulinae* (1790) had been hailed as a most original work and had been translated into German (1797).<sup>3</sup> As for his *Evidences of Christianity* (1794), that work had admirers ranging from the king down.<sup>4</sup> Lastly, Paley's most famous work *Natural Theology* (1802) had already passed through eight editions by the time of its author's death in 1805.<sup>5</sup>

Yet these days few remember Paley. Those who do are usually found in specialist areas of academia. For historians of ethical theory Paley represents an anticipation of Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism, for those interested in the history of Christian Apologetics, Paley is an outstanding example (even if no longer convincing) of evidence writing; as for the historians of Natural Theology, Paley to them is the exemplary exponent of a particularly outmoded (though once most respectable) teleological argument for God's existence, and to historians of science Paley is one of those windows through which one may glimpse the role of teleological explanations in eighteenth century England.<sup>6</sup>

Surprisingly, since Leslie Stephen's treatment of Paley in his *English thought in the eighteenth century* (1876) and his article on him in the *Dictionary of national biography* (1895) only two book length studies of Paley have appeared in English.' M.C. Clarke's *Paley: evidences for the man* (1974) accented Paley's life with consideration given to his thought; whilst D.L. Le Mahieu's *The mind of William Paley* (1976) paid particular attention to Paley's thought, with some consideration given to the man.<sup>8</sup>

These two 'recent' examinations of Paley suggest that the decline in Paley's reputation as a shaper of thought began, in the main, with criticisms and then rejection of Paley's ethical theory (especially Le Mahieu). According to Le Mahieu, for example, criticism of Paley's moral thought began as early as 1789 with Thomas Gisborne's *The*

*principles of moral philosophy investigated* and culminated in 1833 with the publication of Adam Sedgwick's, *A discourse on the studies of the University*. It was the latter's criticism, emanating from Cambridge itself, which broke Paley's hegemony over ethical thought at the University.<sup>9</sup> On this view, Paley was losing credibility as an ethical theorist before any widespread rejection of his apologies for natural and revealed religion set in.<sup>19</sup>

However, the contention of this study is that Paley's reputation was already seriously damaged and in decline well before Sedgwick's assault, and that the decline of his reputation, even at his own university of Cambridge, began, in the main, with doubts about his Trinitarian orthodoxy, in a period of great doctrinal controversy over the nature of the Godhead and the status of Christ. This was the controversy between orthodox and Rational Dissent. A great weakness in both Clarke and Le Mahieu's treatment of Paley is their failure to take seriously enough the significance of Paley as a divine in his own time, and concomitantly, the importance of his sermons for his contemporaries and to the next generation as evidence of his thought.<sup>11</sup> For, as we shall see, more than one person in the next decades after Paley found his sermons difficult to square with Athanasian orthodoxy and the theological tenets of the articles of the Established Church.

As for the importance of the sermon as evidence for thought, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a much closer correlation existed between pulpit and essay styles and contents, than subsequently.<sup>12</sup> The fifteen sermons of Bishop Butler preached at the Chapel of the Rolls Court in 1726 are important evidences for any assessment of his theological and philosophical anthropology. And the first four volumes of John Wesley's sermons helped provide the doctrinal standards for later Methodism. Any approach to Paley's thought in general, methodologically considered, needs to take his sermons (about one hundred in all) into its purview.

On matters Trinitarian and Incarnational the orthodox of the church of George III upheld the classic doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation as embodied in the ancient creeds (Apostles, Nicean and Athanasian) and the Thirty-nine Articles.<sup>13</sup> From this *locus standi* there were a variety of heterodoxies to combat.<sup>14</sup> A Unitarian (or Socinian) view of God and Christ was one. This was a theology that affirmed a godhead of One Person and a Christ who was a human prophet only. In this style of theology there was no room given to the doctrines of Atonement, Trinity, and Incarnation. Such a theology was maintained by numbers of

Rational Dissenters, and even some of the bishops of the Established Church found it attractive—most notably Edmund Law, and his son, John. Both of the latter had connections with Paley. Others of the Rational Dissenters held Arian views of God and Christ. The 'Low' Arian ranged from those who regarded Christ as a higher soul, which pre-existed earthly embodiment, to those who believed that Christ, under God, had substantial roles in both creation and providence. The 'High' Arian had a more exalted conception of Christ. Jesus, on their view, embodied the Word that dwelt with God at creation. This Christ could be both worshipped and petitioned. He was divine, though not deity. Arians, in general, allowed for a modified doctrine of the Atonement in their theology, whereas Unitarians (or Socinians) denied this doctrine root and branch.<sup>15</sup>

The history of Thomas Belsham's religious opinions illustrates, in his own words, one possible trajectory in the era of George III. In this moving account Belsham describes the movement 'from the heights of orthodoxy to the plains of Unitarianism, through the medium of Arianism'.<sup>16</sup> In his view whereas Joseph Priestley had made the complete journey, Richard Price had stopped halfway. Belsham appreciated the attractions of the halfway house, since he had himself spent some twenty years in it. However, Belsham eventually came to believe that High Arianism was totally inconsistent with monotheism.

Where then was Paley to be placed on the doctrinal map? Was he one of the heterodox within the Established Church? If so, was he a Unitarian, albeit a closet one? Or rather, was he an Arian, and if so, then of what sort? These questions were in the air at the time when Paley's first biographer wrote and they demanded some response from him. Meadley wrote in 1809:

The minutiae of Dr. Paley's creed have never been distinctly avowed, and the charge of heterodoxy, *so generally* attached to his theological tenets is supported by the omissions, rather than the assertions of his works. The opinions of those, who are usually called Socinians, have been suspected in the protege of Bishop Law, and the friend of Dr. Jebb (my emphasis).<sup>17</sup>

Meadley provides here two of the grounds for the contemporary questioning of Paley's orthodoxy; the omissions and associations with those known to be heterodox within and without the Established Church.

Moreover, Headley appears to be drawing on an earlier source emanating from one of Paley's own pupils from his Cambridge days at Christ's and who is now believed, with some justification, to have been William Frend. The source is an article in two parts that appeared in the *Universal Magazine* in 1805. The article states:

Paley, the protege of the bishop of Carlisle [Edmund Law] and the friend of John Jebb, might naturally be expected to have been a Socinian in religion; and a whig in politics.<sup>18</sup>

The writer goes on to describe the Bishop of Carlisle as 'the head of modern unitarians'. Paley's connections with the Law family were firm and longstanding. He numbered John Law amongst his oldest friends, having met him as a fellow student at Christ's. Through John he came to know Edmund Law, the father, who as Bishop of Carlisle was to appoint him rector of Musgrove in 1775, a prebendary at Carlisle in 1780 and archdeacon (succeeding John Law) in 1782. It was to the father that Paley dedicated his first major work, *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* in 1785 and to the son he dedicated his *Horae Paulinae* five years later. By that time John Law was Lord Bishop of Killala and Achonry. As for John Jebb, Paley had been a supporter of his schemes to reform Cambridge and a fellow member of the Hyson Club at the university.

The *Universal Magazine* article gives one student's impressions of the kind of 'heterodoxy' presented by Paley in the lecture room.

We had not, you may be sure, any rigmarole stories about the Trinity, or such stuff, the five points (of Calvinism) were left to repose in antiquated folios; the thirty-nine articles were never hinted at; the creed of Calvin the worshipper, as you properly observe in one part of your magazine, of Moloch, not of the God of Jesus Christ, was never thought of, and Paley seems to have taken for his model Locke on the Reasonableness of Christianity and his comments on the Epistles.<sup>19</sup>

If the article is indeed by Frend then amazingly the above summary of Paley's theological position was based on his attendance for one half of the summer term of Paley's final lectures on the New Testament at Cambridge.<sup>20</sup>

If Paley, in fact, felt at home amongst the ideas of Edmund Law and John Jebb, why didn't he declare his own position more clearly during his own lifetime? Our writer offers an explanation. Paley lacked the zeal

of a Jebb and the outspokenness of a Law because of sheer indolence which flawed his character. The thrust of the article is that Paley was Unitarian in theology as any of his intimates had opportunity to learn.<sup>21</sup>

But Meadley, an intimate of Paley in Paley's last years, was not himself convinced that he was a Socinian. Rather, he saw in Paley's works (including the sermons) evidence that he believed in 'the common notions, about the pre-existence, the propitiation, the present agency, and intercession of Christ'.<sup>22</sup> Meadley's view is important since by the time he came to write his memoir of Paley he had been converted to the Unitarian position himself and drew a careful distinction between orthodox, Socinian and Arian views.<sup>23</sup>

Despite Meadley's opinion, controversy continued over Paley's orthodoxy as a divine. The controversy was especially fuelled by the publication of Paley's sermons, a number of editions of which appeared during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The 1806 Sunderland edition of sermons (the only one whose contents were consciously provided by the ailing Paley) went through seven editions by 1825. Another expanded volume, brought out in 1817, saw two reprintings by 1825. And Edmund Paley's two volume edition of his father's sermons appeared in 1825.<sup>24</sup>

The availability of Paley's sermons to the next generation is of great importance in the story of Paley's decline in reputation as a divine over the 1809 to 1825 period. As a *Quarterly Review* article of 1809 put it:

The subject of Dr. Paley's theological tenets as evinced in this volume (the third edition of the Paley authorized one), must not go unnoticed. *A large share* of the free censure has been poured out against him on this head, in some of the publications of the day (my emphasis).<sup>25</sup>

According to this review the chief problem some were having with the sermons lay in their lack of a clear affirmation of Christ's divinity. The reviewer explains this lacuna in terms of the volume being a posthumous one and of Paley's demise before he could give the sermons his mature reflection. However, if perchance the sermons were quite consciously designed not to offend 'particular sectaries', then the reviewer has only disgust for Paley.<sup>26</sup> Clearly, there was a perceived need to explain the Christological content of Paley's sermons, or rather the lack of it.

Though the Act of 1813 removed legal penalties from being of Unitarian persuasion, controversy invoking Paley's name continued.

The Bishop of St. David's, for example, saw the Act as 'the loss of guards intended for the protection of our common Christianity' and said so in a charge to his clergy.<sup>27</sup> In attacking Unitarian theology he appealed to Paley for support and in particular to Paley's posthumous sermons on the influence of the spirit. He argued that these sermons supported the Trinitarian scheme by acknowledging the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit.<sup>28</sup> Meadley roused to reply accepted that the sermons showed an alteration in Paley's opinions on the Spirit (a fact he'd drawn attention to in his memoir of Paley).<sup>29</sup> However, Meadley was not at all persuaded that Paley's new sentiments could be appealed to by the Trinitarians.<sup>30</sup> The bishop's charge and Meadley's reply show how orthodox and Rational Dissenters alike invoked Paley's name. And, once again, it was the sermons that provided the controversial evidence.

Almost a decade later controversy over Paley could still be found. For example, Francis Wrangham argued in a charge to the clergy of Cleveland in 1822 that Unitarians appealed to Paley and others to lend an air of respectability to their views and did so 'upon the slightest pretext'.<sup>31</sup> To which Unitarian stalwart C. Wellbeloved responded the very next year.

I am not aware that Watson, Paley and Sir William James have been generally, or with any degree of confidence, claimed by us.<sup>32</sup>

A reviewer of Wellbeloved's reply endorsed this judgement.<sup>33</sup> However, in the very next issue of the magazine, an anonymous correspondent (who signed the letter 'Cantabrigensis', interestingly), opined that Paley's sermons,

savour more of "orthodoxy" than anything else he published in his lifetime, but is not the orthodoxy here in words merely? Could not a Unitarian of a large conscience and of a conciliatory temper, have said all that Paley preached to his parishioners?<sup>34</sup>

Once more, the sermons provide the problematic as questions concerning Paley's heterodoxy lingered on within Rational Dissent.<sup>35</sup>

The publication in 1825 by E. Paley of two volumes of his father's sermons, which included hitherto unpublished ones, together with the *Works* in seven volumes (the first being a biographical one) raised afresh the question of Paley's orthodoxy. E. Paley's own comment is tantalizingly brief:

By one, indeed, he had been held to have unscriptural views of many doctrinal points; and by another to have abandoned his reserve, and expressed himself too freely an advocate for these very doctrines. By Trinitarians he is represented as smacking of a Socinarian, by Unitarians as leaning too much to the contrary side.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, the backdrop to E. Paley's remarks is one of claim and counter-claim invoking Paley's name and with Paley pleasing neither side

What then of Paley's reputation by 1825? A reviewer of E. Paley's two volumes of his father's sermons offered this comment in 1825,

It is not to be denied that in some quarters the reputation of Paley *as a divine*, and perhaps also as a moral philosopher, is already declining, and this, even in that seat of learning, where his fame was planted, and so long flourished and expanded.<sup>37</sup> (My emphasis)

According to this reviewer, the reason for this decline in reputation lay in the questioning of Paley's orthodoxy, especially in the light of Paley's well-known views on subscription to the Articles; but as well in his associations with Law and Jebb and the omissions in his works (shades of Meadley).<sup>38</sup> The allegation was that Paley was a Socinian. However, the reviewer himself was convinced—given a sermon with explicit Trinitarian content—that Paley's 'orthodoxy was much less questionable, than by many person seems to have been supposed'.<sup>39</sup>

By 1825 then, many were questioning Paley's orthodoxy as a divine against the backdrop of debate between the orthodox Trinitarians of the Georgian church and the Rational Dissenters over the nature of the Godhead and the status of Christ. Paley was linked to Socinians and sectaries by some and to orthodoxy by still others; attention was drawn to omissions in his major works, to his views on subscription to the Articles and especially to his sermons with their alleged deficiencies in Christological content.

The question remains, however, as to the actual nature of Paley's own position. The new homilectical material provided by E. Paley led one reviewer to comment:

On the whole, this, we think, has been proved—that he was nothing like a modern Socinian, that is he was, at least, something more than an ancient Arian; but that the precise shade of his creed cannot be determined by us, and perhaps had not been determined by himself.<sup>40</sup>

As far as this reviewer was concerned, Paley's sermons on the Atonement proved the man to be no Socinian and his willingness to speak of Christ as 'the divine founder' of Christianity and of the Holy Spirit as 'a real, efficient, powerful, active Being' showed him to be more than an *Arius redivivus*.<sup>41</sup>

These are judicious remarks especially in the light of Paley's annotated Greek New Testament which contains both orthodox and heterodox comment on key Biblical texts, and given the fact that Paley was quite happy to promulgate Trinitarian material under his aegis as Archdeacon of Carlisle; as both the *Clergyman's companion* and his compilation *Young Christians instructed* testify.

Paley's Greek New Testament, for example, on a key text such as Philippians 2. 5-11 contains comments on Christ such as 'in the image of God, i.e. in the chekinah amongst the Jews' (v.6), and 'emptied himself—taking the form of a servant. Or of God-being man and in the likeness of man' (v.7).<sup>42</sup> Whereas his comment on the christological thrust of Hebrews 1.3 reads: 'mean ufulgence [sic] imprestinage [sic]—substance or being—in the highest places or amongst the highest beings'.<sup>43</sup> As can be seen from the above these comments are condensed and in places appear deliberately to cover a range of opinion. They appear to be aids to the memory; determining the exact degree of Paley's orthodoxy or heterodoxy is difficult from such material.<sup>44</sup>

As for the two works distributed in his archdeacon's days—the *Clergyman's companion* is Paley's reissue of an older work. It does however contain an explicitly Trinitarian liturgy by Bishop Andrews and an explicitly Trinitarian prayer by Bishop Cosins.<sup>45</sup> *Young Christians instructed* is Paley's own compilation and contains material predicating 'omnipotence' and 'omniscience' of Christ,<sup>45</sup> Trinitarian catechetical material and Paley's own brief 'A short history of our Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ', which can be read in ways consistent with both Athanasian orthodoxy and High Arianism.<sup>46</sup>

Regarding the puzzle of the apparent lack of explicit theological (as opposed to moralizing) in Paley's works, his sermons may furnish the clue. Of course, one should not expect dogmatics in works of apology like *Natural theology*, *Horae Paulinae* and *Evidences of Christianity*, nor in a work on ethics like *The Principles of moral and political philosophy*. However, sermons preached to ordinary parishioners, ordinands and clergy are another matter. What then may the clue be?

In a sermon on the sacrament Paley argued:

There are many errors in religion, which having no bad effect upon a man's life or conduct, it is not necessary to be solicitous in correcting. A man may live in such like errors as these without prejudice we humbly hope, to his happiness or salvation. But when errors in opinion lead to erroneous practices, when our notions affect our behaviour, it then becomes the duty of every Christian, especially of every teacher of Christianity, to set these notions right, as far as it is in his power.<sup>47</sup>

In Paley's typically lucid prose can be found his style of Latitudinarianism *in nuce*, his concern for conduct, for happiness and salvation, for doing one's duty as a Christian, and as well, his concept of the clergyman's role as a teacher.

On this view conduct usually matters more than creed and seriousness in religious attitudes much more than enthusiasm. This is a latitude of spirit that might allow a wide range of ecclesiastical acquaintance and support. Thus Paley could attend Methodist meetings (the plural is important) and speak well of the sincere piety he consistently found in them.<sup>48</sup> Thus, he could address his first major work to Bishop Edmund Law in terms 'of our common Christianity'.<sup>49</sup> Thus, he could even, on one notable occasion, send a vegetable laden cart to Catholic emigre priests who were barracked at Sunderland having just fled revolutionary France.<sup>50</sup> Serious Christianity, of whatever stripe, for Paley covered a multitude of 'sins'—conceptual 'sins'.

In conclusion, there is evidence that Paley's reputation was in serious decline earlier than recent scholarship suggests and for a reason, hitherto largely neglected: namely, the questioning and doubts surrounding Paley's Trinitarian orthodoxy. Such questioning and doubts are incomprehensible except against the background of what more than one Rational Dissenter termed 'the grand controversy of the day'; namely, the theological battle between orthodoxy and Rational Dissent over the person and pre-existence of Christ.<sup>51</sup> This battle saw, over the decades after Paley's death, his writings and especially his sermons appealed to or repudiated by both sides. The importance of this battle and its effects on Paley's reputation underline J.C.D. Clark's point, that in our historical vision of the period, economic and political reductionism must not be allowed to eliminate the significance of religion and religious opinions, as part of the tapestry of the times.<sup>52</sup> What Paley had believed mattered to the next generation. This part of the story of



Paley's impact on the nineteenth century neither Clarke nor Le Mahieu adequately explore, since their starting point is the critique of Paley's ethics. In particular, insufficient attention to both the sermon and reactions to it, as important sources for understanding late eighteenth and early nineteenth century thought and opinion, may help explain the same lacuna in both Clarke and Le Mahieu's accounts. As for Paley's own position on the vexed question of the Trinity, he appears, on the evidence of the sermons especially, to have been more orthodox than Leslie Stephen thought; although it was always an orthodoxy that placed creed at the service of Christian conduct.

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<sup>1</sup> See G.W. Meadley, *Memoirs of William Paley, D.D.* (Sunderland, 1809), 199. The statement appears in a letter addressed to Meadley himself dated 8 Dec. 1808.

<sup>2</sup> M.L. Clarke, *Paley: evidence for the man* (London, 1974), 127.

<sup>3</sup> Leslie Stephen, *The dictionary of national biography*, ed. Sidney Lee (London, 1895), XLIV, 105.

<sup>4</sup> See *Works of William Paley*, ed. E. Paley (London, 1825), I, ccx-ccxi.

<sup>5</sup> Meadley, 165.

<sup>6</sup> On Paley and the Utilitarian traditions, see J.B. Schneewind, *Sidgwick's ethics and Victorian moral philosophy* (Oxford, 1977); on apologetics, see A. Duiles, *A history of apologetics* (London, 1971); on natural theology, see W.P. Alston's article in *The encyclopaedia of philosophy*, ed. P. Edwards (New York, 1967), I, 84-88; and on the history of science, see J.H. Brooke in *New interactions between theology and natural sciences* (Milton Keynes, 1974), Units 9-10, Open University.

<sup>7</sup> Leslie Stephen, *English thought in the eighteenth century*, 3rd edn. 2 vols. (London, 1902) and *DNB*, XLIV, 101-107.

<sup>8</sup> Clarke and D.L. Mahieu, *The mind of William Paley* (Lincoln and London, 1976). I have yet to find a review of Le Mahieu's book.

<sup>9</sup> Le Mahieu, 155-59.

<sup>10</sup> S.T. Coleridge figures prominently in this story. See Clarke, 126. Coleridge, of course, had little sympathy for Paley's theological utilitarianism. On this score, see Le Mahieu, 158.

<sup>11</sup> Both Clarke, 122-25, and Le Mahieu, 21-23, give little concentrated attention to the analysis of Paley's sermons. And since neither explores in depth the controversy over Paley's alleged heterodoxy, the sermons are seen as either anticipating Paley's *Natural theology* and *Evidences of Christianity* or providing insights into Paley's piety. Their doctrinal content is barely considered.

<sup>12</sup> See J. Downey, *The eighteenth century pulpit* (Oxford, 1969), ch. i especially.

<sup>13</sup> See the fine summary of the orthodox position in J. Stoughton, *History of religion in England* (London, 1881), 204-205. Interestingly, Stoughton lists Watson and Paley amongst the orthodox.

<sup>14</sup> This variety is somewhat masked by J.C.D. Clark in his 'Note on terminology' in his *English society, 1689-1832* (Cambridge, 1985), xiii.

<sup>15</sup> For this paragraph the writer is indebted to M. Fitzpatrick's 'Toleration and truth' in *Enlightenment and Dissent*, No. 1 (1982), 13-14.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Belsham, *Memoirs of Theophilus Lindsey, M.A.* (London, 1873, the centenary volume). Belsham discusses both Price's and his own views, pp. 182-84.

<sup>17</sup> Meadley, 105.

<sup>18</sup> 'Anecdotes of Dr. Paley', *Universal Magazine* (London, Dec. 1805), 511. As for Frennd's authorship, see F. Knight, *University rebel* (London, 1971), 25 and for further possible evidence, see *The Christian Reformer* (Sept. 1842), 537.

<sup>19</sup> *Universal Magazine* (Nov. 1805), 416.

<sup>20</sup> See the important endnote in Clarke, 141, n.17, on the length of the Paley-Frennd overlap at Cambridge.

<sup>21</sup> *Universal Magazine* (Dec. 1805), 511.

<sup>22</sup> Meadley, 165.

<sup>23</sup> On the change in Meadley's own views, see Alexander Gordon's article in *DNB*, XXXVIII, (1894), 188, and for Meadley's ability to draw such distinctions, see also his *Letter to the Bishop of St. David's* (London, 1814), 11-12.

<sup>24</sup> According to the catalogue of the British Library.

<sup>25</sup> *Quarterly Review* (Aug. 1809), 82.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-83.

<sup>27</sup> 'A charge delivered to the clergy of the diocese in Sept. 1813', quoted in Meadley, *Letter*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> Meadley, *Memoirs*, 165-66.

<sup>30</sup> Meadley, *Letter*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Cited in *The Monthly Repository* (Jan. 1825), 38.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 'To such claims we are also strangers.'

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* (Feb. 1825), 73.

<sup>35</sup> For example, as late as 1891, Paley's annotated Greek New Testament was read for its doctrinal content and the case put that he had been at least a High Arian in his heterodoxy. See *The Christian Life*, 11 July, 1891, 334-35; 1 Aug. 1891, 370-71, and 22 Aug. 1891, 408. Leslie Stephen used this material for his remarks on Paley's orthodoxy in his *DNB* article. However, the series of articles is often inaccurate in quotation. For example, the last of the articles quotes Paley on John 1.1 in these terms: 'On the logos of the Fourth Gospel Paley's comment is "word of God, because employed to carry his word; also the wisdom of God, because employed to execute the purpose of his wisdom. Proverbs VIII and Eccl. XXIV." ' However, Paley actually comments 'in the beginning of the word or existence of God as the word, word of God because ... etc.' (My emphasis) See British Library, Add. MSS. 12080: Paley on John III. This example could be multiplied many times.

<sup>36</sup> E. Paley, I, 120. Complaints about the 'unscriptural' nature of Paley's views began early. From the evangelical side, J. Overton found fault with Paley's doctrine of hell on this count during Paley's own lifetime. See his *The true churchman ascertained*, 2nd edn. (York, 1802), 304. Although ironically Paley had a major impact on evangelical missionaries over the next fifty years. See F.S. Piggin, 'The social background, motivation and training of British Protestant missionaries to India, 1789-1858' (University of London, unpublished Ph.D., 1974), 317.

<sup>37</sup> *The Quarterly Theological Review and Ecclesiastical Record*, II (1825), 181.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 168-69.

<sup>40</sup> *The Quarterly Review* (1828), 328-29.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Add. MSS. 12080, Paley's comments on Philippians 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, comments on Hebrews I.

<sup>44</sup> Leslie Stephen following *The Christian life* articles of 1891 describes Add. MSS. 12080 as 'Paley's notes for his lectures', *op. cit.*, 105. However, this can be misleading as the volume contains comments much less formal than this remark of Stephen's suggests. A comparison with Paley's notes for his Moral and Political Philosophy lectures in Add. MSS. 12078 and 12079 bears this out.

<sup>45</sup> James Paxton (ed.), *The works of William Paley, D.D.* (London, 1845), III, 398-401.

<sup>46</sup> W. Paley, *Sermons and tracts* (London, 1808), especially 197-98, 247, and for Paley's own contribution, 207-211.

<sup>47</sup> E. Paley, *Sermons on various subjects by William Paley* (London, 1825), II, 114.

<sup>48</sup> See Meadley, *Memoirs*, 161.

<sup>49</sup> James Paxton, I, iii-iv.

<sup>50</sup> See E. Barker, *Traditions of civility* (Cambridge, 1948), 227.

<sup>51</sup> The quote comes from Kippis on Dr. Lardner and runs in full: 'What are the doctrines of the NT, with regard to the person and pre-existence of Christ, is the grand controversy of the day; a controversy that is warmly ignited and which is not likely soon brought to a conclusion.' . . . A reviewer in *The Monthly Repository* (Jan. 1825), 37, adds his own comment. 'This remark was submitted to the public in 1789, nor is the fact which gave occasion to it much less observable at Present'.

<sup>52</sup> See Clark, *English society*, ix-x. Not that the writer would endorse all of Clark's ambitious, revisionist programme.

## JOSEPH TOWERS AND THE COLLAPSE OF RATIONAL DISSENT

*F.K. Donnelly*

The collapse of Rational Dissent in late eighteenth century England has never been fully explained. Perhaps the reason for this is the difficulty in placing this form of heretical Presbyterianism in its proper political context. The broad intellectual features of Rational Dissent are well known including, the strong belief in reason as a component of human nature, the confidence that religious knowledge can be reconciled with secular learning, and the belief that reason will be progressively applied to the Scriptures in order to understand divine purposes in general with the result that human impositions, or superstitions, on the true Christian faith will gradually fade away. The latter led Rational Dissenters to an anti-Trinitarian position involving a rejection of Calvinist doctrines, including predestination and justification by faith alone. Indeed Rational Dissent can be interpreted as a stage through which some Protestant Dissenters passed after extricating themselves from Calvinism and before becoming Unitarians.' In social terms Rational Dissent involved a rejection of puritanical asceticism in favour of a more worldly appreciation of the refinements and pleasures of life. When Dissenting ministers moved in this direction they usually lost part of their congregations with the result that Rational Dissent was a contracting religious tendency with a limited appeal to a more bourgeois, affluent, and learned audience.<sup>2</sup> The leading intellectuals within Rational Dissent, men like Joseph Priestley and Richard Price, were, by extension of their theological stance to politics, strong advocates of religious toleration, the expansion of civil liberties, the abolition of slavery and the extension of the franchise.

The collapse of Rational Dissent in the 1790s has been explained in various ways.<sup>3</sup> Many of its leading lights were men of the same generation who died, retired or emigrated in the 1790s without a new cohort from the Dissenting academies to replace them. It is, however, precipitous to suggest that Rational Dissent was already a spent force by 1791.<sup>4</sup>

Likewise the political crises of the 1790s, the war with France, the suppression of reform societies, and the temporary success of a more secular, plebian organized radicalism (in the form of the London Corresponding Society, for example) can be seen as forces that overwhelmed the already declining moderate reformism of Rational Dissent. These explanations are useful but not entirely satisfying. We

still need to know why a new generation did not rise up to continue the work of the older one. We also need to be careful in discussing the decline of Rational Dissent in terms of the crisis of the 1790s. The relationship between the reformism of Rational Dissent and the radicalism of the London Corresponding Society is subtle to the extent that a simple displacement explanation is not adequate.

Some light can be shed on the problem by examining the career of Joseph Towers (1737-1799) because he was one of the most politically active of the Rational Dissenters.<sup>5</sup> His writings and activities reveal something of the intellectual weaknesses as well as the internal divisions within Rational Dissent. As these became more pronounced in the 1790s, Towers' thoughts on the various political crises of that decade can help us to understand why Rational Dissent faded away so quickly. Moreover, Joseph Towers does not quite fit the stereotype of the affluent, bourgeois Rational Dissenter capable of political compromise with the secular authorities of eighteenth century England.

Joseph Towers was born in Southwark on 31 March 1737 (Old Style). Of humble origins, his father was a secondhand bookdealer and young Joseph was sent out to work as a stationer's errand boy from age 12. In 1754 at age 17 he was apprenticed to Robert Goadby, the printer of Sherborne in Dorset. Under Goadby's influence and by his own self-education, Towers rejected the strict Calvinism of his upbringing in favour of Arianism. In 1763 he published a tract which attracted some attention amongst Rational Dissenters for its clarity of argument against Calvinism. For Towers who had no time for the doctrine of original sin, Christianity, 'the most simple, intelligible, and rational of all religions', only makes sense if men are 'free creatures'.<sup>6</sup> Within a year he returned to London to work first as a journeyman printer and then a bookseller. From 1765 through until 1793 he was engaged as an editor and writer for two large multi-volume biographical works. Indeed Towers is often best remembered as a biographer who worked in an uneasy relationship with Andrew Kippis, another of the Rational Dissenting fraternity.<sup>7</sup>

In 1774 Towers was ordained as a Dissenting minister and gave up his bookshop. He first worked as pastor to the Presbyterian congregation at Southwood Lane, Highgate, then in 1778 moved to Newington Green where he was 'co-adjutor' to Richard Price. In November 1779 Edinburgh University awarded him an honorary LL.D. and on the basis of this in formal address he was referred to as 'The Reverend Doctor Joseph Towers'. His sermons were almost entirely based on Scriptures and they occasionally dealt with such topics as reason in human nature,

and the need to extend toleration even to Roman Catholics.<sup>8</sup> He fitted well into the world of Dissent as his wife was a relative of Caleb Fleming while his younger brother John (1747-1804) was pastor to the Independent congregation in Barbican.<sup>9</sup>

Towers was noted for his strong political positions on a number of issues important to Rational Dissent. He wrote many letters on public matters and published some 20 pamphlets, many of which were reprinted in a three-volume edition in 1796. The printed subscription list for the latter shows 218 purchasers and indicates an interest in his work on the part of the Rational Dissenting community.<sup>10</sup> In 1769 Towers defended John Wilkes and the actions of his more excitable supporters, while he condemned the violence of the authorities in suppressing the Wilkite riots as 'murders'. For Towers the issue in this matter was not whether Wilkes 'be a good or a bad man' or the exact nature of his opinions on politics or morality, but whether 'the rights of Englishmen have been violated in the illegal seizure of his person and papers, and the other arbitrary proceedings against him'. The broader concern was that 'every man ought to consider himself as injured when the rights of any one of his fellow subjects are invaded'.<sup>11</sup> In politics Towers was an ultra-Whig, quick to defend the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688, but equally quick to point out that it did not go far enough to establish the liberties of the people in general or Dissenters in particular. His pamphlets were often defences of a radical interpretation of the constitutional settlement of 1688, or the ideas of John Locke, or the patriot heroes of the seventeenth century constitutional struggles (e.g. Algernon Sidney, William Russell, and John Lilburne).<sup>12</sup> Lilburne, the Leveller leader, was a particular favourite of Towers for his vigorous advocacy in 1649 of the idea that juries could find law as well as fact. This radical idea was incorporated in Towers' well-known pamphlet on jury trials which became a standard reference work for those accused of seditious libel.<sup>13</sup>

In the late 1780s Towers was active in the campaign to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts that still denied full civil liberties to Dissenters. He was one of a more 'strident' group of 44 London Dissenters who tried unsuccessfully in 1789 to force the issue along with a series of public meetings.<sup>14</sup> His 1786 pamphlet entitled *Dialogues concerning the ladies...* has some interesting lines suggesting that females were the intellectual equals of males.<sup>15</sup> Towers was also a leading member of the 'Revolution Society' of London which was set up to celebrate the centenary of the 'Glorious Revolution'. In connection with this he delivered a stirring speech at the London Tavern in November 1788 to

explain that the lesson of the past was that 'Englishmen disdained submission to the government of a tyrant.'<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps more important was Towers' involvement in the Society for Constitutional Information (SCI). Originally founded by gentlemen reformers in 1780, its purpose was to disseminate political knowledge, especially about Parliamentary representation. Towers was active in the SCI from 1782 until its suppression by the government in 1794. A major purpose of the organization was to distribute free political tracts and Towers wrote the editorial introduction to the two-volume complete set:

it is the wish of the Society to extend this knowledge throughout every part of the united kingdoms, and to convince men of all ranks, that it is their interest, as well as their duty, to support a free constitution, and to maintain and assert those common rights, which are essential to the dignity, and to the happiness of human nature.<sup>17</sup>

The history of the SCI, as well as the involvement of even an active member like Towers, was irregular. After an initial burst of activity from 1780 to 1785, the society languished in a state of near dormancy for almost seven years, revived in 1792, and died in William Pitt's wartime repression of 1794-95. In its lifetime the SCI distributed a large amount of political literature and in the 1780s supplied one Thomas Hardy, shoemaker of London, with its pamphlets. He went on to found in 1792 the London Corresponding Society (LCS), the great plebian radical society of that decade. The LCS and similar clubs in Sheffield, Norwich and Manchester frightened the government of the day. Moreover they were doubly concerned about the SCI which appeared to act as an 'umbrella' organization, for both London and provincial societies obtained the right to send delegates to SCI meetings in London. So, when in 1794 the government moved against the perceived radical threat, one of the many persons brought up for interrogation was Joseph Towers. Hauled before the Privy Council of 14 June 1794 to explain his activities in the SCI Dr. Towers, who was somewhat of an expert on the subject of self-incrimination, gave testimony so evasive, vague, and qualified by his own forgetfulness as to be worthless. In spite of the fact that the authorities had seized the SCI minute books and confronted Towers with the minutes of meetings he attended or chaired, they could not get him to admit even that he knew any members of the LCS.<sup>18</sup>

While the wartime repression closed down most radical and reform societies in the mid and late 1790s, they revived in one way or the other in the post-war era. By contrast Rational Dissent did not survive the

political crisis of the 1790s and the suggestion here is that there was something in its ideological make-up that can account for this. The great flaw in Rational Dissent, as practised by an exponent like Joseph Towers, was its inflexible confidence in a one-sided over-optimistic view of human nature. Just as Towers was supremely confident that in time the true version of Christianity would emerge to banish the 'superstitions' of Calvinism and Popery, he was equally certain of the progressive attainment of political reforms. His political writings display a boundless confidence in human nature from the time he first put pen to paper.

In 1769 he had defended the 'moderation' and patriotism of Wilkes' violent supporters. Further, he thought persons of the upper class were of immoderate habits and therefore less likely than common people to exhibit patriotism or restraint from corrupt practices.<sup>19</sup> In 1790 Towers responded to Edmund Burke's hostile interpretation of the early French Revolution with a declaration of confidence in Gallic intentions:

Whatever new arrangements they may make in their mode of government, there can be no reason to apprehend, that so enlightened a people will ever descend, from the felicity and the dignity of freedom, to the wretchedness and the dishonour attendant on a despotic government.

Moreover he expected that France would remain 'on pacific terms with England' now that she had become a 'free country' .<sup>20</sup>

Yet the events of the 1790s did not bear out the predictions and expectations of Rational Dissenters. Howling 'Church and King' mobs attacked Joseph Priestley's house in Birmingham in 1791; the French executed their King and by 1793 were at war with England; and on the home front William Pitt was able to launch his 'repression' with the support of a large number of his fellow countrymen. From November 1792 some gave support to John Reeves' Association for Preserving Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers' much to the dismay of Towers who had no explanation for such misguided loyalty. In his view 'the idea of securing property, by an indiscriminate support of administration, is not founded in reason'. For Towers such persons had simply made a mistake in reasoning and they, like those who supported the tyrant King Charles I to preserve their estates, might well end up losing everything through their support for unconstitutional measures.<sup>21</sup> This lack of any real explanation for the events of the early 1790s led Towers into an extremely bitter opposition to the 'most impolitic and destructive War in which this Country ever was engaged' .<sup>22</sup> Finally in

1797 he offered his 'explanation' for the various national disasters of the 1790s with a medical analogy:

At certain periods, whole nations, or at least the greater part of them, have been under the influence of a kind of temporary delirium. When the majority of a nation discover a total ignorance of their own real advantage, when they manifest an extreme incapacity of reasoning concerning it with any justness or accuracy, when they plunge headlong into measures highly pernicious or destructive, and when they listen to no rational remonstrances upon the subject, they are then in a state so exactly similar to that of individual lunatics, that such a people may properly be said to be in a state of national lunacy.<sup>23</sup>

Here is the fundamental weakness of this brand of Rational Dissent. It can't explain the crisis of the 1790s other than in terms of a universal madness that allowed despotic tendencies to flourish.

For many others, equally committed to reformist and radical causes, a more sophisticated explanation was required. They were attracted to the idea of necessity (or what we might call today with some reservations, determinism) which was accessible in the writings of Helvetius, d'Holbach, and from 1793, William Godwin.<sup>24</sup> If the actions of men were wholly or partly accounted for by environmental factors, then that would go a long way towards explaining the crisis of the 1790s, while still allowing radicals to maintain a positive notion of human nature and progress. But for some Rational Dissenters, including Joseph Towers, this way of thinking could never be acceptable. Their basic idea of a reasonable Christianity required that Man be an entirely free agent. In this respect Towers was the disciple of his mentor Richard Price who had engaged in a friendly exchange with Priestley on this matter in 1778.<sup>25</sup> In 1796 and 1797 Towers engaged in a public dispute on the question of necessity that illustrated his growing isolation from the rethinking going on in radical circles. He wrote several letters to the *Monthly Magazine* attacking the doctrines of Helvetius' respecting the intellectual faculties of man as:

contrary to the analogy of nature, contrary to the general and prevailing opinions of man in all ages and nations, and not supported by one single conclusive argument.<sup>26</sup>

The formalities of public letters do not capture the full bitterness of those divisions amongst radical reformers. A chance encounter on the

streets of London with a former political acquaintance gives a better sense of the split. Thomas Holcroft, the radical playwright, sometime follower of William Godwin and former member of the SCI, recorded this entry in his diary for 14 November 1798:

Saw Dr. Towers at Debrett's; his democracy still maintaining its violence; I should scarcely exceed if I said its virulence. He asked me if the universal defection had not made me turn aristocrat.

And on the more philosophical and anti-Godwinian level:

The Doctor doubted Man's perfectability; was more inclined to think him a radical sinner; and said, as I held such opinions, I was no doubt a Necessarian, to which I readily assented.<sup>27</sup>

Parallel to these disputes were related divisions over the anti-religious views of some radicals. Towers could not accept the ideas in Thomas Paine's *Age of reason* (1795) and in his notebook referred to 'His absurd representations of Christianity'. Likewise he attacked William Godwin's opinion that some exceptional persons had no need for public religious worship.<sup>28</sup>

In the end we are left with the paradox of Rational Dissent. On the one hand it contributed in a significant way to the emerging political consciousness of plebian radicalism and popular democratic thinking in the 1790s. Here Towers made a particular contribution with his work on jury trials. On the other hand Rational Dissent, especially in the form practised by Joseph Towers, relied on a simplistic confidence in human nature that prevented it from explaining the political disasters suffered by the radical movement in the 1790s. Without such an explanation Rational Dissent in political terms was a dead-end tendency that simply died when its older generation of adherents passed away.

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On the essential ideas of Rational Dissent, see M. Fitzpatrick, 'Toleration and truth', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 1 (1982), 2-31; R.V. Holt, *The Unitarian contribution to social progress in England* (London, 1938); U. Henriques, *Religious toleration in England, 1787-1838* (London, 1961); A.H. Lincoln, *Some political and social ideas of English Dissent* (Cambridge, 1938) and M.R. Watts, *The Dissenters; from the Reformation to the*

*French Revolution* (London, 1978 and 1985).

<sup>2</sup> J. Seed, 'Gentlemen dissenters: the social and political meanings of Rational Dissent in the 1770s and 1780s', *Historical Journal*, 28, 2 (1985), 299-325.

<sup>3</sup> M. Philp, 'Rational religion and political radicalism in the 1790s', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 4 (1985), 35-46.

<sup>4</sup> Watts, 482-490.

<sup>5</sup> On the life of Joseph Towers, see *Dictionary of national biography*, LVII, 91-92; A. Chalmers, *The general biographical dictionary* (London, 1816), XXIX, 489-492; J. Lindsay, *A sermon occasioned by the death of the Rev. Joseph Towers, LL.D. delivered at Newington-Green, June 2d, 1799...* (London, 1799); *Cambridge Intelligencer*, 1 June 1799; *Gentleman's Magazine*, LIX, part 1 (1799), 528-29; and *Monthly Magazine*, VII, part 1 (1799), 413-14; T.W. Davis, 'Joseph Towers (1737-99)' in *Biographical dictionary of modern British radicals*, 1 (1770-1830), ed. Joseph O. Baylen and Norbert J. Gossman (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1979), 493-96.

<sup>6</sup> J. Towers, *A review of the genuine doctrines of Christianity...* (London, 1763), 12-18 and 66-71.

<sup>7</sup> Towers edited the first seven volumes of *British biography...*, 10 vols. (London, 1766-1772), and then worked with Kippis on the never completed *Biographia Britannica* 5 vols. (London, 1778-1793). He also wrote *Memoirs of the life and reign of Frederick the Third, King of Prussia*, 2 vols. (London, 1788).

<sup>8</sup> Six sermons of Joseph Towers are in Dr. Williams's Library, London. MS. 28.14(1-6). *Bunhill memorials*, ed. J.A. Jones (London, 1849), 280-81 and Joseph Towers' Notebook in Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. misc. e. 334, fol. 243.

<sup>10</sup> J. Towers, *Tracts on political and other subjects*, 3 vols. (London, 1796), I, 3-14.

<sup>11</sup> J. Towers, *Observations on public liberty, patriotism, ministerial despotism, and national grievances* (London, 1769), 8, 19-20.

<sup>12</sup> J. Towers, *A letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley...* (London, 1771); *A letter to the Rev. Dr. Nowell* (London, 1772); *An examination into the nature and evidence of the charges brought against Lord W. Russell, and A. Sydney, by Sir J. Dalrymple, Bart.* (London, 1773); *A letter to Dr. Samuel Johnson* (London, 1775), and *Observations on Mr. Hume's history of England* (London, 1778). On the controversies over the seventeenth century martyrs, see B. Worden, 'The commonwealth kidney of Algernon Sidney', *Journal of British Studies*, 24, 1 (1985), 1-40, and L.G. Schworer, 'William Lord Russell: the making of a martyr, 1683-1983', *Journal of British Studies*, 24, 1 (1985), 41-71.

<sup>13</sup> J. Towers, *Observations on the rights and duty of juries, in trials for libels...* (London, 1784).

<sup>14</sup> See *Committees for repeal of the test and Corporation acts, minutes 1786-90 and 1827-8*, ed T.W. Davies (London Record Society, 1978), xiii, 40 and 42. See also J. Towers, *A dialogue between two gentlemen, concerning the late application to Parliament for relief in the matter of subscription to the thirty-nine articles and liturgy of the Church of England* (London, 1772).

<sup>15</sup> J. Towers, *Dialogues concerning the ladies...* (London, 1785), 32-34 and 145.

<sup>16</sup> J. Towers, *An oration delivered at the London Tavern, on the fourth of November, 1788 on occasion of the commemoration of the Revolution...* (London, 1789), 23-24.

<sup>17</sup> Society for Constitutional Information, *Tracts published and distributed gratis... with a design to convey to the minds of the people a knowledge of their rights, principally those of representation* (London, 1783), 1. For Towers' authorship, see Minutes of the SCI, 13 and 20 Sept. 1782 in T.S. 11/1133 in Public Record Office, London and E.C. Black, *The Association: British extraparliamentary political organization, 1769-1793* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 197.

<sup>18</sup> Examination of Joseph Towers, 14 June 1794, P.C. 1/22/A36(c) in Public Record Office, London. In Aug. 1794 the LCS put Towers on a list of 'Literary Gentlemen' to be

approached to write the prospectus for their planned periodical. See *Selections from the papers of the London Corresponding Society 1792-1799*, ed. M. Thales (Cambridge, 1983), 214-15.

<sup>19</sup> Towers, *Observations...* (1769), 11-12 and 27-29.

<sup>20</sup> J. Towers, *Thoughts on the commencement of a new parliament...* (1790) in his *Tracts...* (1796), III, 135-36 and 177-79.

<sup>21</sup> J. Towers, *A dialogue between an associator and a well-informed Englishman* (1793) in his *Tracts* (1796), III, 190-91, and see also, J. Towers, *Remarks on the conduct, principles and publications of the association... for preserving liberty and property against republicans and levellers* (1793) in his *Tracts* (1796), III, 249-298.

<sup>22</sup> J. Towers to C. Wyvill, 2 Aug. 1794 in C. Wyvill, *Political Papers*, 6 vols. (York, 1806), V, 222, and see also, Towers to Wyvill, 26 Apr. 1793, *Ibid.*, 136-37.

<sup>23</sup> J. Towers, *Thoughts on national insanity* (London, 1797), 1-2, and see also 5, 8-9, 11-17, and 21-28.

<sup>24</sup> On Godwin and Rational Dissent, see M. Fitzpatrick, 'William Godwin and the Rational Dissenters', *Price-Priestley Newsletter*, 3 (1979), 4-28; M. Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (Ithaca, 1986), and W. Stafford, 'Dissenting religion translated into politics: Godwin's *Political Justice*', *History of Political Thought*, 1, 2 (1980), 279-299.

<sup>25</sup> J. Priestley, *A free discussion of the doctrine of materialism, and philosophical necessity, in a correspondence between Dr. Price and Dr. Priestley...* (London, 1778), and see Watts, 474-76.

<sup>26</sup> *Monthly Magazine*, J.T. to editor, Apr. 1797, 265, and, see also Feb. 1796, 26-29 and Aug. 1796, 521-23.

<sup>27</sup> *Memoirs of the late Thomas Holcroft, written by himself and continued by William Hazlitt* (1816; Oxford, 1926), 269, and see also 246.

<sup>28</sup> Notebook of Joseph Towers, op. cit., fol. 118, and *Monthly Magazine*, H.S. to editor, May 1798, 355. For Towers as author of the latter, see Notebook, op. cit., fol. 200. On the influence of Godwin, Paine and various French philosophers in London radical circles of the late 1790s, see W.H. Reid, *The rise and dissolution of the infidel societies in this metropolis* (London, 1800).

REFLECTIONS ON A FOOTNOTE: RICHARD PRICE AND LOVE  
OF COUNTRY.\*

*Martin Fitzpatrick*

In a revealing footnote to his *Observations on the importance of the American Revolution*, Richard Price noted that 'Christianity has wisely omitted to recommend' the principle of love of country.' Yet six years later, in a sermon preached before the London Revolution Society to commemorate the Glorious Revolution, he recommended the very same principle. This *Discourse on the love of our country* provoked Edmund Burke to respond with his *Reflections on the revolution in France*, a work which offered a very different view of patriotism. Yet Price in his *Discourse* had captured the contemporary feeling that national prejudices could be shaken off and nations reclothed in a new enlightened patriotism which would enhance the well-being of individual communities and of nations in general. Price, moreover, had not arrived at this position by rejecting his former notion of love of country. Indeed, in many respects the contents of his *Discourse* were foreshadowed in the earlier footnote. But in 1789, in keeping with the optimistic spirit of the times, he argued that the destructive aspects of the principle could be regulated and its nobler aspects harmonized with Christian benevolence.

Price was not the first to attempt to solve the problems inherent in devotion to country and to cosmopolitan values. Montesquieu had found himself in difficulties on the topic in his *The spirit of laws*, a work which Price held in the highest esteem.<sup>2</sup> Montesquieu hoped that his study of the various forms of government would 'afford new reasons to every man to love his prince, his country, his laws; new reasons to render him more sensible in every nation and government of the blessings he enjoys'.<sup>3</sup> Yet there was a tension between this aspiration and the cosmopolitan desire to dispel national prejudices.<sup>4</sup> His belief that different forms of government were founded on different basic principles led him to make comparisons which suggested that 'love of country' flourished more in republics founded upon virtue than monarchies founded on honour. Although he hastened to explain in an introductory note that 'love of country' was a political not a moral or Christian virtue,<sup>5</sup> this is less than convincing for his description of this virtue suggests that it was a secular version of Christian charity, as Nannerl Keohane has pointed out.<sup>6</sup>

Richard Price, in his *Review of the principle questions in morals*, published ten years after *The spirit of laws*, argued that it is not possible

to isolate the various parts of virtue from each other, a point of view which he expressed forcefully again in his *Discourse* some thirty years later when he declared,

'I cannot reconcile myself to the the idea of an immoral patriot, or to that separation of private from public virtue, which some think possible.'<sup>7</sup>

For him, 'love of country' could only be recommended if it were consonant with other aspects of virtue, and, since he did not possess Montesquieu's interest in governments as they were, but rather was concerned with how they ought to be, he avoided the difficulties inherent in combining descriptive and prescriptive notions of love of country. Price made it clear, both in his footnote and his *Discourse* that the conditions necessary for the development of genuine patriotism were identical with those for the spread of liberty. He portrayed love of country as hitherto a dangerous principle. The patriotism of subjects of despotism amounted to attachment to slavery. It could become a degrading principle even in communities which enjoyed a greater degree of liberty, and where subjects were also citizens and genuine members of a polity. He instanced the Jewish and Roman love of country: for the Jews it amounted to a 'a wretched partiality to themselves and a proud contempt of all other nations', whereas for the Romans it was little more than a principle of domination exerted by banditti. Price, in 1783, concluded that Christianity had wisely refused to countenance this 'vice among mankind'.<sup>8</sup> In his *Discourse*, he went to some lengths to explain why Christ had not recommended it; had he done so, he would have confirmed Jews and Gentiles 'in one of the most pernicious faults'<sup>9</sup> rather he taught the nobler obligation to love mankind, and recommended universal benevolence as one's first duty 'next to the love of God'.<sup>10</sup> However, in 1789 Price chose to add that it would be wrong to conclude that Christ did not consider love of country to be a duty. Clearly Price believed that the time was ripe for dispelling wrongful notions of patriotism and for diffusing correct ones which were enlightened, Christian and universalist. To explain this change of emphasis if not change of heart, it will be useful to examine Price's ideas and career as a patriot.

Price was not immune to conventional patriotic pride. Indeed, his first published sermon, *Britain's happiness, and the proper improvement of it*, portrayed British victories against the French in the Seven Year's War as signs of providential approval for God's chosen people. Republished in expurgated form in 1791, with the mischievous title,

*Britain's happiness and its full possession of civil and religious liberty briefly stated and proved by the late Rev. Richard Price*, it was regarded by Bishop Porteus of London as 'a compleat answer to all Dr. Price's subsequent political publications, as well as to Thomas Payne and every other Republican writer that has since appeared.'<sup>11</sup> But that was a partial view based on a partial knowledge of the sermon. Despite Price's enthusiasm for British successes, his sermon, in the best tradition of the jeremiad, warned that success was contingent upon obeying God's wishes, and although he was less critical of the constitution than he would be in later years, neither was his attitude completely adulatory. Proud as he was of 'the best constitution of government, the best laws, the best King and the best religion in the world', he reminded citizens of their duty to give 'publick testimony in favour of universal Liberty and the simplicity of the gospel'.<sup>12</sup> Patriotism was subject to Christian restraints, and God's favour would only be bestowed on the virtuous. It was therefore necessary for Britons, as Price put it:

'to suppress carefully in ourselves all vain confidence, placing our chief trust in God, and discovering, in all events, that regard to the common welfare of mankind and the equitable, reasonable, and pious dispositions, which are the best proofs of true magnanimity, and the best means of securing the continuance of the divine protection.'<sup>13</sup>

In the next two decades Price's confidence in his countrymen and his own patriotism were sorely tried. Hopes for reform in the constitution in church and state were dashed and the country embarked on a suicidal contest with its American brethren. Despite Dr. Johnson's oft repeated verdict on patriotism, it was in fact the supporters of the government who wrested the patriotic argument from reformers in the mid 1770s.<sup>14</sup> It would not be until the 1780s that Price began to feel once more the dawn of millennial paradise. In the meantime, Britons had forgotten that true patriotic conduct was dependent on principles of universal application. He wrote in the introduction to his *Two tracts on civil liberty* that the British were 'too full of ideas of our own dignity, too proud to retract, and too tenacious of dominion', and he feared 'just retribution'.<sup>15</sup>

The tendency to associate love of country with aspirations for conquest and dominion was not just triggered off by the behaviour of the British against their American colonies. In a fast sermon preached presumably during the Seven Year War on the topic of *Love of Our Country*, Price's great friend William Adams, the future Master of Pembroke College, Oxford, analysed the nature of this virtue and argued that it had been much mistaken:



most of the appearances of it have been nothing else but ambition, a love of dominion and tyranny; and that many of those who have been most honoured as benefactors to their country have only contributed to its greatness or power by invading the rights of their neighbouring nations; carrying war and desolation into distant countries, and enslaving and oppressing as many as they could conquer. Among the Romans, where the passion prevailed most, and was held in the highest, it was a national principle to conquer and subdue as many countries as they could.<sup>16</sup>

Adams's sermon was published in a multi-volume series entitled *The English Preacher* in 1774 by Joseph Johnson, a Rational Dissenter who was also a friend of Price. We do not know whether Price had read the sermon before he wrote his *Observation on Civil Liberty*, but Price certainly was aware of Adams's sentiments. Price had known Adams since the publication of his *Review* in which he had made favourable mention of a sermon by Adams on virtue. This was the occasion of their friendship. They became correspondents and Adams would dine with Price when he visited London.<sup>17</sup> At any rate, it is hardly surprising that Price, in his *Observations*, should liken the behaviour of the British to that of the Roman Republicans whose empire consisted of 'one state free and the rest slavery'.<sup>18</sup> Later, he contrasted the narrow and partial actions of his countrymen with his own stance as a 'citizen of the world'.<sup>19</sup> Although in immediate terms we may surmise that the considerable authority of Montesquieu lay behind the views of Adams as well as Price, both, in their circumspect attitude towards love of country, were drawing on a long tradition which was Christian and classical. Two examples will suffice rather better than a potted history of cosmopolitanism.

John Milton noted in his commonplace book:

'a blind and carnal love of country should not carry us off to plundering and bloodshed and hatred of neighbouring countries, so that we may enrich our country in power, wealth or glory; for so did the pagans act. It behooves Christians, however, to cultivate peace among themselves and not seek the property of others. For this reason Lactantius attacks philosophy. 2, 0

Lactantius, tutor to Constantine's son, whose works, incidentally, were read and cited by Rational Dissenters, attacked pagan philosophy as a source of bad conduct.<sup>21</sup> Yet when the Christian Tudor historian, Polydore Vergil, condemned nationalism in his *Anglica Historia*, he drew on the authority of Cicero:

' "But since, as Plato puts it so well, we are not born for ourselves alone, but our country, our parents and our friends make claims upon a share of our being; and, as the Stoics think, everything which is produced on earth is made for the use of man; moreover men are born for the sake of men in order that they may co-operate to help one another; in this we should follow the lead of nature, render services to the community by a mutual exercise of duties, by giving and receiving, and thus by our skill, labour and abilities bind together the society of mankind." '22

Such sentiments, emphasizing the bonds binding men and communities, were very much of a piece with Price's own emphasis upon the importance of self-government. His contemporary, Rev. Philip Furneaux expressed similar ideas in a sermon on *The Duty of Benevolence and Public Spirit*. In condemning greed, he argued that the avaricious person 'forgets that he is a member of society, and a steward of this world's goods'.<sup>23</sup> His authority for this was not Cicero but Matthew XXV, 30. The tendency of Rational Dissenters was indeed to express cosmopolitan ideals in Christian form although they were deeply versed in the classics. For them, revelation provided a confirmation for the rational theism of the pagans.<sup>24</sup> Price was profoundly convinced that his cosmopolitanism was Christian even though he found himself in a minority amongst ministers of religion in England. Polydore Vergil was moved to write against nationalism through witnessing the use of the pulpit against foreigners. Price experienced something similar against his American friends. In the opening year of the colonial conflict the Anglican clergy rallied their flock behind the crown. American sympathisers were portrayed as unpatriotic: The constitution was vigorously defended and not always with arguments alone. In 1780, Markham, Archbishop of York warned that there would be no future preferment for those of his clergy who joined the Yorkshire Association.<sup>25</sup> For Price, who favoured reform at home and conciliation abroad, and was, besides, a heterodox dissenter, the situation was often uncomfortable. He, himself, wrote of 'a vast deal of abuse and ill-will' which his stand on American independence had brought him.<sup>26</sup> Yet he had no regrets at playing the role of Jeremiah to his countrymen, hoping all along that he would be rendering a service to his country.<sup>27</sup> If his stance was genuinely patriotic as he claimed it to be<sup>28</sup> and if his apprehensions had been vindicated by events, it is entirely understandable that he did not praise love of country in his tract of 1783. The American conflict had confirmed a whole history of suspicion of that virtue, and his singling out of the Jews as well as the Romans served as a reminder of the dangers of being a chosen people. In the 1750s both

Price and Adams had detected God's grace in their nation's fortunes. Adams suggested that the security which Britons possessed for their liberties and the 'enjoyments of mankind' was probably unparalleled in history, and added, unlike Price, that they were also blessed with the purest religion in the world.<sup>29</sup> But if he believed that this made the duty to love their country more imperative than elsewhere, he was careful to analyse the various aspects of that love and to recommend some more highly than others. When Price preached his *Discourse*, it was probably in homage to his friend who had recently died.<sup>30</sup> He chose an identical title for his discourse and extracted from his friend's analysis those elements of love of country which were laudable and idealistic and omitted entirely the descriptive aspects. He therefore had no need to contradict his deceased friend. There were, however, special reasons why Price could feel that an idealistic interpretation could be appropriately applied in the world of the late 1780s.

In one of his sermons, Price wished that he had the ability to infuse 'liberality into every human soul' so that 'men of all nations and religions' could be reconciled. He added, 'But this is infinitely above my feeble powers, and can be accomplished only by the particular providence and grace of God.'<sup>31</sup> In the mid 1780s he began to feel that the world was being transformed by grace. This was not intuitive, it was based upon the interpretation of real events. As a good Rational Dissenter, Price believed in the ultimate harmony of reason and revelation. The transformation of the world foretold in the Bible, would for Price be effected by men acting in an enlightened and virtuous way. In a sermon preached in April 1787 at the first anniversary of the new liberal Dissenting academy at Hackney, London, he chose as his topic, *The Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement in the State of Mankind, with the Means and Duty of Promoting It*. In this he set out the reasons for his belief that there was 'a progressive improvement in human affairs which will terminate in greater degrees of light and virtue and happiness than have been yet known.'<sup>32</sup> He argued that although progress had been irregular, it had been continuous and that it tended to occur exponentially.<sup>33</sup> The achievements in natural philosophy, which increased dramatically in the seventeenth century, culminating in the work of Isaac Newton, exemplified this. Nor had they come to an end for 'great advances' had been lately made by philosophers 'standing on his [Newton's] shoulders'.<sup>34</sup> Similarly progress in religious knowledge had recently made great strides, freeing Christianity of the corruptions of the ages. The extension of toleration in particular furthered this process; Price took special delight in the separation of church from state in America regarding it as important evidence that 'alliances between

church and state and slavish hierarchies are losing credit'. The loosening of the age old alliances not only promoted the cause of truth, it also assisted the development of peace and understanding. Bigotry would be weakened and the day grow nearer 'when mankind shall love one another as brethren amidst their religious differences'.<sup>35</sup>

There were other circumstances, too, which indicated the movement of mankind towards a state of grace. Here Price drew upon ideas which had the assent of most of the fraternity of the Enlightenment. They included the weakening of papal authority, the softening of the 'spirit of popery' and the repression of the Jesuits, the 'alleviation of the horrors of war', the diffusion of knowledge through printing and the growth of commerce, and, finally,

'the establishment, at this moment going forward, of an *equal* representation of the different provinces of FRANCE, and the tendencies to it in some of the other countries of EUROPE'.<sup>36</sup>

The progress which Price detected was almost indistinguishable from secular progress. Certainly it did not occur through miraculous intervention, rather it was 'brought about by the operations of Providence concurring with those tendencies to improvement which I have observed to be inseparable from the nature of man'.<sup>37</sup> Yet the native tradition of patriotism on which Price drew tended to be a critical one. As Bolingbroke put it, 'the love of our country is a lesson of reason and not an institution of nature'; it was orators and poets who had 'endeavoured to work up this precept of morality into a principle of passion'.<sup>38</sup> Whether the passion was instinctive or cultivated, it was something of which Price was extremely wary. His friend, William Adams, argued that love of country contained both rational and instinctive elements. The instinctive element was the love for those 'with whom we converse'. This, according to Adams, had no virtue in it at all. At a slightly higher level, it included affection for 'the members of the same community', but it was only fully laudable when it was grounded in reason; in this sense love of country was due to governments which protected the rights and liberties of their citizens understood in universalist terms: 'that government has the best right to our affection and service in which the common rights of mankind are best secured, and protected to us'.<sup>39</sup> It was the latter virtuous aspect of love of country which Price developed in his *Discourse*. In the view of one of his most trenchant critics, Archdeacon Coxe, this led him to ignore the natural aspects of love of country and to make impossible demands upon people's benevolence. Coxe argued that, by neglecting habit, custom

instinctive and often opposed to virtue, and the determination of our minds which is 'the proper, and most natural and intimate spring and guide of the actions of reasonable beings.'<sup>49</sup> It is the use of our natural intelligence which distinguished human beings from animals. Reason is essential to man's nature and 'a deliberate resolution not to be governed by it, is scarcely possible'.<sup>50</sup> Man should therefore seek not so much to eliminate the passions, which are not in themselves evil, but, as Price says of love of country, to regulate and direct them in a virtuous path.<sup>51</sup> Thus virtue is to be *desired*, and virtue achieved will cause pleasure. Reason provided the means for such a happy outcome for it could correct 'whatever is amiss in the inward man, and inconsistent with its sound and healthful state.'<sup>52</sup> When Price recommended benevolence in his *Discourse* he was not recommending instinctive benevolence but rational benevolence, although in a virtuous being the two would be fused:

`it is not possible that endeavours to obtain an end which, as reasonable, we cannot but love and chuse, should not be by reason approved, or that what is *necessarily desirable* to all beings, should not be also *necessarily right to be pursued*.'<sup>53</sup>

In the *Discourse*, Price described 'UNIVERSAL BENEVOLENCE' as an 'unspeakably nobler principle than any partial affections', but contrary to Coxe, he did not say that one should love one's neighbour more than oneself, rather he suggested that we should love each other as brothers.<sup>54</sup> He believed that most evil had arisen from private interest overcoming the principle of universal benevolence and that it was therefore necessary to offer a corrective to the tendency to overvalue 'every thing related to us' including country.<sup>55</sup> Nonetheless, he was careful to point out that the obligation to 'love our own families, friends and country, and to seek, in the first place, their good' remained the same irrespective of the virtue of other people and communities.<sup>56</sup> The obligation arose from the 'constitution of nature' and was part of God's design in which 'every man is charged primarily with the care of himself.'<sup>57</sup> The distinction between self-love and love of mankind was discussed in some detail in the *Review*, in which Price classed 'true self-love' as one of the virtues.<sup>58</sup> In practice, he accepts that we are often in the dark as to the nature of our obligations, and that the duties to pursue public and private virtue sometimes appear to clash, as do our other duties.<sup>59</sup> At one point, Price seems to suggest that in such instances considerations of the public good should be paramount,<sup>60</sup> yet he set his face very determinedly against the idea that all other virtues were necessarily subordinate to concern for the public good; in

particular, he discountenanced utilitarian notions of justice, noting with approval Cicero's view that there were some acts 'so foul, that a good man would not do them to save his country'.<sup>61</sup> His cautious espousal of patriotism was of a piece with a moral philosophy which allowed a role for the various affections provided they were properly understood. In the *Discourse*, Price made it clear that even if one's own community were a community which was properly self-governing, and one in which civil liberty flourished it would not have an exclusive claim upon one's affections; and his belief that some communities were more worthy of affection than others did not conflict with his recommendation of love of country as a virtue, for love of country was critical. Were it not so, it would be the duty of 'only a very small part of mankind', for there were 'few countries that enjoy the advantage of laws and governments which deserve to be preferred'.<sup>62</sup> One's duty to one's country therefore implied a dual commitment to ensure that it became a liberal and enlightened community which was properly free and self-governing, and to ensure that it did not behave in such a way as to infringe the rights and interests of other communities: offensive wars were always unlawful, only defensive ones could be justified.<sup>63</sup> For him, communities were individuals writ large. They were subject to similar moral restraints and the same duty to seek to understand properly their interests and to be mindful of the interests of others.<sup>64</sup>

Price's ethical teaching demonstrates a lively appreciation of the difficulties of reconciling the daily practical problems encountered in attempting to live the moral life. It is, therefore, unlikely that he would have countenanced the taming of the dangerous passion of love of country had not the time been propitious for general moral and political enlightenment, when the practical difficulties encountered in moral problems would be mitigated by man's growing wisdom and understanding of the essential unity of the virtues. Towards the close of his *Discourse*, in recommending patriotism, he declared,

`thus we shall promote, in the best manner, our own private interest, as well as the interest of our country'.<sup>65</sup>

The Platonic doctrine of the harmony of the virtues and the Christian invocation to love one's neighbour as one's self blended in this aspiration that self-love and love of country would coincide. This was but a particular instance of Price's belief that 'the three great principles of the love of God, the love of man, and true self love, will always draw us the same way'.<sup>66</sup> And if such a harmony were not achieved on earth, the virtuous patriots could still look forward to the prospect 'of soon becoming members of a perfect community in the

heaven'.<sup>67</sup> Price's peroration on France however, suggested that this consolation would become less necessary (as consolation) for 'light and liberality' were spreading, beginning 'a general amendment...in human affairs' which would lead the dominion of kings and priests to give way to that of law, reason and conscience.<sup>68</sup>

In his *Discourse*, Price had thus tried to show how the passion could be disciplined and regulated so that it harmonized with Christian benevolence. He had, however, already shown by his own example during the American War of Independence that a truly patriotic citizen may be obliged to oppose warfare which one's country is waging.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, he never abandoned the notion that 'a virtuous man must be a firm and determined patriot'.<sup>70</sup> Yet the example of Christ, who Price argued had 'a particular affection for his country' yet had refrained from recommending it<sup>71</sup>, showed that one's countrymen had to be capable of enlightenment in such matters before one could preach up the duty of love of country. Even then, it can be suggested that Price made the conditions for the emergence of genuine patriotism too exclusive, for the possibility of such patriotic behaviour depended upon the existence of a considerable degree of liberty both civil and religious. Thus, although Price's concept of love of country as critical solves some of the problems encountered in Montesquieu's concept, it does not solve them all. In his *Civil Liberty*, Price argued that only a government which was free was just and legitimate.<sup>72</sup> Clearly the patriotic citizen should strive to ensure that his government was free. But it is not clear whether one's obligations to love one's country are distinct from those to ensure liberty, whether love of country differs at all from love of liberty. By equating love of country with devotion to a political community, Price has made it more exclusive than Montesquieu and followed the logic of Montesquieu's view that it was a principle of republics. What Price says of the affection has little relevance for subjects who had no rats at all and for countries where equality before the law was but a dream.

Price's recommendation of love of country and his failure to consider the relevance of his remarks to countries which were not political communities is indicative of the optimism of the late 1780s. In 1789, Price could see even more reason for being enthusiastic about the possibility of progress than he had in 1787. The centenary of the Glorious Revolution in 1788 not only provided reformers with the opportunity to issue timely reminders of the need for the fulfillment of principles of the revolution, but also the chance for the renewal of pride in those principles. Rev. Joseph Towers, in his address to the Society for Commemorating the Revolution, described patriotism as 'that sacred

flame', and he reminded his audience that 'genuine patriotism' and 'ardent attachment to public liberty' went hand in hand. He acknowledged, in a footnote to the published version, that his arguments were 'chiefly appropriate to Great Britain', yet he sincerely hoped that the French would recover 'their liberties' and that 'the blessings of freedom may be extended to the whole human race'. He added that his wish was that France and England would abandon their ancient hostility and join in becoming the emancipators of mankind.<sup>73</sup> A year later, in his *Discourse*, Price took up this theme. He believed that the philosophes had 'sowed a seed' which was now producing 'a glorious harvest'; they had prepared men's minds for 'the recovery of their rights', and, like Towers, he added a footnote expressing the aspiration that Britain and France would unite to make the world 'free and happy'.<sup>74</sup> In the congratulatory address which Price moved on behalf of the Revolution Society to the French National Assembly, he described France's revolution as a 'glorious example...to encourage other nations to assert the unalienable rights of mankind'.<sup>75</sup> The French response from the Duke of Rochefoucauld, to whom it was initially conveyed, and from the Archbishop of Aix, President of the National Assembly, was sympathetic. According to the Duke, the National Assembly had seen in the address,

'the dawn of a glorious day, in which two nations who have always esteemed one another notwithstanding their political divisions and the diversity of their governments, shall contract an intimate union, founded on the similarity of their opinions and their common enthusiasm for liberty.'<sup>76</sup>

For his part, the Archbishop endorsed Price's sentiments, believing that the time was ripe for extinguishing 'national hatred and rivalry' and that France and Britain, 'the two most enlightened people of Europe, ought to show, by their example that the love of country is perfectly compatible with every sentiment of humanity.'<sup>77</sup>

Characteristically, Price confided to his journal both his worries about the outcome of the revolution and his immense expectations for such an unparalleled event. Noting that the *Discourse* had gone through five French editions, he hoped that he had 'contributed somewhat towards promoting the spirit of liberty which is now *regenerating* that kingdom'.<sup>78</sup> In June 1790, he was relieved to record that the National Assembly had not granted 'the King the power of making peace and war' and he thought that the prospect of the revolution being 'happily settled' were rosier than ever.<sup>79</sup> On the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, at a commemorative dinner, he gave the toast, 'An Alliance

between France and Great Britain, for perpetuating peace, and making the world happy.' In proposing this, he envisaged a rudimentary league of nations to be formed under the auspices of France and Great Britain, Holland and other European countries and, across the Atlantic, the United States, which would be able to prevent, in an unspecified way, conflict between nations.<sup>80</sup> In a sense, he envisaged these states belonging to an enlightened imperial arrangement of the sort which he had earlier contrasted with the awful Roman example.<sup>81</sup> Clearly, he now expected the consummation of his ideas about the unity of mankind and the comity of nations which had been in his mind and prayers over the years, and which enabled him to believe that love of country could play its part in a harmonious arrangement of the virtues. He died some nine months after proposing the compact for 'promoting *peace on earth and good-will among men*'.<sup>82</sup> We may count him fortunate in not living to witness the speedy breakdown of such ambitions.

The dramatic collapse of aspirations for the pursuit of love of country in a spirit of concord only serves to heighten the very special significance of the late seventeen eighties which made such hopes possible. 1789 was the cosmopolitan moment when it appeared that the true principles of government were spreading rapidly throughout the world. In retrospect, it can be seen that Price's concept of love of country was dependent upon thoroughly enlightened assumptions: upon a uniformitarian view of man's nature, upon the belief that right thinking citizens in whatever polity could agree upon the conduct which governments ought to observe, and upon the view that love of country was indistinguishable from the obligations of a citizenship which was ultimately of the world. It was also fostered by a millennial interpretation of the future in which prescriptive notions of love of country would eventually become descriptive. It is, however, too easy to point to the naivety of his views and assume that they were swept aside by the new nationalism evoked by the French Revolution which emphasized the uniqueness of the state and the exclusiveness of its claims upon its citizens. Even when the euphoria of the early years of the revolution evaporated and the revolutionary wars became wars between nations, radicals in Britain sustained a loyal and courageous opposition to those wars based upon the example and precepts of Richard Price. The creation of an anti-war movement, the Friends of the Peace, which not pacifist but rather concerned with the proper regulation of the patriotic spirit, was one of the most tangible developments arising from the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment and its general unease about war.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Observations on the importance of the American Revolution, in, Richard Price and the ethical foundations of the American Revolution*, B. Peach ed. (Durham, N. Carolina, 1979), 210. Subsequent references to Price's pamphlets edited by Bernard Peach will give the title followed by 'Peach ed.'.

<sup>2</sup> Price cited the authority of Montesquieu in his *Observations on the nature of civil liberty, Additional Observations on the nature and value of civil liberty and the war with America, and Observations on the importance of the American Revolution*, Peach ed., 75, 80, 139, 155-156, 158-159, 169, 183-184. See, F.T.H. Fletcher, *Montesquieu and English politics, 1750-1800* (London, 1939, repr. Philadelphia, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> Montesquieu, *The spirit of laws*, trans. Thomas Nugent repr. with intro. by Franz Neumann, Hafner Press, New York, 1949, lxviii.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, bk III, chs. 5-7; bk.V, 2 [pp. 22-25,40-41].

<sup>6</sup> N.O. Keohane, *Philosophy and the state in France. The Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1980), 414; *The spirit of laws*, lxvii-lxix. Here Montesquieu wrote that 'The most happy of mortals should I think myself could I contribute to make mankind recover from their prejudices.... It is endeavoring to instruct mankind that we are best able to practice that general virtue which comprehends the love of all'. This virtue seems much closer to 'love of country' than honour, 'that is the prejudice of every person and rank'.

<sup>7</sup> Price, *A Review of the principal questions in morals*, D.D. Raphael ed. (Oxford, 1974, repr. of third edn., 1787, corrected and enlarged), 165 [hereafter, *Review*]; *Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, 2nd ed. (London, 1789), pp.42-43 [hereafter, *Discourse*]. The latter was probably a covert reference to Charles James Fox. It appears that in preaching the discourse Price had made 'some expressions of great asperity against Mr. F.' and that these were omitted from the published version. Northallerton Record Office, Wyvill Papers, MS 2FW 7/2/159/6, Disney to Wyvill, 9 July, 1803. See also, *A sermon delivered to a congregation of Protestant Dissenters at Hackney* (1779), Peach ed., 279-280.

<sup>8</sup> *Observations on the importance of the American Revolution*, Peach ed., 210; *Discourse*, 5-7.

<sup>9</sup> *Discourse*, 7-8.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Lambeth Palace Record Office, MSS 2103, Porteus Notebooks, f.45, 15 Aug., 1791.

<sup>12</sup> *Britain's happiness and the proper improvement of it represented in a sermon preach'd...on Nov. 29. 1759* (London, 1759), 10, 20.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>14</sup> See, John Sainsbury, *Disaffected patriots. London supporters of revolutionary America 1769-1782* (Kingston and Montreal, & Gloucester, 1986?), 129-131; & D. Jarrett, *The begetters of revolution. England's involvement with France, 1759-1789* (London, 1973), 150-152; this work provides a detailed analysis of the politics of 'patriotism' in this period.

<sup>15</sup> *The general introduction and supplement to the two tracts on civil liberty, the war with America, and the finances of the kingdom* (1759), Peach ed., 60.

<sup>16</sup> W. Adams, 'On the love of our country', in, *The English preacher: or sermons on the principal subjects of religion and morality, selected, revised and abridged from various authors. Volume the ninth. Containing occasional sermons* (London, 1774), 211.

<sup>17</sup> 'Richard Price's journal for the period 25 March 1787 to 6 February 1791 deciphered by Beryl Thomas with an introduction and notes by D.O. Thomas', *The National Library of Wales Journal*, XXI, no.4, Winter 1980, entry 25 Jan. 1789, 389-390 [hereafter, 'Price's Journal']. The first extant letter between Price and Adams, 21 Dec., 1769 shows Price assisting in the publication of a sermon by Adams on 'A Test of true and false doctrines', *The Correspondence of Richard Price; volume I: July 1748 -March 1778*, D.O. Thomas & B. Peach eds. (Durham, North Carolina & Cardiff, 1983), 84.

<sup>18</sup> *Observations on civil liberty*, Peach ed., 80. It is not being suggested that Adams's views played a critical role in the formation of Price's ideas at this time. On this occasion, Price cited the authority of Montesquieu, but when he made an identical point in his *Additional observations*, he quoted Hume's *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* (1740). Peach eds., 80, f.n. '1; 154.

<sup>19</sup> *Additional observations*, Peach ed., 130.

<sup>20</sup> *Complete prose works of John Milton; volI 1624-1642*, D.M. Wolfe ed. (New Haven & London, 1953), 422. I am grateful to Mr. Warwick Forster for this reference.

<sup>21</sup> Lactantius, *Seven books of divine wisdom*, Bk.VI, ch.6. The translation is by Milton; for a modern translation, see, *Lactantius. The divine institutes*, bks I-VII, trans. Sister M.F. McDonald, O.P. (Washington, D.C., 1964). Lactantius was anxious to draw on the authority of the classical authors while exposing the limitations of their earthly wisdom, for, 'no one...is just and wise except the one whom God has instructed with heavenly precepts'. Ibid. Lactantius was one of the 'principal ecclesiastical writers' referred to in Priestley's *A History of the corruptions of Christianity* (1782, repr. London, 1871), vi; more interesting is the fact that Theophilus Lindsey quoted Lactantius in the preface to his *Apology...on resigning the vicarage of Catterick* (1774).

<sup>22</sup> *The anglia historia of Polydore Vergil A.D.1485-1537*, ed. with trans. by D. Hay, *Camden Series*, LXXIV, (1950), 243.

<sup>23</sup> P. Furneaux, *The duty of benevolence and public spirit* (London, 1775), 10.

<sup>24</sup> T. Percival, *Medical ethics* (Manchester & London, 1803), 198-199; J. Jebb, *The works, theological, medical, political and miscellaneous*, J. Disney ed. (London, 1787), I, 189-190, nos. 88 & 90.

<sup>25</sup> C. Wyvill, *Political Papers* (York, 1794-1806), I, 253-254.

<sup>26</sup> B. Peach ed., *Richard Price and the ethical foundations of the American Revolution*, app.8, 'Selected correspondence', 319, Price to F. Dana, 26 Sept., 1780.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., Price to Franklin, 22 Dec., 1780.

<sup>28</sup> *A Sermon delivered...at Hackney* (1779), Peach ed., 278-279.

<sup>29</sup> Price, *Britain's happiness*, passim; Adams, 'On the love of our country', loc.cit., 216-218.

<sup>30</sup> D.O. Thomas, *The honest mind. The thought and work of Richard Price* (Oxford, 1977), 297.

<sup>31</sup> *Sermons on various subjects* (London, 1816), 86.

<sup>32</sup> *The evidence for a future period of improvement in the state of mankind, with the means and duty of promoting it* (London, 1787), 5.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., Bolingbroke, *Letters on the study and the use of history*, in, I. Kramnick ed., *Bolingbroke's Historical Writings* (Chicago and London, 1972), Letter 2, 15. For a discussion of the tradition which Bolingbroke represents see H. Cunningham, 'The language of patriotism, 1750-1914', *History Workshop*, 12, Autumn 1981, 8-13; Jarrett, op.cit., passim, & I Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his circle. The Politics of nostalgia in the age of Walpole* (Cambridge, Mass. & London, 1968). Kramnick notes (p.170) that Price praised Bolingbroke's "Patriot" Opposition in his *Appeal to the public on the subject of the national debt* (1771). A fascinating examination of Bolingbroke's contribution to the idea and language of patriotism in Britain and France may be found in, D.J. Fletcher, 'The emergence of Patriotisme', *Semasia*, Band 4, 1977, pp. 1-14.

<sup>39</sup> Adams, 'On the love of our country', 213, 214, 216-217.

<sup>40</sup> W. Coxe, *A Letter to the Rev. Richard Price...upon his discourse on the love of our country* (London, 1790), 8-11. The same point was made by the anonymous author of, *Observations on Doctor Price's revolution sermon* (London, 1790), 23-25.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 12-14.

<sup>42</sup> P. Fumeaux, *The duty of benevolence and public spirit*, 11-12. Furneaux considers benevolence both as an obligation and as a cultivation of a natural affection. W. Stafford has argued that Rational Dissenting arguments for benevolence can be traced to Hartley for whom 'benevolence was not natural but acquired'. Certainly he was a major formative influence on ideas concerning benevolence. But it can be argued, that the process by which individual benevolence developed by degrees into universal benevolence was, according to Hartley, a natural one - even sex was a 'source of the benevolent affections'. Moreover, Price was not, like Hartley, an associationist. Indeed, the idea that affections could become more and more generalized was not specific to Hartley. For example, in support of such an aspiration, Bolingbroke quoted part of the conclusion of the poem dedicated to him, Pope's *An Essay on Man*:

Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake;  
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake,  
The centre mov'd, a circle straight succeeds;  
Another still, and still another spreads;  
Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace,  
His country next, and next all human race.

W. Stafford, 'Religion and the doctrine of nationalism in England at the time of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars', *Studies in church history*, 1982, 18, ed. S Mews: *Religion and national identity*, 383-385; D. Hartley, *Observations on man, his frame, his duty, and his expectations*, 5th edn. (London, 1810), I, 242, II, 16-17; Bolingbroke, *Letters on the study and use of history*, loc. cit., Letter 5, 61-62. For a discussion of the empirical dimension of eighteenth-century ideas of benevolence, see T.A. Roberts, *The concept of benevolence* (London & Basingstoke, 1973).

<sup>43</sup> Coxe, op.cit., 11; Price, *Discourse*, 10.

<sup>44</sup> 'Price's journal', loc.cit., 372-373, 378, 379, 380, 381, 396, 406.

<sup>45</sup> S. Palmer, *The true patriot. A sermon, on the much lamented death of John Howard* (London, 1790), 16.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 32,

<sup>47</sup> *Discourse*, 11.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 2-11, 45.

<sup>49</sup> *Review*, 185-189.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 213-215.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 200-202, 214; *Discourse*, 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Review*, 223-224, 229.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>54</sup> *Review*, 8-9.

<sup>55</sup> *Discourse*, 4-6.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 9-10; cf. W. Stafford, art. cit., 382-384.

<sup>58</sup> *Review*, 148-151, 193. For a detailed discussion of the relationship in Price's thought between self-love and love of mankind, see Thomas, *The honest mind*, 68-111, 298.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 166-169.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 159-161, 208-209; but see also, 163-164, where Price allows considerations of the public good to be 'one important ground' of many of the maxims of justice.

<sup>62</sup> *Discourse*, 6.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 11-30.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Bolingbroke, 'political societies have been always individuals.' *Works*, II, 417, cit., Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his circle*, 187.

<sup>65</sup> *Discourse*, 48.

<sup>66</sup> *Review*, 165-166.

<sup>67</sup> *Discourse*, 48.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>69</sup> D.O. Thomas, *Richard Price and America* (Aberystwyth, 1975), esp. 1-3.

<sup>70</sup> *A Sermon... delivered at Hackney* (1779), 278-279.

<sup>71</sup> *Discourse*, 45.

<sup>72</sup> *Observations on civil liberty*, Peach ed., 69-75.

<sup>73</sup> Joseph Towers, *An Oration delivered at the London Tavern on the Fourth of November 1788...* (London, 1788), 32-34. The constitutional model which Towers had in mind for the French was, of course, the English.

<sup>74</sup> *Discourse*, 14, 30.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., app., 13.

<sup>76</sup> *Discourse on the love of our country*, 3rd edn. (London, 1790), app., 13.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 18-20.

<sup>78</sup> 'Price's journal', loc.cit., 393-394.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 394.

<sup>80</sup> 'Price's journal', loc.cit., app.III, 399.

<sup>81</sup> Price had discussed the possibility of creating a union, or confederation of states, which would have the means, through a representative senate, of arbitrating disputes between members and enforcing its conclusions. He offered this as a solution to conflict in Europe and between Britain and the American Colonies, and as the path towards universal peace. *Observations on civil liberty*, Peach ed., 70-71, 80; *Observations on the importance of the American Revolution*, Peach ed., 187-189.

<sup>82</sup> 'Price's journal', app.III, 399.

<sup>83</sup> See, J.E. Cookson, *The friends of peace. Anti-war liberalism in England 1793-1815* (Cambridge, 1982). This provides a detailed demonstration of the crucial role which Rational Dissent played in the formation of the Friends, although the importance of Price's arguments against offensive war is undervalued. W. Stafford, art. cit, 395, has suggested that religion in general challenged 'the nation with other loyalties and higher concerns', but it was a challenge that many of the clergy were unable to meet. The best general treatment of patriotism and Price's contribution to it in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries can be found in J. Dinwiddy, 'England', in, O Dann & J. Dinwiddy eds., *Nationalism in the age of the French Revolution* (London, 1988). I am grateful to Dr. Dinwiddy for allowing me to read his chapter in advance of publication.

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## ELIE HALEVY AND BENTHAM'S AUTHORITARIAN LIBERALISM

F. Rosen

Elie Halevy's *La formation du radicalisme philosophique* (1901-4) is a complex and subtle study of Bentham's life and work.<sup>1</sup> Although it has not escaped criticism by contemporary scholars, the book has managed remarkably to survive relatively unscathed to remain the single most important study of Bentham's thought.<sup>2</sup> So well-established is the work that it has come to be treated as a neutral source of information about Bentham rather than as an unorthodox and somewhat misleading study of Bentham's role in the development of political thought. The thesis which will be challenged here is Halevy's depiction of Bentham as introducing into liberal thought an authoritarianism which was at odds both with the Whig doctrine which preceded it and with contemporary radical and democratic thought. My criticisms will be based partly on the way in which Halevy interprets Bentham's position and partly on the assumptions he brings to this interpretation.

### I

In each of the three volumes which make up *La formation du radicalisme philosophique*, Halevy tends to distinguish among Bentham's legal, economic and political theories. If in legal matters Bentham was ahead of his age the period between 1776 and 1789, and in economics, an expression of the age which had adopted (as he had) Adam Smith's *Wealth of nations*, in politics he was behind this age of rebellion and revolution.<sup>3</sup> For Bentham's utilitarianism in this period is considered conservative and authoritarian. Above all, in Halevy view, it contains few elements of liberalism.

To use the term 'liberalism' to depict political ideas prior to the French Revolution, and, indeed, prior to the 1820s when it possessed a definite meaning in English politics, is generally recognized as hazardous.<sup>4</sup> Halevy complicates matters further by considering Bentham's liberalism not only by examining various periods but also by distinguishing among the different categories of his thought. Nevertheless, he does make fairly clear what he means by the doctrine which, in his view, Bentham did not adopt in his early political thought. For Halevy, Bentham displayed no great devotion to liberty. In spite of a superficial convergence of opinions between Bentham and those who

favoured liberty (as in Bentham's critique of the excessive severity of judicial punishments), Halevy argues that liberty was not one of the ends of legislation in Bentham's conception of the ends of the civil law and was replaced in his thought by the notion of security. Furthermore, he argues that Bentham did not consider liberty as a means to bring about the general interest—'his philosophy is essentially a philosophy written for legislators and men engaged in government, that is to say, for men whose profession it is to restrict liberty'.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Halevy points out that Bentham was opposed to the sentiment of individual emancipation which was current at the time.<sup>6</sup> He was the disciple of Helvetius whose doctrines were 'despotic, philanthropic, and Utilitarian, but not in the least liberal.' Although Halevy depicts Bentham as the disciple of Adam Smith and identifies Smith with economic liberalism,<sup>8</sup> he also argues that 'it was the idea of utility and not the idea of liberty or intellectual emancipation which was fundamental in Adam Smith, and above all in Bentham.... They endowed the liberal movement which was carrying everything before it in Europe with a Utilitarian formula peculiar to the Anglo-Saxon world'.<sup>9</sup>

If, for Halevy, liberalism means a devotion to liberty and especially liberty as opposed to utility, it also means the acceptance of certain Whig doctrines such as the social contract and mixed government. 'At this time', he writes, 'the idea on which English political liberalism, taken as a whole, was based, was the idea of contract—the very idea against which Hume and Bentham set the contrasting idea of utility'.<sup>10</sup> The criticism of Whig principles seems, in Halevy's view, to bring together Tories and Utilitarians. In politics, Bentham, like Hume, took the side of authority over liberty.<sup>11</sup> He was in his youth a Tory and when he became attached to Lord Shelburne, 'Bentham's Tory friends grew anxious and feared that he would go over to the Americans'.<sup>12</sup>

From these remarks, it seems that for Halevy liberalism in this period means a devotion to liberty and to the 'sentiment' of liberty and emancipation, a devotion to Whig principles such as the social contract (through which resistance might be justified) and the division of power (as the bulwark against despotism), support for the American Revolution, and the acceptance of the principle of commercial liberalism. This collection of doctrines does not, however, easily fit together. Not all Whigs were devoted to liberty above all other principles, that is to say as emancipation, and, as Halevy seems to have recognized, commercial liberalism was based on utilitarian principles which were not necessarily compatible with liberalism as he conceived it. Some of these puzzles are worked out by Halevy in subsequent volumes and some that remain can

be explained by appreciating that Halevy wrote as a Frenchman, for whom the boundaries of English liberalism were marked out with French signposts. He is able to combine Whig principles and liberalism because he sees Whig principles through the legacy of Montesquieu and De Lolme whose ideas formed part of the basis of French liberalism in the 19th century. He also sees the writings of the *philosophes*, such as Helvetius, as intimately linked with despotism (however enlightened) rather than with liberalism.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, if one grants that 'liberalism' is not a term which can be easily applied to the period prior to the French Revolution and that it cannot be automatically identified with Whig principles, Bentham's position becomes more problematic, and he cannot so easily be labelled purely and simply an authoritarian in politics. It is surely arguable that Bentham did not exclude liberty as one of the ends of the civil law. He incorporated the idea of liberty into the concept of security which he depicted as the most important constituent of happiness. Halevy should have appreciated the importance Bentham gave to liberty through security, because he notes that Bentham acquired this conception of liberty from Montesquieu who is recognized as a liberal.<sup>14</sup> Halevy misses the significance of this important link largely because he interprets Bentham on property and civil law as a disciple of Hume. Furthermore, the polarization between utilitarianism and liberalism is partly established by the depiction of Helvetius (who, for Halevy, favoured despotism) as a utilitarian, while liberalism is considered a Whig doctrine. If Bentham was the disciple of Helvetius, then he can be excluded from a share in liberalism. Nevertheless, in examining the utilitarian tradition from Hume and Smith, as well as from the *philosophes*, which Bentham inherited, one finds few elements of 'despotism', and, though conservative in certain respects, the doctrines are liberal in others.<sup>15</sup> After all, Halevy himself ascribes to Adam Smith the origins of economic liberalism.

## II

Halevy next turns to the development of utilitarian thought from the beginning of the French Revolution to 1815. In this volume he dwells least on Bentham's liberalism and casts his net widely to examine more complex developments in English political thought during the revolutionary period. Against the background of the French Revolution, Halevy pays little regard to Bentham's initial enthusiasm for the revolution as in the following passages:



Bentham thus, at first sight, appears to have been converted to the democratic view by the example of France. At bottom, he was not, at the moment, a sincere democrat.<sup>16</sup>

Bentham himself also seemed for a moment to have leanings towards republicanism; but this crisis was extremely short and extremely superficial.<sup>17</sup>

This view seriously underestimates the strength of Bentham's early enthusiasm for events in France which has now been established by contemporary scholars.<sup>18</sup> It also underestimates the distance of his retreat. He, like a number of British enthusiasts, saw the road the revolution was taking. Nevertheless, what concerns us here is not so much Halevy's misreading the evidence as the conclusions he reaches as a result. Whatever else Bentham was during this period, for Halevy, he was neither a republican nor a democrat.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Bentham is cut off intellectually by Halevy's analysis from the libertarian radicalism of Paine and Godwin; but paradoxically, he does not thereby become linked with what Halevy takes to be the defence of English liberalism in the Whig form in Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Halevy again reads English political thought through Montesquieu who noted that simple laws were best suited to despotic regimes.<sup>20</sup> Burke, of course, defended the highly complex, 'time-worn' constitution of England on the grounds that it best preserved liberty.<sup>21</sup> But as Bentham, especially in the final volume of Halevy's study, became identified with a radicalism aimed at simplification in politics, he was, at this earlier stage, cut off from the liberal tradition which is identified by Halevy with Burke through Montesquieu. Thus, at the time of the French Revolution, Bentham is depicted by Halevy as neither a democrat nor a Whig liberal. This political isolation, so to speak, then leads Halevy to place more emphasis than is perhaps warranted on the relationship between Bentham and James Mill in Bentham's 'conversion' to democracy. Scholars today have developed a more complex view of the factors involved in Bentham's so-called 'conversion', and Bentham's earlier attitude towards events in France, though perhaps not as decisive as the influence of James Mill, was nonetheless of some significance.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, Halevy places the greatest emphasis in his account of the beginning of philosophic radicalism on the relationship between Bentham and Mill: '... Bentham gave Mill a doctrine, and Mill gave Bentham a school'.<sup>23</sup> For Halevy, Mill made Bentham into a democrat though not a libertarian democrat in the tradition of Paine and

Godwin.<sup>24</sup> 'James Mill's thesis', he writes, 'was akin to the traditional thesis of the Whig liberalism, and he based himself... on the principle of the artificial identification of interests in order to demand that, granted the necessity of government control, the government itself should be submitted to an organised control'.<sup>25</sup> This move to link philosophic radicalism with traditional Whig doctrines via James Mill does not seem in itself objectionable. It is also an argument on which Halevy placed the greatest stress, as in the following passage:

At bottom, the Radical theory of the representative regime, interpreted in this way, tended to be assimilated to the thesis of traditional English Liberalism. The party tended to lose its Utopian and revolutionary character, and to become a party of bourgeois doctrinaires—the party that fifteen years later, was to be called the party of 'intellectual' or 'Philosophical Radicals'.<sup>26</sup>

This apparently innocent assertion paves the way for Halevy's argument that Bentham's liberalism is largely authoritarian. For if Bentham's liberalism (which he supposedly obtained from Mill, as he is not a liberal) is a version of Whig Liberalism, and Whig liberalism is basically Montesquieu's conception of the English constitution, any deviation from this conception (especially one which is critical of Montesquieu, himself) will be suspect. It will be especially suspect if some of the criticisms of Montesquieu's praise of the English constitution are such that they might be interpreted by Halevy as applicable, in Montesquieu's categories, to despotism. It is in this spirit that Halevy links Bentham's attempts to simplify law and constitutions, surely unobjectionable in themselves, with despotism, because Montesquieu, as we have seen, wrote of the simplification of the law as a characteristic of despotism.

Halevy's argument depends on the way he joins Bentham and Mill to form philosophic radicalism. This partnership is expounded somewhat to absorb (note that the route is through Mill rather than Bentham) the economics of Ricardo and Malthus. 'All the actions in Ricardo's life, after 1811, were willed by James Mill', writes Halevy, to which he adds the well-known quotation (in Bowring's words) from Bentham: 'I was the spiritual father of Mill, and Mill was the spiritual father of Ricardo: so that Ricardo was my spiritual grandson'.<sup>27</sup> In James Mill, Halevy finds all the elements of Philosophic Radicalism joined together, and it was through Mill that the grand synthesis of philosophic radicalism was possible:

But in 1808, he [Bentham] was still neither a Radical nor a Malthusian. It was James Mill who converted him to advanced political liberalism. It was James Mill who, having become a Benthamite, perceived the logical link which connected the ideas of Bentham and of Malthus, became a Malthusian and made use of Ricardo to incorporate the ideas of Malthus with the tradition of Adam Smith.<sup>28</sup>

It was James Mill, who, for Halevy, even became the symbol of utilitarian man:

He was nothing more than the man of abstract convictions, a living example of the Utilitarian morality and of the absolute identification of private interest with the good of humanity... without eyes or ears for the beauties of nature and art, having systematically destroyed in himself the spontaneous impulses of feeling—in short, the Utilitarian whose caricature was soon to become popular.<sup>29</sup>

Even Halevy has to admit that in character and disposition, Bentham was quite different. Nevertheless, Halevy's argument depends on this synthesis of doctrine of Bentham and Mill, which receives its fullest exposition in the final volume of his study.

### III

At one point in the final volume of *La formation*, which concentrates on the period between 1815 and 1832, Halevy poses a number of rhetorical questions:

Must it then be admitted that Bentham under the influence of his friends, but also under the profound influence of contemporary opinion, came to incorporate, almost without knowing it, in his authoritarian Utilitarianism, the formulae of Constitutional Liberalism? Was his radicalism no more than a much more accentuated form of the traditional Whiggism?<sup>30</sup>

Halevy is writing about Bentham's constitutional principles which enjoined the legislator and the people to arrange government so as to *minimize confidence* in rulers in order to minimize the abuse of power. He notes that the idea that the governed should mistrust the government was part of traditional Whig liberalism and underpinned such notions as the right of resistance, right of representation, and even the theory of the division of powers. Having posed his questions, he

concludes that 'Bentham did not think of it in this way', that is to say, did not think of his own theory as a 'much more accentuated form of the traditional Whiggism'.<sup>31</sup>

To support his contention, Halevy argues that Bentham explicitly rejected the main principles of what he calls Whig liberalism. He refers to such notions as a bill or declaration of rights, the division of powers, safeguards for the rights of minorities, the jury system, two legislative chambers, and points to the way Bentham either rejected them or created alternative arrangements such as an omniscient legislature and sovereignty in the people, which appear as radically different alternatives to these liberal measures.

Halevy's argument is misleading in several respects, largely because he fails to appreciate that on the one hand Bentham was clearly drawn to the earlier tradition in philosophy and political thought which Halevy labels 'Whig' but on the other hand was prepared and even eager to advance and revise the basic concepts of this tradition. This was due in Bentham's view to the fact that however well such concepts as the social contract and division of powers may have suited theorists in the 17th century, they had become in the late 18th and early 19th centuries at best clichés and at worst concepts which enabled oppression and corruption to flourish. In his early critique of Blackstone, Bentham was anxious to show that a number of conceptions which Blackstone utilized were meaningless, not because Blackstone was a Whig and Bentham, a Tory, but because both Bentham and Blackstone were disciples of Locke, and Bentham, unlike Blackstone, could discern basic flaws in the Lockean tradition. Furthermore, in his later critique of the principle of the division of power, Bentham could appreciate that the principle was originally intended as a protection from despotic government, and he could accept its use in certain circumstances to serve that end. But he also argued that once the principle of representative democracy was accepted, more suitable checks on the exercise of despotic power were available. Thus, Bentham's rejection of the principle was not the simple replacement of a liberal principle with a despotic one, but rather (to use Halevy's terms) the replacement of one liberal principle by another.

There are at least three reasons for Halevy's failure to appreciate the creative dimension of Bentham's constitutional theory within what has become known, however misleadingly, as the liberal tradition. The first of these may be found in the conflation of the ideas of James Mill and Bentham. We have already noted how Halevy uses their association to suggest that they created a sect isolated from both the Whig tradition

and from other more libertarian, radical movements. This conflation of the two fails to appreciate that Bentham, if not Mill, addressed a wide and varied audience on a number of different levels. He could at the same time urge reform of the law to a sympathetic Whig audience and, in other writings, appeal to republicans and democrats with doctrines emphatically rejected by traditional Whigs. This ability of Bentham to write on different levels to different audiences was surely the reason for Macaulay's display of great respect for Bentham as a jurist while he attacked what he took to be the Benthamite doctrine of James Mill's *Essay on government*.<sup>32</sup> Bentham could also address an audience in the Iberian world or in Greece where he was regarded as an important representative of European liberalism and speak in somewhat different terms to the problems of parliamentary reform in England.<sup>33</sup> He could recommend his democratic *Constitutional code* to an enlightened European monarch and adapt his doctrine of securities to a Moslem state.<sup>34</sup> And while being identified with the political economy of Smith, Ricardo and Malthus, he could appeal to a different audience through his critique of Malthusian pessimism in conjunction with Francis Place.<sup>35</sup> In addressing these widely different political audiences, Bentham did not present different, contradictory doctrines. He simply wrote about a wide range of problems in terms which his different audiences might appreciate. Nevertheless, this capacity hardly makes Bentham a narrow sectarian and surely helps to distinguish him further from the position of Mill.

Halevy's conflation of Bentham and Mill also has some curious consequences in the way he depicts Mill, on the one hand, as bringing liberalism to the Tory Bentham, but on the other hand, as embodying an authoritarian doctrine himself. For example, Halevy ascribes a brief period of sympathy in Bentham for the jury system as due to the influence of Mill, 'a democrat and liberal'.<sup>36</sup> But soon afterwards, he calls attention to Mill's admiration of Hobbes whom he depicts as 'a theorist of absolute government'.<sup>37</sup> This link with Hobbes is then quickly shifted to Bentham, so that the doctrine that a right becomes real only when sanctioned by force is 'the essential thesis of the philosophy of right founded in the seventeenth century by Hobbes, and developed in the eighteenth by Bentham'.<sup>38</sup> Halevy's approach allows him to ignore the fact that Bentham took little interest in Hobbes and never expressly regarded him as an influence on his own work. But so long as Mill admired Hobbes, Halevy is able to use this to ascribe Hobbes's authoritarianism (such as it was) to Bentham.

Above all, the conflation of Mill and Bentham tends to minimize the

creative side of Bentham's thought which is not as strong in Mill. If Mill was doctrinaire and sectarian, Bentham was more creative, experimental, and innovative. Bentham himself hardly belonged to the caricature of Benthamism, of which Mill became the archetypal figure. And it might be argued that this willingness to experiment is more a mark of liberalism than a slavish adherence to 17th century Whig principles in the 19th century.

A second reason for Halevy's failure to appreciate the creative side of Bentham's constitutional theory may be found in his approach to this theory via Bentham's writings on evidence and adjective law. Halevy begins by noting that Bentham's theory utilized two important distinctions. First, Bentham proposed three codes (civil, penal, and constitutional) to form a complete body of laws; and secondly, he distinguished between adjective and substantive law.<sup>39</sup> This gave him four categories—civil, penal, constitutional, and adjective. Halevy then argues that Bentham's doctrine of civil and penal law was well established early in his career, at least by the time of the *Traité*, but what remained incomplete were adjective and constitutional law.<sup>40</sup> These, he continues, can be studied together. One reason for studying them together is that constitutional and adjective law operate in similar ways and that constitutional law is in part reducible to adjective law.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, adjective law can be regarded as part of constitutional law, and he notes that Bentham devoted a third of the *Constitutional code* to the problem of judicial organization.

It is to Halevy's credit that he was probably the first scholar to appreciate the scale and significance of Bentham's writings on evidence and procedure. This may have been due to his tendency to interpret Bentham in relation to James Mill who assisted Bentham with the completion of the *Introductory view* and whose son, John Stuart, edited the massive *Rationale of judicial evidence*.<sup>42</sup> But he also thought very highly of the *Rationale* itself and considered it Bentham's most important work.<sup>43</sup> In addition, the theory of evidence is considered the main component of adjective law and hence the key to Bentham's constitutional thought. Nevertheless, Halevy's argument is misleading in several respects. In the first place, there is no evidence to suggest that Bentham regarded the principles of penal and civil law as fully settled and those of adjective and constitutional law as yet to be resolved. In the 1820s, for example, Bentham set out to construct a *pannomion*, or complete code of laws, and gave no indication that his work in penal or civil law was already complete.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, he wrote considerable new material in these areas as he did on adjective and constitutional law.<sup>45</sup> In

the second place, there is no evidence to suggest that Bentham himself regarded adjective law as the key to constitutional law or that constitutional law might be reducible to it. While it is true that Bentham felt unable to complete his constitutional code and especially the material on judicial organization and procedure in 1824, until he settled some matters of adjective law, it does not follow that constitutional law is reducible to adjective law, or that with the exception of the obvious connection between judicial procedure and judicial organization, they are even closely related. In the third place, and most important perhaps, is the fact that many of Bentham's ideas about constitutional organization developed from his writings on parliamentary reform and from the radical critique of British government (together with a growing admiration for American government) which developed after 1809 and his conversion to radicalism. Halevy's thesis about Bentham's liberalism requires that Bentham's ideas remain apart from that tradition to which he has access mainly through James Mill.

The third reason for Halevy's failure to appreciate Bentham's creativity is that he tends to view what he calls 'Anglo-Saxon liberalism' in terms of French categories. Here, again, he approaches Bentham's constitutional theory through evidence and procedure, where, above all, according to Halevy, Bentham stressed the importance of simplification. Now, the "simplification" of the Benthamite, he writes, 'shocked the liberal, or supposedly liberal, prejudices which were particularly dear to public opinion in England, but which had been sanctified throughout the whole civilized world by the testimony of Montesquieu.'<sup>47</sup> The 'prejudices' dear to public opinion, he finds in Burke, but the more important reference here is to Montesquieu who links, as we have seen, the simplification of the laws and of judicial procedure with despotism. "Bentham criticized rules of evidence and procedure which curbed the discretion of a judge; for 'disciples of Montesquieu', these rules are 'guarantees of the liberty of the accused'.<sup>49</sup> Bentham's advocacy of a single judge (so as to enhance his accountability) is linked with continental Enlightened Despotism. Bentham's advocacy of administrative centralization is 'inspired primarily by the French system'.<sup>50</sup>

For Halevy, the opposition between Bentham and Montesquieu is perhaps strongest in Bentham's critique of current British judicial formalities (the 'technical system') in which Montesquieu 'saw so many guarantees of liberty'.<sup>51</sup> These are, in Halevy's view, the liberties which Blackstone attempted to defend in the *Commentaries* and which Bentham saw as so many devices used by 'Judge and Co' to secure the

profits from corruption and serious abuses of power. If Montesquieu said that to breach the rule which prevented a man being condemned to death by a single witness was fatal to liberty, then a discussion by Bentham of the utility of such a rule is considered as a rejection of liberty.<sup>52</sup> The same approach is taken by Halevy with respect to Bentham's critique of the English jury system. Bentham and Montesquieu (and hence Bentham's liberalism) are also juxtaposed, as we have seen, on the issue of the division of powers. Bentham argues for legislative supremacy, but, for Montesquieu, 'to absorb the executive and the judicial powers in the legislative power is to establish a despotic government'.<sup>53</sup> 'Once again', notes Halevy, 'Bentham puts himself against the authority of the name of Montesquieu'.<sup>54</sup>

In recalling Bentham's critique of Montesquieu, it is also important to recall his praise of and indebtedness to Montesquieu's earlier work. 'The errors of Montesquieu', Bentham wrote at one point, 'were the errors of an original genius struggling under the heap of confusion accumulated by his predecessors. A great part of that heap he has contributed to remove.'<sup>55</sup> When comparing Montesquieu and Blackstone, he could write: 'The Englishman copied: but the Frenchman thought.'<sup>56</sup> These remarks give some indication of the way in which Bentham saw his own writing developing in relation to Montesquieu. Like the earlier Frenchman, he too was an innovator who attempted to take legal theory, not in a new and more authoritarian direction, but along the same road of critical discovery of new truths in jurisprudence. Halevy presents Montesquieu and Bentham primarily as developers of opposing doctrines, but Bentham thought of himself as providing a doctrine which might legitimately succeed that of Montesquieu.

Among the principles which Bentham surely accepted and which might be included in a list of fundamental 'liberal' principles are: individual liberty, the rule of law, and freedom of speech, discussion, and the press. He conceived of liberty in terms of security and made security the most important constituent of happiness and the main object of the civil law. As a jurist, he placed great emphasis on the rule of law, even where he wanted to reform it, and he was in the forefront of numerous struggles for freedom of speech and especially for freedom of the press. Halevy underemphasizes this basic orientation towards liberty, because he attempts to see liberal doctrines in several respects as equivalent to Whig doctrines, and these Whig doctrines through the categories of Montesquieu. As a result, distinctions between Whig and Radical ideas become confused with liberalism. This confusion, together with the confusion arising from the attempt to project

liberalism back into the 18th century, and beyond, leads to a failure by Halevy to appreciate the importance of Bentham's liberalism.

The distinction between Whig and Radical is not an easy one to draw. Both Whigs and Radicals differed among themselves on the most fundamental issues, as one might expect from a distinction which supposedly affected English politics for a considerable period. Nevertheless, one main dividing point was over the issue of universal suffrage and representative democracy. On the whole, though not universally so, Radicals favoured representative government based on a widespread suffrage and Whigs did not. Bentham, of course, especially after the publication of the *Plan of parliamentary reform* (1817) was widely recognized as a Radical and democrat.<sup>57</sup> But this did not make him an authoritarian, as Halevy has suggested. For Halevy, a belief in democracy meant Jacobinism and the 'general will' of Rousseau; these were, in his opinion, authoritarian, even despotic, doctrines.<sup>58</sup> But Bentham's radicalism was not based on doctrines or principles related to the French Revolution and an understanding of this fact is the key to understanding his liberalism. Bentham's democratic theory was related to American practice. And though French liberals, at least since Tocqueville, have tended to regard American democracy with critical eyes, there is surely a difference between American constitutional democracy and the radical doctrines associated with the French Revolution.

It is perhaps easier today than when Halevy was writing to distinguish between English radicalism and theories of democracy at the time of the French Revolution and those theories which emerged in the 1820s. By the 1820s not only was the new 'science' of political economy more fully established and utilitarianism had made an indelible mark on political thought in general, but also the failure of the French Revolution and the success of democracy in America encouraged the development of new perspectives based upon more realistic expectations of what might be achieved by democratic government. Furthermore, the 1820s saw the conjunction of a successful democracy operating in the United States and new possibilities for extending democracy in Latin America, Spain, Portugal, and Greece which encouraged fresh thought about democracy and new theories to emerge. Bentham was certainly encouraged by these developments to develop a general theory which, in his terms, was applicable 'to all nations and all governments professing liberal opinions'.<sup>59</sup> To this theory it would be inappropriate to apply the label 'Jacobin' just because it favoured representative democracy. Bentham's theory by the 1820s had absorbed into it not only Jacobinism but

anti-Jacobinism and could still advocate representative democracy, because the critique of Jacobinism was in part no longer relevant, and the useful part of that critique was already a lesson learned. The example of America showed that one could have representative democracy with security of property, that popular sovereignty need not mean mob rule or terror, and that decreasing inequality was possible without a threat to individual security. Bentham's theories refined and developed these basic perspectives.

It may be argued that Halevy's critique of Bentham did not depend wholly on his confusing Bentham's theory of democracy with earlier French theory and practice. Halevy's most telling criticisms appear in the material on judicial organization and procedure which is then used to criticize Bentham's constitutional theory. Before examining these criticisms, it is important to re-emphasize Bentham's creativity in devising various means by which government was made more accountable to the governed. It is perhaps a mark of his liberalism that Bentham was willing to adopt ideas for practices considered by others as illiberal and make them fit into a pattern which aimed at securing the individual from oppression and misrule.

One persistent criticism which Halevy makes of Bentham is that he placed too much reliance on the efficacy of publicity and public opinion in securing good government.<sup>60</sup> Halevy, in turn, sees legal rewards and punishments as the only effective way to secure responsibility and argues that Bentham's own theory also accepted the artificial identification of interests as the basis of his constitutional theory. It is important to note, as Halevy does, that Bentham's emphasis on publicity and public opinion pre-dated his democratic theory but nonetheless played an important role in it. Before he became a democrat Bentham emphasized the importance of publicity and public opinion as ways of curbing the illegal and immoral acts of rulers and others in positions of authority. It was not simply a matter, for Bentham, of his having greater faith in public opinion than in law. He believed that it was unlikely that those responsible for making laws would use these laws to benefit the community when it was in their power to use them to benefit themselves. Thus, for Bentham, public opinion was crucial despite the existence of legal remedies. When he became a democrat, he had additional incentives for developing and emphasizing this position. But he never argued that *vox populi, vox Dei*. The power of the people was limited, but if law was not readily available, public opinion was.<sup>61</sup>

Bentham's tendency not to see in law all remedies for political and

judicial oppression was also linked to his distrust (perhaps 'hatred' is a better word) of the motives and achievements of the legal profession. Halevy finds Bentham's hatred of lawyers threatening to the sanctity of the rule of law—a traditional liberal precept—which Bentham at times seemed to call into question. The simplification of judicial procedure and organization was also interpreted by Halevy as threatening the principle of the rule of law. This position is tenable only if Bentham did not present alternative procedures which upheld the rule of law, and, at the same time, checked and reduced the power of lawyers and judges to act arbitrarily in the judicial system. Bentham did not challenge the importance of the rule of law; indeed, he confirmed its importance by attempting to secure for the law a reduction in arbitrary interference by an excessive dependence on those whose job it was to enforce it. Halevy's criticisms would have greater force if he could show that Bentham's alternatives, as developed at length in the *Constitutional code*, also threatened the rule of law. But merely to show that they differed from Whig principles is not to establish that they were for this reason alone authoritarian. For example, Bentham opposed the idea of an independent judiciary not directly accountable to the legislature and the people, but he nonetheless gave judges extensive power in reviewing, revising, and suggesting new acts for incorporation into various codes. Similarly, while Bentham was critical of the traditional jury system, his conception of the 'quasi-jury' was fully intended to be a worthy substitute. Halevy fails to consider seriously these alternatives, which Bentham proposed, largely because he fails to appreciate the creative side of Bentham's constitutional theory.

## V

That Halevy's portrayal of Bentham's liberalism is a striking departure from conceptions held by others writing at this time may be seen in a brief comparison with Leslie Stephen's first volume of *The English Utilitarians*, published a year before Halevy's work and mentioned in his bibliography.<sup>62</sup> Even though Halevy's study is more philosophical and Stephen's more biographical, and Halevy uses the unpublished manuscripts while Stephen confines himself to published works, these differences do not account for the fundamental difference of perspective displayed by the two authors. In Stephen, for example, there is neither an argument that Bentham was hostile to liberty nor that the utilitarians were an isolated sect. Bentham is measured neither against Montesquieu nor against Helvetius.<sup>63</sup> These are not omissions by Stephen, as he provides an alternative account of Bentham's liberalism (now more properly called his 'radicalism') which, if not valid

in every respect today, may still stand comparison with Halevy's account. Stephen grants that Bentham was initially a Tory, though he points out that Bentham had no natural party allegiance, and his main political 'friends' were Whigs.<sup>64</sup> Stephen also portrays him as politically isolated not only from the parties but also from doctrines such as the 'Rights of Man' and the arguments of reformers like Paine.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, he does not transform him into a sectarian, and his isolation is considered short-lived. Bentham 'was drawing into closer connection with the Radicals', writes Stephen referring to the period just after 1809-10, and he notes contacts with Cobbett, John Hunt, Romilly, Burdett, Wooler and Birckersteth as well as the importance of James Mill.<sup>66</sup>

Stephen's main argument about Bentham's radicalism is directly opposed to that of Halevy:

Bentham's development coincided with that of the English reformers generally. They too began with attacking specific abuses. They were for "reform not revolution".<sup>67</sup>

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Thus, both Bentham and the reformers generally started—not from abstract principles, but from the assault upon particular abuses. This is the characteristic of the whole English movement, and gives the meaning of their claim to be "practical". The Utilitarians were the reformers on the old lines; and their philosophy meant simply a desire to systematise the ordinary common-sense arguments. The philosophy congenial to this vein is the philosophy which appeals to experience.<sup>68</sup>

In this passage, Stephen links the utilitarians generally with radical reform in England and with the philosophical tradition which is associated with Locke. He thus places Bentham in the mainstream of English liberalism. He then argues that this tradition, though opposed to what he calls the ideals of the 'Jacobins', hardly differed from them in practice. But by 'Jacobin' ideals he means simply the ideals of the French Revolution such as those enshrined in the Declaration of Rights of 1791 and not an especially authoritarian doctrine.<sup>69</sup> 'Jacobin' does not carry a pejorative meaning for Stephen as it does for Halevy. He explains the apparent paradox of Bentham's critique and adoption of 'Jacobin' ideals by noting that 'political theories are not really based upon philosophy.'" Though a critic of 'Jacobin' ideas philosophically, as they did not make sense from the empirical and utilitarian perspectives

which he employed, Bentham nonetheless could advance political ideas which were in the end quite similar though justified on utilitarian grounds. But Stephen neither sees the French ideas as authoritarian nor Bentham's doctrine as French. Bentham remains in the mainstream of English political thought, a follower of the empirical tradition of Locke and providing systematic theory for radical reform in the early nineteenth century. Halevy's depiction of Bentham's authoritarian liberalism represents a striking departure from this interpretation.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 3 vols., Paris. The volumes are entitled: *La jeunesse de Bentham* (1901), *L'évolution de la doctrine utilitaire de 1789 à 1815* (1901), and *Le radicalisme philosophique* (1904). The three volumes have been translated (though without the extensive annotation) in *The growth of philosophic radicalism*, trans. M. Morris (London, 1928). References will be given first to the French original and then to the English translation in round brackets. Quotations have been taken from the English translation.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, S. Collini, D. Winch, and J. Burrow, *That noble science of politics, a study in nineteenth-century intellectual history* (Cambridge, 1983), 95n. Some recent criticism may be found in W. Thomas, *The philosophic radicals: nine studies in theory and practice 1817-1841* (Oxford, 1979), 7ff. and L.J. Hume, 'Revisionism in Bentham studies', *The Bentham Newsletter*, No. 1 (1978), 3-20. Halevy's influence has been considerable. See, for example, E. Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford, 1959), where, explicitly adopting Halevy's views (pp. 72ff, 324), Stokes sets forth the misleading argument that Bentham and the English Utilitarians exported an 'authoritarianian' doctrine to India.

<sup>3</sup> Halevy, I, xiv-xv (4).

<sup>4</sup> For a sensitive study of these hazards in the context of the political thought of Benjamin Constant and especially of the difficulty of imposing more recent and not perhaps very profound conceptions of liberalism on this earlier period, see Stephen Holmes, *Benjamin Constant and the making of modern liberalism* (New Haven and London, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Halevy, I, 131 (74).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 130 (74).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 152 (85).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 191 (105).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 216 (118).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 238-9 (130).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 257, 265 (140, 144).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 266 (145).

<sup>13</sup> This antithesis between the 'liberal' Montesquieu and the 'despotic' Helvetius is not one which appears in more recent interpretations of French political thought. See, for example, Kingsley Martin, *French Liberal thought in the eighteenth century*, revised edn., ed. J.P. Meyer (London, 1962), 151, 166, 185.

<sup>14</sup> Halevy, I, 265 (144). See Charles Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, (1748), XI, 6.

<sup>15</sup> For an intelligent attempt to interpret Hume's political thought in terms of a distinction between conservatism and liberalism, see David Miller, *Philosophy and ideology in Hume's political thought* (Oxford, 1981), 194ff.

<sup>16</sup> Halevy, II, 27 (168).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 34-35 (172).

<sup>18</sup> See J.H. Burns, 'Bentham and the French Revolution', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, xvi (1966), 95-114.

<sup>19</sup> Halevy, II, 46 (178).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 55 (183). Montesquieu, op. cit., VI, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Halevy, II, 54 (182-83).

<sup>22</sup> See J.R. Dinwiddy, 'Bentham's transition to political radicalism, 1809-10', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXXVI (1975), 683-700.

<sup>23</sup> Halevy, II, 187 (251).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 196 (255).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 200-210 (258).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 213 (264).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 216 (266) and *The works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. J. Bowring, 11 vols. (Edinburgh, 1838-43), X, 498.

<sup>28</sup> Halevy, II, 295 (301).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 299-300 (309).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 181 (407).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> See *Utilitarian logic and politics*, ed. J. Lively and J. Rees (Oxford, 1978), 153-4, 177-8.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Codification proposal* (1822) (Bowring, IV, 535-594), and *Plan of parliamentary reform* (1817) (Bowring, III, 433-557).

<sup>34</sup> See *Constitutional code*, I, ed. F. Rosen and J.H. Burns (Oxford, 1983), *CW* [Collected works of Jeremy Bentham], xi, and 'Securities against misrule' (Bowring, VIII, 555-600).

<sup>35</sup> See Lea Compos Boralevi, *Bentham and the oppressed* (Berlin, 1984), 109ff.

<sup>36</sup> Halevy, III, 166 (400).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 205 (400).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 227 (431).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 113-114 (373).

<sup>40</sup> *Traité de législation, civile et pénale*, ed. E. Dumont, 3 vols. (Paris, 1802).

<sup>41</sup> Halevy, III, 114 (374).

<sup>42</sup> 'An introductory view of the rationale of evidence' (Bowring, VI, 1-187), and *Rationale of judicial evidence*, 5 vols. (London, 1827) (Bowring, VI, 189-585, VII).

<sup>43</sup> Halevy, III, 133 (383).

<sup>44</sup> See *Constitutional code*, I, *CW*, xxxvff. as *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, xxvi-xxvii.

<sup>46</sup> Halevy, III, 116 (374-75).

<sup>47</sup> See above, n. 20.

<sup>48</sup> Halevy, III, 117 (375).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 118 (375).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 125 (379) citing Montesquieu, VI, 1-2.

<sup>51</sup> Halevy, III, 153-54 (393).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 183 (408).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> A comment on the commentaries and a fragment on government, ed. J.H. Burns and H.L.A. Hart (London, 1977), *CW*, 278. See also p. 403, 'Before Montesquieu all was unmingled barbarism'.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 278n.

Bowring, III, 433-557.

<sup>58</sup> Halevy, I, 269 (146).

This was the original sub-title of the *Constitutional code*. See *Constitutional code*, I, (CW), 1.

<sup>60</sup> Halevy, HI, 189 (411).

<sup>61</sup> See F. Rosen, *Jeremy Bentham and representative democracy* (Oxford, 1983), 19-54.

<sup>62</sup> 3 vols. (London, 1900). See Halevy, I, 441, 'la premiere etude consacree a la personne et a l'oeuvre integrale de Bentham'.

<sup>63</sup> On Helvetius, see *ibid.*, I, 285n

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 195-96.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 216-17.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 288.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 289.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 290, 294, 295, 297.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 290.

<sup>71</sup> Stephen does at one point refer to Bentham's radicalism as 'absolutist' in a comparison of his doctrine of sovereignty with that of Hobbes. 'Both thinkers', he writes, 'are absolutists in principle, though Hobbes gives to a monarch the power which Bentham gives to a democracy' (303). This comment, which has often been made and which plays a minor role in Halevy, is qualified somewhat with the acknowledgement that 'Bentham does not appear to have studied him. The relation is one of natural affinity' (302). Whatever the validity of the comparison, it is one which refers to an ultimate principle of sovereignty rather than to the character of Bentham's liberalism. Neither Stephen nor Halevy have explored Bentham's account of popular sovereignty and the distinctions he developed between constitutive power and operative power on the one hand and between popular sovereignty and an omniscient legislature on the other. An exploration of these themes might have revealed considerable differences in doctrine from that of Hobbes. See H.L.A. Hart, *Essays on Bentham* (Oxford, 1982), 220-242 and Rosen, *Jeremy Bentham and representative democracy*, 22-23, 41-54, 206-211, 239-241.

## PRICE, PROVIDENCE AND THE *PRINCIPIA*

*John Stephens*

In a previous paper I argued that the axioms of Newtonian mechanics were of crucial importance to what I called Price's epistemological strategy.<sup>1</sup> In the *Review of morals*<sup>2</sup> Price did not go beyond arguing that these axioms are self-evident and exemplify the human mind's power of apprehending truth. I now want to take the argument a stage further by looking more closely at the way Price used Newtonian concepts to explain the organization of the material world and God's providential direction of it. This was not something that had been dealt with in the *Review* to any great extent but it received sustained attention elsewhere, notably in the dissertation 'On Providence', one of the *Four Dissertations* published in 1767.<sup>3</sup> A later, polemical, treatment appeared in *A free discussion of the doctrines of materialism, and philosophical necessity* in which Price and Joseph Priestley worked out the consequences of their (on the whole diametrically opposed) views.<sup>4</sup>

The tension between Price and Priestley reproduces in an extreme form one that had been present both in the development of Newton's own thought and also in the practice and discussion of natural philosophy throughout the course of the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> In the *Principia* Newton had shown that certain mathematical regularities could be found in nature and could be expressed in terms of concepts such as inertia, force, and action at a distance.<sup>6</sup> In the *Principia* however he went no further: it was only in the queries appended to later editions of the *Opticks* that he publically speculated about the causes of the phenomena whose existence he had demonstrated.<sup>7</sup> These speculations were taken up with varying degrees of assiduity by eighteenth century writers and it became a commonplace assumption that matter had (in some unstated fashion) powers of its own. The numerous expressions of this view were not necessarily consistent with one another or with themselves: Priestley's work represents an extreme and more sophisticated version of these theories. He conceived of matter in terms of alternate eccentric spheres of attraction and repulsion. Instead of conceiving matter in terms of mass (as the ordinary mechanist would do) he conceived it in terms of powers or forces. Price was incapable of accepting these views: for him the three laws of motion were not (as Priestley argued) generalizations which serve as the foundation of all our reasoning. That matter is inert and that all the phenomena of nature depend on the action of immaterial agents are axiomatic. Price not only held these opinions but found his authority for them in Newton's *obiter*



*dicta*; he saw himself as a representative of the true Newtonian tradition.<sup>8</sup>

Some notion of the character of Price's Newtonianism<sup>9</sup> can be inferred from the two sources he quotes most frequently for the interpretation of Newton's metaphysics. The first of these is Newton himself, or rather Newton as represented in the series of letters he wrote to Richard Bentley whilst the latter was preparing a popular account of his discoveries to be delivered as the last two of his Boyle lectures for 1694.<sup>10</sup> Newton here takes an extreme minimalist position, and is so anxious that Bentley should not ascribe the notion of innate gravity to him that he is opposed to the ascription of any power to matter, whether innate or imposed from without.<sup>11</sup> As a means of interpreting Newton these letters, first published in 1756, are tendentious in the extreme. As is well known, in public he was reluctant to go beyond what he could prove by demonstration, by which term he specifically understood mathematical demonstration. The letters though nominally private are, because of their context, public statements. Whatever Newton's private speculations or the public statements of those associated with him, it was doubtless convenient for Price to discover explicit confirmation of the views that Newton expressed publicly from an ostensibly private source.

The second of Price's chosen authorities—'an excellent philosopher' as he calls him—was Colin Maclaurin whose *Account of Sir Isaac Newton's philosophy* appeared posthumously in 1748. That Price placed so much importance on this book is significant in that Maclaurin was the only one among his generation of Newtonian commentators to assert that what we could know of the natural world amounted only to mathematical regularity:

The laws of nature are constant and regular, and for aught we know, all of them may be resolved into one general and extensive power, but this power itself derives its properties and efficacy not from mechanism, but in a great measure from the immediate influences of the first mover.<sup>12</sup>

Price echoes this:

Sir Isaac Newton ... professes to have discovered only certain facts in the constitution of nature: the causes he has left others to investigate.<sup>13</sup>

The laws of motion are the principal instances of these 'facts'. Not only are they self-evident truths<sup>14</sup> but,

All our reasonings about bodies and the whole of Natural philosophy are founded in the three laws of motion, laid down by Sir Isaac Newton at the beginning of the *Principia*. These laws express the plainest truths; but they would have neither evidence nor meaning, were not inactivity contained in our idea of matter.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed it would be impossible to add a capacity for activity to inert matter by the Divine Power since that would be to change its essence:

If inactivity belongs to it [i.e. matter] at all, it must belong to it *as matter* or solid extension, and therefore must be inseparable from it.<sup>16</sup>

Thus though we can know some of the properties of matter we cannot know others. In particular we cannot know anything of its internal constitution. Nevertheless since the laws of motion are known to be true and since they are predicated on the assumption that matter possesses certain qualities (such as passivity), we can assert that passivity is essential to matter and be certain that any theory which ascribes to matter properties incompatible with passivity cannot possibly be true.

Granted this to be the case, it is not surprising that Price so easily rejects Priestley's assertion that, 'Matter has in fact no properties but those of attraction and repulsion'.<sup>17</sup> So defined matter amounts only to extension which Price equates with void space. Matter so conceived could not possibly act according to the laws of motion:

Two equal solid bodies moving towards one another in contrary directions, and with equal velocities, will meet and impinge and stop one another; but if *un-solid* they would not act at all on one another, but pass through one another, just as if there had been nothing in the way.<sup>18</sup>

Granted the self-evident truth of the laws of motion, it follows that a particle cannot possess at a microscopic level qualities that are incompatible with its macroscopic behaviour. The logical problems entailed by such a view had already been noted by Priestley in *Disquisitions*, the first section of which starts with a discussion of Newton's rules of philosophizing. Priestley says that although:

We have followed these rules pretty closely in other philosophical

researches, it appears to me that we have, without any reason in the world, intirely deserted them in this. We have suffered ourselves to be guided by them in our inquiries into the causes of *particular appearances* in nature, but have formed our notions, with respect to the most *general* and *comprehensive principles* of human knowledge, without the least regard, nay in direct contradiction to them.<sup>19</sup>

These rules, as Priestley paraphrases them, assert (i) 'that we are to admit no more causes of things than are sufficient to explain appearances', and (ii) 'that to the same effect we must as far as possible, assign the same causes'. Priestley points to certain phenomena in what I have called the macroscopic field which might suggest that matter is impenetrable—resistance when I place my hand on a table, the impulsion of billiard balls. As Priestley paraphrases it, the 'vulgar' account runs as follows:

I therefore conclude universally, that all matter, as such is entirely destitute of *power*, and whatever is true of larger bodies with respect to each other, must be equally true of the smallest component parts of the same body; and consequently that all *attraction* or *repulsion* must be the effect of some *foreign power*, disposing either larger bodies, or their small component parts, to certain motions and tendencies, which otherwise they would not have had.<sup>20</sup>

Priestley argues that the resistance 'on which alone our opinions concerning the solidity or impenetrability of matter is formed' is never occasioned by solid matter but by a power of repulsion acting 'at a real and in general an assignable distance from what we call the body itself'. Secondly, he argues that the cohesion of larger masses of matter depends on a power of attraction normally supposed to be a property foreign to or imposed on matter. Therefore, if bodies (or their component parts) do not attract one another, they 'come to nothing at

Here Priestley has in view an ontological pluralism that had become an essential feature of eighteenth century thought. Newtonian dynamics postulated the existence of hard, massy, atoms having no properties other than solidity, the 'essential' character of matter.<sup>22</sup> However in order to explain other phenomena it became necessary to suppose that other powers 'inhered' in matter in some unspecified fashion, or could be 'superadded' by an omnipotent God.<sup>23</sup> This had the virtue of saving the distinction between material and immaterial substance together with the theological implications that this was thought to entail. It was

achieved, however, at the expense of metaphysical coherence. In so far as the powers that are supposed to inhere in matter are directed, that is, demonstrate a coherent, purposive pattern, the dependence on the mere existence of a power is inadequate. For powers to be directed entails the continuing presence of a direct agent supposed to be God or a subordinate agent.<sup>24</sup>

What was left undefined was the nature of the tie (if any) that was supposed to hold between matter and its powers. It was as if two different models were being applied. One, the mechanical, depending on inert matter reacting according to the laws of dynamics. The second emphasized active matter expressed in terms of forces of attraction and repulsion. It was difficult to see how these two could co-exist and the richer explanatory potential of the force model could be seen to make the other redundant. It was this point that was seized upon by Priestley:

The principles of Newtonian philosophy were no sooner known, than it was seen how few, in comparison, of the phenomena of nature, were owing to *solid matter*, and how much to powers.<sup>25</sup>

He is here committed to the Occamist principle that entities are not to be multiplied without necessity and also to the principle that a cause if it is a real cause must have some 'common property' with that upon which it acts:

Let a man torture his imagination as much as he pleases, I will pronounce it to be impossible for him to conceive even the possibility of *mutual action* without some *common property*, by means of which the things that *act* and *react* upon each other, may have some *connexion*.<sup>26</sup>

Priestley does not explain what he meant here and the resultant ontological ambiguity raises some problems for him. He is concerned to avoid positing inferred entities and to explain everything in terms of observed phenomena. He is therefore reluctant to posit entities such as matter or spirit. For Priestley a common property does not carry the same ontological implication that it does for some of his contemporaries. This, no doubt, is why he felt able to explain a series of causes leading to apparently contradictory phenomena—vibrations to consciousness, for example—without feeling the difficulties that so concerned his dualistic contemporaries and which made Priestley's own position impossible for them.

However, if Priestley required a logical ambiguity, Price solved the same dilemma in a different but hardly less contentious fashion. The contrast may be put in this way. If Priestley, seeking some sort of equation between cause and effect, insisted on a common factor, Price aware that certain effects could not be explained by any (material) cause, instead called in an immaterial (and by implication superior) cause to cross the logical gap. The importance of Price's insistence on the inertia of matter can best be understood by considering the alternatives open to him. If one accepted (i) that matter possessed powers of its own (or that 'matter' consisted only of powers) one had to reconcile this supposition with (ii) the fact that the world was organized in a given, consistent, and coherent fashion. The supposition behind (ii) was that the powers that were observed to exist in the world acted in an intelligent way as part of a larger scheme. But if this was so the control of the powers rested entirely with a mind or minds. The effects of powers inhering in or superadded to matter would be random and therefore supposition (i) has to be rejected.<sup>27</sup>

Price's alternative was as follows. If it is granted that powers alone are insufficient to guarantee the stability of the world and maintain the laws of nature, their maintenance must be due to mind which by definition cannot be equated with powers and cannot inhere in matter. It follows that all powers are directed by a superior mind. This guarantees the intentional character of Newtonian mechanics which is not the case with Priestley's determinism. In Price's case the omnipotence of the supreme mind (together with his subordinate agents) enables apparently unrelated agents to affect one another, though it must be noted that this *apparent* lack of relation means no more than that. A further point is that this intentional approach to the laws of nature precludes Priestley's assumption that a cause (in given circumstances) has only one possible effect. Hence this view entails God's continual and guiding presence in the world. Priestley's rejection of this and other views central to the eighteenth century theistic polemic, such as the immateriality and immortality of the soul, doubtless conspired to render his views at best unacceptable, at worst atheistic.<sup>28</sup>

## II

It is easy to dismiss the arguments advanced in the *Free discussion* as little more than the sterile recitation of the consequences of incompatible axioms. Having just hinted at the logical geography within which Price and Priestley operated, it would seem appropriate to examine this further. As I have stated Price's insistence on the immateriality of the

soul is crucial. This staple of eighteenth century apologetic receives a significant variant in Price's hands in that he asserts that the individual mind participates in the Divine Mind. General ideas cannot arise from sensation (which only yields particulars) but from some other source and are identified for the most part with the basic postulates of Newtonian physics: these are abstract ideas which 'seem most particularly to belong to the understanding'. At this point Price also rejects the criticism of the doctrine of abstract ideas made by Berkeley (whom Price may have read) and repeated by Hume (whom he certainly had read). In contrast Price insists that the universality (he is taking a triangle as his example):

consists in the *idea*; and not merely in the *name* as used to signify a number of particulars *resembling* that which is the immediate object of reflexion ... because, was the idea to which the name answers and which it recalls into the mind, only a particular one, we could not know to what other ideas to apply it, or what particular objects had the resemblance necessary to bring them within the meaning of the name.<sup>29</sup>

This is of course compatible only with the non-imagistic view of 'idea' that Price embraces. The nub of Hume's discussion is that 'tis utterly absurd to suppose a triangle really existent, which has no precise proportion of sides and angles'. But Price's views are impervious to Hume's criticism since although,

whenever any general notions are present to the mind, the imagination, at the same time, is commonly engaged in representing to itself some of the particulars comprehended under them ... it would be a very strange inference from hence that we have none but particular ideas.<sup>30</sup>

The triangle is not typical of Price's examples. What he is trying to do is to explain the regularities that we perceive in nature by appealing to a generalized idea of power. Of this we have only a vague and unsatisfactory notion as when we know that we have the power to move our limbs though we only know that this is something we can do. In the same way we are aware of power acting in the natural world. This marks an important difference between Price and his seventeenth century predecessors, notably Cudworth. They had conceived the powers of the mind in terms of a capacity of apprehending universal ideas such as, for example, the idea of substance, or the concept of good. Price, however, conceives of power in terms of the interrelation of particles and forces.

The example of the triangle is not of the same logical type since like certain other universal ideas cited by Cudworth (such as those of the colours) it is always possible to imagine particular instances. In contrast Price is making assertions about what lies behind perceptual experiences: a form of transdiction in other words.<sup>31</sup>

Price thinks that he has shown that Newton's three laws are true in what we take to be the external world, but that we only have a vague understanding of the powers that actuate these laws. A consequence of his belief that Newton's laws are self-evident truths is that he cannot conceive of them as inductive truths. So he cannot accept that these laws may be only partial analogies. Hence in his few discussions of scientific problems Price takes it as an axiom that matter is inert, but never extends the scope of his argument to allow him to specify the power(s)-that act on matter.

This leaves Price free to argue that God is everywhere active, not always directly, but in such a way that 'every law, and every effect and motion in it must *at last* resolve into' the Divine Power. God cannot be an indifferent spectator. He does not necessarily act directly but can use subordinate agents (including human beings) to carry out his will and thus achieve the ends required by Divine Providence. In this way the mechanism by which the world becomes a school of virtue is realized and the moral development of man and his ultimate perfectibility is assured.

In addition God acts as the immediate sustainer of the material world. The general laws by which this world is governed represent the 'immediate power of the Deity exerted everywhere'. He 'is properly the life of [the creation] the *infinite spirit* by which it is informed and sustained ... all material causes are no more than instruments in his hand, and ... from him their efficacy is derived'. Without this activity 'universal confusion would take place and all nature fall to pieces'.<sup>32</sup>

In discussing the mechanism by which this is achieved Price is more circumspect. Citing what has already been quoted about universal gravitation, he states that what he has said about this,

might with equal evidence be proved concerning any more general cause, of which possibly gravitation may be only an effect; such as Sir Isaac Newton's *aether* or whatever other mediums or powers may exist, and the real *primary* causes of the phaenomena of the world. The elasticity, for example, of such an *aether*, as Sir Isaac Newton has

described, supposing it to exist, must be derived, not from any powers of self-motion in the matter of this *aether*, but from the constant agency upon it of an intelligent and omnipresent spirit...<sup>33</sup>

Hence the laws of nature—so called—denote God's *modus operandi* which, by virtue of our limited participation in the Divine Mind we comprehend in part. This has moral repercussions since a regularity of causes is necessary so that we can exercise the virtue of prudence. This is important since it is one of the cardinal features of Price's thought that ethical judgements ought to be made on the basis of the fullest available evidence. However, in that God actively participates in the operation of the physical world, there follows the further consequence that nothing can happen without His approbation. Price borrows from Wollaston the example of a man crushed to death by a falling wall:

How easy would it have been, had his death at this particular time, and in this particular manner, been an event proper to be excluded, or which was not consistent with exact order and righteousness in the regulation of events ... would it have been to hinder him from coming too near the dangerous place, or to occasion his coming sooner or later, by insensibly influencing the train of ideas in his mind, and in numberless other methods, which affect not his liberty.

Since, however, the wall duly crushed the man we can be assured that it happened with God's collusion. We know that 'it was not *right* to be done and that the event did not happen without the counsel and approbation of Providence'.<sup>34</sup>

God can also intervene directly in the natural world. Here again, if the laws of nature are the ways in which God operates and the limits within which he works, He can also intervene to produce extraordinary effects.

Citing Butler, Price asserts that,

the interposition of superior power implied in a miracle however unusual or extraordinary, may be entirely natural: That is; the constitution of the world may be such as allows of it in certain cases. ...I know it is common to think, that miracles imply a *suspension* or *violation* of the laws of nature. But no opinion can be more groundless.

The example that Price cites is the parting of the river Jordan. We cannot here say that the law of gravitation was suspended,

for the water might have gravitated as usual, and the true cause of the event be, the exertion of an adequate superior power to controul the effects of gravitation, in which its suspension is no more implied than in a man's preventing a heavy body from falling, by applying his hand to it.<sup>35</sup>

In our own day an exact and more comprehensive analogy would be the force exerted by a rocket as it leaves the earth's gravitational field.

That the world is sustained by God was an eighteenth century commonplace. Price's particular variant of this theme takes the form of asserting that since the mind's self-activity has something in common with God's, we can make judgements in certain areas with absolute certainty. Although this is only true to a limited extent in questions of natural philosophy, it has a much wider application in matters of morality. The fundamental purchase of Price's argument is that these (moral) ideas are of the same type as those used in natural philosophy and, consequently, are known in the same way. It is significant that at the start of Ch. I, sect. iii of the *Review* he states that he will 'apply the foregoing observations [i.e. relating to ideas in general] to the ideas of right and wrong'. Having established that these ideas arise in the mind, Price finds very little need to justify them further, as opposed to expounding their practical implications. We can perceive that an action is right or wrong in the same way, and, importantly, with the same limitations that attend our idea, for example, of power.<sup>36</sup>

It also follows that if ideas of morality relate, as they must, to actions, they cannot be understood in terms of quasi-mathematical equivalents any more than Newton's ideas of motion can be. Thus Price attacks the commonplace rationalist definition of 'fitness' put about most notably by John Balguy. For Balguy obligation is 'a state of the mind into which it is brought by perceiving a reason for action'. Price argues that what Balguy has described 'is the effect of obligation perceived rather than *obligation itself*'.<sup>37</sup> Obligation forms the moral equivalent of force: it provides in the moral, as force does in the natural, world a reason for action. In both cases it is something we intuit rather than perceive directly.

A second consequence can be noted briefly. In the *Review* Price had a lot to say about what we might call the internal conditions leading to the perception of our obligation to undertake certain acts. What he does not do in the *Review* is define the external restraints that may apply. This he did only in *Observations on the nature of civil liberty* in which he defines

the external liberties that are necessary to render moral action unhindered. These have nothing to do with the internal criterion which is analysed in the *Review*, and this was why Price did not feel the need to undertake a fundamental revision of the text of the work in its last edition in 1787. Consequently Price had no political views that led him to prescribe one single form of government. His criterion was a state's efficiency in giving its citizens the freedom to develop their moral and religious capacities which was grounded in the individual's right to participate in the political process. Hence Price distinguishes between a free government and one in which freedom is (by concession) enjoyed. This explains a good many apparent inconsistencies in Price's political pronouncements and actions. His views changed because his perception of the nature of British Government changed radically in the course of the 1770s: this was why the American Revolution was of such ethical significance since it was an assertion of the right to self-determination which the British government had denied the colonists.<sup>38</sup> It was also a proof that the British Government was not as perfect as Price had once proclaimed it to be. He came to the conclusion that many of the rights that the British nation enjoyed they enjoyed as concessions rather than as rights. One can see this in a hardening in Price's position on the question of the guarantees required of Dissenting Ministers under the terms of the Toleration Act.

Hence for Price metaphysics, perception and Providence are all inextricably linked. The continuous presence of God is the key to understanding Price's philosophy as a whole. In 1748, in the earliest piece of his writing to survive he wrote:

God is continually working within and without us; that whatever happens among human creatures or throughout the world is under immediate, wise and good direction from him, and that we cannot say of any the most minute event, that it would have been better if it had not happened or been permitted to happen.<sup>39</sup>

Already the essentials of the later discourse 'On providence' are all present. Nevertheless we are free and our freedom is an essential part of the working out of our salvation:

It is absolutely necessary ... that intelligent beings should have scope given them for action. There is a plain congruity in making their happiness to arise from the proper exercise of their powers, and to be the result of their own endeavours. This is the only happiness that can suit the natures of active and free creatures. Had they no command

over events; were bliss forced upon them, independently of their own choice and endeavours; or were their states so immutably fixed as not to be liable to be affected by one another, the consequence would be that they would have nothing to do; that their faculties would be given them in vain; that virtue would be totally excluded from the creation, an universal stagnation or quietism take place in it.<sup>40</sup>

God directs us by presenting choices to our minds: in responding to them we develop our capacity to grow in virtue. So it is also in the providential relation of God to political events. Price saw himself as the heir to one revolution—that of 1688—and the witness of two others, both glorious so he thought. The words of the peroration to the *Discourse on the love of our country* perhaps, above all, show how he thought of this providential aspect of history. The ardour for liberty there shown is evidence of the self-awareness that is necessary for true freedom. In that sense he thought that he was in the last days when the final perfection of man would be attained. On occasion he uses the rhetoric supplied by the scriptures as one would expect from a minister of religion. But he was not a millenarian like Priestley who read the events of his time in the light of the books of Daniel and Revelation. This for Price was to deprive man of the chance of bringing about his own salvation. Without that freedom of the individual mind Price's thought loses its cohesion.<sup>41</sup>

In creating man God created creatures that share his own properties. He did not determine beforehand what man should be. Instead a chain of being from the lowest to the highest came into existence. Besides this there was the application of the principle of plenitude. Happiness is a free gift from God and it is the purpose of His Providence to spread this as far as possible in this world and indeed in others. All this is predicated on the dominance of mind over matter: nothing could determine the mind's choice or course of action except its own capacity to discern (or refuse to discern) the call of truth. Newton had shown how this operated in the physical world. Price by analogy extended this to the moral world. The analogy perhaps is partial, but there can be no doubt that Price saw the same underlying forces at work in both the natural and the moral worlds. Is it fanciful to suppose that Price was here extending the analogy that Butler had seen between natural and revealed religion?

### III

Granted their initial assumptions both Price and Priestley show a large degree of consistency. Priestley accepts determinism, which, to

Price, seems to sink into Spinozism. Price accepting free will as axiomatic built his philosophy accordingly. Common to both schemes is the notion that nature shows an order which is the consequence of planning. This is allied to the analogy of nature as a machine: in such an analogy everything is an event. This is why causation and its nature occupy such an important place in the history of the thought of the period. If, like Price, one relies, on immaterial causes, one overcomes the limitation of purely mechanical explanation, whilst depriving oneself of the possibility of investigating other relevant phenomena. Alternatively, like Priestley, one can reduce the effect to the same level as the cause, which, to guarantee consistency, entails determinism.

However, there is another strand in eighteenth century thought which cannot be overlooked though full consideration would go far beyond the scope of this paper. It became increasingly useful to *make ad hoc* assumptions for various specific purposes of which one of the most obvious is that God 'superadds' powers to matter. From the metaphysical point of view this is a dubious move, since it begs the question of how these powers are directed. Such apparent inconsistencies can be predicated on the notion that God can do what he likes in the universe and can go His own way without having to conform to the formal schemes of metaphysicians. Alternatively, one can take the view that the contradictions are only apparent, due to the imperfect stage of our knowledge. This ontological pluralism enables hypotheses to be put forward that do not necessarily conform to metaphysical preconceptions. The resulting chaos could only be resolved by some change of scientific theory in which reliance on force and intention had less part. This was, however, a particularly difficult move to make since the assumption that the universe is organized presupposes the further assumption that it is organized to a plan and not by chance. Since the event metaphor was so successful in the limited area of mechanics, it was adopted uncritically in other areas, so that, for example, the intention of producing an effect itself became a cause. Such a sequential approach easily falls prey to the criticisms of Hume. But most eighteenth century thinkers combined this view with the notion that causes are intentional which is easy enough as long as one accepts that one can only 'explain' things in a partial way. However the need to pose a rationality in the world led to all manner of other devices: the various forms of sympathy in ethics, Smith's invisible hand or Hutcheson's theologically inspired moral sense. The extreme example, possibly, is Reid who was caricatured by Priestley for his pains. But all accepted the event metaphor together with a notion of causation that was heavily tinged with intention. When intention and causality became detached—

the achievement of the *Origin of species*—the scream of incomprehension was enormous. Other notions, Dalton's autonomous atoms leading to field theories and beyond, whilst having the virtue of yielding an elegant and coherent explanation of natural phenomena only did so at the expense of removing them from any control but their own.

Oxford.

<sup>1</sup> John Stephens, 'The epistemological strategy of Richard Price's *Review of morals*', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, No. 5 (1986), 39-50.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Price, *A review of the principal questions in morals*, ed. D.D. Raphael (Oxford; 1974). All references are to this edition unless otherwise stated.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Price, *Four dissertations*, 3rd edn. (London, 1772). All references are to this edition: it should be noted that the pagination in the four editions published in Price's lifetime is substantially identical. With the exception of one addition (noted below) the text of the dissertation 'On Providence' does not disclose any changes.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Price and Joseph Priestley, *A free discussion of the doctrines of materialism and philosophical necessity* (London, 1778), 3-47. Joseph Priestley, *Disquisitions on matter and spirit* (London, 1777).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Robert E. Schofield, *Mechanism and materialism: British natural philosophy in the age of reason* (Princeton, 1970), passim, but especially 7-14; P.M. Reimann and J.E. McGuire, *Newtonian forces and Lockean powers: concepts of matter in eighteenth century thought* (Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences), III (1971), 233-306; Henry Guerlac, 'Where the statue stood: divergent loyalties to Newton in the eighteenth century' in his *Essays and papers in the history of modern science* (Baltimore and London, 1977), 131-145.

<sup>6</sup> Isaac Newton, *Mathematical principles of natural philosophy*, trans. Andrew Motte, rev. Florian Cajori, (Berkeley, 1934) [hereafter *Principia*], 547. For Price's interpretation of Newton, see *Free discussion*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Isaac Newton, *Opticks* (N.Y., 1952).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Arnold Thackray, *Atoms and powers. An essay on Newtonian matter theory and the development of chemistry* (1970), 101ff. For a popular exposition of spheres of attraction see Benjamin Martin, *A plain and familiar introduction to the Newtonian philosophy* (London, 1751), 3-4. On Price's citation of Newton, cf. *Free discussion*, 10-11, citing *Opticks*, 375.

<sup>9</sup> Price was clearly regarded in his day as an authority on Newton and had apparently been asked to edit the edition of Newton's *Works* that eventually appeared under Samuel Horsley editorship, (London, 1779-1785). The fact that Horsley's views on these matters bore a marked similarity to Price's may have significance. The fragmentary evidence is set out in John Stephens, 'Samuel Horsley and Joseph Priestley's *Disquisitions on matter and spirit*', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, No. 3 (1984), 103-114. Price himself had been taught by John Eames, an associate of Newton. Cf. D.O. Thomas, *The honest mind: the thought and work of Richard Price* (Oxford, 1977), 11; H.J. McLachlan, *English education under the Test Acts* (Manchester, 1931), 118-119.

<sup>10</sup> Isaac Newton, *Four letters to Dr. Bentley* (London, 1756) in *Newton papers and letters on natural philosophy*, ed. I. Bernard Cohen (Cambridge, 1958), 279-312, which also reprinted the text of Bentley's lectures on pp. 313-394. Cf. also Henry Guerlac, 'Bentley, Newton and God', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXX (1969), 207-318; Richard S. Westfall, *Never at rest; a biography of Isaac Newton* (Cambridge, 1985), 504-506; Alexandre Koyre, *Newtonian studies* (London, 1965), 149ff.

<sup>11</sup> Newton, *Papers and letters*, 298. 'You sometimes speak of Gravity as essential and inherent to Matter. Pray do not ascribe that Notion to me; for the cause of Gravity I do not pretend to know, and therefore would take more Time to consider of it', cited *Free discussion*, 29. Koyre, *Newtonian studies*, 282, cites George Cheyne's *Philosophical principles of natural religion* (London, 1705) as asserting that gravitation is a primordial quality of matter. Roger Coates originally thought it an 'essential' quality of matter. <sup>12</sup> Colin Maclaurin, *An account of Sir Isaac Newton's philosophical discoveries* (London, 1748), 287, cited in *Four dissertations*, 44n. Cf. Maclaurin, *Account*, 109. 'But [Newton] gives repeated cautions, that he pretend not by the use of this term [attraction] to define the nature of the power or the manner in which it acts.' Koyre, *Newtonian studies*, 16.

<sup>13</sup> *Free discussion*, 26-27.

<sup>14</sup> *Review*, 27. Price's view that the laws of nature are self-evident truths is certainly at odds with the views of his contemporaries. Gerd Buchdahl comparing Euclid with Newton points out that 'unlike Euclid's treatise, the axioms of Newton's book were not self-evident principles'. They were instead 'fundamental premisses'. *The image of Newton and Locke in the age of reason* (London, 1961), 5, 14.

<sup>15</sup> *Four dissertations*, 29.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>17</sup> Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 17. Price frequently asserts that the inactivity of matter is the foundation of all sound philosophy. Cf. *Sermons* (London, 1816), 111. For this reason he attacks the notion found in some writers of a 'plastic nature or certain vital and spiritual but unintelligent and necessary agent which the Deity is supposed to have created to carry on under himself the schemes, and to produce the various effects and phaenomena of nature', *Four dissertations*, 46n. Price cites Ralph Cudworth whose dissertation on plastic nature appears in the *True intellectual system of the universe* (London, 1678), 147ff. reprinted in C.A. Patrides, *The Cambridge Platonists* (London, 1969), 288ff. Price also cites Henry More and Nehemiah Grew. He must have had in mind More's *An antidote against atheism*, II.v.13. Cf. *A collection of philosophical writing* (London, 1662), 53 (also in Patrides, *The Cambridge Platonists*, 258-59). Grew in *Cosmologia sacra* (London, 1701), 87, denies that God is a 'solitary or immediate agent'. Rather 'every thing depends upon some Created Cause or causes, with Commission or Power, sufficient to produce it'.

<sup>18</sup> *Free discussion*, 32.

<sup>19</sup> Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 1. Cf. *ibid.*, 73. For the rules themselves see Newton, *Principia*, 398.

<sup>20</sup> Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5. Priestley distinguishes between the powers of attraction and repulsion which constitute the smallest parts of matter and the use of these powers to bring about the cohesion of larger masses of matter. Priestley's exposition of the theory is ambiguous however since he still refers to the smallest parts of a gross body. Thus it was open to his contemporaries to assume that Priestley merely referred to the cohesion of matter. For example, *An essay on the nature and evidence of a material world* (London, 1781), largely a discussion of Priestley's views referring to the new system of materialism, argues, 'they mistake the cohesion of a solid body for the solidity itself ... [and confound] the contiguity of the parts of a piece of matter, with the matter'.

<sup>22</sup> An interpretation derived from Newton, *Opticks*, 400.

<sup>23</sup> For a clear exposition of this view, cf. Isaac Watts, *Philosophical essays on various subjects* (London, 1753), 50ff., attacking Locke's notion of substance in general and replacing it with the idea of substance as solid extension. Cf. also Berkeley, *Principles*, sect. 9, 'matter or corporeal substance', *Works*, ed. A.A. Luce and T.E. Jessop (London, 1948-1957), 45, 50, 62.

<sup>24</sup> Locke refers to the possibility that God may 'superadd to Matter a Faculty of thinking' just as he might 'superadd to it another substance, with a Faculty of thinking', *Essay*, IV.ii.6. Cf. also the examples cited by John W. Yolton, *Thinking matter* (Oxford, 1984), 94-97.

<sup>25</sup> Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 17. Both Price and Priestley refer to Andrew Baxter's theory which is in Price's words (*Free discussion*), 11, that the primary particles of matter 'are themselves composed of other particles, which cohere by divine agency; and for the same

reason those of others still smaller which by the same cause, and so on'. Mass becomes 'the power of the cause incessantly set forth' with the result that the ultimate articles of matter have no properties. They might as well be either logical postulates or points. By making resistance 'the power of the immaterial cause, indefinitely impressed upon, and exerted in every part of matter', Baxter's solution becomes incompatible with Newtonian dynamics by making *vis inertia* into an active power, *Inquiry into the nature of the human soul*, 2nd edn. (London, 1737), II, 345, cited in *Disquisitions*, 8-9. Baxter was not much discussed in the literature of the period and Priestley seems to have been led to him by John Mitchell (Cf. *Disquisitions*, 21). This is the interpretation given in *Disquisitions* and discussed in *Free discussion*. What independent knowledge Price had of Baxter is another matter. He is cited in *Four dissertations*, 30, but there Price only refers to the first section of the work in which he argues for the inactivity of matter in a section entitled, 'That resistance to any change of its present state is essential to matter, and inconsistent with any active power in it'. Priestley's citations all come from much later in the work.

<sup>26</sup> Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 61.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Four dissertations*, 39-42, pointing out that, 'Were it [i.e. matter] ever so intelligent or active, it could *know* nothing it could *do* nothing beyond' the particular point of space it fills up. Price cites Matthew Stewart, 'Some remarks on the Laws of Motion and the Inertia of Matter' in *Essays and observations physical and literary read before a society in Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1754): cf. pp. 121-22, 'The active powers both of attraction and repulsion are of such a sort, as could not be exercised by the bodies themselves, without either distinct perceptions of their own situations and magnitude with respect to other bodies, or a regular succession of some kind of clear perception, corresponding to every variety of situation and magnitude, and all this accompanied with a memory and a power of comparing past and present perception'. Price added this reference in the second edition (1768) of *Four dissertations*, 35. He and Stewart were acquainted as is shown by a reference to him in a letter to Monboddo (Price to Monboddo, 2 Aug. 1780), W. Knight, *Lord Monboddo and some of his contemporaries* (London, 1900), 123.

<sup>28</sup> A point made by Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 147.

<sup>29</sup> Price, *Review*, 30. Cf. Stephens, 'Epistemological strategy', 42-43.

<sup>30</sup> *Review*, 30. Price refers to Hume, *Treatise*, 19. It is not clear how far Price was acquainted with Berkeley. There is a brief reference at *Review*, 56n. which depicts Berkeley as the originator of the sceptical principles which found full expression in Hume's *Treatise*. For a note on Price in this context see Stephens, 'Epistemological strategy', 46-47. A useful, more general, discussion of the issues may be found in A.C. Grayling, *Berkeley; the central arguments* (London, 1986), 29ff.

<sup>31</sup> Transdiction is the use of data 'in such, way as not only to be able to move back and forth *within* experience, but to be able to say something meaningful and true about what lay beyond the boundaries of possible experience'. Cf. Maurice Mandelbaum, *Philosophy, science and sense experience* (Baltimore, 1964), 61.

<sup>32</sup> Price, *Four dissertations*, 72-73. Cf. Price, *Sermons on the Christian doctrine* (London, 1787), 21, 'the nature of things have their foundation in the nature of the Deity'.

<sup>33</sup> Price, *Four dissertations*, 43-44.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 13; William Wollaston, *The religion of nature delineated* (London, 1724), 98; Cf. Price, *Sermons on the Christian doctrine*, 280-81.

<sup>35</sup> Price, *Four dissertations*, 80-81.

<sup>36</sup> *Review*, 40. On the contingent limitation of our knowledge, cf. *Review*, 170.

<sup>37</sup> *Review*, 114. Price presumably has in mind a passage such as that in John Balguy, *A collection of tracts* (London, 1734), 118-119, reprinted in L.A. Selby-Bigge, *British moralists* (Oxford, 1897), para. 722.

<sup>38</sup> For the account of liberty given in *Observations on the nature of civil liberty* see Bernard Peach, *Richard Price and the ethical foundations of the American Revolution* (Durham, N.C., 1979), 67-69, and D.O. Thomas, *The honest mind*, 187-89. On Price and the Toleration Act see John Stephens, 'London Ministers and Subscription, 1772-1779',

*Enlightenment and Dissent*. No. 1 (1982), 43-71 and the references there given.

<sup>39</sup> Price to Miss Ashurst, 9 July 1748, *The correspondence of Richard Price*, ed. D.O. Thomas and W. Bernard Peach (Cardiff, 1983), I, 3-4. The text there given comes from the *Christian Reformer*, IV (1837), 46-47; the substantial accuracy of that text has been confirmed by the recent discovery of the MS. now in the National Library of Wales. <sup>40</sup> Price, *Four dissertations*, 125-126.

<sup>41</sup> Price, *A discourse on the love of our country*, 2nd edn. (London, 1789), 48-51. Price would, of course, have accepted that in revelation God has revealed some of his intentions. But this is not incompatible with Price's emphasis on freedom.



## RESTORING 'FAITH' IN LOCKE

*Stephen N. Williams*

Michael Polanyi's comprehensive analysis and critique of Enlightenment thought and culture surely deserves attention. Its comprehensiveness lies not in its detailed historical knowledge but in the grasp of some broad formative forces in the making of modern culture. Amongst the significant claims he makes, made compelling by his experience as a practical scientist, is that the Enlightenment spawned an erroneous set of epistemological convictions which left 'modern man' largely incapable of insight into what really happens in cognition and correspondingly incapacitated when it comes to entertaining some key beliefs.<sup>1</sup>

An important relevant passage, one which has justly received attention in contemporary theology, is found in Polanyi's *magnum opus*, *Personal knowledge*, where he is expounding the significance of the sub-title of that work, *Towards a post-critical philosophy*.<sup>2</sup> Here Polanyi highlights what he takes to be a critical turning-point in Western thought. Commenting on what happened when modernity succeeded its predecessor, Polanyi remarks that,

it now turns out that modern scientism fetters thought as cruelly as ever the churches had done. It offers no scope for our most vital beliefs and it forces us to disguise them in farcically inadequate terms.

The kind of self-reliance upon one's judgement, rooted in a 'fiduciary framework', forcefully expounded in this work must break with a critical framework which itself replaced the Augustinian *nisi credideritis, non intelligitis*. For by the end of the seventeenth century John Locke had propounded this distinction between knowledge and faith:

How well grounded and great soever the assurance of faith may be wherewith it is received; but faith it is still, and not knowledge; persuasion, and not certainty. This is the highest the nature of the thing will permit us to go in matters of revealed religion, which are therefore called matters of faith; a persuasion of our own minds, short of knowledge, is the last result that determines us in such truths.<sup>3</sup>

Polanyi comments as follows:

Belief is here no longer a higher power that reveals to us knowledge lying beyond the range of observation and reason, but a mere

personal acceptance which falls short of empirical and rational demonstrability. The mutual position of the two Augustinian levels is inverted. If divine revelation continues to be venerated, its functions ... are gradually reduced to that of being honoured on ceremonial occasions...

Here lies the break by which the critical mind repudiated one of its two cognitive faculties and tried completely to rely on the remainder. Belief was so thoroughly discredited that, apart from specially privileged opportunities, such as may be still granted to the holding and profession of religious beliefs, modern man lost his capacity to accept any explicit statement as his own belief. All belief was reduced to the status of subjectivity: to that of an imperfection by which knowledge fell short of universality.

Polanyi proceeds to claim that belief must now once more function as the source of all our knowledge and to develop this claim. What has happened, it would seem, is that the real source of knowledge (beliefs) has been replaced by an unworthy superior (demonstration) and reduced to low status (subjectivity). The figure we meet at the crucial juncture here (he has already been met and unfavourably received)<sup>4</sup> is John Locke. Whether Polanyi takes the disastrous consequences for faith to be directly entailed in or to be a natural progression from the sentiment expressed in the *Third letter*, its author definitely put us all on the slippery slope. It is the adjudication of this claim made against Locke that will concern us in this essay. Much of what is important in his religious epistemology cannot be touched on; much of what is touched on cannot be explored within the confines of a single article and to this extent the aim is to expound a case with adequate cogency rather than with maximal rigour. Yet, bearing in mind Polanyi's comment on the exceptional possibilities for religious belief, I wish to argue that Locke should not be unduly taxed with the burden of his putative legacy, and to do this by focusing on some aspects of the concept of faith in Locke's religious epistemology in its relation to knowledge. This is worth pursuing especially as we approach the tricentennial of major works like *A letter concerning toleration*, *Two treatises of government*, and *An essay concerning human understanding*.<sup>5</sup>

The problem of relating Locke's ideas of faith and knowledge has provoked some occasionally lively literature over the past couple of decades. A decisive essay published by Richard Ashcraft in 1969 is worth a lengthy summary, as it shows the shape that a response to Polanyi on behalf of Locke might take.<sup>6</sup> Ashcraft argues that commit

ment to Christianity as embodied in Scripture was the framework within which Locke operated and that even adumbration of the great philosophical tenets of the *Essay* occurred within it. What is religiously fundamental and tenable with conviction is frequently a matter of faith and not of demonstrative knowledge. Ashcraft argues that in the *Essay*, it is the limit, not the extent, of our knowledge that is striking, and that Locke undertakes to show that the moral and religious life has adequate epistemological foundations. Locke thus simultaneously delimits the scope of knowledge and bolsters the epistemological basis of faith; what looked to contemporary detractors like an attack on Christianity is in fact a philosophical and religious defence of it. Belief in God, rationally demonstrated in the *Essay*, significantly informs its substantive claims. It is true that superficially the *Essay* is geared to establishing and demonstrating the distinction between knowledge and opinion, that certainty pertains to the former while faith is a species of the latter. But not only is it the case that little is, in fact, known; also, what is deemed probable (rather than technically certain) can as resolutely determine our assent, and so regulate our conduct, in practice as do items of knowledge—we live life mostly 'in the twilight of probability'.<sup>7</sup> For practical purposes, therefore, the knowledge/opinion distinction may wither away with the blurring of the boundaries. And when we come to the faith/reason distinction we have a different boundary again. The opinion/knowledge distinction applies when we deal with propositions arising from sensation and reflection in the 'ordinary' course of things; the faith/reason distinction has to do with alternative means of acquiring information, respectively by 'extraordinary' (divine) or 'ordinary' (rational) means.

When it comes to assessing the claim of whether a proposition is revealed by God, unclarity and inconsistency arise: sometimes faith's claims seem to defer to those of certain knowledge; sometimes faith is 'above reason'.<sup>8</sup> But 'whatever the contradictory nature of Lockean statements on this point, in the end there is no escaping the 'unmoved foundation' of faith or the fact that the Scriptures contain 'divine and infallible truth' against which the fluctuating claims of human reasoning cannot contend.<sup>9</sup> Anything granted to certain knowledge ('no revelation can "shake or overrule plain knowledge" ') is but minimally concessionary when it is remembered that so little is known in life and when it is recorded that revelation can and should take precedence over 'probable knowledge'. In Locke's, *The reasonableness of Christianity* we see how he applies the principle that theology, the supremely important science, governs or underlies philosophical reflection. 'The precepts of faith are necessary precisely because of the failure of philosophy' (219).

Quite simply, God has given us in Christ that knowledge of religion and morality for which philosophy, with ultimately heroic failure, strives. The *Reasonableness*' defends the reasonableness of a Christianity which announces this. If they are in competition, faith is victor over knowledge. Omitted from this account are some otherwise important aspects of Ashcraft's discussion, including of Locke's moral philosophy. With regard to the issue before us, the following emerges from Ashcraft's account. First, what is apprehended in faith is the functional framework for whatever is said about demonstration or the relation of demonstration to faith. Secondly, within that framework, even if demonstration enjoys a certain theoretical precedence over faith, its materially effective limits issue in the practically superior abilities of faith to grasp those principles of religion and morality that pertain to salvation.

However, Ashcraft's analysis was soon challenged. In 1973 Paul Helm outlined his argument that Locke has two undistinguished but inconsistent answers to the problem of relating faith to knowledge.<sup>11</sup> The first he labels the 'extrinsic thesis', a thesis itself embodying an internal contradiction, for it stated that 'p' can be known with demonstrative certainty though the grounds for 'p' are only probable. Here Helm argues that if Locke holds together, as he seeks to do, both the claim that we grasp in faith what is infallibly true (whatever God has revealed must be so) *and* that the grounds on which we accept the claim that a given proposition actually comes from God are only probable, then we can regard only as probable (not as infallibly certain) the relevant propositions of faith. That is, the claim that we enjoy certainty in the realm of faith is undermined by the claim that we can at best esteem probable that what is proposed for assent has God as its source. Hence 'revelation, in so far as it contains non-demonstrative, non-intuitive propositions, can never be *known* (in Locke's sense) to be a revelation from God'. (58) The basis of Helm's claim is Locke's distinction between belief and knowledge and the assignment of revelation to the former and certainty to the latter realm.

However, Helm proceeds to argue that Locke propounds a second thesis, an 'intrinsic' thesis. Here, Locke is held to distinguish between knowing and believing as 'acts', that knowing something does not entail believing something. The upshot is that 'in the case of the intrinsic thesis, faith and knowledge are distinct in that what a person believes can never be touched by what he knows'.(62)

Helm's analysis leads to a twofold criticism of Ashcraft, whom he

explicitly challenges. First, Ashcraft, because he fails to perceive the extrinsic thesis, fails also to note the inconsistencies in Locke's epistemology, namely the disparity between the extrinsic and the intrinsic theses. Secondly, Ashcraft, because he fails to note Locke's constant qualifiers to the effect that reason must judge whether 'x' is from God, wrongly emphasizes the bedrock foundation in faith for Locke's convictions. Finally, Helm himself proposes a theoretical resolution of the two theses in Locke more in the spirit of doing him a favour than of expounding his intentions. Whilst it is neither explicitly offered by Locke himself, nor capable of resolving all inconsistencies, it might be maintained that the extrinsic thesis has to do with matters of *mere* faith (matters of probability, though such that assent may necessarily follow) and the intrinsic thesis with matters of faith, *simpliciter* (propositions tenable by faith but tenable alternatively as a result of demonstration, such as the proposition that God exists). This resolution would tend to extol natural religion and mean that 'Locke reads revelation for its confirmation and republication of natural religious truth'.(65)

Most recently, David Snyder has returned to the issues introduced by Ashcraft and Helm.<sup>12</sup> Snyder argues that Locke's view of the relation of faith to reason exhibits features similar to some found in Aquinas's thought. He maintains that Aquinas's position involves the following:

1. We can know some propositions apart from faith and revelation.
2. There are other propositions which we must accept as faith.
3. The two classes of propositions are distinguished by (1) the source of their validity, and (2) their epistemic status, although some propositions are members of both classes.
4. Although by faith we believe many true propositions, the use of faith and the use of reason are distinct; yet neither faculty is sufficient to enable us to discover every proposition which can be truly believed. (200f.)

In seeking to illuminate Locke's thought on this supposition, it is the third point which receives by far the most extensive discussion. Locke's distinction between truths of faith and those of reason are deemed by Snyder 'far from satisfactory' (203) for two reasons. First, as 'matters of faith involve assent they should fall under the jurisdiction of the faculty of judgment'.(207) Yet judgement only comes into play when things are

(maximally) probable and (minimally) doubtful. Now there is a dilemma here when one reflects on this in the light of the fact that when it comes to a biblical writer like Paul we find that he did not doubt the propositions he propounded. But how can that be, asks Snyder? Had Paul *judged* to be true the propositions he affirmed he would not have been justified in being free of doubt—but he was free of doubt. Had Paul *known* to be true the propositions he affirmed, it could not then have been a matter of faith—but it was a matter of faith. Snyder considers various ways out of this dilemma but judges them inadequate. So:

It is more than a semantic problem, a problem of Locke not knowing how to *describe* Paul's faith but is rather an indication that Locke's view of faith and reason *cannot account* for such faith, and so his position is inadequate. This inadequacy, I suggest, is due to his exclusion of matters of faith from the realm of knowledge. (209)

Secondly, Locke holds that it is reasonable to believe that the Scriptures are true, and yet he implicitly rejects a principle of Scriptural religious epistemology. For, Snyder argues, 'throughout Scripture faith is characterized as involving absolutely certain knowledge of the truth...'.(210) Yet Locke denies that faith does or can involve this. Hence our second problem. *Pace* Ashcraft (this is the only reference to either Helm or Ashcraft in the body of the argument) we must finally conclude 'that Locke was not quite the consistently Christian thinker that he wished to be'. (213)

Now I have blandly reiterated some central points in the proposals of Ashcraft, Helm and Snyder to show how, even on such a conspectus, with all its varieties and even conflicts, the emergent picture is not identical to that presented by Polanyi. The last sentence cited from Snyder's contribution forces us to remark on the distinction between intention and execution in Locke's programme. To some extent this narrows (though not much) the differences in the accounts of Ashcraft and Helm: it is true that Ashcraft's omission of Locke's insistence that reason must judge revelation is puzzling, but after all, Ashcraft is concerned with Locke's central intentions as embodied in the relevant literature and not with a criticism of its philosophical coherence, with which Helm is partly concerned. Certainly, it is puzzling to find Snyder referring to the opening page of Ashcraft's essay to justify his claim that the latter 'maintains that Locke's views on faith and reason are perhaps not totally inadequate but at least are coherent' ... where does Ashcraft say so?<sup>13</sup> Ironically (in the light of Helm's contention that 'Ashcraft has

a curious disregard for Locke's inconsistencies<sup>14</sup>) the formulation of Ashcraft's point at the one place where he admits Lockean inconsistency and contradictions is surely unsatisfactory.<sup>15</sup> The claim that faith is 'above reason'<sup>16</sup> does not collide with the fact that 'the certainty of man's knowledge overrides the claims of faith, or at least puts them aside' for propositions 'above reason' only come into the matter when they can be so described in contrast to propositions *contrary to* or *according to* reason where reason may meet faith, as it were, on all fours.

But I am not concerned with the assessment or defence of any of the thinkers discussed on the whole: a perusal of these and many other useful recent contributions to the study of Locke's general or religious epistemology indicates that nothing less than a full-length treatment is needed for this purpose.<sup>17</sup> Rather, let us note how on none of the accounts given is Polanyi's position obviously vindicated. If the claim is that Lockean literature embodies the *intention* to exalt demonstration over faith, neither Helm nor Snyder deny (nor affirm) that Locke's road of faith is paved with good intentions designed to give faith plenty of scope alongside that of demonstration, though his efforts to strike the balance may fail (perhaps, indeed, to the advantage of demonstration). If the claim is that in its *execution* Lockean literature achieved this victory for demonstration, then the question arises of whether this is so clear that later generations and contemporaries eager to enter into his inheritance were bound to take the route of demonstration. The need to address ourselves to this point leads us to make two comments on Locke's religious epistemology.

First, we are surely not to confuse a distinction between faith and knowledge with a distinction between faith and reason in the *Essay*. Paul Helm argues that Ashcraft's account of Locke's position on the relation of faith to knowledge is as follows:

The information we receive through faith however, is not part of our ordinary experience, and therefore, quite apart from the differences that lie in the degree of certainty that we attach to any proposition so received, there is a difference in kind separating the information transmitted to us by God from that which we receive by any other means.<sup>18</sup>

Without commitment to either protagonist in general or in detail, it must be said that Ashcraft here does not seem to be talking about the distinction between faith and knowledge but about the distinction

between faith and reason. The shape of such a distinction can be outlined without further reference to Ashcraft's argument.

In IV.14.4. we read that knowledge and judgement compose two faculties of the mind 'conversant about truth and falsehood'. In the former case the agreement or disagreement of ideas is *certainly* perceived; in the latter it is *presumed*. When we judge in matters to do with words we assent or dissent (IV.14.3); assent betokens *faith*, not knowledge. (IV.xv.2) Here we indwell the realm of belief, assent or opinion, apposite to probability as knowledge is to certainty. Faith and knowledge are thus contrasted. Here we are not yet explicitly in the domain of religious epistemology. And plainly there would be no sense in a distinction at this point between faith and reason. Reason is associated alike with faith and with knowledge as the means whereby one attains either probability or certainty. Where reason can attain demonstration, it *knows* the truth of a proposition; where it can only establish probabilities, it *believes* it.

When Locke discusses our assent to testimony, he concludes by noting one case of bare testimony which commands the 'highest degree of our assent'. (IV.xvi.14) Divine testimony which 'carries with it assurance beyond doubt, evidence beyond exception ... is called by a peculiar name, *revelation*, and our assent to it, *faith*...'. Of this it may be said that it,

as absolutely determines our minds, and as perfectly excludes all wavering as our knowledge itself; and we may as well doubt of our own being as we can whether any revelation from God be true. So that faith is a settled and sure principle of assent and assurance, and leaves no manner of room for doubt or hesitation.

There follow crucial qualifiers leading to the conclusion that 'our assent can be rationally no higher than the evidence of its being a revelation, and that this is the meaning of the expressions it is delivered in' and that faith really is 'nothing else but an assent founded on the highest reason'. There is a warning here, though not yet more than that, that to think of faith as just a species of belief<sup>19</sup> is to risk blurring the faith/knowledge and reason/faith distinction—the extraordinary grounds of assent (for faith is unshaken by common grounds of assent, such as common experience) and the extraordinary power of assurance (apparently full-blooded) imply something significantly distinctive about this faith. It turns out that what is distinctive is that Locke is here heralding a faith/reason distinction. 'Reason', he tells us, can mean many things (IV.xvii.1) and one unfortunate, yet now inevitable, use is

that which takes it to be opposed to faith (IV.xvii.24). If one entertains such a distinction it is valid if described as follows:

*Reason*, therefore, here, as contradistinguished to *faith*, I take to be the discovery of the certainty or probability of such propositions or truths, which the mind arrives at by deduction made from such *ideas* which it has got by the use of its natural faculties, viz. by sensation or reflection.

*Faith*, on the other side, is the assent to any proposition, not thus made out by the deductions of reason, but upon the credit of the proposer as coming from God, in some extraordinary way of communication. This way of discovering truths to men we call *revelation*. (IV.xviii.2)

Locke then proceeds to show that however they be distinguished, yet they are not to be opposed, and he charts their relationship. I shall not pursue this. The point is that the faith/reason distinction we find here has to do with alternative ways of establishing a proposition—either by assent and revelation or by discovery and deduction. Earlier, as we saw, where faith is contrasted with knowledge it is entirely within the sphere of reason's discovery and deduction. It appears to me that however we propose to relate them and however hard it may be to identify them we should label the 'faith' of chapter xv 'rational faith' and the 'faith' of chapter xviii 'religious faith'. The faith/knowledge distinction may then be a distinction between knowledge and rational faith and the faith/reason distinction will be, in IV. xviii, a distinction between reason and religious faith. In this case, it is the domain of rational faith to assent to the proposition that 'p' is revealed and the opus of religious faith to assent to the proposition 'p'.

Secondly, it is worth asking in what cases the boundaries of certainty and probability, knowledge and rational faith, seem to disappear. I am not concerned with this whole problem as such.<sup>20</sup> But in light of Helm's formulation of the 'extrinsic thesis' it will be as well to note the terms of the claim made by Locke, as it surfaces in the portion of the *Essay* that concerns us, that probabilities can amount to practical certainties so that rational faith may amount to practical knowledge. After offering the distinction between knowledge and judgement which we noted in xiv.4 Locke refers to those general cases (as yet not instantiated) where propositions,

border so near upon certainty that we make no doubt at all about

them, but *assent* to them as firmly and act according to that assent as resolutely as if they were infallibly demonstrated, and that our knowledge of them was perfect and certain. (xv.2)

There are cases, then, where propositions not infallibly demonstrated nor known with certainty yet function with respect to practical or existential doubt (I do not mean to make 'existential' synonymous with 'practical') as if they were infallibly demonstrated.<sup>21</sup> Assent here is fully assured and confident—justifiably so. Full assurance may eliminate practical doubt as does certain knowledge. In what cases does this obtain?

In this part of the *Essay* only with one sort of proposition does Locke instantiate what I term 'indubitable probabilities'. Locke is discussing two sorts of propositions whose status as probable we are required to gauge; they are:

either concerning some particular existence or, as it is usually termed, matter of fact which, falling under observation, is capable of human testimony; or else concerning things which, being beyond the discovery of our senses, are not capable of any such testimony. (xvi.5)

In dealing with the first sort of proposition, Locke goes on immediately to say that,

where any particular thing, consonant to the constant observation of ourselves and others in the like case, comes attested by the concurrent reports of all that mention it, we receive it as easily and build as firmly upon it as if it were certain knowledge; and we reason and act thereupon with as little doubt as if it were perfect demonstration. (xvi.6)

After giving concrete instances, Locke concludes that:

These *probabilities* rise so near to *certainty* that they govern our thoughts as absolutely and influence our actions as fully as the most evident demonstration; and in what concerns us we make little or no difference between them and certain knowledge; our belief, thus grounded, rises to *assurance*.

Now in xvi. 14, a *third* sort of proposition is introduced which shares with the first type, on the face of it, at least one feature—it 'challenges

the highest degree of our assent'. We have already cited this portion, where Locke speaks of propositions given by an absolutely reliable source—God. Presumably we are not to try to assimilate this in either of the two sorts of propositions mentioned earlier even if there may be shared features. By implication, I think, the ground of probability in the case of this type of proposition may be extraordinary, for whereas Locke has previously talked of two grounds of probability (xv. 4) to be applied to the two sorts of propositions (including in the case of those found to be indubitably probable) Locke has just introduced prior to this introduction of a third sort of proposition a new, 'extraordinary ground of probability' too (xvi. 13), namely miracle.<sup>22</sup>

How can 'miracle' be fitted in to the structure of Locke's religious epistemology? If miracles are well-attested, do they sanction the claim that the putatively accredited proposition is revealed with such force as to procure assent to such a claim *necessarily*? That is, do miracles furnish us with a rational faith of the highest order (as though we had a rational demonstration) so as to undergird a religious faith whose confidence is correspondingly unswerving?

This way of putting it certainly owes far less to the *Essay* than it does to the argument of *The reasonableness of Christianity* and the posthumously published *Discourse on miracles*.<sup>23</sup> Miracles play a prominent role in the argument of the former work, though neither there nor in the *Discourse* nor in other writings where miracle is touched upon (like the *Third letter on toleration*) does Locke seek to relate miracle with explicit or detailed precision to the structure of religious epistemology outlined in the *Essay*. Of course, the question of religious epistemology is not the only or even the main one discussed in *Reasonableness* wherein the author tries to show that Christianity is reasonable largely by expounding the nature of Christianity, and much of the exposition is carried on in order to show that the proposition to which we must assent if we wish to be saved is that which claims Jesus is the Messiah. The context and content of this discussion in relation to the question of justification by faith has been highlighted recently.<sup>24</sup> But Locke, in the course of establishing what was proposed for belief in the New Testament, makes persistent and prominent appeal to miracle as the strongest of supports for the accredited christological propositions.<sup>25</sup> The power of miracle to sustain the relevant proposition yields little or nothing to the compelling power of demonstration.<sup>26</sup>

Appeal to miracle, of course, does not stand alone. One can cite the less conspicuous appeal to the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy

and I.T. Ramsey long ago urged us to explore the epistemological implications of a sense that Jesus' own person attests to the truth of His claims and utterances.<sup>27</sup> But the point at which the relation of reason to revelation comes most explicitly to the fore in the discussion is in the latter portion of the work where Locke wants to establish some kind of necessity for revelation while retaining some kind of reality for the light of nature. These portions of the argument have been variously read. Peter Laslett, for instance, is struck by the pessimism of *Reasonableness* on the question of natural light relative to what is said in the *Two treatises of government*; Peter Schouls counters this claim with an argument that Locke is less pessimistic here and more consistent with emphases elsewhere on rational knowledge of the moral law.<sup>28</sup> In keeping with the policy of trying not to allow an estimate of Polanyi's thesis to depend overly on the adjudication of controversies over the interpretation of Locke, I shall not comment on this discrepancy. But whatever place Locke gives to the *lumen naturale* and however will and intellect are related in his religious philosophy, the following theses are clearly advanced in *Reasonableness*. First, the course of history has seen the extinguishing of natural light. Secondly, even the finest thinkers in history have not produced the comprehensive morality presented by Jesus. Thirdly, Jesus has incomparable *authority* as a teacher of moral and religious truth.<sup>29</sup>

At the least, religious faith grasps *de facto* what has not been demonstrated and does this both with respect to what matters most (what pertains to salvation) and with unabashed confidence (miracles together with the light of nature and other things variously warrant acceptance of the proposition that Jesus is Messiah). Given disagreements about the argument of *Reasonableness* and the fact that Locke seems to have believed that a demonstrative ethics is theoretically possible, we must yet make a minimalist claim that it is as plausible to read *Reasonableness* as an encouragement to rely on faith for our hold on the Gospel, as to read it as an encouragement to rely on demonstrative powers to grasp the counsel of God whereby we must live.

In relation to miracle in particular, the starting-point for our reference to *Reasonableness*, the *Discourse on miracles* provides further evidence of how strongly miracles can accredit accompanying propositions, though Locke is clear that their comprehension and use in religious epistemology is possible not in isolation but within the framework of theistic belief.<sup>30</sup> But we introduced a contingency earlier by asking what epistemological role miracles could play in providing

rational warrant for religious faith *if* they were well-attested. It is sometimes claimed with regard to miracles that Locke 'took Scripture at its face value as history.'<sup>31</sup> However, whatever his works said or left unsaid, there is little doubt that Locke was wrestling with the question of biblical inspiration years before the writing of *Reasonableness*.<sup>32</sup> Contemporaries like Richard Willis and John Edwards were quick to point out that the thesis of *Reasonableness* regarding assent to the proposition that Jesus is Messiah identifiably smacked of Hobbes whose forty-third chapter of *Leviathan* also refers to his distinction between knowing and believing.<sup>33</sup> Without going into the contentious question of the literary relation of Locke to Hobbes, it is worth noting that if Locke read, marked and digested the argument of that chapter he could not have avoided the question of the grounds for believing the Bible to be the Word of God. Yet Locke does not come to terms with the question of scriptural historicity in his religious epistemology with any kind of deliberateness or detail.

One might plausibly assume that the way we assess the testimony of others in general is applicable here.<sup>34</sup> If so, a bold line of reasoning in relation to religious epistemology goes as follows. We deem a witness that miracles occurred highly probable and confidently assent to the truth of the report. We deem that miracles are such that we must necessarily assent to the proposition they accompany. Now that rational faith has reached its limits, we place our religious faith in the proposition in question. Such an atomistic presentation of the process of belief may strike us as embodying what is philosophically untenable. Further, it may seem like an over-schematization of Locke's thought. And finally, it will tend to confirm Helm's argument that even if we push back the epistemological questions in this way, we are left only with the sanction of rational probability for the things Locke tells us are fully assured. The way in which our confidence in our judgement is related by Locke to our confidence in faith when we judge a proposition to be revealed and assent to that material proposition respectively, precludes a claim that Locke is saying that we can be *certain* that a proposition is revealed by compounding our rational probability with something else that makes for certainty.<sup>35</sup> If Locke intended this then Helm is surely right in judging his argument to be flawed.

Nevertheless, what is outlined here constitutes a marked re-description of the relation of faith and demonstration when set alongside the summary comments of Polanyi. It may be developed in a direction that ultimately subordinates faith to demonstrative knowledge. It may be taken in a direction, alternatively, that liberates faith from demonstra-

tive knowledge. However ineffectively, this latter is what Locke apparently tried to do in the correspondence with Stillingfleet. The relation of faith to knowledge described here may be as problematic in relation to the *formulation* of religious epistemology in the *Essay* as it is on purely philosophical grounds. But still, as in the *Essay*, without confounding faith and knowledge or assurance and certainty, Locke wishes to cede to faith fullest assurance. And in light of Snyder's claim that in this correspondence Locke 'gives neither an explanation of this distinction [between certainty and assurance] nor a reason for thinking that it is plausible'<sup>36</sup> it is worth citing the following:

My Lord, my Bible expresses the highest degree of faith, which the apostle recommended to believers in his time, by full assurance [Locke here cites Hebrews x. 22]. But assurance of faith, though it be what assurance soever, will by no means down with your lordship in my writing. You say, I allow assurance of faith; God forbid I should do otherwise; but then you ask, "why not certainty as well as assurance?" My lord ... I find my Bible speaks of the assurance of faith, but nowhere, that I can remember, of the certainty of faith, though in many places it speaks of the certainty of knowledge, and therefore I speak so too ... When I shall see, in an authentic translation of our Bible, the phrase changed, it will then be time enough for me to change it too, and call it not assurance, but certainty of faith.<sup>37</sup>

However implausible it sounds, it certainly constitutes some sort of explanation. And Snyder's argument that Locke's religious epistemology is counter to biblical epistemology must be read in the light of it. In the Stillingfleet correspondence faith is more like a stranger to knowledge than a subordinate to it.

The discussion in this article hitherto has been conducted in convenient forgetfulness of the only text Polanyi cites in *Personal knowledge* in support of his claim (which, incidentally, can be construed as a less thoroughgoing verdict on Locke's work than I have construed it here, though that does not affect the purpose or argument of this article). For he explicitly cites the *Third letter on toleration*. This is an extremely interesting source. If one wished to find evidence in Locke for the subordination of faith to knowledge in the way Polanyi does, it is certainly to the toleration letters one must go. More precisely it is to this (third) one and, indeed, to the fragmentary fourth one. The first two toleration letters do not make this epistemological move, though reading them with hindsight (and perhaps with foresight) they may seem

pregnant with the trial of faith and knowledge yet to come.<sup>38</sup> It is undoubtedly the case that issues of religious epistemology and issues of political toleration were deeply interlocked for a long time before Locke contributed his toleration letters, and Ashcraft's impressively detailed reconstruction of Locke's political radicalism, whether or not it will command universal support, tends to accentuate our sense of the high stakes for which Locke was playing in the development of his political philosophy.<sup>39</sup> The point of this remark here is to note how, as Ashcraft's earlier essay requires that what we think of the religious context of Locke's philosophy, so his *magnum opus* further makes us wonder about the political context of Locke's religion—and, in the context of the toleration writings, to what extent their religious epistemology is governed by perceived political needs. Maurice Cranston is certainly right to point out that in this third letter 'Locke was forced ... to acknowledge a more sceptical attitude towards religion as such than he had previously admitted'<sup>40</sup> and it might be added that it was a more sceptical attitude than he later adopted as well, unless we partially except the fourth letter."

A proper examination of these letters lies outside the scope of this argument, though stark epistemological subjectivity is too much to claim for the 'faith' of the toleration letters even on their own terms, given the fact that what might be epistemologically public to the point of probability may yet be politically private when coercion is at issue. However, if one allows Polanyi's case on the basis of this section of the third letter to pass by default, it does not lend the necessary support to his contention that Locke's way of thinking had the legacy it did. It need not, in other words, be taken to mirror his mind nor, if it mirrors the mind of others, need it be taken as a sign that they took their cue from Locke.

This way of putting it gives entry to the conclusion I wish to establish. That there is some scope in Locke's thought for the subsequent elevation of demonstration over faith I do not wish to contest though how far there is scope is also left open. But that there is plenty of scope in Locke's thought for an elevation of faith over demonstration is also clear—not necessarily an elevation that would satisfy Polanyi or his adherents but one which certainly did not bequeath to posterity the legacy Polanyi is concerned to identify. What the sins of the forefathers contribute to the habits of later generations can be distorted if one reads intellectual history via concepts alone. If someone in the eighteenth century wanted to correct or develop the religious epistemology that surfaced in Locke's literature, why strengthen demonstration rather



than faith? A proper answer to that question would be mined with difficulties of a wide range of sorts that derive from the very way the question has been put. But Locke has more than one face and the one we select for the portrait gallery is as informative about the observer as it is about the observed. It is tempting to propose that Locke's religious epistemology has as little or as much to do with subsequent 'scientism' as his denial of what is innate had to do with subsequent atheism.

John Dunn, in a passage with interesting affinities to Polanyi's thesis, writes that,

there is real justice in seeing the European Enlightenment as Locke's legacy: both his triumph and his tragedy. As it turned out, the culture which he wished to fashion did not become easier to believe in and to live in the better it was understood. Instead it fragmented alarmingly. Shared religious good intentions gave way to shared secular good intentions; and the latter, too, gave way to violent and acrimonious wranglings over which secular intentions truly are good. The clearer his view of what men can know became, the less convincing became his view of how they have good reasons to live their lives. If the Enlightenment was genuinely his legacy, it was scarcely the legacy which he wished to leave.

We are all of us children of his failure.<sup>42</sup>

Dunn is thinking in far more comprehensive terms than our own restricted concern with religious epistemology. But we are brought back with his words to the question of intention. We can think of intention in three different ways. First, we can think of the heart's intention, the inner man. This has not been subject to comment here and perhaps no one can feel greatly assured about the truth of this.<sup>43</sup> So to what extent contemporaries and later generations followed Locke's intentions, even if they knew them, we cannot tell. But such intentions are not to Polanyi's point.

Secondly, there is the intention embodied in the literature or, more straightforwardly, literary intention. One cannot pretend that this can be treated entirely apart from the first kind of intention. But enough has been said to show how the Locke reader need not, on the basis of these texts, tend to go off in pursuit of the superiority of demonstration. Indeed, at risk of unsupported banality, one should add that there is nothing in the intellectual climate of his day or of the next generation's that should have made such support as Locke gives to demonstration faith-shakingly significant.

Finally, one might talk of something different, which we might term 'intentionality' instead of 'intention' with reference to the actual text. A text can acquire a conceptual drift once set in a literary mould, such as a character 'takes over' a novelist or a landscape the painter. This is closer to the execution of authorship. But it is not at all clear that demonstration wins out over faith here either. That is, the claim that reason has the kind of limits set by Locke and the kind of relation to faith he maintains appears to me broadly patient of a strong defence *in a climate described by Paul Hazard as 'rationalistic in spirit and empirical by consent'*.

It is precisely Locke's responsibility for that climate that is at issue. And for any who think that the storm-clouds are increasingly gathering over contemporary European civilization, it is worth granting the right of reply to Polanyi on behalf of Locke—for we need from both of them more than a little help.

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While plenty has been written on Polanyi's thought since then Richard Gelwick's *The way of discovery; an introduction to the thought of Michael Polanyi* (OUP, 1977) is the best general guide I know of to the range of Polanyi's concerns. See esp. 19ff. on the Enlightenment.

<sup>2</sup> Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958. For what follows see 265f.

<sup>3</sup> These words come from Locke's *Third letter on toleration* found in *Works* (London, 1823), VI, 144. Polanyi's wording differs slightly from the 1823 edition.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Apparently, all three works were publicly available before the end of 1689 even if official publications dates could be later.

<sup>6</sup> 'Faith and knowledge in Locke's philosophy' in *John Locke: problems and perspectives*, ed. J. Yolton (CUP, 1969), 194-223. This was regarded as an 'extremely convincing essay' by T. Kato long after it had been vigorously counter-attacked; see 'The "Reasonableness" in the historical light of the *Essay in The Locke Newsletter*, 1981, 48f. J.W. Gough commented that Locke's 'rationalism was never as thoroughgoing as it purported to be ... and the faculty of reason really operated within a sphere conditioned by religious faith', *John Locke's political philosophy*, 2nd edn. (OUP, 1973), 10 and 11-19. As we shall see, this is consistent with Ashcraft's argument.

<sup>7</sup> This phrase is, of course, Locke's: *Essay*, IV. xiv. 2. The edition used will be that of Peter Niddich (Clarendon, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> Another Lockean phrase: *Essay*, IV. xvii. 23. It signifies one of the important areas we must leave unexamined, with its ramifications for the development of deist epistemology.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit., 216. Pages in this essay will from here on be cited in brackets in the text of this article and so with the two subsequent articles (by Helm and Snyder) summarized. <sup>11</sup> I follow David Snyder here in using George Ewing's edition of Locke's *On the reasonableness of Christianity* (Chicago, 1965).

<sup>11</sup> See his 'Locke on faith and knowledge' in *Philosophical Quarterly*, Jan. 1973, 52-66.

<sup>12</sup> David C. Snyder, 'Faith and reason in Locke's *Essay*', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XLVII, No. 2 (Apr.-June 1986) 197-213.

<sup>13</sup> See Snyder, 197, and Ashcraft, 194.

<sup>14</sup> Op. cit., 63.

<sup>15</sup> See op. cit., 215f.

<sup>16</sup> Ashcraft here cites IV. xviii. 7 and 9 in the *Essay*, but see too IV. xvii. 23. Sometimes scepticism is voiced regarding the actual presence of material propositions in this category; for example, S. Westfall, *Science and religion in seventeenth century England* (Yale, 1958), 135.

<sup>17</sup> Among the issues and essays that should be considered here I mention especially the whole question of the vocabulary of 'assent'; see J.T. Moore, 'Locke's analysis of language and the assent to Scripture', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXXVII, No. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1976), 707-714; Moore, 'Locke's concept of religious assent', *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy*, 8 (1977), 30-36; J.A. Passmore, 'Locke and the ethics of belief', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 64 (1978), 185-205; G.J.D. Moyal, 'Locke, innate ideas and the ethics of belief', *Locke Newsletter*, (1979), 97-128.

<sup>18</sup> Op.cit., 62, citing Ashcraft, 215.

<sup>19</sup> See Helm, 64f.

<sup>20</sup> Amongst recent treatments, note D. Odegard's article on 'Locke on certainty and probability' in *The Locke Newsletter* (1980), 77-88, not only because it makes evident what a full treatment of the matters that occupy us here would involve but because of the reference to miracle that closes his account, 87f.

<sup>21</sup> Here again we must forego a detailed enquiry into the question of moral or practical certainties, theory and practice. Locke does not actually speak of moral certainty though it may be argued that he deploys something that captures what his predecessors sought to net with that category: see H van Leeuwen, *The problem of certainty in English thought, 1630-1690* (The Hague, 1963), 124, and in the light of discussions of 'assent' in Locke, see the remarks on its relation to doubt on p. 135. On the general theme, see more recently, B. Schapiro, *Probability and certainty in seventeenth century England* (Princeton U.P., 1983).

<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note how sometimes at the close of portions of the *Essay* that do not have religion in mind Locke raises religious considerations: this tends towards confirming psychologically in the reader the claim that it is as we reach the closing chapters of Book IV that the ultimate concern of the *Essay* comes to light. See, for example, most strikingly, III. ix. 23.

<sup>23</sup> For the latter, see *Works*, IX, 256-265.

<sup>24</sup> See Dewey D. Wallace, 'Socinianism, justification by faith and the sources of John Locke's *The reasonableness of Christianity*' in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XLV, No. 1 (Jan.-Mar., 1984), 49-66.

<sup>25</sup> This is so often put forward that it requires no documentation, but note that the context of appeal to miracles may change and vary, for example they function in the context of the Old Testament prophecy or general theistic belief.

<sup>26</sup> For strong statements here, see sect. 237 (p.164); sect. 240 (168f.); sect.243 (esp. p. 179). I do not by the use of the word 'compelling' commit myself on the question of volition in relation to belief in Locke's thought.

<sup>27</sup> In his introductory essay to the abridgement of Locke's *Reasonableness* (London, 1958).

<sup>28</sup> See Laslett's introduction to Locke's *Two treatises of government*, 2nd edn. (CUP, 1967) 87ff. and Schouls, *The imposition of method: a study of Descartes and Locke* (Clarendon, 1980) 220f. Schouls' entire work repays consideration in relation to Polanyi's analysis. But on this point Locke's comments on 1 Corinthians in *Works*, VIII, 86-93 including note f on 2.7 and the paraphrase of 2.14 should be juxtaposed to Schouls' citations from the comments on Romans. For a vigorous protest of his allegiance to the theology of the epistles, see Locke's *Second vindication of The reasonableness of Christianity*, *Works*, VII, 249. And note that J.L. Colman surely underplays Locke's scepticism concerning reason in *Reasonableness in: John Locke's moral philosophy* (Edinburgh U.P., 1983), 139.

<sup>29</sup> The relevant discussion opens at sect. 228 (156).

<sup>30</sup> For especially strong claims, see op. cit., 257, 259, 261f.

<sup>31</sup> Colin Brown, *Miracles and the critical mind* (Eerdmans, 1984), 46.

<sup>32</sup> See Cranston, op. cit., 255f., though he later goes too far in claiming on the basis of Locke's paraphrase of the Pauline epistles that 'he [Locke] did not think that the writings of St. Paul should be in any way exempt from rational criticism' if he thinks, as he implies, that Locke's hermeneutical remarks mean that 'rational criticism' entails denial of infallibility. See Cranston, 456, and see *Works*, VIII, esp. 15-23. See too M. Seliger, *The liberal politics of John Locke* (Allen & Unwin, 1968), 58-62.

<sup>33</sup> After Richard Ashcraft's discussion of Robert Ferguson in *Revolutionary politics and Locke's Two treatises of government* (Princeton U.P., 1986), esp. ch. 2, we must certainly look further into the literary relationship of Ferguson and Locke, including in relation to the argument of *Reasonableness*.

<sup>34</sup> See John Biddle, 'Locke's critique of innate principles and Toland's deism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1976, 411-422, 416.

<sup>35</sup> Though see the possible bearing of Ramsey's exploration of the concept of intuition here (loc. cit.) on this question.

<sup>36</sup> Op. cit., 212, though Snyder may be right on the implicit nature of Locke's distinction between assurance and certainty in the *Essay*, taken as a whole.

<sup>37</sup> *Works*, IV, 274f.

<sup>38</sup> See here E.J. Eisenach, *Two worlds of liberalism: religion and politics in Hobbes, Locke and Mill* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), part II and, especially, the connection he makes between the civic/religious distinction and the knowledge/belief distinction.

<sup>39</sup> One issue we have scarcely broached in this article is the definition of 'reason', yet Ashcraft's discussion also shows how crucial this was in political and specifically toleration arguments. See, for example, 53ff., 124ff. in *Revolutionary politics*.

<sup>40</sup> Op. cit, 367.

<sup>41</sup> *Works*, VI, 549-574.

<sup>42</sup> *Locke* (OUP, 1984), 21.

<sup>43</sup> It is worth noting Sullivan's comment here: 'The tension between the will to believe and the temptation to doubt which pervades Locke's writings makes it difficult to determine the nature of his mature opinions. At the end of his life he remained uncertain about some central theological problems.' R.E. Sullivan, *John Toland and the Deist controversy: a study in adaptations* (Harvard University Press, 1982), 75. It seems to me that Locke was less orthodox than his writings. 'In general, it was the newer ideas of thought to which Locke was attracted and gave support', John Yolton, *The Locke reader* (CUP, 1977), 4; 'What we have, then, is the portrait of an intellectual whose religious and political views became increasingly radical as he grew older', Richard Ashcraft, *Revolutionary politics*, 78. But for a critical view of Dunn's assessment here, see Yolton's review of Dunn's book in *The Locke Newsletter*, (1985), 88-95.

<sup>44</sup> *The European mind: 1680-1715* (Yale U.P., 1953), 240.

**THE ORIGINS OF METHODISM:  
an unpublished early French account**

*Jeremy Black*

An anonymous account of early Methodism dated August (new style) 1739 can be found in the French Foreign Ministry. The full reference is Paris, Quai d'Orsay Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Mémoires et Documents, Angleterre, vol. 8, fo. 209-12. It is possible that the memorandum was produced by Silhouette, a French diplomatic agent who visited Britain in the late 1730s and sent back detailed reports on economic and fiscal matters. Silhouette could read and write English. However there is no evidence for this suggestion. The memorandum is an interesting account of early methodism, particularly valuable as it comes from a foreign commentator.

*Sur M. Whitefield et les Methodistes d'Angleterre*

[fo. 209] Les Methodistes ne sont point encore une secte; Peut etre le deviendront ils dans quelques tems; mais jusqu'a present ils n'enseignent; encore rien de contraire aux articles de l'Eglise Anglicane; au contraire M. Whitefield dans ses sermons affecte de justifier tout ce qu'il avance par l'autorite de ces articles ou par des expressions tirees des collectes ou des autres parties du service de cetter Eglise. Il est meme si eloigne de vouloir faire croire qu'il veuille former une secte particuliere, qu'a Noel dernier it a reçu l'ordination de la pretrise de l'Eveque de Gloucester, qu'il preche dans les Eglises Paroissiales, quand les Ministeres de ces Paroisses ou les Eveques le lui permettent; Qu'il fait partout professsion d'etre ce cette Colonie de la Georgie l'envoyent dans Eglise et un porte l'habit, et qu'en fin les Commissaires de la Colonie de la Georgie l'envoyent dans ce pays la pour en etre le Ministre, ce qu'ils ne feroient pas s'ils le regardoient comme auteur d'une nouvelle secte. Combien de tems continu era t'il dans cette union avec son Eglise? C'est ce qu'il s'est pas facile de prévoir, et l'on se seroit point surpris que l'antipatie que semble avoir prire pour lui la plupart du Clerge le portat a quelques extremités et lui fit former quelque nouvelle assemblee dans un Pays ou Il le peut faire impunement a l'abry de la protection des loix.

La chose paroît d'autant plus aisee a croire, que cet homme aussi bien que ses associes paroissent donner beaucoup dans l'Entoutiasme et que le petit People a pris pour eux et particulierement pour M. Whitefield une sorte d'attachement et de veneration qui pourroient bien leur

inspirer la vanité de former un parti, surtout depuis que quelques Evêques et la plupart des Curez [210] leur ont interdit la prédication sans leurs Eglises. Cette interdiction qu'ils n'ont pas manqué de faire regardée comme une sorte de persécution a attiré au Sr. Whitefield un si grand nombre d'auditeurs que s'étant mis à prêcher en pleine campagne, et que les Evêques n'ont pas l'autorité d'empêcher, on le voit suivi de plusieurs milliers de personnes et que le nombre s'en monte quelques fois jusqu'à dix quinze ou vingt mille.

Cependant rien que la nouveauté de la chose ne peut lui attirer cette foule; Car on ne voit rien d'extraordinaire dans cet homme qui est tout jeune, qu'un zèle impétueux, une apparence de religion et de piété que l'on croit véritablement sincère, un air touché et de persuasion, une manière de parler animée et pleine d'agitation qui n'est pas ordinaire aux prédicateurs Anglois qui lisent au lieu qu'il déclame, un grand flux de paroles plus que de choses, un langage un peu figuré, de apostrophes fréquentes, en un mot un homme tout propre à faire un excellent Missionnaire Capuchin et un autre Père honnorable de Caen; mais pour ce qu'il dit tout est du plus commun excepté que lui et ses confrères se sont fait un jargon particulier parlant perpétuellement *de régénération intérieure, de nouvelle naissance en Jésus Christ, de mouvement de l'esprit, de justification par la foi de grâce, de vie de l'esprit*, et d'autres termes de cette nature que le Peuple admire d'autant plus qu'il les entend. Cela joint à des fréquentes menaces de damnation, à un ton un peu prophétique, à des réflexions satiriques sur le reste du clergé, à une sorte de compassion qu'excite l'interdiction qui l'empêche de prêcher dans les Eglises à frapper les uns et lui a attaché les autres au point qu'il ne seroit ni sûr ni prudent de rien dire ou rien faire quand il prêche, au préjudice du Prédicateur.

Quoiqu'on croie que cet homme est honnête homme et a de bonnes intentions, on est cependant porté à penser que si la chose a des suites [211] elle ne peut manquer de dégénérer en parfait fanatisme, d'autant plus que ces Messieurs se flattent de sentir les mouvements du St. Esprit; or quand on en est venu jusqu'à ce point le reste du chemin est aisé à faire. La suite en apprendra davantage sur le compte de ces nouveaux relateurs; mais on conçoit qu'il faut ou que cela finisse dans peu, ou que l'on verra quelque nouveau Pietisme succéder à ce prétendu zèle.

C'est une sorte de zèle en effet qui a donné naissance à ce que l'on voit. Un petit nombre de jeunes Etudiants à Oxford ou scandalisés des désordres du siècle, ou touchés peut-être de leurs propres irrégularités entrèrent il y a quelques peu d'années dans des engagements récipro-

ques de se réformer eux-mêmes et de travailler au salut des autres. En conséquence ils se firent quelques règles de vie et se proposèrent certaine méthode de conduite qui leur firent donner le nom de Methodistes. Leur vie fut d'abord fort austère; Ils s'interdirent toutes sortes de plaisirs; Ils menerent une vie retirée, pénitente, mortifiée et appliquée; Ils se livrèrent à différents exercices de charité comme la visite des pauvres et des malades. On parloit alors de beaucoup de jeûnes, de fréquentes prières, de veilles extraordinaires, d'un grand retranchement de toute superfluité et de toute commédiate, de peu de conversation qu'entre eux-mêmes; Mais plusieurs singularités ou un excès de spiritualité rendirent suspecte toute cette ferveur, et l'on augura dès lors que la fin pourroit en être dangereuse; Aussi se sont-ils un peu humanisés depuis, et comme disoit l'autre jour le Sr Whitefield *à présent ils boivent et mangent comme les autres*.

Après tout le mal jusqu'ici n'est pas encore bien grand et peut-être même en est-il provenu quelque bien parmi certain nombre du petit peuple; Car on ne voit pas qu'il se soit fait encore de Sectateurs parmi les autres; Mais Quelle sera la fin de tout cela? Ce n'est pas chose facile à prédire, ce que l'on entrevoit simplement, c'est que si ces nouveaux prédicateurs se trouvent soutenus et que [212] le Clergé continue à les décrier et à les pousser ils pourroient bien se jeter du côté des Presbiteriens ou Dissenters, qui semblent leur marquer plus d'égards, soit que véritablement ils les estiment, soit qu'ils ne soient pas fâchés de mortifier le haut clergé en soutenant contre lui tout ceux qui peuvent servir à en décrier le caractère ou à en affaiblir l'autorité parmi le Peuple.

Voilà tout ce que l'on peut dire présentement sur ce sujet. On ne sache point qu'il soit encore question d'aucun nouveau dogme, et l'on voit même par quelques écrits faits contre les Methodistes qu'on ne les accuse que de singularité et d'une sorte de rigorisme. Dans un âge de relâchement comme celui où nous vivons il est assez naturel qu'en voulant l'éviter ou se jeter dans un excès opposé. Tout ce qui est à craindre, c'est que les gens d'esprit en voyant tout l'abus de ces excès ne se jettent dans une plus grande corruption. C'est assez l'effet ou conduit une fausse spiritualité et l'on ne seroit pas surpris d'en voir naître un jour un nouveau Molinisme.

D.J. Adams, *Diderot, dialogue and debate*, Vinaver Studies in French II, (Liverpool, Francis Cairns, 1986). £20.00.

Dr. Adams's book looks very much like a response to a challenge. In the first place he has chosen to write about some of the least known (and in some cases least interesting) of Diderot's works; in the second, he has made dialogue his main theme, when the works he is studying come from the period (1745-54) when Diderot was least interested in dialogue. Nevertheless, this is a task worth taking up, for, as anyone familiar with Diderot will know, most of the great works of the *philosophe's* maturity are in dialogue form, which proved itself particularly apt for the expression of his way of thinking, so there is some interest in examining his early works to look for traces of a developing penchant for dialogue or of the kind of thinking that called for it. It is not by any means a gratuitous challenge, then, but it remains a challenge. For apart from the fact that only one of the eight works studied here consists chiefly of dialogue, what dialogue there is rarely gives much indication of what is to be Diderot's mature manner. Dr. Adams is not discouraged by this: from the witty dust-jacket, across which two identical Diderots face each other in determined silence, through eight chapters of analysis, plus an introduction and a conclusion, the author takes us carefully and confidently through this often uninspiring terrain. Rather than look for significance where it cannot be found, he concentrates on the gradual formation of Diderot's ideas, showing how his concern with various aspects of epistemology, solipsism, experience and experiment, and his growing belief in the importance of communication pointed towards the value of dialogue as a means of expression and discovery. In tracing these developments, Adams provides a detailed and valuable account of the evolution and crystallization of Diderot's ideas, together with close analyses of some of the epistemological problems in the *Lettre sur les aveugles* and *Lettre sur les sourds et muets* and the *Interpretation de la nature*. Indeed, the problem of dialogue and debate sometimes recedes from view as, step by painstaking step, the analysis moves forward, and one occasionally wonders whether Diderot always took himself as seriously as Dr. Adams takes him. But the author has the qualities of his seriousness: meticulous, honest, accurate, as much at home with the discussion of texts and dates as he is with textual analysis, as familiar with the critical literature as he is with the texts themselves, he has carried out his task conscientiously and thoroughly and at the same time provided a useful guide to the early development of Diderot's ideas.

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Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (Duckworth, London, 1986), pp. x, 278. £28.00.

Mark Philp's intriguing and ambitious study attempts a number of distinct tasks. In the first place it aims simply to provide a more coherent and accurate account of the structure and transformations of Godwin's moral and political theory in the successive editions of the *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* than has hitherto been available. In the second, it aims to identify what Godwin supposed himself to be doing in drafting these recensions of the work and to explain why he considered his arguments throughout to be compelling. In the third place it attempts a partial defence and justification of his intellectual and political judgment in the light of the changing social milieu which supported his self-assurance in composing and revising his text and which, by its collapse in the last three years of the century, destroyed his standing as a writer and a thinker and largely broke his political nerve. It is in the link between the second and third of these tasks that Philp makes his most original contribution.

*Godwin's Political Justice* is a carefully composed and thoughtful work which displays an impressive range of intellectual skills. Even following the important contributions to Godwin scholarship over the last decade—by Clark, Locke and Marshall in particular<sup>1</sup>—it constitutes an unquestionably major achievement. But some aspects of it are considerably more effective and imaginative than others. Least interesting, perhaps, is the deployment of modern analytical techniques to establish the precise status of Godwin's theory of the human good at different points in time or the deployment of game theory to bring out the logic of the plot line in *Caleb Williams* (109-110). (The last in particular bears the stigmata of an expensive modern higher education all too prominently.) The analysis of the structure of the ethical theory of *Political Justice* as it moves from edition to edition is sophisticated and relevant enough; and some version of it is certainly indispensable to fulfilling Philp's purposes. But its presentation is uneconomical and not always very clear and suggests an undue zest in theoretical elaboration for its own sake.

Far more illuminating is the close connection drawn by Philp between Godwin's changing network of social encounters and the shifting theoretical centre of gravity revealed by the analysis of the successive renditions of his book. Drawing deftly on the unusually full documentation afforded by Godwin's diaries Philp succeeds in making far better



commentator has done. In two particular respects the results yielded by this approach are strikingly convincing. Most importantly perhaps, Philp shows with great elegance that the strongly rationalist first edition of *Political Justice*, with its vividly perfectionist rendering of the battle cries of Rational Dissent and ultra-Cartesian prospect of the literal prevalence of the immortal soul over carnal mortality, is steadily eroded by Godwin's transition, largely under the influence of the literary success of the book itself, into the more sophisticated and secular milieu of the metropolitan intelligentsia. In place of a rationalist culture which depended for its theoretical shape and substance largely upon the imaginative heritage of Dissenting Christianity, Godwin entered a more pragmatic, worldly and intellectually modern thought world, strongly marked by the British moralists of the preceding century and disinclined to attach undue value to the restraint of desire for its own sake. Philp is especially successful in tracing the somewhat *ad hoc* and disaggregated consequences of these shifts in intellectual idiom and in sense of subjective plausibility. He makes it plain that by the third edition of *Political Justice* Godwin's position had become firmly, if still rather primly, utilitarian and that he had abandoned the drastic rationalism of his initial philosophical psychology and the elevation of truth as a source of motivational force somehow external to and potentially dominant over existing human sentiments. But he also shows that these shifts left intact the principal elements of Godwin's political arguments: the insistence on the individual's right and duty of private judgment, the critique of all but the most minimal governmental restraints and the presumption of a virtually indefinite potential for human improvement.

Besides accounting in this way for the purely intellectual continuities and discontinuities in Godwin's thinking Philp also contrives to show him as a far more serious, consistent and insightful commentator on contemporary politics than many have presumed, taking much of the sting out of Thelwall's sneer at the absurdity of the fact that *Political Justice* 'should at once recommend the most extensive plan of freedom and innovation ever discussed by any writer in the English language, and reprobate every measure from which even the most moderate reform can be reasonably expected'(196). The discussion of the changing context of radical politics through the 1790s is of considerable interest in itself and shows Godwin to have been neither as idiosyncratic nor as dishonourable a participant in the vicissitudes as most earlier writers have implied.

It is scarcely surprising that a close study of Godwin's milieu and a careful reconsideration of his own sense of what he was attempting to do

should succeed in making appreciably better sense of his intellectual activities than the edgy condescension or open contempt of some of Philp's predecessors has done. But in one respect hermeneutic charity has here gone a trifle too far. Philp reconstructs Godwin's intellectual milieu as a 'critical intellectual community' (170-73) and presents *Political Justice* as in effect a 'product' of this community (216). (The evidence for this diagnosis is set out more or less schematically in the five appendices; but the claim itself is quite adequately presented in Philp's main text.) Somewhat more boldly Philp also chooses to present the existence of this community as an index that Godwin's conceptions of political possibility were 'empirically grounded' (173) and that they consequently deserve some real intellectual respect even from the perspective of today. It is true that he is a trifle equivocal on the question of quite how much respect they do deserve. But even given the proviso that Godwin should have accorded greater weight than he did to 'the causal conditions which made his community possible' (173), this surely conflates plausibility with justification to an unacceptable degree. The fact that Godwin's social experiences led him to take a notably sanguine view of human political possibilities no doubt in some sense contributes to explaining the content of his theories. For some modern post-Quinean epistemologists (or anti-epistemologists) it may even render his own credence in these theories in some sense rational. But it does little to render it more rational for *us* to credit them in our turn.

Not even Joseph de Maistre can have doubted that human beings who share interests, concerns, purposes and a common social milieu and who are divided by no deep conflicts of practical need can often associate together in reasonable amity for lengthy periods of time. But it is an abuse of Philp's main modern sanction for his conception of community (Michael Taylor's *Community, anarchy and liberty*)<sup>2</sup> to argue that Godwin's hopes for the future were rendered reasonable by 'his practical experience of a community able to resolve its internal conflicts without recourse to a centralised coercive agency'(216). In a community 'bounded by a larger society and state which provided law enforcement at home and defence against external aggression' (172) and united within itself by a shared culture and a common experience of external distaste or disapproval, it was plainly the culture which explained the sense of integration; but it was scarcely just the culture which secured the reproduction of the community. The fact that the radicals were repressed does nothing whatever to reinforce the cogency of Godwin's views of political possibility (227-28). Furthermore the fact that it was their cultural unacceptability to the majority of their fellow subjects which made it politically possible to repress them, especially seen in the

light of the more empiricist analysis of Godwin's third edition and the year and a half which followed this, renders any sense of predictable progress towards the cultural telos of a society constituted and sustained by the exercise of myriads of uncoerced private judgments simply absurd.

Only within the vibrant culture of Rational Dissent in which Godwin's sense of human value and the demands of integrity first took shape was there a stable framework of imaginative assumptions sufficiently robust and rigid to uphold his political conclusions in the teeth of a hostile society. In the more relaxed, modish and untranscendent culture of the London intelligentsia and the leaders of the radical societies, the bruising politics of the 1790s were bound in the end to sunder an exigent but somewhat narcissistic personal moralism from its optimistic political accompaniment, replacing an initially serene expectation of utopia with an uneasy amalgam of despondent pragmatism and obstinately rational witness to the dignity of human autonomy. Philp shows splendidly why Godwin thought and felt as he did. But, in doing so, he obviates any need to extend our sympathy for Godwin as a historical being to the massive indiscretion of his understanding of the nature of politics.

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J.P. Clark, *The philosophical anarchism of William Godwin* (Princeton, 1977); Don Locke, *A fantasy of reason: the life and thought of William Godwin* (London, 1980); Peter H. Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Taylor, *Community, anarchy and liberty* (Cambridge, 1982).

J.C.D. Clark, *English society 1688-1832. Ideology, social structure and political practice during the ancien regime* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. xiii, 439. £10.95, pbk.

'This is a revisionist tract' Jonathan Clark pronounces at the very beginning of his long, difficult and contentious book. Its aim is nothing less than to overturn what he sees as the dominant historiography of the period 1688-1832 and to provide an alternative account of what he terms the English 'ancien regime'.

*English society 1688-1832* has six main chapters. The first, and by far the shortest, provides a detailed survey of the literature on elections and party organization throughout the period, seeking to show the inadequacies of the received picture. The image of eighteenth century Britain as a society of rugged individualists, forward-looking in business and politics, the pioneers of a secular, democratic and industrial future, is critically examined in the next two chapters. Clark warns that such thinkers as Locke, Hume, Smith, Paley and Bentham provide unreliable guides to social and political thinking in this period. This was a society in which duelling was a more accurate index of dominant cultural values than the protestant ethic, or 'possessive individualism'. He shows too the widespread persistence of monarchical and legitimist doctrines, and of religious perceptions of monarchy.<sup>1</sup> The impact of the 'industrial revolution' has been much exaggerated. Industrialization in Britain in the early nineteenth century was, he argues, a matter of 'minor changes of degree for the great majority of men' (and, presumably women?). There was no radical erosion of traditional values or social hierarchies. Indeed, traditional social elites expanded and profited from economic growth. And far from originating in the puritan-democratic values of 'bourgeois individualism' British commercial and industrial success was based on the values of the dominant aristocratic-Anglican nexus: 'the virtues of loyalty, diligence, discipline, subordination and obedience in the workplace, whether factory, mine or office' (73).

Chapter four looks at Anglican political theology between 1760 and 1815. Too often the failure of radical movements in these years has been ascribed to naked power and mindless authoritarianism on the part of government. In fact, Clark argues, the political ideology of the Anglican-aristocratic regime was sophisticated and influential and developed a subtle and effective response to radicalism. Burke's *Reflections* has frequently been identified as novel merely because the rich intellectual context of conservative political arguments in this period has been neglected by historians. In the next chapter attention shifts to connections between religious heterodoxy and political radicalism. It is important, he argues, not to isolate political reform, which looks important to the modern historian, from what can seem obscure theological or ecclesiastical wranglings. For people in this period church and state, religious faith and political order, were inextricably fused. Clark looks at different forms of heterodoxy across the period and elaborates two main arguments. The first is that political reform was derived, above all, from religious antagonisms. And the second is that this politico-religious heterodoxy was largely confined to small, unrepresentative intellectual groups disconnected from any



economic or social grievance and incapable of mobilizing any social grouping.

Finally, chapter six looks at the great watershed of 1828-32, marking the demise of the English 'ancien regime'. The great Reform Act of 1832 was not, Clark argues, the culmination of a long, consistent and widely-supported political campaign. Nor was it a reorganization of the political system so as to realign it with a changing socio-economic structure. It was Catholic Emancipation and repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828-9 that subverted Anglican-aristocratic hegemony and opened up the space for parliamentary reform. These twin hammer-blows were in turn an effect of the long-term drift of substantial numbers of the population away from Anglican affiliation into Nonconformity, Methodism or religious indifference. 'In ancien-regime England, the mass of the population was organised, given an identity and a direction within the public arena (in so far as these things happened at all) not by political parties but by churches' (375). It was therefore the erosion of Anglican influence which made possible the radical political shifts of the 1830s, with its Whig-radical onslaught on the central institutions of the ancien regime.

This is certainly an imposing piece of writing. There has been a too casual reliance on a rather flimsy caricature of the eighteenth century as a robust, materialistic, bourgeois age—embodied in a corrupt political system and a secularized and Erastian church. Clark's stress on the Church of England and religious discourse as a central nexus of the political order, his careful reconstruction of Anglican political theology and his sympathetic recovery of a number of Anglican figure Anglican—Charles Leslie, Samuel Horsley, John Scott Eldon among others—all contribute to the wider reassessment of England's 'long eighteenth century'. Clark's account does provide a political and religious context which helps to make Wesley, Samuel Johnson, Burke, even Eldon, more representative and more comprehensible.

However, this is a very uneven book and it charges a high price for each and every insight. The obsession to undermine the significance of radicalism leads to some dubious arguments. It is quite clear, for instance, that late eighteenth century Unitarianism was much more than the proclivity of a few disaffected intellectuals.<sup>2</sup> The book's title is a serious misnomer. It contains very very little of what most people would regard as social history. Clark's whole approach is extremely traditionalist and is concerned almost wholly with what is taken to be 'the centre': high politics and the history of ideas. The luxurious footnotery is

innocent of the Public Record Office or other archive sources. While there is no intrinsic virtue in grinding through collections of primary source materials, the implications of relying upon the existing historiography plus contemporary political, philosophical, and religious texts are significant. Quite simply, the world of a narrow elite is assumed to be the reality of eighteenth-century England. To be more specific: it is all very salutary to be reminded of the importance of the Church of England as the central agency of the state. There can be little doubt of its importance or of its neglect by historians of the period. However, when we are told that a 'Christian faith and moral code was a common possession of all moral strata'(87), we are entitled to some careful documentation of the ways in which this was realized in practice. In fact, little or no evidence of the ideological effectiveness of the Anglican church is provided. This would require detailed investigation of the role of the Church in specific communities—the proportion of the population attending church, the ways in which religious ritual and language shaped perception, the role of the Church in exerting social discipline, and so on. Clark castigates some interpretations of the period for their economic reductionism. This is, to some extent, justifiable. However, in this book the charge seems to serve primarily as a rhetorical device to exonerate the author from any need to discuss the whole sphere of social relations and economic production. What after all was political power and cultural hegemony about in this period? It was, if not entirely nevertheless substantially, about power over material resources. It was to do with reproducing structures which ensured that the products of nature and human labour were distributed unequally and to the profit of all those landowners and higher clergy. The Anglican-aristocratic regime was built upon material wealth, often obtained in ways owing little to theology. But Clark turns away his eyes unsullied from such secular realities.

This is not just a work of historical revision but, Jonathan Clark forewarns us, 'a breach of the historiographical peace' (x). Indeed it is, attacking with quite unnecessary vehemence the work of a number of the best historians of this period. Thus, to give one example, he argues that the dominant interpretation of this period was developed within a framework established by the Webbs, the Hammonds, Tawney, Laski, Graham Wallas and G.D.H. Cole. 'If slickly packaged and marketed for the new campuses of the 1960s by another generation of historians, the structure of the argument was little changed. Yet as Attlee's England and the world view on which it was premised recedes from us, and especially after the change in mood of the 1970s, it is easier to see the limiting effect of those assumptions and to begin to disengage ourselves

from them' (1). The combination of half-truth, distortion and non-sequitur in these lines is remarkable. Out of the dazzling radiance that surrounds Margaret Thatcher's 'new regime' emerges Jonathan Clark, sword of vengeance in hand, to lead historians back to the paths of righteousness. Important and interesting arguments are frequently pushed too far to fit the author's own ideological obsessions. It would be sad if these extraneous political delusions of *English society 1688-1832* were to obscure the limited but nevertheless real contribution which parts of this book make to the wider reassessment of British history in this period.

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It is surprising here that Clark neglects the work of Linda Colley, notably her *In defiance of oligarchy. The Tory Party 1714-60* (Cambridge, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, John Seed, 'Gentlemen Dissenters: the social and political meanings of Rational Dissent in the 1770s and 1780s', in *The Historical Journal*, 28, 2 (1985), 299-325.

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